

NUDL Guidelines for Neurodiversity-Affirming Museum Activities

Foster Belongingness and Agency as a Foundation for Learning

- Anticipate diversity in learning preferences and describe differences as expected and valued
- Make accommodations available to all and help learners adjust their environments

Communicate Goals and Expectations

- Express goals and parameters right away
- Offer explicit guidance with visuals and words
- Offer examples to show what's possible
- Provide low-stakes skill-building activities

Build Autonomy

- Provide a wide range of entry points and ways of approaching each activity
- Encourage learners to make choices
- Balance providing suggestions and leaving room for experimentation

Sustain Engagement

- Break up complex tasks into smaller steps
- Scaffold iteration or trying again in a new way
- Provide structure for engaging with others in different ways
- Connect to learners' interests, STEM topics, and/or everyday life

Reflect and Transition

- Encourage learners to reflect on what they did before moving on
- Provide ways to share and celebrate what learners do
- Suggest activities to try next based on learners' interests

Options for Implementing

- Materials and physical environment
- Activity design
- Facilitation strategies
- Social interactions

Tools:

Reflect on Neurodiversity and Belongingness

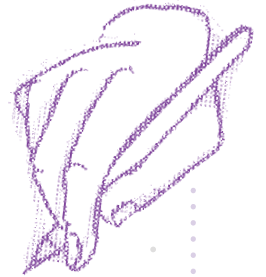
Take a moment to think about your own learning preferences and needs.

What's your ideal learning environment?

Think of a place where you feel inspired, curious, focused, or supported.

What is it like? What makes it work well for you? What supports or strategies do you find helpful?

Use the box below to write, draw, make lists, etc. to record your thoughts.



A large rectangular area filled with a light purple dotted grid, intended for writing or drawing.

Think about...

What aspects of the physical space help you learn or make you feel at home?

What supports do you rely on?
What options do you appreciate having?

Are there other people around? How do you prefer to interact with them?

What sounds are there? How does that impact the way the space feels?

When do you like to have guidance or help, and how do you prefer to receive it?

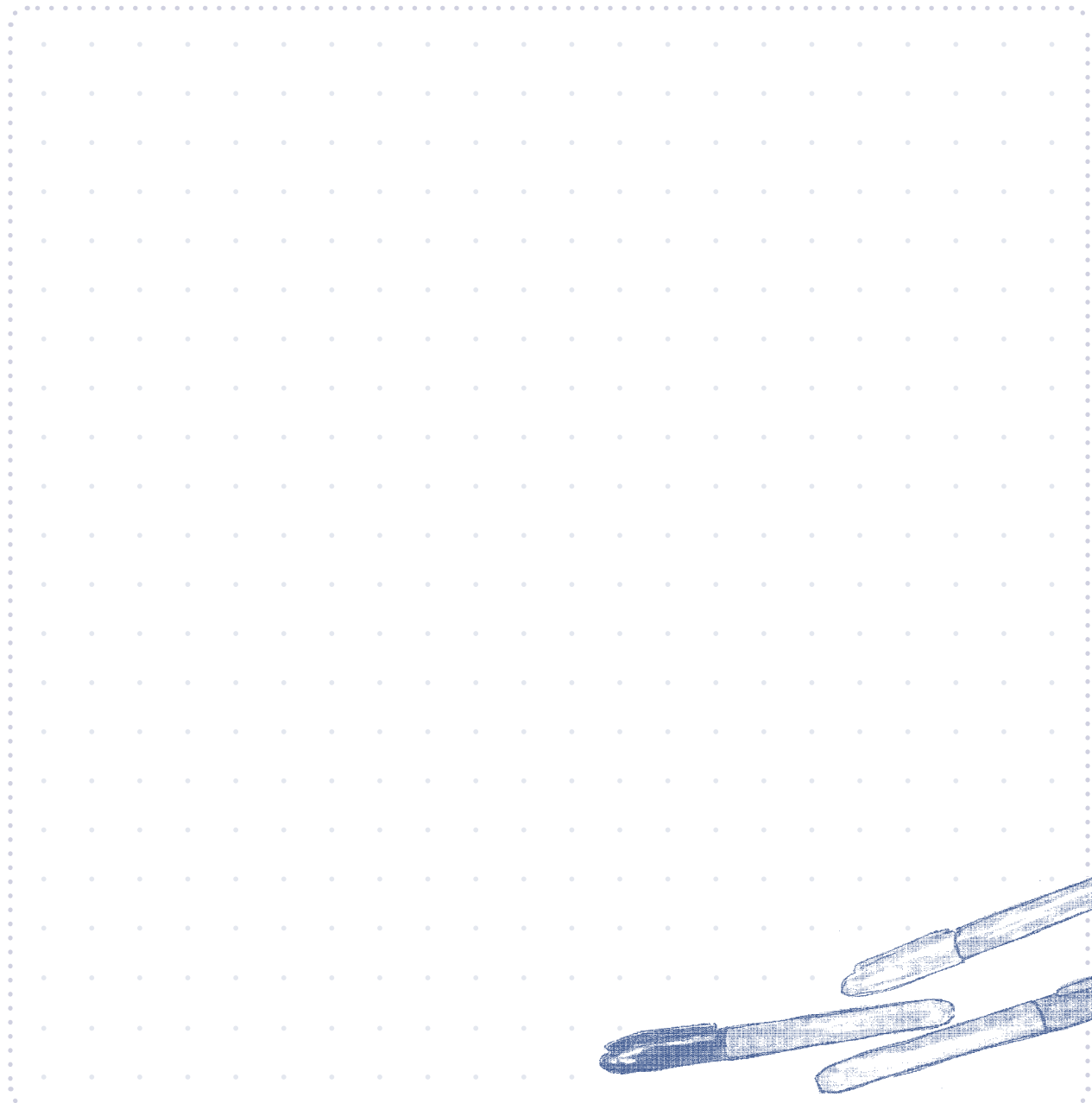
How do your preferences change from day to day, or depending on the kind of task you're doing?

Tools:

Make a Plan

Write or draw:

What kinds of experiences do you want to improve at your institution?
What ideas from the previous pages could you implement right away?
What might these strategies look like for you?



Think about...

Use these prompts to think about one activity at your institution. Which parts of the experience could you strengthen?

Foster belongingness and agency

How do you show that diverse ways of thinking are expected and welcomed?

Communicating goals and expectations

How does the experience help people understand what they can do and how to begin?

Building autonomy

What options do people have for how they can engage in the experience?

Sustaining engagement

How does the experience support persistence and deeper engagement?

Reflecting and transitioning

How does the experience help people reflect and share their work or keep learning?

What can you change? Choose options that are doable for you!
See the resources on pages 57 – 61 for more ideas!

Physical environment and materials:

- ☐ Setup/arrangement of space
- ☐ Design of signage
- ☐ Type of materials
- ☐ Variety of materials

Design of activities:

- ☐ Diversity of entry points
- ☐ Diversity of possible goals
- ☐ Pacing/timing
- ☐ Breaking up steps or process
- ☐ At-home resources

Facilitation:

- ☐ Introductions to tools/materials
- ☐ Connections to real-world ideas/concepts
- ☐ How options are shared
- ☐ Individual support for persistence

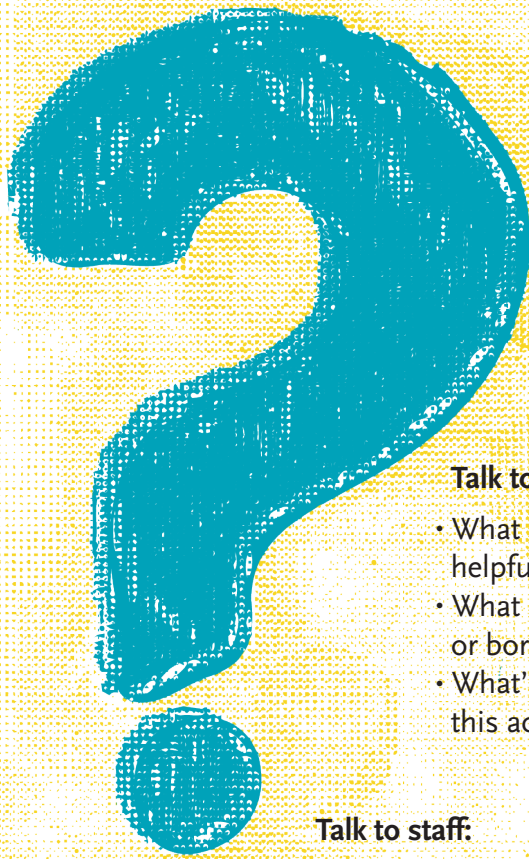
Structure for social interactions:

- ☐ Options for working solo
- ☐ Options for working collaboratively
- ☐ Options for parallel play/side-by-side
- ☐ Support and info for caregivers

Tools:

Prototyping Guide

Use the template on the opposite page to guide your notetaking, either while visitors are engaging in the activity, or to capture reflections at the end of the day.



Observe:

- How do people figure out how to get started?
- Can people participate in different ways?
- What parts of the activity help people connect to their interests or work through challenges?
- How do people wrap up the activity at the end?

Talk to visitors:

- What parts of the activity were interesting, helpful, or fun for you, and why?
- What parts were confusing, frustrating, or boring for you, and why?
- What's one way we could make this activity better?

Talk to staff:

- How was this activity facilitated?
- What did you notice about how visitors were using the materials, or how they were interacting with each other?
- What help or support did visitors need?
- What suggestions do you have to improve this activity?

Notetaking Template

First Iteration:

Activity or experience to improve:

Changes to test right away:

How do you think these changes will help?:

Who to test this prototype with:

Follow-up Iterations:

What changes to keep:

Additional changes to make:

How do you think these additional changes will help?:

Who else to test the prototype with:

Low Cost Changes Playbook

Rearrange
furniture or
activity stations

Break up
an activity
into steps

Encourage
facilitators to
model or use
parallel play

Leave out
examples of
what people
have made

Add solo
versus social
zones or
quieter areas

Try different
combinations
of materials

Make it
self-paced or
drop-in rather
than scheduled

Sort and
arrange
materials

Change where
signage is
located to
make it
more visible

Connect to
learners'
interests

Add visuals
to signage

Provide
information
to caregivers
to help them
co-facilitate

Suggest
2 or 3 goals/
challenges
learners can
choose from

Make safety
rules or
guidelines
easily visible

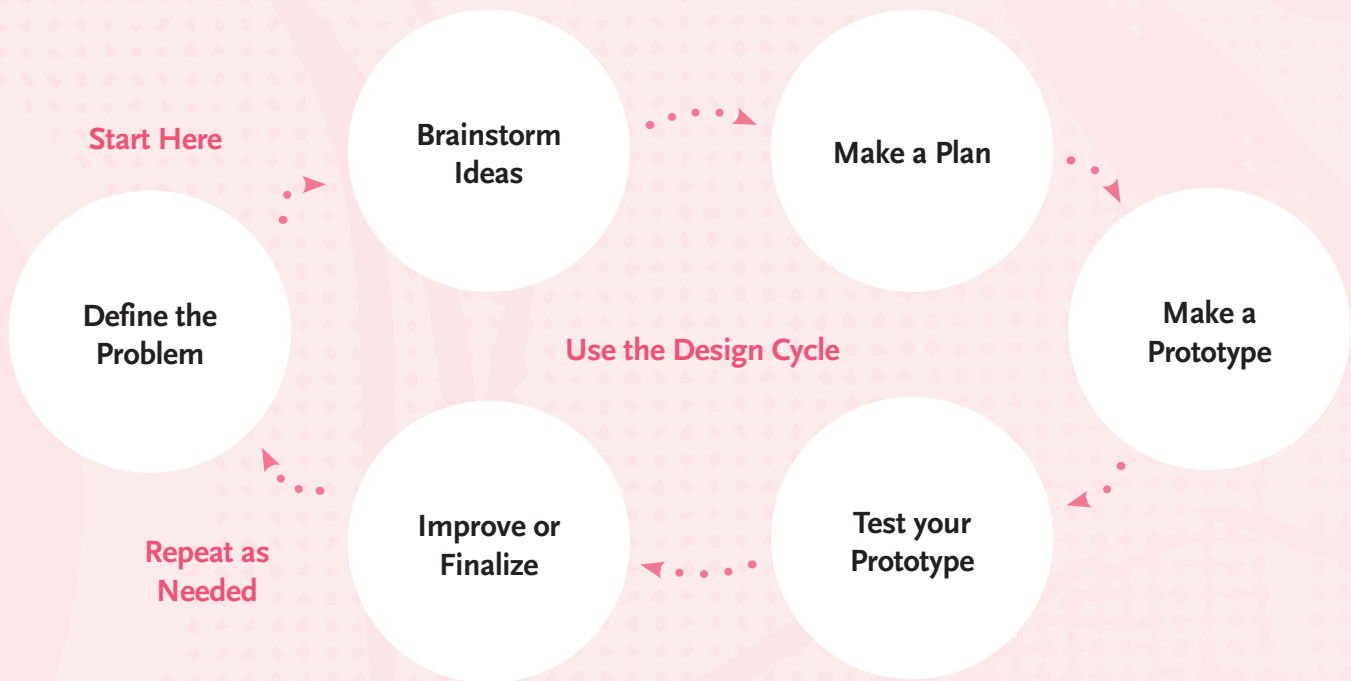
Find at-home
resources you
can share
that relate to
the activity

Help learners
notice what
worked and
what didn't



 add more ideas in the empty boxes

NUDL Recommendations



Info to include on signage (using words and visuals/icons):

- ☐ What kind of thing you make/do
- ☐ How much time it takes
- ☐ Maximum (or minimum) number of people
- ☐ Sensory or cognitive considerations
- ☐ Safety rules/guidelines
- ☐ Accommodations/supports offered
- ☐ Materials/tool glossary
- ☐ Where and how to get help if needed

Tips for setting up the physical environment:

- ☐ Make safety rules/guidelines conspicuous with signage or by blocking off areas
 - ☐ Put signage outside of entrances so people can decide whether or not to enter
 - ☐ Sort and group materials, and arrange them in ways that are appealing to explore
 - ☐ Show examples of what other visitors have made (with photos, videos, physical items)
 - ☐ Use multiple stations to break up a complex activity into smaller tasks/steps
 - ☐ Create a quiet area, even if it is just a corner slightly away from others with dimmer lighting and sensory materials
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Tips for Activity Designs:

- ☐ Provide multiple entry points and ways of approaching the activity
- ☐ Build in options that learners can choose from (challenge/design prompts, separate stations, multiple types of materials, etc)
- ☐ Provide opportunities to explore individual concepts, materials, or parts of the activity
- ☐ Let learners do each step at their own pace (avoid time pressure whenever possible)
- ☐ If everyone's projects come out the same, adjust the goals of the activity or the materials people can use
- ☐ Offer free and user-friendly resources people can continue using at home to learn more

Facilitation Tips:

- ☐ Consider talking with visitors about being neurodivergent (if you are and if you feel comfortable doing so)
 - ☐ Give structured, low-pressure intros to unfamiliar tools and materials
 - ☐ Make connections to visitors' interests and real-world situations
 - ☐ Suggest options using "either/or" phrasing to give learners language to choose
 - ☐ Do the activity next to visitors (parallel play) to model and be available for questions
 - ☐ Help visitors persist through challenges by noticing what happened, and identifying something to change/adjust
 - ☐ Help visitors celebrate, document, and share what they did
 - ☐ Suggest other activities to try next, ways to keep learning at home
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Structuring Social Interactions:

- ☐ Create spaces for people who want to work solo or with others
- ☐ Offer to take photos for people of what they made
- ☐ Encourage facilitators (and other visitors) to work side-by-side
- ☐ Support caregivers as co-facilitators — give enough info that they can help support their children
- ☐ Offer visitors suggestions for different ways of doing the activity (separately, collaboratively, or competing)

Co-design Best Practices Cheat Sheet

Trust and Belongingness:

- Create accessible and welcoming spaces for learning
- Create community agreements or norms
- Offer multiple ways of participating and sharing ideas
- Talk about learning styles and preferences
- Normalize stimming, taking needed space and breaks, and using accommodations
- Make collaborative roles and responsibilities clear
- Provide structure and consistency
- Build familiarity with new activities and environments

Structure and Support for Design Thinking:

- Break down the process, focus on one step/prompt at a time
- Use examples and modeling to spark ideas
- Activate critical thinking by repeating activities/discussions with different prompts
- Establish routines for giving and receiving feedback
- Create time and structure for reflecting on iterations
- Build in time for multiple iterative cycles
- Encourage social connections and collaboration
- Lean into co-designers' strengths and interests

Checklist for Co-design Meetings

Supplies

- ☐ Fidgets
- ☐ Notebooks
- ☐ Whiteboard
- ☐ Headphones
- ☐ Tablets or laptops
- ☐ Post-it notes
- ☐ Pens/pencils/markers
- ☐ Visual timer
- ☐ Snacks, water
- ☐ Badges/nametags for co-designers

To-do: Before meetings

- ☐ Choose a welcoming and accessible meeting space
- ☐ Set up or choose a quiet area
- ☐ Send visual schedule and/or agenda to co-designers in advance
- ☐ Decide who will be a notetaker, who will be the primary facilitator, and who can be available to provide individual support to co-designers if needed

To-do: At meetings

- ☐ Rearrange or decorate space with co-designers
- ☐ Revisit community agreements and project goals
- ☐ Focus on one step/prompt at a time
- ☐ Provide multiple options for participating
- ☐ Notetaker takes notes on whiteboard during group discussions
- ☐ Set aside time to reflect about important ideas/next steps