

# Excerpt

*Engaging Visitors*

AMERICAN SPACES

# Idea Book 2.0



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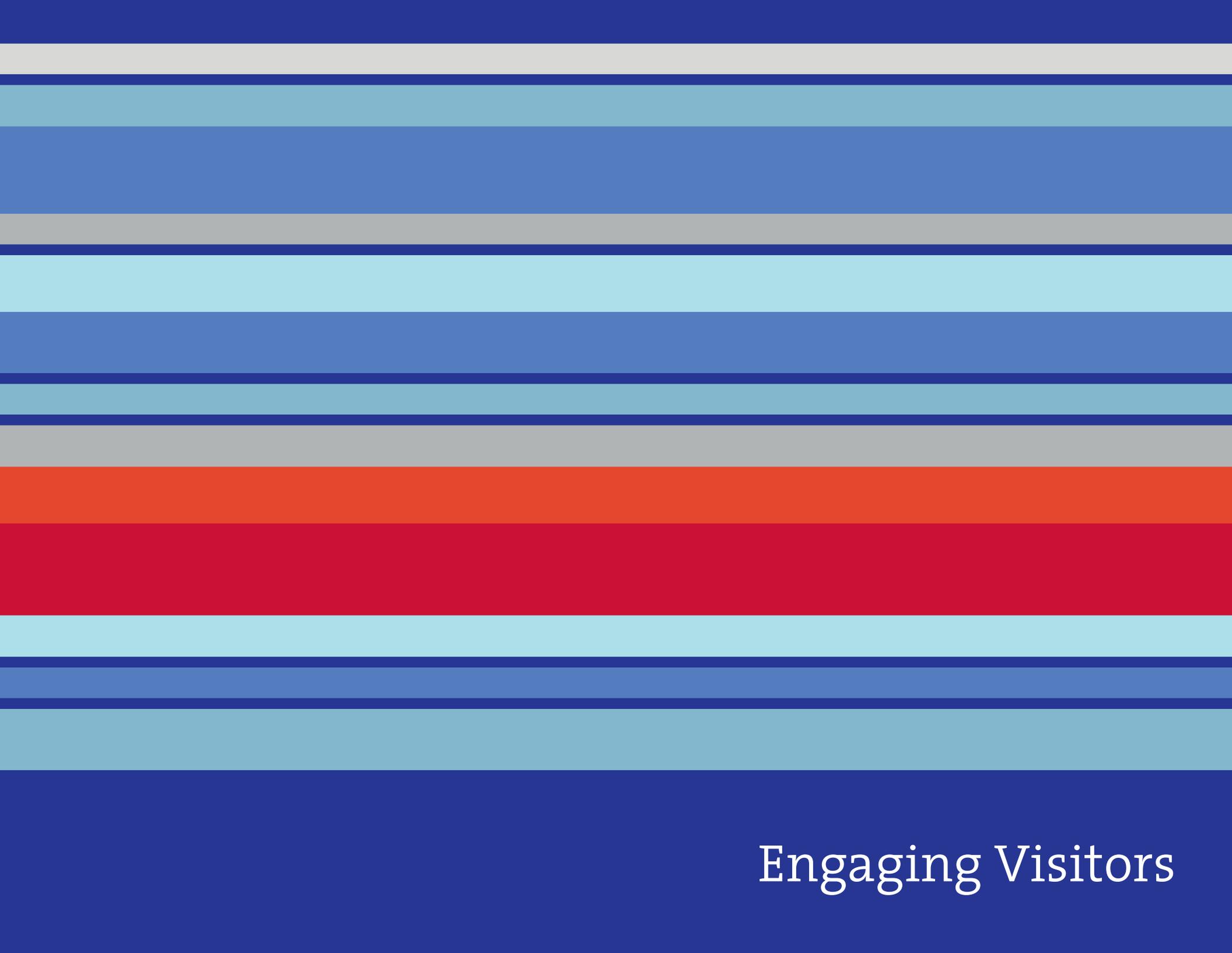
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Engaging Visitors

What makes visitors come back to an American Space? Maybe it's the topical speakers on issues of local interest, such as climate change. Perhaps they want to connect with someone in America. Or it could be the appeal of a vibrant, stimulating place to create and construct.

American Spaces are evolving into collaborative laboratories that inspire local residents, alumni, partners and others to build new products, share current ideas and solve old problems, all while advancing U.S. and mission foreign policy goals.

By providing cutting-edge technology, hands-on creative opportunities and virtual learning platforms, American Spaces are increasingly becoming informal discovery environments in one or more U.S. foreign policy themes:

- cultivate entrepreneurship
- specialize in science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM)
- model civil society

all the while fostering personal and professional growth. *In this dynamic habitat, focus is moving away from passive space—studying and reading areas—and quietness.*

To engage people in an active environment, American Spaces need to look and feel engaging. They also need to look American, and to the extent possible, visually reflect the essence of policies they are communicating, such as innovation or tolerance. Idea Book 2.0 provides ideas and inspiration for designing a physical framework that encourages visitors to embrace a creative setting.

Among people who visit American Spaces are members of minorities at risk (women, religious and cultural minorities), trade associations, media, host governments, local governments, and civil society organizations. Others are opinion leaders, academics, alumni, business leaders and young professionals, as well as tourists and students going to the United States. Increasingly, American Spaces are hosting focus groups to learn more about their audiences and help them create programs. Tips for conducting focus groups are provided on page 3.4 of this book.

Using the Idea Book 2.0 as a guide, American Spaces can set up environments that flexibly accommodate the diversity of their audiences and that

- are open, welcoming, modern and vibrant,
- provide different kinds of experiences—informal and formal, social and independent—and
- offer various ways to access and use advanced technology and equipment.



# The American Spaces Experience

Programming is becoming more “bold and dynamic,” defined as innovative, fun, thought-provoking, creative, exciting, unique and, above all, mission-driven.

Posts are helping their American Spaces align programming with integrated country strategy (ICS) and public diplomacy goals. “Campaign” programming is taking priority over one-time events.

**Bold and dynamic programming:**

- promotes active participation and “doing” over listening and sitting in an audience,
- enables users to decide, plan and/or implement activities,
- takes advantage of residents who have been to the United States, as well as U.S. expatriates, and
- is policy-relevant.

Active programming that can exemplify policy themes includes maker activities, which can indirectly promote a policy, such as climate change or civil society, or business classes that directly promote entrepreneurship and self-reliance. Examples include:

**Makerspaces**

- Courses on robotics, computer programming, or 3D printing to promote skill building and digital literacy
- Model building and prototyping of business ideas or products
- Ongoing workshops or professional-level courses
- Maker Faire to showcase local makers, tech enthusiasts, educators, tinkerers, engineers, science clubs, artists, or students

**Entrepreneurship/Business**

- Resume-writing classes, using peer editing to encourage community
- Social networking workshops to promote an individual or business, examining Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or local equivalents and showing how to connect with American mentors
- Blogging effectively and appropriately to promote business
- Writing a business plan or grant proposal



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# Bold and Dynamic Programming

This increasingly active environment provides the opportunity to involve more outside expertise through partnerships with local public or private organizations.

**Suggestions for recruiting facilitators, trainers, volunteers and partners:**

- Seek possible “feeder” systems, such as local schools or universities
- Locate local makerspaces, co-working entrepreneurial hubs, or FabLabs
- Seek out American expatriates

**Suggestions for retaining volunteers:**

- Provide location-appropriate incentive systems, such as professional development training, access to online courses, special access to visitors/speakers, or appreciation activities/events
- Explain that volunteering can be helpful to include on a college application
- Increase the volunteers’ ownership of projects
- Increase the volunteers’ responsibilities within the American Space



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**Bold and Dynamic Programming** *(continued)*

Whether you're designing a new space, updating your current space, or evaluating your programmatic offerings, focus groups can provide some of the most valuable insights into the thinking and needs of American Space users, staff, partners, and alumni.

A focus group is a small-group discussion centered on a dedicated topic, or range of topics, led by a facilitator. In a focus group, discussants are encouraged to express their opinions and share ideas with one another to provide the facilitator with honest feedback and direction about a given subject. These sessions can be creative, informative, and productive.

Ask participants questions about their favorite programs that the space currently offers or the kinds of programs or technology they would like to see offered. Spend time talking about the look and feel of the space and what would make the physical environment attractive and appealing to them. Use focus groups to find out what brings patrons to the space, what keeps them coming back, and what makes the space unique.

Consider facilitating focus groups composed of:

- American Spaces staff
- EducationUSA, FLEX, Fulbright, Access, and other local partner staff
- Alumni of USG Programs
- Existing or potential target audiences
- Existing or potential partners
- Program participants

For more ideas about leading a focus group in your space, including suggestions for types of questions to ask, please see our Recommendations for Leading a Focus Group document found at <https://americanspaces.state.gov/smithsonian>



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# Conducting Focus Groups

The breadth and depth of Smithsonian resources, including more than 850 Smithsonian-related websites, means it can be challenging to know where to begin.

With a focus on supporting English language learning, classroom activities and innovative programming, this content has been highlighted in two convenient digital sources. The **Content and Programming Book** and the themed **Content Packages** gather and organize Smithsonian resources into manageable digital files.

**The Content and Programming Book** is a comprehensive digital book providing information about how to use Smithsonian content, recommendations for running successful programs, and a collection of resources according to six foreign policy priority topics:

- U.S. History, Presidents and Democracy
- Equality, Human Rights and Tolerance
- American Culture and Diaspora
- Science, Technology, Health and the Environment
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Education/Education Diplomacy.

**The Content Packages** tackle the wide-ranging SI resources and organize them by theme into pre-selected, pre-curated content “packages” that reside on the American Spaces website. For each resource, you’ll find a brief summary of the material as well as a few suggestions for how the content can be quickly and easily incorporated into a program. Themes range from American holidays, such as Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, to foreign policy priority themes including women’s empowerment and entrepreneurship.

The Content and Programming Book and the Content Packages strive to find the balance between SI’s extensive content and distribution to suit the needs of your space and audience and are available for download through the Smithsonian module of [americanspaces.state.gov](http://americanspaces.state.gov).



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# Smithsonian Content and Digital Programming Resources