

SUPPLEMENTARY VISITOR CENTER INFORMATION

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The designing of a Visitor Center is not simple. The gathering together of all the various opinions and isolating the important information upon which to form a judgment and segregate the important elements is of concern to all planning personnel. The Museum Prospectus admirably provides the Division of Interpretation at all levels with the basis for considered review.

In discussing the problems of the architects and planners with members of the Division of Interpretation, a group of sympathetic dilemmas were revealed. It was apparent that some supplementary information together with the present Museum Prospectus would be extremely helpful at all stages. It would help field personnel more accurately to determine their needs; reviewing officials would have a better grasp of the total concept; the Design Office would have a realistic basis for design.

When technicians from the various divisions have had the opportunity to review and discuss completed Visitor Centers, the hindsight has been valuable in providing guiding thoughts for future structures. Mistakes have been made that might have been avoided. Some are not irreparable and have been resolved. Most of them could have been avoided and more effectively solved if there had been sufficient information available in time for the original planning.

A Visitor Center is a public use building, and at least one of the main objectives of a successful building is to provide adequately a service to the public. Many hospitals are too often planned for the

convenience of the doctors and operating personnel and not for the comfort and convenience of the patients. Perhaps, in our planning of Visitor Centers we view the problem from only one side. These structures, empty of visitors, may work admirably for Park Service operations. Do they, on the other hand, fully consider the mental comfort and physical convenience of the visitor? Essentially and in most instances, our people are transient. A Visitor Center is but a stopping place, and in the visitor's mind it becomes basically a source of information regardless of the subject matter, whether informative, instructive, or utilitarian.

The assumption that the visitor will expose himself, willingly, to an unfamiliar situation for the purpose of obtaining information must be one of the primary considerations. Being in an unfamiliar setting, every visitor has a problem. He may be tired, hot, browbeaten by children, family situation, sun, driving conditions, personal discomfort.

The first thing a person wants in an unfamiliar situation is warmth and friendliness and freedom from decision. When he has satisfied his creature comforts, gotten a drink of water, etc., there should be a visual invitation of a direction to follow. In the Jamestown Visitor Center, with the lobby becoming an all-inclusive melting pot, the invitation of direction is supplied by the very substantial sales area of a concessionaire. It is normal that in this situation the most familiar course is one of window shopping until a decision of direction

can be supplied. The gift shop here has caused much confusion, to the extent that a relatively insignificant rear stairway gets public use. Why? It is in the direction of flow -- the path of least resistance.

The mental efforts surrounding decisions can be substantial to many individuals. The visitor is a stranger in strange surroundings, and after he has solved the problems of creature comforts, he needs purposeful help and guidance. He is not well prepared mentally or emotionally to make decisions. In the sense of providing a warm and welcoming hand, we should provide him with the encouragement to move in the right direction. We should remember that many people on first impulse associate uniforms with law enforcement. It is the park's job to show that the uniform also means friendliness, helpfulness, and understanding. We hope that the visitor will sense these qualities as he receives the encouragement and guidance his Visitor Center experience might require.

This encouragement is provided by the architecture as well as by park personnel. And in no sense should the guidance be in the philosophy of the captive audience. But the suggestion to follow the best, even though predetermined, course should be supplied, with ample opportunity for the visitor to change his mind or stop at any point. In the spirit of warm welcome, there is pronounced evidence that some facility for stopping to rest, for the provisions of simple though adequate lounge or rest areas, would encourage a more active and interested visitor participation and enhance his experience.

How best to handle the immediate problem of visitor reception, information, and, for lack of a better word, guidance will probably evolve only with experience. There is certainly evidence that the dispersal of miscellaneous information is a more important function, and consequently requires more space than has been previously considered.

Circulation, the movement of people from space to space internally within the limits of the building, must be carefully thought out and resolved. Openness of space and openness of plan suggested the use of nature instead of enclosed space as a method of distributing people at a minimum cost. Moving visitors through spaces without returning to the point of beginning was also considered feasible. The Museum Branch feels that totally enclosed space and return to the point of beginning ensures the most efficient exhibit room, but will willingly consider other solutions that enhance the efficacy of a complete sequential story.

Beside the openness of the plan, the opportunities to encourage the total visitor experience from the building were explored. Views from the Visitor Center, where applicable, should be exploited. Views from the lobby should be considered. There are instances where views from the exhibit room, because of either placement or natural features, should be encouraged, such as at Mount Rushmore.

Views from other places, such as easily accessible outside terraces, at the end of the visit were considered excellent possibilities. At the Yorktown Visitor Center, Colonial National Historical Park, a roof overlook was provided; and because of the elevation and

proximity to the earthworks and story being told, this solution, for its place, is considered excellent.

If the visitor experience is to be encouraged, the actual placement of the facility may well require different treatment in different locations within the same park. The values in a park must be conveyed to the visitor, and the method by which they are related is somewhat similar to those in a story book. There must be a beginning, which in this case is a park boundary. Immediately following the opening sentence of the book, a mood is set. There is then the book's main body, which sets the theme and the character of the several individuals, and the final portion of climax and summation. How, you ask, does this have anything to do with Visitor Centers? Simply this--the placement of the visitor is a basic consideration in the portion of the story to be told. A building, particularly a Park Service Visitor Center, should not be so thoroughly complete as to accomplish the "be all" and "end all" role.

The Visitor Center is a building, and within it is told one portion of the park story. The total story is told by the park itself. Where does the Visitor Center fit into the total concept of interpretation? The sequence diagram or analysis concerns only the services, orientation, indoctrination, and explanation that will be involved in this particular building. It is one part of the interpretive situation. What is the total problem and a total analysis of the entire story, sequence, and visitor visitation experience should also be told in a greatly enlarged sequential explanation of park interpretation. The

Visitor Center should architecturally integrate well with its setting and surroundings. It must also be an integral portion of the total concept of interpretation. Its place in the program must be defined.

There are three placements for Visitor Centers: (1) at or near the park entrance; (2) en route between entrance and possible destination; (3) at a terminus. The location has much to do with visitation. Figures have yet to prove that over 20% of the public use a Visitor Center. But this figure could be materially altered by location and, possibly, by roadside interpretive displays. Certainly, it is poor planning to be satisfied with a figure as low as 20%. We should re-examine and shape future plans to attract more.

An entrance Visitor Center certainly should set the mood for the park, or at least "catch" the mood and pass it on to the visitor, though this is better done before arriving at a building. It should introduce and orient the public and provide positive encouragement to participate in the other interpretive facilities in the park. It should be the introduction to the total interpretation of park values.

At an "en route" Visitor Center, there is the definite possibility that the tenor or mood of the park has already been effective upon the visitor. Here, interpretation is more difficult, because it must provide both an introduction and a synopsis of the park values already passed, as well as the encouragement to get those values of importance that lie ahead. Yet here again the "learning process" takes place--summary, review, and conditioning for the next step.

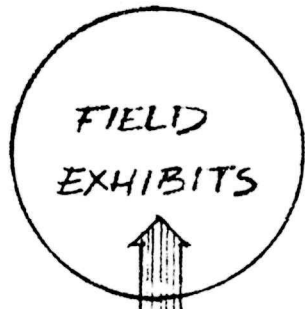
A terminal Visitor Center will have the greatest demand and will require the fullest treatment. The mood of the park has already had ample opportunity to make itself felt on the visitor. More of the park story has already been told. The terminal Visitor Center must provide a synopsis of these park values and, in addition, it must provide the introduction to and interpretation of the nearby park features. These features are the reason for the existence of the park itself and, possibly, for the location of the Visitor Center. By its location alone, there is encouragement to participate.

Where the Visitor Center is near overnight accommodations, it may well have its largest visitation during periods of bad weather when other forms of park enjoyment are precluded. Night use can also be encouraged, lengthening the hours of possible visitation. Close association with other facets of total interpretation, such as the campfire circle, can also increase visitor interest and use.

Placement, then, is more than a hopeful or loose-jointed thing. It is important in early thinking and master planning. How the total program of the park is to be presented affects the way the story in the building is told. It affects how, in what sequence, the story is told, as well as how much or how little. These basic considerations affect architectural planning for the visiting public.

One help to those planning a total building as distinct from the intricate problems involved in portions or component parts, such as the assembly room, exhibit room, administrative functions, is a well

defined statement of how the building is to be used by the public, in what order the park expects the visitor to make use of the various comfort and interpretive facilities of the Visitor Center. Toilets, for instance are always important, and, perhaps, associated with drinking fountains. This element can often be made accessible from outside, so that visitor load on this facility is not also a burdensome building load. A possible sequence diagram is shown as an example. There are, of course, many others, but a clear understanding of what the visitor should do for his best orientation and grasp of the problem is extremely important to a successful solution. The example is shown in its most elementary form.



ENTRANCE

VISITOR SEQUENCE DIAGRAM

For convenience and reference, several examples of flow patterns follow. Notes on each describe circulation problems. Though these diagrams are not all inclusive, they are suggestions. There is no relationship of relative size, either actual or implied, to be drawn from the sizes of the various circles. They are indications of visitor flow. However, it can be readily seen from Example 1 that if the lobby must distribute all people to both primary spaces of assembly and exhibit, it must provide the needed square feet to hold two full auditorium loads (1. For those leaving the auditorium; 2. For those waiting to enter), plus a percentage of the exhibit room capacity-- those who are leaving and space for those arriving.

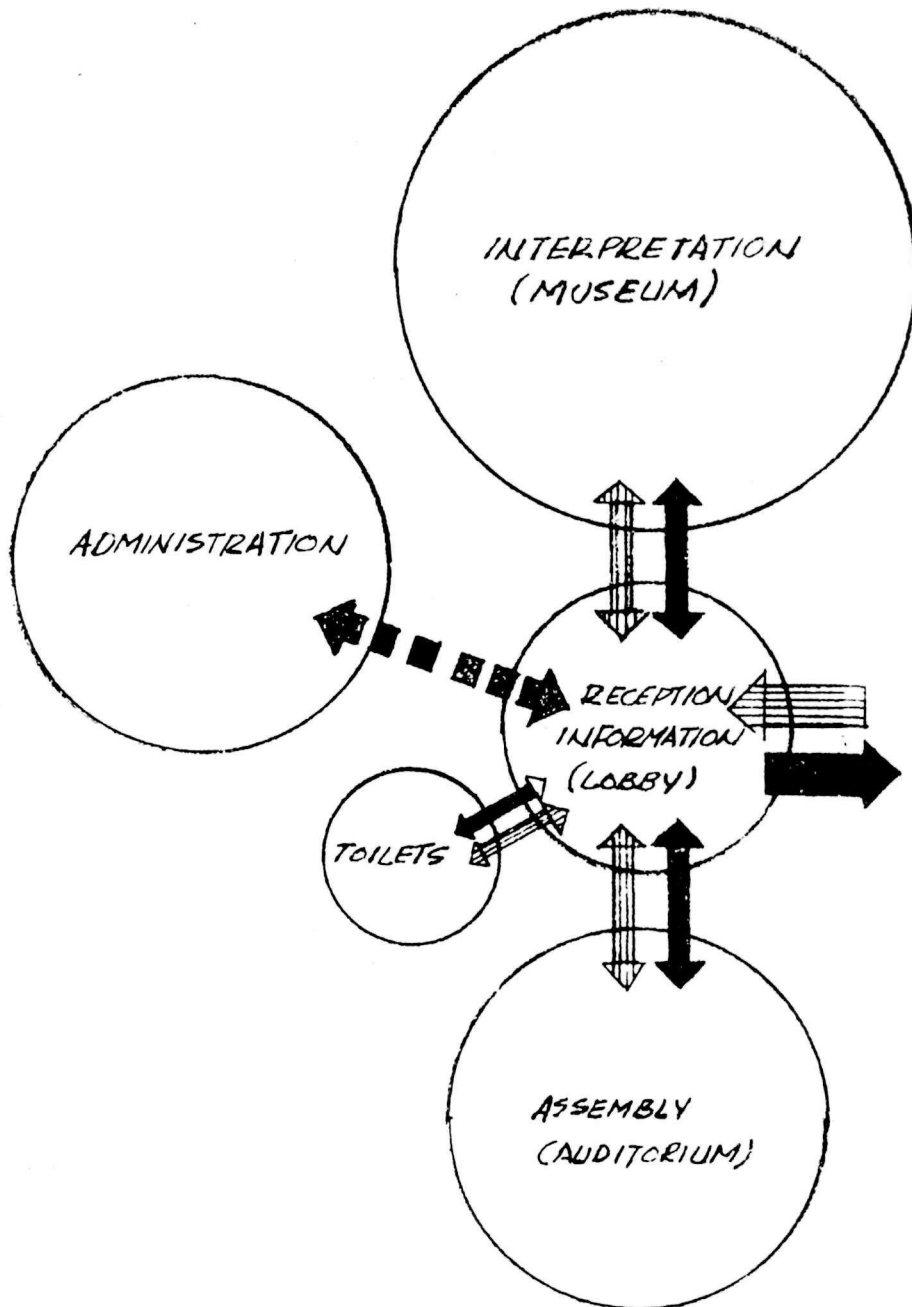
Example 1 indicates that architecturally the lobby is usually a space enclosed on three sides, being open only at the entrance--a treatment usual in hotels. This type of almost total enclosure may generate a totally inappropriate psychological reaction. The visitor is captured. He should, on the contrary, feel welcome and relaxed, free to partake in a little or a lot, free to stay or leave, encouraged to gain through an enjoyable experience.

Example 1.a graphically indicates a larger lobby, if it is to serve as more than a transitional room.

Though the assumption can be made that at its densest occupancy the lobby could be crowded space, none the less, the needed area must be provided, and space costs money.

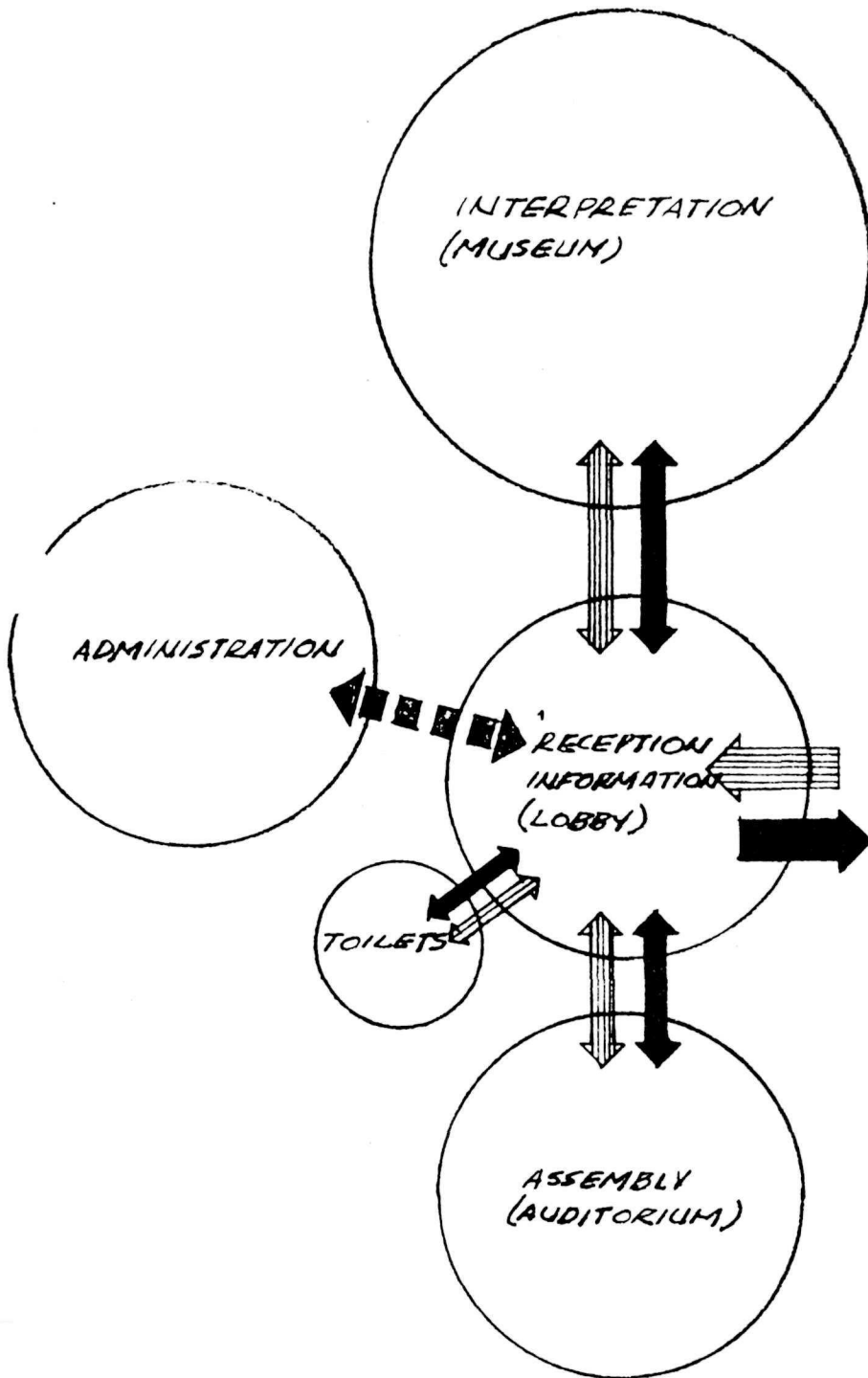
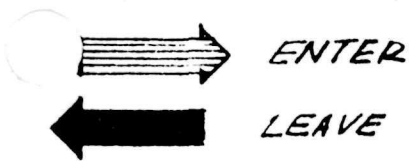
Examples 2, 3, and 4 are indications of the possibility of directing the flow of visitors so that there is no need to return to the reception and information space, although they may do so as they wish.

In all of the flow diagrams, it has been assumed that the visitor, upon exiting, moves either on foot or by auto to the next phase of interpretation. This is often field exhibits.



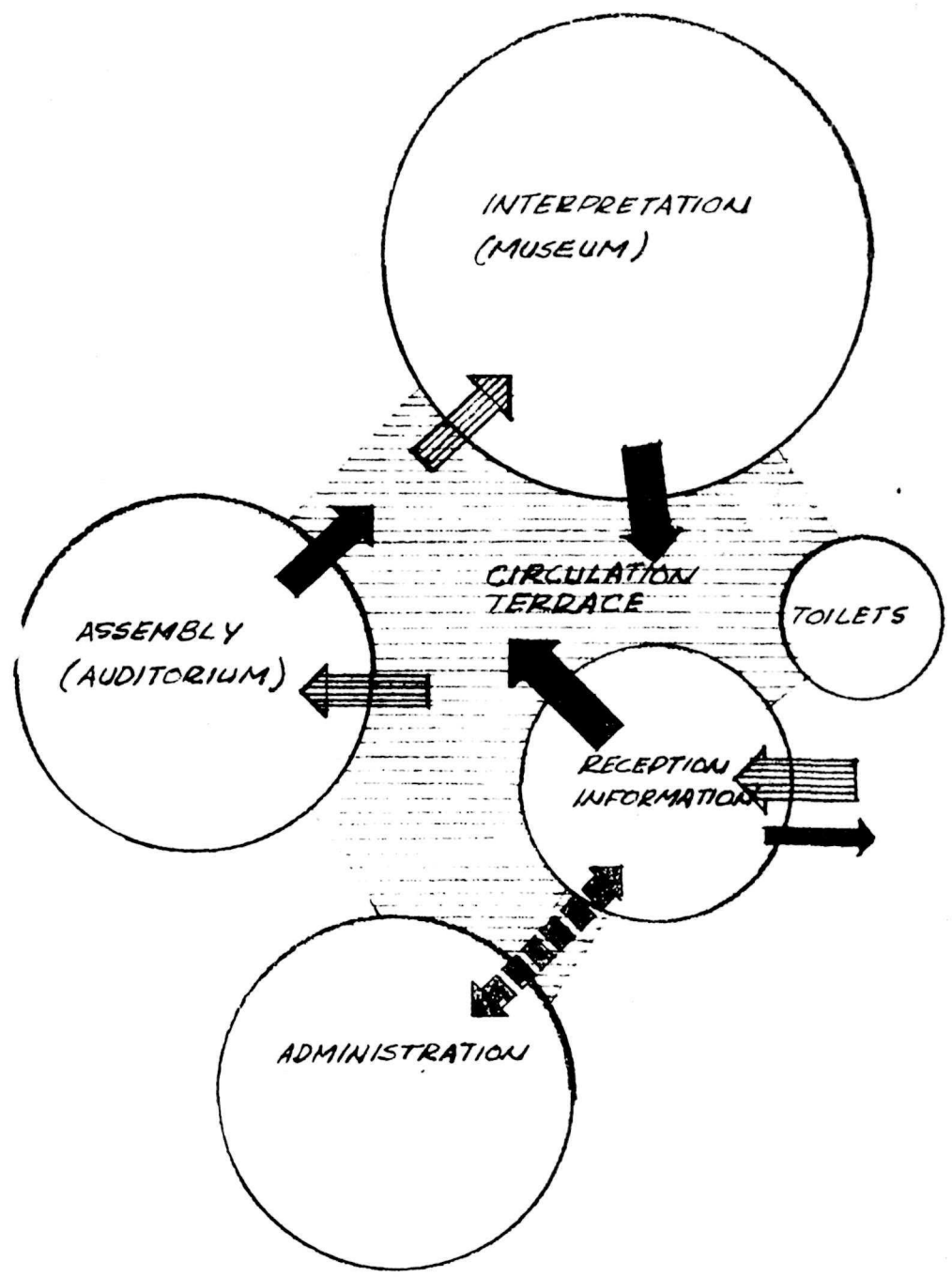
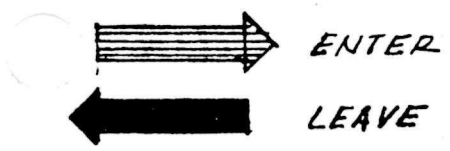
SPACE - VISITOR FLOW - DIAGRAM

BASED ON PRESENT SYSTEM OF VISITOR CIRCULATION USED IN MOST EXISTING AND PROPOSED VISITOR CENTERS



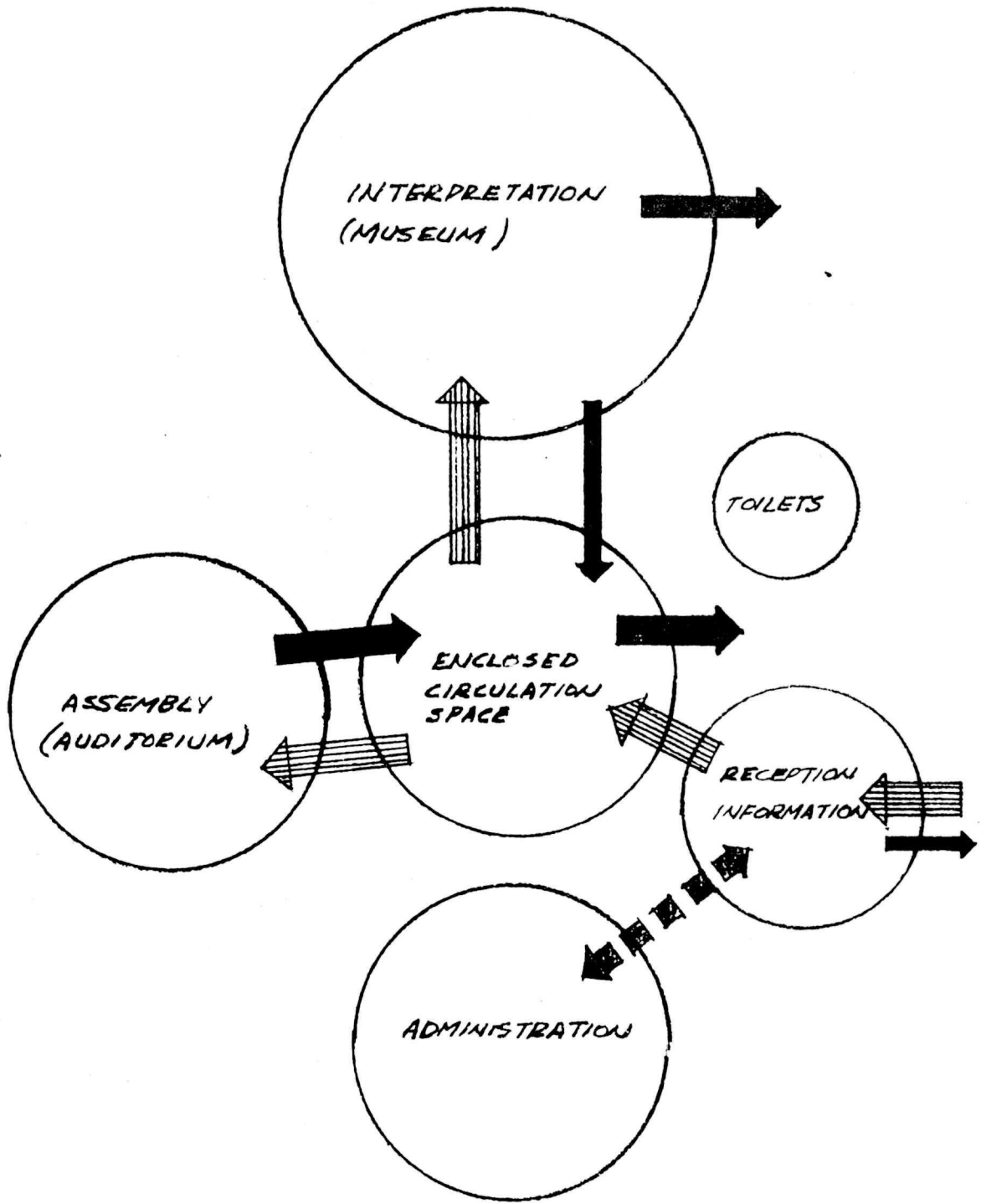
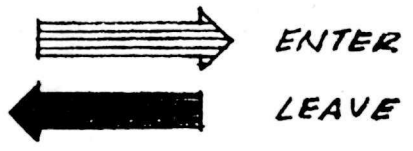
SPACE - VISITOR FLOW - DIAGRAM

LOBBY SPACE INCREASED TO ALLOW MORE FREE CIRCULATION.



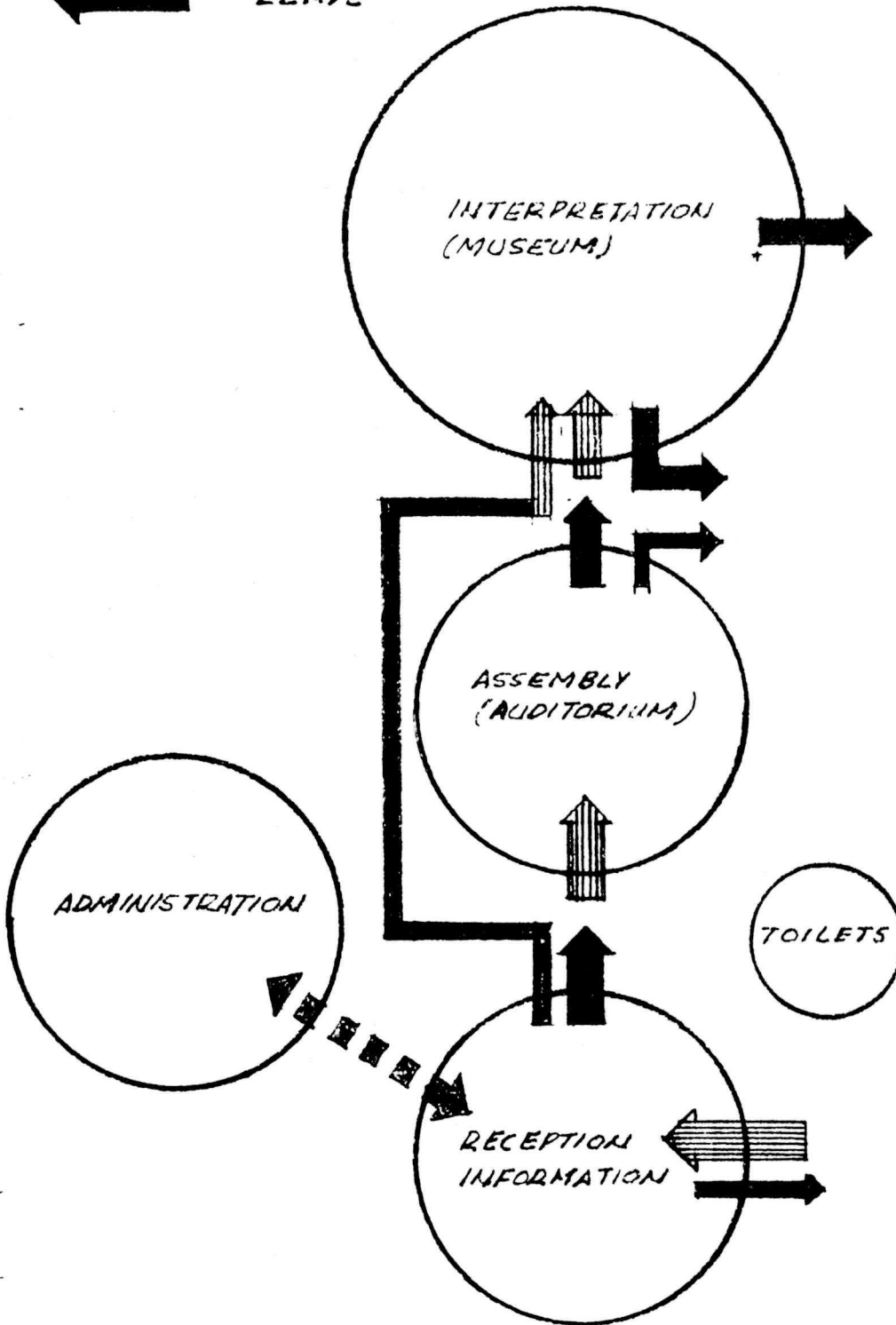
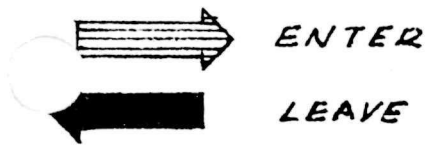
SPACE - VISITOR FLOW - DIAGRAM

ALLOWS VISITOR TO MAKE CHOICE AT ANY POINT. DOES NOT REQUIRE HIM TO EXIT THROUGH ENTRY. OPEN CIRCULATION FREES MOVEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL.



SPACE-VISITOR FLOW-DIAGRAM

ALLOWS VISITOR TO MAKE CHOICE AT ANY POINT. SEPARATE CIRCULATION SPACE ALLOWS FREE MOVEMENT BETWEEN ALL ELEMENTS. VISITOR MAY CHOOSE TO LEAVE AT ANY POINT.



SPACE-VISITOR FLOW-DIAGRAM

IN LINE CIRCULATION BETWEEN ELEMENTS WITH BY-PASS OF ONE. ALLOWS VISITOR TO CHOOSE AT ANY POINT TO CONTINUE OR LEAVE.

It has been emphasized in review many times that the diagrammatic sketch included in the Museum Prospectus, as required by the manual, carries with it architectural implications. After repeated review at various levels, this sketch assumes an importance for which it was not intended. This sketch should properly indicate the park thoughts on the relationship of spaces, but the architectural plan and character should await the study of professional technicians.

What is really needed more than a plan are three important pieces of information:

1. A Sequence Analysis
2. A Flow Diagram
3. A Total List of Sizes and Spaces

With this information, the architects will have a point of departure to start their preliminary designs.

The close correlation between architecture and interpretation is paramount. Field and Regional personnel can be extremely helpful in rationalizing, isolating, and determining the situations at the field level. Help toward that goal can be supplied with a few generalities that are sufficient for preliminary assumptions. A check list was prepared for use in the presentation of PCPs. The portion referring to Visitor Centers has been extracted and rearranged. The sizes of all facilities are determined by the number of people to use them. Parking areas exclusively serving a Visitor Center are sized according to the number of people the building or building group can handle. It is a fair assumption that 80% of the parking area load figured at 3.2 persons per car will be in the building. Ten per cent (10%) will be enroute to, and 10% will be enroute from the Visitor Center. The hourly building load can be pre-figured for all public spaces by the use of the following averages:

1. Lobbies - 12 sq. ft. per person
2. Assembly rooms - at capacity
3. Exhibit rooms - 20 sq. ft. per person
4. Lounge rest areas - corridors 20 sq. ft. per person
5. Toilets at capacity

This will establish public capacity. Since programing often precedes the Prospectus, the fitting together of the ideal facility with the proposed funds usually ends in a compromise. If, however, the compromise is too great, serious consideration should be given

to reprogramming. It is recognized that an effective procedure would be:

1. Exhibit Prospectus
 - A. Supplementary Visitor Center information
2. Estimates and PCP
3. Programming
4. Exhibit Plan
 - A. Reviewed at park with architects
5. Architectural Preliminary

This is a worthwhile goal and hopefully attainable in the future. The pressure of the present rearranges the order, and the following Check List should be helpful in presenting enough suggestions so that no important use or need is overlooked.

VISITOR CENTER

1. Visitation - gross number of people per hour.
2. Lobby - Define use. Allow 12 sq. ft. per person per hour.
 - A. Refuge from weather
 - B. Gathering place for scheduled trips
 - C. Transition to
 - (1) Assembly
 - (2) Exhibits
 - (3) Outside or field exhibits
 - (4) Lounge or rest area
 - (5) Special spaces
 - (6) Administrative Offices
 - D. Contact - information concerning
 - (1) Park
 - (2) Interpretive Sales
 - (3) Travel
 - (4) Roads
 - (5) Weather
 - (6) Accommodations
 - E. Combined use as Lobby-Lecture
 - (1) Space storage for seating

For the following 3 special uses, add extra space @ 20 sq. ft. per person:

- F. Writing Room
- G. Resting Area or Lounge

- H. Reading Room
- I. Drinking Fountain(s)
- J. Telephone Booth(s)
- 3. Information Office (adjacent, but not included in Lobby)
 - A. Office space for attendant
 - B. Literature Sales
 - C. Protection
 - (1) Exhibit Room
 - (2) Assembly
 - (3) Other activities
- 4. Auditorium - Assembly -- Number of people. (Allow 9 sq. ft. per person.)
 - A. Uses
 - (1) Orientation
 - (2) Multi-use
 - a. Park programs for personnel
 - b. Community programs
 - c. Church
 - d. Special lectures
 - e. Other
 - B. Special Audio-Visual Room
 - C. Admatic
 - D. Space storage for chairs
 - E. Projection Booth
 - (1) Film Storage

- (2) Type and number of projectors
 - a. Slide
 - b. Movies
- F. Special Considerations
 - (1) Electronic Center
 - a. General Audio
 - b. Records
 - c. Tape Recordings
 - (2) Screen - dimensional size
 - (3) Type of sound
 - (4) Walls
 - a. Orientation or informational displays in acoustical materials.
 - (5) Acoustics
 - a. Ceiling
 - b. Walls
 - c. Room shape
 - (6) Platform
 - (7) Side Wings
- 5. Exhibit Room(s) - Allow 20 sq. ft. per person. Estimate number of exhibits for each use.
 - A. Park Interpretation
 - B. Special Exhibit Room(s)
 - (1) Seasonal (Botanical, etc.)
 - (2) Traveling
 - (3) Local
 - (4) Regional

- C. Exhibit or Display Storage
 - (1) Work Room
 - (2) Office
- 6. Special Public Rooms
 - A. Lounge or Rest Area at 20 sq. ft. per person
 - B. Library-Reading Room at 20 sq. ft. per person
 - C. Artifact and Specimen Display
- 7. Toilets
 - A. Estimate
 - (1) Peak load number of people per hour
 - (2) Peak load number of people per day
 - (3) Average load number of people per day
 - B. Drinking Fountain(s)
- 8. Staff Offices
 - A. Superintendent
 - B. Clerk-Stenographer
 - C. Others (list)
 - D. Special Spaces
 - (1) Mail distribution
 - (2) Mimeographing
 - (3) Drafting
 - (4) Radio and Dispatcher
 - (5) Vault and Money Counting Room
 - (6) Special Storage Vaults
 - (7) Toilets

- E. Conference
 - F. Employees Rest and Lunch Area
 - G. Study Collections
 - (1) Storage
 - (2) Workshop or Laboratory
 - (3) Library
 - (4) Office
 - H. Photographic Laboratory
 - (1) Dark Room
 - (2) Workshop
 - (3) Office
9. Special Uses
- A. Nursery - Children's Room
 - B. First Aid
 - (1) Nurse's Office
 - (2) Patients' Room
 - (3) Toilet
 - C. Detention
 - D. Elevators
 - E. Escalators
 - F. Animal Shelter
10. Space Calculation

To the total of the itemized list of square footages, add 25% to determine total square footage of building. This provides for halls, closets, stairs, Mechanical Equipment Room, and the thickness of construction.

11. Mechanical Equipment

- A. Telephone
- B. Electrical Distribution
 - (1) Transformer Vault
 - (2) Generator
- C. Heating
- D. Air Conditioning
- E. Special

12. Outside Features

These items should be added to total square footage at 1/3 of area before cost computation:

- A. Terrace(s)
 - (1) Circulation to building
 - (2) Circulation from building
 - (3) Circulation between elements of building
- B. Covered Porches
- C. Overlook

13. Furniture, Furnishings, and Miscellaneous

- A. Special
 - (1) Wall Maps
 - (2) Murals
 - (3) Other
- B. Furniture
 - (1) Desks
 - (2) Cases

(3) Cabinets

(4) Tables

(5) Chairs

(6) Special

(7) Other

C. Furnishings

(1) Rugs

(2) Curtains

(3) Shades

(4) Blinds

(5) Other