

Jet Propulsion Laboratory Visitor Center Upgrade
Administered by JPL Education Office
Type of Agreement: Contract
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Upgrade JPL's existing von Karman Visitor Center.

Goal: Through a facilitated or self-guided experience in JPL's von Karman Visitor Center, guests gain an appreciation and understanding of the diversity and scale of our solar system and the universe, why we explore, and how we explore.

Objectives: Use the Visitor Center and its exhibits to explain the process of space exploration as conducted by NASA/JPL, for a variety of visitors ranging from elementary students to heads of state. Provide the context for the other stops on a typical tour of JPL (which usually includes mission control and the spacecraft assembly facility) while giving them a sense of the human talent, skill and creativity necessary to study and explore our home planet, our solar system, and the universe. Tell the story of space exploration in a clear, engaging, and visual way. Provide educational opportunities.

Outcome: In FY09, JPL Facilities secured institutional funds for construction changes to the JPL Visitor Center in FY10, which will enable more effective use of the space. An exhibit design firm was selected and delivered a final conceptual design. A Request for Proposals for fabrication of the exhibit hardware was developed. . The upgrade project is on track to close the JPL Visitor Center on Dec 18, 2009 and to reopen in May 2010.

Detail

In FY2009, a final conceptual design was developed by the exhibit design firm. Key elements include:

- Replace "trade-show" portable exhibit structures with sturdier, more sophisticated modular structures that allow flexibility in terms of updating images, text, video, or computer content.
- Refresh content with current images, text, video, and computer interactives.
- Include a scale model solar system (planets to scale) and universe
- Install one or two new interactive exhibits

PROJECT BENEFIT TO OUTCOME (1, 2, OR 3)

The Visitor Center upgrade primarily benefits Outcome 3 (Inspire, Engage) by telling the story of space exploration for varied audiences in an engaging and compelling way. Since school children and other students constitute a large number of JPL's annual visitors, the upgrade also serves the intentions/spirit of Outcomes 1 (Employ) and 2 (Educate) indirectly.

PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS (*CONNECTION BACK TO ANNUAL PERFORMANCE GOALS AND PLANS*)

Developed plans for necessary facilities changes including creating solid walls, moving an electrical panel, incorporating another approx 100 sq ft of space into the Visitor Center, creating a new office space for Visitor Center/Auditorium information staff, new carpeting, trenching for electrical and A/V cabling, and acoustic treatments. Secured internal funds for FY10 to implement facilities changes. Issued RFP for facilities contractor.

Selected nationally known exhibit design firm and implemented contract for detailed conceptual design, which was received in Sept. 2009. Developed RFP for exhibit fabrication.

Completed front-end evaluation of the JPL visitor experience, which included on-line surveys, phone interviews, and “tracking and timing” observations of visitor demographics including school groups and the general public.

Continued tours for students and general public.

PROJECT CONTRIBUTIONS TO PART MEASURES

(Fiscal year 2009 (Oct 2008 – September 2009)

Tour groups: 793 tour groups (26,474 people)

including 435 student groups (14,914 students, teachers, chaperones)

Open House: 30,000 people (over two days)

JPL is a member of the NASA Museum Alliance and is included in the number of museums that host NASA events. JPL hosts events such as a monthly public lecture series, regular educator workshops (primarily on weekends), career nights, major mission events (e.g., landing on Mars), and other mission-related events.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE IN THE PAST YEAR

The project promoted internal conversations at JPL about understanding our visitors and their needs, how better to tell the story of NASA/JPL, and resulted in closer working relationships between the Education Office (which is responsible for the funding) and the Public Services Office (which is responsible for the facility and tours), as well as the Audio/Visual Office and Office of Communications and Education.

PROJECT PARTNERS AND ROLE OF PARTNERS IN PROJECT EXECUTION

Internal partners:

Office of Communications and Education

Education Office

Public Services Office

Audio/Visual Services Office

Acquisitions Section

Facilities Division

External partners:

C&G Partners, New York – design

Dr. Catherine Bowman, Raytheon - evaluation