

THE NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE

THE EYE SITE: A COMMUNICATIONS EVALUATION

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SUBMITTED BY: GYMR PUBLIC RELATIONS

I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The National Institute of Health's (NIH) National Eye Institute (NEI) has developed The Eye Site, a traveling exhibit consisting of a series of colorful kiosks, along with a touch screen program and other video components, and various takeaway resources. The exhibit is displayed at shopping centers across America to provide consumers with information on the causes of low vision and tips for living more comfortably with the condition. The exhibit provides a self-assessment to help people determine whether they or someone they know may have low vision. An animated character, ELVEE (L.V. = Low Vision) guides the viewer through the program, as well as several short videos that provide "hands-on" advice.

Stated goals of the exhibit are to increase public knowledge of:

- Low vision
- Vision rehabilitation services
- Adaptive devices
- NIH, NEI, and its medical research

In the summer of 2006, NEI engaged GYMR Public Relations, a Washington, DC-based communications firm that specializes in health issues, to conduct an evaluation of The Eye Site to confirm its value to NEI and help plan for the future.

Goals of the evaluation were to:

- Review offerings of The Eye Site
- Evaluate The Eye Site's effectiveness in coordinating messages and information for the general public
- Assess internal and external satisfaction with The Eye Site (Note: This does not include the general public)
- Generate ideas for possible new activities

The evaluation was conducted over a period of four months (June-September 2006). GYMR worked closely with NEI communications staff and consultants and vendors currently contracted to NEI.

Evaluation components include:

- Interviews with 10 NIH/NEI staff and contractors
- Interviews with 17 members of local Host Committees or mall marketing managers
- Review of Host Committee meeting minutes and evaluation reports

- Review and analysis of printed and online materials for (a) the general public to take away from The Eye Site, (b) announcing the exhibit to media, (c) marketing the exhibit within a community, and (d) informing Host Committee members and others about the exhibit and its procedures
- Analysis of print and broadcast media coverage related to The Eye Site
- A cursory assessment of other NIH-sponsored exhibits
- In-person observations from visiting The Eye Site in one location

Based on analysis of these components, GYMR was able to draw a series of conclusions about The Eye Site, perceptions of its effectiveness and ideas for the future.

Summary of findings include:

- The Eye Site has strong support among internal and external stakeholders, who view the exhibit as (a) a novel and effective way to educate the public about low vision and (b) an effective tool for forging relationships between NEI and local vision research institutions.
- Messages conveyed through The Eye Site are well-coordinated, consistent and professionally packaged and presented.
- The contents of the exhibit have been carefully crafted and can be repackaged and refreshed to reach even more people.
- The role of the Host Committee – or another entity to physically staff the exhibit and plan localized awareness-raising activities – is important to the exhibit's success and should be a factor in thinking about the exhibit's future.

II. INTERVIEWS WITH NIH/NEI STAFF AND CONTRACTORS

Background:

To gauge internal perceptions of the National Eye Institute's Eye Site exhibit, GYMR Public Relations interviewed 10 professionals who either work as NIH staff members or as consultants who work closely with NEI. These brief interviews provided insights into internal perceptions of The Eye Site's main objective, its effectiveness in reaching the target audience and its relevance to NEI and the larger NIH community.

Interviewees were chosen to represent a range of perspectives, including NEI staff and consultants who work on communications issues, leadership of the Institute, and contractors who managed the marketing and logistics for the Site. The interviews were not taped, but detailed notes were taken. Complete confidentiality was assured.

Overarching Conclusions:

- There is strong internal support for The Eye Site, even while acknowledging its expense.
- In terms of goals, the awareness-raising role of the site is quickly followed by its ability to bring community stakeholders together for networking.
- Internally, there is support for continuing to visit malls *and* expanding to new venues.
- There are some concerns about malls being the best venue for attracting visitors to the site, especially when it is not staffed by a Host Committee.

Evaluation Findings:

1. **Everyone interviewed was in agreement about The Eye Site exhibit's goal.**

The site's overall goal was cited by all interviewees as raising public awareness about low vision. Some said that by raising awareness, the Site was also providing hope for those with low vision and hoped that this would then bring the consumer closer to getting help. Additional goals cited include fostering collaboration among others in the professional vision community, providing communications opportunities for vision care locally, bringing NEI's resources to the grassroots level and providing opportunities for people to work with others they don't usually work with. Because the site is branded with the Institute name and provides educational materials from NEI and NIH, interviewees also said that the exhibit helps to promote the Institute and its research within these communities.

I think the information office at NEI has forged new ties with local groups that have been interested in the topic for a long time. Also, the NEI name is all over the exhibit, so it helps people understand that the government is really behind this and funding research in this area.

[The exhibit] has been a strong bridge for grantee institutions, and health organizations in their community, to come together and work on this with NEI.

The exhibit provides local organizations and healthcare providers a chance to work with people and organizations they normally wouldn't work with, which helps the vision community as a whole.

2. Interviewees said that the exhibit may need technical or graphic improvements and/or updates.

Technology has advanced since The Eye Site was created five years ago, and some interviewees said that improvements to the site are needed in order to maximize the Site's effectiveness in the malls. Additionally, they said computer problems at the kiosks are preventing people from being able to use the machines and access to the full range of information the Site has to offer. Other interviewees mentioned the amount and size of the type of kiosks given the low vision audience, and questioned whether the information panels should be made more appealing to general consumers.

Some of the most challenging aspects are the logistics of an aging exhibit, and computer problems.

We're very proud of [The Eye Site] but with everything in a mall, I don't know if it really stands out or if we can compete with other things.

3. Interviewees believe that malls are a good venue for exhibiting public health information, while also saying that they wish more people could see the exhibit.

Interviewees said that the foot traffic and the demographics of people who visit shopping malls are in sync with the site's overall goal of raising the public's awareness about low vision. At the same time, they cited the expense of exhibiting at shopping malls and mentioned that they would like to see the Site branch out to other venues like senior centers and libraries using a smaller, more portable version of the Site exhibit.

At first, when they said they were going to shopping malls, I was doubtful, but I understand that this is where the people are, so that is where we need to be.

I think the exhibit's design and its being located in malls have been very effective [at reaching the target audience] and are unique. Having the exhibit in public venues really gets it in front of people we normally don't work with, and that is important for NIH with a health message.

4. Some interviewees wonder about attendance at the exhibit.

A couple interviewees raised questions about how many mall visitors actually spend time with the exhibit and questioned how interest in the exhibit could be increased. They cited the opening reception as well-attended, but questioned whether attendance drops off, especially when the exhibit is not staffed.

I've been to the exhibit a handful of times in different places. When it's in a mall, they have an opening event and the exhibit gets a fair amount of attention that day. But the next day, or even a couple of hours later when all of the chairs have been cleared, and it's left there, I don't know how much attention it gets.

When someone is answering questions and bringing people in to the exhibit, it helps. But when it is sitting there by itself, it doesn't attract a lot of people. I don't think it's necessarily because of the subject matter or the exhibit's design. I just think that's what happens in a mall.

5. Interviewees raised the benefits and pitfalls of Host Committees.

Without prompting, almost every interviewer raised the “good” and “bad” of Host Committees. Everyone said that the presence of local groups and/or experts who know about the issues and can staff the exhibit adds credibility and likely builds attendance. At the same time, they mentioned that assembling and recruiting Host Committees can be extremely time intensive. Several mentioned that in the absence of a Host Committee, local specialists are important to add credibility to the site and helps increase awareness about the issue and what local resources are available.

I would like to see low vision specialists be present at the exhibit, even when there isn't a Host Committee. Doctors add credibility and draw an audience.

One thing that would be good is if an informed individual was there at the exhibit absolutely all of the time. Maybe that already happens, and I don't realize it. If it does, that's great.

The most effective [Eye Site exhibitions] have had on-site volunteers. Just having [the exhibit] sitting in the mall may increase the awareness, but not necessarily motivate people to stop by.

6. All interviewees acknowledge the expense.

Virtually every interviewee offered that The Eye Site is an expensive program. Most also said they believe it is a cost-effective program that has been worth its investment. Several cited that the investment and learnings from The Eye Site over the past few years must now be utilized to shape its future direction.

III. HOST COMMITTEE AND MALL MARKETING MANAGER INTERVIEWS

Background:

GYMR Public Relations interviewed 17 people from across the nation who have been involved with the National Eye Institute's traveling Eye Site exhibit. These interviews provided valuable insights into external perceptions of The Eye Site, including its effectiveness in meeting the exhibit's goals.

Interview scripts were developed with NEI staff and interviews were conducted via telephone in 30 minute increments. Interviewees were provided by NEI from a list of past exhibit field participants, including contacts from local exhibit Host Committees and mall marketing managers. The interviews were not taped, but detailed notes were taken. Complete confidentiality was assured.

Overarching Conclusions:

- Externally, the exhibit has support and its staff is praised.
- External audiences see the exhibit as having a very wide variety of audiences.
- Members of the Host Committees (and some mall managers) believe organized events and continual staffing greatly enhance the exhibit's attendance and usefulness.
- There is external support for expanding to new venues and refreshing the exhibit's appearance.

Evaluation Findings:

1. Overall impressions of The Eye Site from hosts and visitors are positive.

All of the interviewed participants from the Host Committees and mall marketing staffs were satisfied and impressed by the exhibit. As the front-line staff involved in planning and operating it, they were in a unique position to observe the exhibit in action. The exhibit as a whole was praised for its functionality, design, simplicity and ease of setup. Frequent mention was made of its usefulness as an educational exhibit and its interactive kiosks.

These interviewees said that feedback from visitors was positive, with people praising the exhibit for teaching them about low vision issues. They said that visitors were appreciative of the free eye exams, ask-a-doctor consultation events and guides to local resources. Response cards from consumers echoed this as well.

The exhibit was great – there were interactive pieces, it was well put together, and we had lots of people using the displays and picking up information.

Very clean and easy to understand. Straightforward and not complicated.

I thought it was a nice exhibit, well presented, informative. I really found it to be thorough over all. I liked that it was compact and yet still interactive.

2. The interviewees believe the exhibit fulfills a community service and effectively meets its goals while reaching a diverse audience.

The majority of interviewees cited the community benefit of The Eye Site and identified its goals as public education and increased awareness, yet they varied greatly in defining a specific target audience. All Host Committee members and mall staff stated that they brought the exhibit to their communities as a professional and public service, fulfilling a need for education about low vision and existing rehabilitation options. When asked to identify the primary target audience, answers ranged from the general public, to seniors, to children. The most common responses referred to the diversity of the visitors in mall settings and therefore the positive ability of the exhibit to reach a wide audience.

Our internal studies have repeatedly shown a need for education about low vision, rehabilitation services that exist and how to access them – and the exhibit helped with that.

This exhibit provides a mechanism for educating people and helping them take steps to get eye exams.

Malls are America's main street of today. The Eye Site is really not a direct educational vehicle to the person with low vision, but instead to the caregiver. The target audience was really the caregivers of people with low vision.

It was geared to everyone, across the board. It was for people with low vision and people who know people with low vision.

3. The role of a local Host Committee is viewed as instrumental in the value and overall success of the exhibit.

Interviewees were certain that building a local coalition of partners and forming a Host Committee to sponsor the exhibit contributed greatly to the exhibit's success. Reasons for this included not only the financial necessity of splitting the associated costs, but also the importance of local cooperation and knowledge in building an audience for the exhibit and sharing resources to staff the exhibit and hold events in conjunction with it.

[The host committee was] very important – they are the ones who get exposure and the events going. The NEI doesn't know the local landscape and these things don't otherwise happen.

We couldn't have done the exhibit financially otherwise. We could do five malls for a couple of weeks each because we worked together.

4. While Host Committee members cited the benefit of working together, they were not effective in developing lasting local coalitions.

Few of the Host Committee members have continued to work together on other events. While many expressed interest in doing so, they cited the realities of "competition" as not allowing for this to happen. Only a couple of the organizations said they have managed to do other substantive work together.

It's too bad that we don't [work together more often]. Without another big event to work together on, we all went back to our own little realms to do whatever we were doing before.

5. Reviews of the exhibit’s look and appearance were mixed.

The majority of people interviewed said that the exhibit was visually attractive but that it was still difficult to catch the attention of those passing by in an already overwhelming mall environment. The bright colors, interactive aspects and low vision aid tools (large calculator, etc.) were specifically cited as critically important for drawing people in. A few questioned the heavy reliance on text in an exhibit partially aimed at those suffering from low vision.

Multiple interviewees also expressed a dislike for the touch screens because they have become technologically outdated, occasionally suffer from technical glitches and because they believe they were distrusted or feared by the elderly visitors.

It seemed to effectively draw people in, despite the fact that most people have a mission when they are in the mall – shopping.

It is a very visual exhibit – more than others – because of its three-dimensionality. This attracts people.

It was supposed to have an appearance that would look like something at the mall, yet the problem was that nobody could figure out what it was from a distance.

We had a kickoff event (with bands and line dancers), an Ask the Doc day, and lectures, which were not very effective because of the food court venue. Overall the most beneficial were the doctors on site.

6. Live events and staffing were cited as most effective in attracting visitors.

Interestingly, while Host Committee members and mall staff said that the exhibit’s look and appearance were mostly effective, they also cited live events and staffing as having the largest impact on attendance levels. A few singled out the “Ask-a-Doctor” and free vision screenings – events with clinicians in “white coats” on site – as being the most effective for drawing passers-by to actually engage in the information being presented.

7. Significant interest was expressed in an alternative, perhaps portable, format of the exhibit.

The majority of respondents expressed strong interest in a more portable version of The Eye Site, adaptable for different venues. In a different format, the exhibit would be able to visit places that could not necessarily accommodate its existing, large-scale format. Health fairs were often cited as good venues for it, as well as senior centers. A different format would also have the added benefit of saving the hosting organizations a considerable amount of money from transportation, setup and mall costs. No clear preference was given to any particular preferred format.

The exhibit was a huge thing with professional movers needed. A portable version would be good. The transportation and setup costs were expensive, as well as the mall costs.

More portable would be good, but I’d probably lean toward something more involved than just a presentation on a laptop. Something that could still have an event around it, but that could be used and transported daily from place to place.

I think it should be in a van or something that's in parking lots – go libraries, senior centers, church programs, etc. It could be out in the parking lot for a day or two, and then move on to the next location.

8. NEI staff and contractors were overwhelmingly praised for their work and efforts in overseeing the exhibit's success.

A considerable amount of credit for the exhibit's success was given to NEI staff and contractors. Their assistance and support ensured that The Eye Site operated smoothly from beginning to end. They were constantly cited as being professional, organized and extremely accessible. Specifically, the mall marketing and event managers were clear that The Eye Site was one of the better managed and maintained exhibits that have been hosted at their malls.

The support was excellent. There is nothing I would change about that. They even took minutes at our meetings. It was really wonderful!

The NEI staff were really helpful and did a lot of good stuff. All I had to do was pick up the phone. It was a totally positive experience.

The NEI was very good and provided excellent help throughout the exhibit.

This exhibit was easy compared to others – the setup was easy and efficient. We had no problems with the display. The person they [the NEI] sent to the mall was superior, professional and nice.

IV. REVIEW OF HOST COMMITTEE MINUTES AND EVALUATION

Background:

GYMR Public Relations reviewed minutes from several Host Committees convened to shepherd The Eye Site in communities nationwide over the past five years. GYMR also reviewed Evaluation Reports from select Host Committees. These materials helped form general qualitative conclusions, which were further informed by auditing a sampling of media coverage from various Eye Site tours and a thorough review of materials (both explanatory materials and template documents) that are provided to Host Committee members.

Overarching Conclusions:

- Although time consuming and political, the presence of Host Committees seems to result in community mobilization, better kickoff events and greater media coverage. The impact of a Host Committee on visitors to the actual exhibit is undetermined.

Evaluation Findings:

1. Host Committees are useful for increasing comity among vision leaders in a community and help produce robust events.

In several of the documents, Committee members commented on benefits of interacting with one another to forge relationships and become better acquainted. Events planned by diverse Committee members seemed to be plentiful and met mutual interests. Host Committees that included a larger membership at the outset of the planning process seemed to move at a quicker pace than did others, but even Host Committees that started off slowly seemed to generate a great deal of enthusiasm among the members as the project progressed.

2. Host Committees are time consuming and can be political.

Although the Host Committees were useful for enhancing relationships among vision experts, they are also clearly time consuming for Committee members. Decisions that otherwise could be made quickly required a consensus process, which in certain instances seemed to become political (e.g. whether or not to include certain for-profit organizations in the project).

3. Host Committee involvement increases the number of events but does not seem to increase overall site traffic.

Based on a cursory review, the involvement of a Host Committee seems to increase the number of special events held at The Eye Site during its exhibition, but it does not seem to affect the number of people who actually pick up materials during its stay.

4. Media results seem to be more robust when a Host Committee is involved.

Based on our cursory review, it seems there is more media coverage when a Host Committee is organizing a given tour. Although there is a wide disparity between media coverage among different tours, Host Committee members seem to play a key role in encouraging the participation of local media – particularly television – in reporting a more

comprehensive feature story on the exhibit that serves to educate the community about low vision.

5. Materials provided by NEI greatly help Host Committees be efficient.

It appears that the excellent materials provided by NEI to Host Committees help guide the planning process and are used by the Committee leaders. Their meetings and minutes are clearly organized by NEI staff and a wide range of template materials (timelines, lists of duties, letters of invitation, email blast, guidelines, flyers, evaluation materials, etc.) seem to be consistently used by the Host Committees.

V. REVIEW OF EXHIBIT MATERIALS

Overview:

GYMR Public Relations evaluated the materials used to explain the National Eye Institute's traveling Eye Site exhibit to reporters and the public in order to assess how effectively the materials meet the exhibit's goals. The majority of materials and distribution data from the exhibit were provided by NEI or accessed online at The Eye Site website. Whenever possible, all materials are identified by the names used in NEI literature.

Overarching Conclusions:

- Materials for informing the public and reporters about the exhibit – and low vision – are targeted and thorough.
- The Eye Site website could be used as an important portal for providing low vision information to new audiences, rather than remaining just an organizational site for information on the exhibit.

Evaluation Findings:

Exhibit Marketing and Promotional Materials

1. Materials for marketing and promoting the exhibit to the public are varied and contain the necessary information to effectively publicize the exhibit.

A total of 28 materials and/or printed images of the materials were evaluated. There were six types marketing and promotional materials, and several versions of each were provided. These included:

- In-Mall flyers – For promotions inside the malls, in English and Spanish
- Mall flyers – For promotions outside of the malls
- Table tent and tent card – Placed on tables in food court, etc.
- Posters – Full color posters
- Banners – Interior and exterior promotional banners for display at exhibit locations
- Ads – Print advertisements for local papers in different sizes (full page, ¼ page, and 5x7)

a. Messages are consistent across all materials.

In general, three elements were used to drive the messages in every item reviewed:

- A provocative question to attract the audience (e.g. "Do you or someone you know have trouble seeing?")
- Health-related information draws viewers to The Eye Site (e.g. "Macular Degeneration, Glaucoma, Cataract, Diabetic Eye Disease. If you or someone you know has trouble seeing, visit The EYE SITE for information.")
- Explanatory information that describes the exhibit and/or its goals ("Visit The EYE SITE, A Traveling Exhibit on Low Vision for Shopping Centers")

b. Nearly all materials can be easily customized for local use.

The majority of marketing and promotional materials had consistent and customized information for each of the exhibit venues, including: the exhibit's name, exact locations, dates, times, special event information, and a list of the host committees. Materials to drive attendance to special event and promotional details (such as keynote speakers, doctor visits, and prize drawings) were particularly abundant.

c. Promotional materials do not consistently direct viewers to other resources.

Materials did not consistently provide resources for additional information, with only eight of all of the materials citing a phone number (and only one – the Grand Central Terminal Ad – including the 1-877-LOW-VISION number). Only three items included the NEI website address, and/or its Eye Site page.

d. NIH and NEI are clearly branded as part of the exhibit and its materials.

All of the materials included some sort of clear mention of NEI and the National Institutes of Health, and many also included the NIH logo.

Media Materials

1. Media materials provided to the Host Committees and/or local sponsors include all of the necessary information and messages consistent with other exhibit materials and appear to be easy to use.

A total of six examples of media material types were provided for evaluation, including:

- Short press release – Press release less than one page in length
- Long press release – Press release more than one page in length
- Media alert release – One page release meant to provide quick details and information to media (What, where, when, etc.)
- Radio PSA script (in both English and Spanish)
- National video PSA – General PSA segment on the exhibit and its goals.
- Regional video PSA – Customized local information for each location.

a. Messages in media materials are consistent with messages conveyed in promotional materials.

The media materials included general, health-related and explanatory messages and expanded upon messages conveyed in the promotional materials. The messages were consistent among all media materials and included:

- Lengthier health explanations and definitions on low vision (“Low vision is a visual impairment not correctable...”)
- Quotes from the director of the NEI and local host committee spokespeople.
- Extensive descriptions of the exhibit (“Five kiosks with an interactive multimedia touch screen program...”)

b. Media materials are customizable, to-the-point and appear easy to use.

The majority of media materials included approved messages and language from the program. Where appropriate the materials could easily be edited to customize with local information for each of the exhibits' locations. All of the media materials included local exhibit details (location, date, time, etc.), mention of the exhibit's goals, a clear mention of the NEI, resources for additional information and always including the 1-877 phone number and the website.

[Note: The only exception is the Radio PSA script, which deviates by describing the exhibit as only being from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and fails to mention the NIH.]

c. Opportunities exist to provide spokespeople with more guidance on managing media interviews.

While the template materials provided to the local organizers are very thorough, other materials could be developed that could provide them with resources to make them more comfortable in interviews, such as a list of key messages, a suggested question and answer document for likely media, etc. This could have the added benefit of increasing their willingness to pursue interviews and more substantive coverage.

Informational and Educational Materials

1. The content and graphics of the informational and educational materials are appealing and in line with the exhibit’s goals of being a public education program and raising awareness of low vision problems.

There are seven types of informational and educational materials from the exhibit that were provided for evaluation and/or described in The Eye Site Info Pack literature:

- “What Causes Low Vision?” flyer in English and Spanish, customized for each venue with local statistics, gives
- “Local Resources” flyer – in English and Spanish
- “Tips for Talking With Your Doctor” flyer
- The Eye Site bookmark
- “Vision” school flyer
- “Healthy Vision Month” activity book – for children ages 6-8
- “Health Vision Month” activity book – for children ages 9-12

a. Local resources are most popular.

Based on NEI data, the most popular item distributed through The Eye Site is a listing of local resources to assist consumers who may have low vision. Based on samples, the information provides exhibit visitors with a convenient resource of state and local vision resources that they or someone they know could use.

b. The content and graphics of the take-away materials are of high quality.

Overall, the content and graphics of the informational and educational materials from The Eye Site achieve the stated goals of the exhibit program: to function as a public education program to promote eye health care and increase awareness of low vision. The materials use textual prompts, statistics and graphics to inform readers about low vision, the importance of regular eye checkups and encourage them to seek help. Perhaps the best example of this can be seen in the “What Causes” flyer, which includes customized local statistics for diseases like cataracts and macular degeneration, as well as altered pictures that demonstrate what the view is like for someone suffering from those diseases.

c. Virtually all of the take-away materials drive people to more information and underscore NEI’s name recognition.

Every one of the materials included the website and/or the 1-877-LOW-VISION phone number as resources for more information. Many of them offered additional, free resources for those who requested them. NEI and NIH were consistently mentioned in

the materials are the exhibit's sponsors, furthering awareness of the NEI/NIH and its mission.

Website

1. The Eye Site website should be revamped to meet the needs of consumers.

Given today's graphic and design standards for information conveyed through the internet, The Eye Site's website could be refreshed.

a. The audience seems to be internal to the management and organization of The Eye Site, rather than communicating The Eye Site's low vision messages to the public.

While the current website offers a repository of materials for Host Committee members and others, it is not geared for the general public and does not offer material and information for the consumer.

b. The layout needs to be updated to reflect the latest web capabilities and better serve an older, low vision audience and their friends and family members.

If the website is to serve the needs of the exhibit's target audience, some design and layout considerations would have to take place, such as larger type and starker color differentiation so that it could be easily read by people with low vision. It should also be possible to reduce the number of clicks to access information and incorporate graphical navigational aids like buttons and images to help visitors with poor vision find information. Ideally, the site would use an address that is more consumer-friendly and memorable, such as www.Eye Site.gov.

c. Materials provided on the website should mirror and expand on those provided at the actual exhibit.

The Eye Site website could provide more in-depth information from the exhibit, or even the same information as the exhibit, so that exhibit visitors can refer friends and family to the website. Since all of the media materials drive visitors to the website, the site should be designed for the general public.

VI. MEDIA AUDIT

Overview:

GYMR Public Relations evaluated a sampling of media clips to determine how the National Eye Institute traveling Eye Site exhibit is reported by the media. The clips were provided by NEI and collected from major commercial media databases.

A total of 70 print articles and 14 television news pieces were assessed. The articles were published or aired during the time period of March 2001 – May 2006. Media clips were evaluated for the following eight data points:

1. Type of Article: Print consumer, print trade or broadcast.
2. Format: Article, short “blurb” about exhibit or calendar mention.
3. Names: Were NEI and/or National Institutes of Health (NIH) named as sponsors?
4. Information: Was there mention of the NEI website or the 1-877-LOW-VISION phone number for more information?
5. Quotes and interviews: Who was quoted or interviewed? Are they NEI representatives or local spokespeople?
6. Language accessibility: Were the exhibit’s Spanish language resources mentioned?
7. Families and children: Was there mention of the ELVEE character as an attraction?
8. Coverage angle: What is the angle of the media coverage? Does it achieve the exhibit’s goals of education and awareness?

Overarching Conclusions:

- Media coverage nicely tracks the exhibit’s goals.
- Most coverage seems to be placed by Host Committees (if placed by mall managers, content is less-specific about low vision).
- Quotes are largely taken from national spokespeople, rather than local spokespeople.

Key Findings:

1. Angles covered by the media are in line with the exhibit’s goals.

Media coverage is overwhelmingly in sync with the stated goal of the exhibit: to function as a public education program to promote eye health care and increase awareness of low vision.

- 100 percent of the broadcast coverage made extensive mention of the health issues surrounding low vision disabilities.
- Half of all print clips contained medical information, descriptions and definitions of “low vision” – its causes and resources available to alleviate suffering.
- Many of the print clips contained in-depth discussion of the health issues surrounding low vision including causes, treatments and national and local

resources. They also suggested regular eye checkups and promoted the importance of eye health care.

2. The majority of coverage appeared in local community publications, rather than local “trade” publications (newsletters, etc.)

Nearly all of the print clips analyzed (62) appeared in consumer print publications, while 13 of the television clips were on the daily newscasts of local stations.

- Only 8 clips appeared in local trade publications, such as the newsletters of local optometric associations.
- Only one of the broadcast media clips aired on cable television.

3. The format of print coverage was varied, but included a number of feature articles on the exhibit and the issue.

Coverage included a diverse spread of clips, but most were feature stories explaining the exhibit and the issue.

- Nearly half (43 percent) were “articles,” which are defined as narrative pieces more than one paragraph in length about the exhibit or topic.
- About one in three (32 percent) were “blurbs” or short narrative pieces 2-3 sentences in length explaining the availability of the exhibit.
- One in four (25 percent) were calendar mentions that listed the exhibit and its location, among a listing of other community events.

4. NEI was named in the media coverage as exhibit sponsors.

Coverage of the exhibit often named NEI or NIH as The Eye Site’s sponsors, furthering awareness of the NEI/NIH and its mission to improve the health of U.S. citizens.

- In almost 75 percent of the print clips and almost 65 percent of broadcast clips, a clear mention of the NEI and/or NIH sponsorship was made.
- However, in 42 percent of the coverage, NEI was the *only* sponsor mentioned with no linkage to its relationship to the National Institutes of Health.
- One in four (27 percent) media placements failed to mention either NEI or NIH.

5. Media coverage does not routinely include resources for additional information.

About half of the media coverage mentioned the 1-877-LOW-VISION phone number and/or the NEI website as resources for additional information.

- 30 of the print clips (43 percent) mentioned the website, while only nine (13 percent) mentioned the phone number.
- More than half (57 percent) of the broadcast segments mentioned either the website and/or phone number.

6. There are tremendous opportunities to shape the quotes that are being used in the media coverage.

Few of the print clips contained quotes, which may represent a missed opportunity to shape the message of the exhibit for the news media.

- Less than 25 percent of print coverage contained at least one quote.
- Only five of the print clips contained interviews or quotes from spokespeople identified as affiliated with NEI or Eye Site spokespeople. When NEI staff was

quoted, it was the Institute's director and acting director, and NEI communications spokespeople.

- Local spokespeople, social workers and/or individuals suffering from low vision were sometimes quoted in local coverage. The majority of "article" print coverage included personal stories of community members who have learned to cope with low vision through the aid of local resources.

7. Few clips mentioned the ELVEE character as an attraction.

Although ELVEE is beneficial to the exhibit and serves as an attraction whether or not he receives media coverage, very little mention of the ELVEE character is made in the media as a potential attraction for children.

- Only eight print and one broadcast clip mentioned ELVEE, amounting to just 11 percent of the overall media coverage.

8. A large percentage of the media clips mentioned that the exhibit presented information and resources in both English and Spanish.

A surprising number of clips (40 percent of the print clips and 21 percent of the broadcast clips) mentioned that the exhibit presented information in both English and Spanish.

- The fact that the authors chose to highlight this detail as being of interest to their readers is indicative of the growing Spanish-speaking community in the U.S.
- At the same time, only one of the media clips came from a Spanish language newspaper which contained a blurb written in Spanish.

VII. NOTES ON OTHER NIH-SPONSORED EXHIBITS

Background:

GYMR Public Relations spoke with a handful of long-time NIH communications directors regarding other traveling exhibits that are sponsored by NIH Institutes or Centers (NIH IC). The conversations were informal and should be considered neither comprehensive nor definitive, but they did provide useful insights.

Overarching Conclusions:

- The Eye Site is unique among NIH exhibits.
- The only similar exhibit is part of the *Heart Truth* Campaign, sponsored by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI).
- Like The Eye Site, it travels to malls to reach consumers with a public health message. Unlike The Eye Site, it only exhibits in the malls for three-day weekend engagements. It is fully staffed at all times and does not include a kick-off event.

Evaluation Findings:

1. **Many NIH ICs have traveling exhibits that are used for trade shows and scientific assemblies, but exhibits like The Eye Site are unique.**
With just one exception, no other NIH body has an exhibit that presents public health information at shopping malls.
2. **The *Heart Truth* Campaign has a series of traveling exhibits, including one that visits shopping malls.**
NIH's NHLBI sponsors several exhibits as part of its *Heart Truth* Campaign. The exhibit used for shopping malls is comprised of a runway featuring red dresses made by famous high-fashion designers, along with kiosks containing information on prevalence and prevention of heart disease in women. Free screenings for the potential of heart disease are also conducted at the same time.
Information on this exhibit includes:
 - The *Heart Truth* Campaign exhibited at five malls in 2004, and is doing so again this year.
 - This year the *Red Dress* exhibit will appear at malls in Pittsburgh, Memphis, Jacksonville and elsewhere.
 - Markets are areas where female mortality from heart disease is high.
 - Additional funding for the exhibit comes from *Red Dress* partners, including the American College of Cardiology, Womenheart, etc.
 - The exhibit lasts three days – from Thursday night through Sunday night.
 - The exhibit is staffed at all times by campaign staff and local volunteers who offer free screenings.
 - Evaluation measures include number of screenings provided, mall foot traffic and gift bags distributed (goodies provided by *Red Dress* supporters).
 - Campaign staff handle all media outreach prior to the installation in a local mall.
 - An opening ceremony is typically not held, since the exhibit lasts just one weekend.

VIII. OBSERVATIONS FROM VISITING THE EYE SITE

Background:

GYMR visited The Eye Site exhibit in Walnut Square Mall in Dalton, Georgia, to interview people who had viewed the exhibit to obtain their opinions on what they had learned, and their suggestions for improvement. The exhibit was located in a high-traffic location within the mall, with about 200-250 people per hour passing by. During two days of observation, only two mall patrons visited the exhibit. On the second day, GYMR began asking people who passed the exhibit why they had not stopped to view it. They told us they had either not noticed the exhibit or did not think it was relevant to their needs.

NOTE: It is important to note that GYMR visited the exhibit late in its run, and the possibility exists that many people who frequently visit the mall had already stopped at the exhibit. Touchscreen reports and an evaluation of materials distributed show that, while not overwhelmingly popular compared to some other 2006 sites, approximately 200 people used the touchscreen and more than 250 pieces of informational material were distributed during the exhibit's run.

Detailed Report:

Walnut Square Mall is a busy, mid-size regional shopping mall, serving a local population of 320,000, according to its website. The mall has 75 stores in 450,000 square feet, including three anchor stores (J.C. Penny, Belk and Sears). From observation, the demographics of the mall patrons appeared very broad, including teenagers, young adults with children, as well as middle aged and older adults. About two-thirds of the patrons were Caucasian and about one-third Hispanic. There were very few African-Americans.

The Eye Site was located in the center of the mall, in the main traffic corridor, across from Belk's. This was a busy location, arguably receiving the greatest traffic of any non-store location in the mall. In fact, the exhibit was set up so that people needed to walk through it to get to the other side of the mall. GYMR staffer Karen Waller counted that at least 250 people per hour came within 10 feet of The Eye Site on a Friday afternoon and about 150 per hour on a Saturday morning.

Karen arrived at the mall at noon on Friday, August 18. She walked through all the mall's hallways, observing the mall layout, The Eye Site location and any promotional information. She also looked at the exhibit itself in detail, reading the display materials, and reviewing the video display. She had a brief scheduled meeting with the mall marketing director at 1:00 pm, and then returned to the exhibit location to observe and interview exhibit visitors.

During her visit, Karen noticed several kinds of on-site promotion. There were 8.5 x 11.5 inch flyers about The Eye Site available at the customer service desk. There were two 18 x 24 inch posters displayed, one on the wall in the hallway going to the mall restrooms, and the other in a display stand visible as patrons exited Belk's (about 30 feet from the exhibit).

During the Friday afternoon, Karen viewed the exhibit for five hours, until 5:30 pm. Although the mall was busy, she did not observe any mall patrons stopping to view any part of The Eye Site.

That same day, a local eye clinic was also holding free vision screenings at tables located near the exhibit (about 15 feet away); the screenings were staffed by three paraprofessionals. They were in the mall from 2 pm to 5 pm, during which time they screened two young school-age boys. The screening staff said that they had held screenings for four consecutive Fridays during the exhibit's time in Dalton. They did not know how many screenings took place overall.

The next day, Saturday, Karen observed The Eye Site from the mall's opening until mid afternoon. During that period, two people stopped to view the exhibit, one older (65+) man looked at the video display for slightly over two minutes and a middle-aged woman read a portion of the exhibit for about 45 seconds. When Karen interviewed them, the man said he could not recall anything he had learned from the exhibit. The woman said her husband had diabetes and that she had stopped to read the section on diabetic retinopathy.

Because it was not possible to interview mall patrons who had visited the exhibit, GYMR decided to conduct interviews with individuals who passed The Eye Site without stopping to view it. Her goal was to determine 1) if they had noticed the exhibit at all and 2) if so, why they had not stopped to view it.

Karen began these revised interviews on Saturday morning, targeting individuals who appeared over 40 years of age. In two hours, she spoke with 14 people who were Caucasian and one person who was Hispanic. Most were over the age of 60.

Interestingly, over half of those she asked said that they had not noticed the exhibit, even if they passed directly through it. Others had not stopped because they didn't think the topic was interesting or relevant to them.

Karen spoke with nearby vendors who told her they had observed The Eye Site over a period of time. One salesperson at the neighboring cell phone sales kiosk (directly adjacent to The Eye Site) told her that in the month The Eye Site had been in place, "about two people a day" stopped and looked at the exhibit. He noted that during the opening days, when The Eye Site was staffed for a few days, there was much greater activity and attendance at the exhibit.

Misc. Observations:

Karen noticed that sunlight from the mall skylights above The Eye Site created glare on the video display screen, making it very difficult to see in the mall environment. The videos shown as part of the display were even more difficult to see because they were shown on only a portion of the screen. The audio of the exhibit was difficult to hear/understand over the mall music and other ambient noise. Even though the mall was not vast, she felt the exhibit's technology was better suited for a smaller space.

IX. EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Eye Site has strong support among internal and external stakeholders, who view the exhibit as (a) a novel and effective way to educate the public about low vision and (b) an effective tool for forging relationships between NEI and local vision research institutions.**

NEI staff, vision leaders throughout the nation, and outside professionals all believe that The Eye Site is a unique vehicle for disseminating information on low vision. Most have seen the site exhibited in a range of shopping centers and believe malls are an effective venue for reaching a range of audiences with public health information. In addition to conveying important and useful information, The Eye Site effectively helps NEI (and by extension, all of NIH) strengthen its relationship with research institutions throughout the nation and related entities that help improve vision health in communities.

- 2. Messages conveyed through The Eye Site are well-coordinated, consistent, and professionally packaged and presented.**

Based on GYMR's review of materials disseminated to the public through The Eye Site – or supplied to local Host Committees or others who help manage and market the exhibit – all materials produced by NEI for The Eye Site are clear, succinct, on-message, and polished.

- 3. The contents of the exhibit have been carefully crafted and can be repackaged and refreshed to reach even more people.**

There is widespread support for both updating the look/feel of the exhibit and repacking its contents to reach more audiences. This includes a smaller, more portable exhibit that could be displayed at senior centers and libraries, transferring the contents of the exhibit to a [www.Eye Site.gov](http://www.EyeSite.gov) website, packaging the contents of the exhibit into a media kit for long-lead magazine reporters, etc.

- 4. The role of the Host Committee – or another entity to physically staff the exhibit and plan localized awareness-raising activities – is important to the exhibit's success and should be a factor in thinking about the exhibit's future.**

Although it is not imperative, GYMR's review of media coverage, conversations with mall managers and interviews with staff and external audiences show that the presence of a Host Committee, or some other group to physically staff the exhibit, increases the success of the exhibition. The Committee seems to serve a very important function in terms of creating local buzz, earning local media coverage and planning a well-attended kick-off event. All of these functions seem to be less successful without a Committee.

Thoughts for the Future:

Although an evaluation of this type is only cursory, and greater analysis with more in-depth data would yield richer information and more quantifiable results, GYMR is certain from this analysis that NEI has a large opportunity to build on the success of The Eye Site. The Eye Site has been crafted with thought and expertise and is an excellent platform for presenting information to consumers on (a) how to identify low vision and (b) becoming familiar with strategies and products that help people with low vision live as comfortably as possible.

Based on what we heard, GYMR offers the following ideas to help you think about the future of the exhibit.

- Convene a discussion about the specific target audience for the exhibit's information and what messages are geared for that audience. While the exhibit crosses many audiences, we were struck by the range of audiences interviewees cited as the "target" audience.
- Given the pace that computers become obsolete, consider either purchasing new computers for the exhibit, or eliminating the computers altogether in a smaller exhibit. Some interviewees said older viewers had difficulty reading the computer kiosks.
- Consider limiting the exhibition to three days. All external interviewees said the most successful period for the exhibit was the first weekend it opened, and that attendance and interest dramatically dropped after the initial weekend.
- Consider the average age of shoppers in the malls where the exhibit is displayed. Perhaps the exhibit would be most cost-effective at reaching older Americans if it were exhibited only in communities where a disproportionate share of older adults reside.
- Rethink the role and necessity of a Host Committee (or a similar arrangement with paid or volunteer staff) to manage and staff the exhibit and plan a kick-off event.
- Brainstorm a list of additional, low-cost venues for a smaller, more portable exhibit. (e.g. senior centers, libraries, etc.)
- Consider creating a consistent media plan for each exhibition that could be implemented by NEI. This could include obtaining local quotes and local resources, booking a speaker on a local talk radio show to discuss low vision, sending information to local organizations and their newsletters (churches, AARP, senior centers, etc), pitching local print media, booking segments on television news programs and local cable outlets, reaching minority media in the community, etc. This would create consistency among each site and increase exposure to the messages of the exhibit.
- Review the size of text in printed materials and kiosks to ensure they are easily legible for older adults.
- Consider designing a website that would house all of the exhibit information so that there is a virtual "Eye Site" for people who will not see the exhibit at a shopping center or other venue.
- Have a discussion about how ELVEE could be used in all materials to more effectively "brand" the exhibit. Could he be used in educational materials aimed at children with questions to ask their grandparents?

X. ATTACHMENTS: INTERVIEW SCRIPTS

Interview Questions for NEI Staff Members/Contractors re: Eye Site Exhibit

Thank you for speaking with me about The Eye Site, the National Eye Institute's traveling exhibit on low vision. My name is _____, and I work for GYMR Public Relations, a local firm here in Washington, DC. We have been engaged by NEI's communications staff to evaluate The Eye Site exhibit.

This interview is only one part of our evaluation. We will also be interviewing others who have been involved with the low vision exhibit by serving on Host Committees, as well as shopping center contacts, local community organizations and exhibit visitors. Once our work is complete, we will compile a report of our findings for the NEI communications team.

This interview is strictly confidential. We will not connect your name to specific answers. Your response will only be used in our assessment and evaluation of The Eye Site. Our discussion should take approximately 10 minutes.

- 1a. As you understand it, what was the initial purpose or goal of the traveling exhibit?
- 1b. Has it evolved since then, and if so, how?
- 2a. To what audience is it geared?
- 2b. Do you think The Eye Site is effectively reaching that audience?
3. What messages does the site convey to visitors?
4. In your opinion, what aspects of the exhibit are most effective at communicating key messages to target audiences – the kiosks, the handouts, the interactive touch screen program, the media coverage, the volunteers who are on site to answer questions...?
5. What *other* goals do you think the exhibit helps NEI achieve – enhanced relationships with local research institutions, forging new relationships with local Host Committee members, anything else?
- 6a. What about The Eye Site exhibit has been most successful?
- 6b. What would you say has been most challenging about the exhibit?
- 6c. If NEI could change just one thing about The Eye Site exhibit – what it does, the messages it communicates, where it travels, etc. – what do you think it should be? Why?
7. In comparing the amount of time spent and expenses incurred against the number of people who have seen the exhibit and the goals that have been achieved, are you satisfied? (*probe* What more would you like to do? What holds you back?)
8. In the future – as the exhibit continues – what should constitute 'success' for The Eye Site?
9. Are you aware of any similar NIH traveling exhibit programs? If so, Please describe.

Interview Questions for People in the Field re: THE EYE SITE Exhibit

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about THE EYE SITE, the National Eye Institute's traveling exhibit on low vision. My name is _____, and I work for GYMR Public Relations, a firm in Washington, DC. We have been engaged by NEI's Office of Communications to evaluate the traveling Eye Site exhibit.

Explain why they are being interviewed/why their input is valuable/crucial to the evaluation process. This interview is only one part of our evaluation.

In addition to your input as a Host Committee member, we will also be interviewing NEI staff, and we have already completed a review of media coverage generated about THE EYE SITE exhibit, as well as a review of materials about the site.

Once these evaluation elements are complete, we will compile a report of our findings for the NEI communications team.

This interview is strictly confidential. We will not connect your name or your organization to specific answers. Your response will only be used in our assessment and evaluation of THE EYE SITE. Our discussion should only take about 10 minutes.

Interview Questions:

1. Why did you bring THE EYE SITE to your community? What was your role on the [INSERT NAME] Host Committee?
2. What is your overall impression of THE EYE SITE exhibit? (*probe* – why do you think that...)
3. What did you think of the exhibit's look or appearance? Did it effectively draw the attention of shopping center/mall visitors?
4. How well attended was the exhibit when it was on display in your community/mall? How could attendance be increased?
5. Did you use the advance marketing materials about the exhibit? Which ones?
 - 5a. Were they helpful? (*probe* – anything you remember in particular about them?)
 - 5b. Are there other types of marketing materials that you would prefer to receive?
6. Did you receive feedback about the exhibit? If so, what sorts of things did you hear?
7. To what audience is the exhibit geared? Do you think THE EYE SITE is effectively reaching that audience? (*probe* – low vision sufferers? Family/friends?)
 - 7a. What could have helped reach them even more?
8. Did your Host Committee hold events at/around the exhibit? If so, were these events effective in attracting visitors to the exhibit?
9. What did you think of the handouts provided for exhibit visitors?

10. How well coordinated was the assistance you received from NEI and its contractors?
10a. Could anything about that process be improved?
11. For this particular exhibit, did you have any role in encouraging media coverage?
11a. If yes, what types of things did you do? Were they successful?
11b. What could have helped you get more media coverage?
12. What would you define as 'success' for THE EYE SITE exhibit?
12a. So did the exhibit meet or exceed your expectations? (*probe* – was it a success?)
13. Do you think building a local coalition of partners and forming a Host Committee to sponsor the exhibit added to the value and overall success of the project?
13a. Have you, or would you, consider it beneficial to continue working with the Host Committee partners on other mutual projects?
14. Have you continued to work with other members of the Host Committee? If yes, please describe. If no, why not?
15. Would you find a more portable version of the exhibit useful and/or more appropriate for your uses? What format would you prefer? (*probe* – web-based, table-top, laptop, flipchart, other?)

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