



Middle Ground expanded

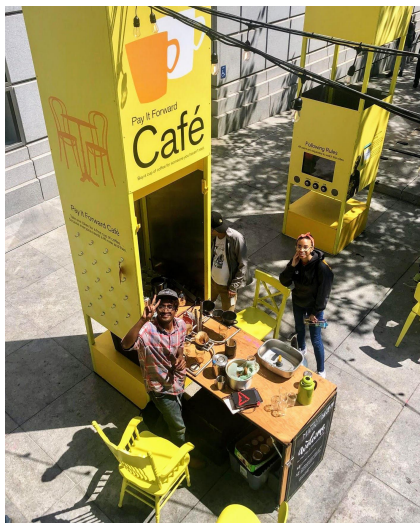
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Award #2116110



Continuing experiments in Urban Social Science

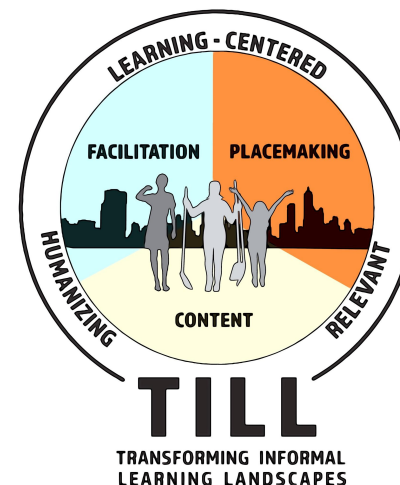


Tables and chairs encouraged visitors to sit, talk, and watch. "You should be able to get something free, like a cup of coffee," said a partner at an early testing session. So we added the Pay It Forward Café, where visitors could get a cup for free, or pay for someone else's

Middle Ground Expanded (MGE), an interactive public placemaking project, showcases social-science concepts and transforms underutilized places into informal learning platforms. This broad implementation project is a collaboration between the Exploratorium, Urban Alchemy, San Francisco Recreation and Parks, and the San Francisco Public Library. Sixteen columns housing interactive, multilingual exhibits will help visitors explore how we think, feel, and interact with other people all within an immersive outdoor experience in the heart of the city.

Innovative social-science exhibits such as *Unseen Stories*, *Making It in America*, *Sharing Faces*, and the *Pay It Forward Café* allow passersby to investigate social interactions, stereotypes, generosity, and the ways in which humans come together and pull apart. These free, centrally located exhibitions will be facilitated by Urban Alchemy stewards, who encouraged local residents and visitors to explore their curiosity and biases toward the strangers around them.

<https://www.exploratorium.edu/middleground>

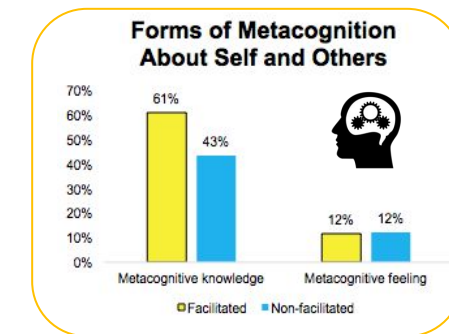


MGE will iterate and disseminate Middle Ground's successful three-part model for engaging members of the public in inquiry into social science concepts.

The model combines:

- (1) social science inquiry exhibits;
 - (2) placemaking; and
 - (3) human facilitation of learning experiences in outdoor public areas
- (See TILL model above).

Middle Ground Expanded will advance public understanding of the social and behavioral sciences; generate and disseminate knowledge about the affordances of integrating informal science content, placemaking, and facilitation in a variety of free, outdoor STEM learning spaces; develop an interdisciplinary model of in-person facilitation in diverse public locations; and increase the capacity of science museum practitioners to co-develop outdoor STEM learning environments with local community groups.



Urban Alchemy: Community Site Partners <https://urban-alchemy.us>

We're a social enterprise that engages with situations where extreme poverty meets homelessness, mental illness and addiction. When a neighborhood, street or intersection earns a reputation as a place to avoid, we turn it around. Urban Alchemy is a peaceful and supportive presence, inviting communities to rebuild and restore a sense of pride and respect in urban spaces.



Research on the impacts of Urban Alchemy Facilitation

Middle Ground research indicated that Middle Ground facilitators improved multiple learning outcomes. Building upon these findings, the Middle Ground Expanded team will use Design-Based Research to hone a theoretical model of facilitation, testing specific facilitation strategies for science learning experiences in outdoor public spaces. This theoretical model draws on research on Social Identity and Motivated Reasoning and will merge pedagogies from the museum field's practices of facilitating scientific inquiry with Urban Alchemy's interpersonal approach that centers trauma-informed empathy to create a framework for supporting science learning in distressed urban areas.