THE LIBRARY WORKERS' FIELD GUIDE

TO DESIGNING & DISCOVERING RESTORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS
The Library Workers’ Field Guide to Designing and Discovering Restorative Environments was created by Beck Tench and dozens of library workers, creative professionals, and informatics undergraduates in a participatory design process.

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INTRO
A FIELD GUIDE?
This 👇 is Ranger Greg.

He works at a museum in North Carolina called the Museum of Life and Science. When you walk around with Ranger Greg, you get to see the world through his eyes.

It's quite a different way to look at things.

For example, you might be walking down a sidewalk when Greg would stop abruptly and point at the ground. You'd see what looks like several pieces of pencil eraser-sized clods of dirt.

"Caterpillar poop!" he'd say. "Look up!"
You'd look up and you'd see the underside of a tree canopy, not unremarkable, but then... you'd begin to see little silhouettes of caterpillars munching away at the leaves above. A few seconds later, you'd spot a nest of caterpillars not far away.

"It pays to look up," he'd say.

And off you'd go awaiting the next marvel hiding in plain sight — bullfrog eyes popping out of the surface of a pond, a black snake hiding in a patch of tall grass, a heron rookery up high in a Loblolly pine, the perfect place to watch bats and dragonflies feast on mosquitoes each evening at dusk.

This field guide is a way to see our workplace the way Ranger Greg sees the museum—to see the restorative potential hiding in plain site around us.
You will learn to see yourself, others, your library, and technology with new eyes. You will become your own version of Ranger Greg, slowing down and noticing the world, walking alongside your friends, family, colleagues, and community and reminding them (and yourself) to look up. You will also build the skills you'll need to create and cultivate restorative space for yourself and others. There are four interconnected parts designed to help you:

The **field guide** gives context for the skills you'll build. It explains important concepts, like attention restoration and the attention economy.

The **cards** will help you build design skills and explore restoration. Expansions packs address specific library roles and contexts. You can also make your own.

The **website** homes examples and all templates you'll need to try these at work and at home.

The **community** meets regularly to build skills and explore cards together.

All four work together to support you in the process of designing and discovering restorative space.
WHO IS THIS FOR?

This guide has been made for library workers, especially those that are experiencing low-morale and burnout. It was also made with library workers through a series of interviewers, focus groups, and participatory workshops.

It is sensitive to the wide range of institutional power and social capital library workers reading this might hold. It recognizes that restoration and connection look different for everyone. What you will see and make through this work will have your fingerprint. It will be seeded by and grow from your lived experiences, personal wisdom, relationships, and intentions.
BUT WHAT WILL WE *DO*?

At this point, you may be wondering what a "restorative environment" actually is. There's more about this on page 23, but for now, think of restorative environments as places we go to feel whole, or grounded, or to be reminded of who we really are and what it's really all about.

This field guide will help you design and discover those places in your library (and anywhere else you decide to look).

- **Design** will help you develop the mindsets and skills to create restorative environments.

- **Discovery** will help you spot restorative potential and explore the restorative environments that work best for you.

What you actually do with this guide will vary based on your needs, your work environment, and your capacity to engage in work like this right now. The reason this is a field guide and not a how to guide is because restorative environments look different for everyone. What you end up doing with this is your own to design and discover.
The general idea, however, is that you will use the methods described in each section to tap into the restorative potential already around you. This potential might be inside you, in others, in your environment, or in digital spaces.

Interestingly, those very things — our inner dialogue, social experience, environment, and technology may also prevent restoration, too. Both designing and discovering restorative environments requires creating conditions for restoration and navigating the tensions created by doing so.

Because our environments are typically not restorative, it may be easier to imagine restorative potential by considering the depleting environments you commonly experience. What are the qualities and aspects of these environments that create the feeling of depletion for you? What qualities of a space (physical, emotional, social, technological) might help you experience the opposite?
Here are some conditions that can help us see how we deplete and restore. They are each potentially restorative and potentially depleting. There's no right way to be and no way to be all the time.

Think about the following conditions as a continuum. Where do you land on the spectrum, and when? What, if any, conditions are missing?

- inside
- with others
- tech
- defined plans
- blank page
- saying yes
- listening
- inner looking
- patience
- stillness
- private
- complexity
- outside
- alone
- no tech
- wide open plans
- fill-in-the-blanks
- saying no
- daydreaming
- outward looking
- spontaneity
- movement
- public
- simplicity

✨ Remember: Restorative space is different for everyone, and what restores you one day might not on another day.
It's important to realize that whatever you do with this guide, the work will be **cyclical** and **iterative**. Here's an example of how a small activity could snowball into a change to the staff-only space through iteration.

For example, you might start by listening more deeply to a trusted friend or colleague through an **empathy map** (card 005.20).

In the second cycle, that new way of listening might turn into a new way to listen in departmental meeting you regularly attend.

In the third cycle, you may ask folks in your departmental meeting to try a **come back circle** (card 005.10), where you each go around in turn, reporting out what you normally would say ad hoc, endeavoring to listen well and give each person the group's time and attention.
In the fourth cycle, you might identify a colleague in that meeting that’s interested in talking more about restorative environments. Together, you brainstorm other possibilities for this work.

In the fifth cycle, you and your colleague might walk around the library on a go along (card 101.30), identifying restorative features of certain spaces.

In the sixth cycle, you might decide to play pretend (card 103.30) to imagine a restorative environment. You repurpose an empty storage closet, equipping it with a pair of noise canceling headphones and a door hanger that requests privacy.
In the seventh cycle, you might set out post-it notes for colleagues to share their kudos, questions, and concerns (card 103.20) and realize that people feel weird about hiding out in a closet.

In the eighth cycle, you might put a comfy chair and the headphones near a window in the staff room that has a nice view. You might conduct a field observation (card 101.20) to see how folks use it.

Whether you are trying to listen more deeply to a colleague or designing a new space in the staff room, you will begin again and again, using what you’ve learned and made in prior attempts. The changes you experience will be both fast and slow. Some cycles will provide immediate relief, others will take a long time for their effects to become known.

Like any field guide, keep this handy so you are ready to make and remake your library world when you happen upon something inspiring.
DESIGN

METHODS FOR PATIENCE, COURAGE, AND LETTING GO
THE DESIGN PROCESS

There are as many design processes as there are designers. In general, they all serve to get us from the blank canvas to something that solves a problem in the world.

In our design work, we're going to focus on three phases: inspiration, ideation, and iteration. Design work typically goes on from iteration to implementation and/or integration, but here we're focusing on the first three phases because we're going to design in such a way that the iteration phase never ends.

Sometimes, from iteration, we will go back to ideation, other times, we'll go all the way back to the beginning. **We are always beginning again.**
INSPIRATION

We tend to think of inspiration as something that happens to us. We are inspired. But in the design process, inspiration is a practice of patience, it is a skill that can be developed over time.

Because inspiration requires patience, part of the skill building required is spending more time being than doing. This allows you time to notice, to contemplate, to gain clarity and understanding, all of which will lead you to ideas in the next phase.

Inspiration is a time to indulge internet rabbit holes, to sit and watch the world go by, to talk out your thoughts to yourself (or to a friend you trust), to do nothing at all. Experiment, try things you’ve never done. Do things you do all the time, but pay more attention than you typically do.

Sit with your thoughts but do not act upon them. Postpone having "ideas" and observe the world around and inside of you. Follow your instincts, be purposefully purposeless. There's no commitment, just curiosity. It's an intuitive and thoughtful time. It can last as long as you like.
IDEATION

In ideation, we face the blank page.

This might be exciting or intimidating idea to you. Either way, ideation is a practice of courage. And like inspiration, ideation is a skill that can be cultivated.

Creating ideas requires us to take what's in our head and heart and put it out in the world. We share our ideas with others, revealing what we think and hope for, and what we don't yet know or understand. This is scary because those who see our ideas (including ourselves) can reject them. Rejection is a powerfully negative experience and it takes courage to make ourselves vulnerable to it, especially over and over again.

Ideation is a messy phase. We must persist through uncertainty, for the best ideas often come later after we've exhausted the obvious. This isn't easy for anyone, and it can be a profoundly discouraging place to endure. With practice, we get better at cultivating the courage to face rejection, uncertainty, and mess.
ITERATION

It can be easy to think of iteration as betterment, or growth, or progress, but for our purposes, it is a practice of letting go.

This letting go shows up in many ways. You will let go of control as you see others use and make meaning (or not) from your ideas. You will let go of (some of) your hopes for it as they meet realities that you didn't anticipate. Sometimes, you will let go of it completely, deciding it's not the right time or the right idea. The very best ideas also require you to let go over ownership because they are so informed by the lived experiences and ideas of others that it's no longer possible to tell who did or thought what.

Letting go can also be liberating. As you share your ideas and watch them live in the world, they might exceed your hopes, you may have to reach beyond what you think you can do to keep pace the possibilities others see in it.

Iteration is a phase where you do things. You cycle through building, testing and evaluating your prototype, each round asking another question about how it will be experienced, and for whom.

Iteration is the most powerful phase of the design process because it allows our lived experiences to inform what we make.
IDENTIFYING AS A DESIGNER

This field guide helps you develop the mindset of a designer. It invites you to not only discover and use restorative environments, but to make (and remake) them. This is because research on individuals that have used this guide suggests that the work of designing restorative environments for others is personally restorative to the designers themselves.

It gives a purpose to rest and renewal in a culture that sees those things as purposeless. When we design for others to restore, it can help us connect with each other, be more self-aware, slow down and notice the world around us, see our environment with new eyes, and, in some cases, use technology differently.

So, engage both the design and discovery phases, whether you’re aiming to cultivate contemplative experiences for yourself; to connect with others; to design spaces in your home or library, or even to create your own guide!

✨ Learn more: The Design Thinking for Libraries Toolkit is a robust and library-specific resource that follows the same phases laid out here. Check out the reading list they’ve developed.

✨ Learn even more: For a theoretical exploration of design in libraries, check out the work of Rachel Ivy Clarke. A great place to start is her article, Toward a Design Epistemology for Librarianship.
DISCOVERY

RECOGNIZING WHAT DEPLETES AND RESTORES US
THE DISCOVERY PROCESS

This guide is as much about discovery as it is design. It helps you discover the restorative potential already around you. It also helps you self-discover what restores and depletes you, and it facilitates connecting with others over these topics, so you can discover what is common and different among you.

We will need to develop a new set of eyes for the world around us, one where we notice the restorative allies and adversaries (card 003.30) in our environments. This new awareness feeds the design process, inviting us to practice patience (inspiration), courage (ideation) and letting go (iteration) as we work to make restorative space.

Part of developing new eyes is understanding how our attention works and the how our culture chronically depletes it. We need to know how to restore our attention passively and actively. We need to see the myriad ways technology companies use behavioral design to distract us and capture our attention for sale in a marketplace called "The Attention Economy."
HOW ATTENTION WORKS

In the late 19th century, William James noted that attention had two modes: effortless and directed. The effortless mode is the attention we use when something grabs our attention. A great example is a bell ringing or a light flashing. The directed mode is the attention we use when we pay attention. It takes effort. You are using directed attention right now to read this guide.

Psychologists and neurologists have since come to understand that directed attention depletes as we use it. They've also discovered that our directed attention rests when our effortless attention is evoked. We can intentionally use our effortless attention to restore our directed attention.

ATTENTION FATIGUE

We spend our days in demanding environments.

These environments are all around us all the time and everywhere we go.
The more time we spend in demanding environments, the more depleted our directed attention becomes. We enter a state psychologists called directed attention fatigue.

We become irritable, less sensitive to others, more error-prone, and more distractible. We feel stress and our autonomic nervous systems can engage our fight, flight or freeze response.\(^7\)

**ATTENTION RESTORATION**

We can restore our directed attention by evoking our effortless attention. When we effortlessly pay attention to something, our mind clears first, then our directed attention restores, then we engage in personal reflection. This is the process of attention restoration.\(^8\)
We can activate this process by spending time in restorative environments, and also through contemplative practice.⁹

RESTORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Environmental psychologists have empirically shown¹⁰ that environments that meet the following four conditions restore directed attention fatigue:

- **Being away**: removing yourself from the demanding environment
- **Compatibility**: going to a place that allows for you to be there and doing the things you want to do to restore
- **Extent**: going to a place that has enough to do, but not so much that it’s overwhelming
- **Soft Fascination**: going to a place that evokes effortless attention in a softly fascinating (as opposed to hard or riveting) way
It's important to note it's not enough to just get away, or to only pay attention to something softly fascinating. For an environment to restore directed attention, it must meet all four of these conditions at the same time.

For example, if you were in a lovely garden, sitting on a bench, watching a bee pollinate a flower, but the garden was in someone's yard and you weren't supposed to be there, you'd be away in a softly fascinating environment with extent, but it wouldn't be restorative because it doesn't have compatibility (you aren't allowed to be there).

Restorative environments come in all shapes and sizes and they are shaped by our lived experiences and personal histories.
CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

Restorative environments are a passive way to restore directed attention, but there's an active way to engage this process as well, and that's through contemplative practice.

For our purposes, contemplative means living moments of our lives with a deep sense of connection and awareness. It's also noticing when we've drifted and are caught up in thoughts of the past or future. Contemplative practices are simply anything we do while trying to be simultaneously connected and aware.

The Tree of Contemplative Practices illustrates the myriad ways we can attempt such presence.
For example, we can go running for exercise. Or, we can run contemplatively, noticing the experience of running, running with an intention to connect to the world and others in it. We can write or sew or draw to create something, or we can write or sew or draw contemplatively, paying attention to the process itself—each word, stitch, or mark—connecting to ourselves or others through it.

One of the environmental psychologists that created Attention Restoration Theory also theorized that contemplative practices evoke the same attention recovery that restorative environments do.¹²

Used together, restorative environments and contemplative practices give us powerful ways to counter the effects of demanding environments. They also can be used to protect and restore our attention from the harms of digital culture and the attention economy that fuels it.

THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

While we spend our days in demanding environments, there is, at present, a huge attention adversary in the form of the technology that we use and carry with us nearly everywhere we go.
Nearly all the technology we use competes in a marketplace called *The Attention Economy*. This marketplace incentivizes companies to harvest, commodify, and trade our attention.

Another word for this economy is *surveillance capitalism*. Tech companies design products to distract us. Once distracted, we pay attention to those products by creating or consuming content. They generate data about how we spend our time and feed those data into computational algorithms that make predictions about who we are and what we are or are not likely to do. Advertisers, political campaigns, and other buyers purchase those predictions to sell their product or ideas to us when we are most receptive (or you might say vulnerable) to their message. The more data collected, the higher the certainty, the greater the value.
BEHAVIOR DESIGN

Tech companies exploit our attention by using behavior design to design their products. \(^{13}\)

The creator of behavior design, BJ Fogg, has developed a formula, \(B=MAP\), for human behavior.

\[
\text{behavior} = \text{motivation} \times \text{ability} \times \text{prompt}
\]

Designers can tweak any part of this formula to trigger our behavior. For example, they can make it more motivating, easier to do, or change how or when the desired action (e.g., refreshing the feed, liking a post, purchasing a product, etc.) is prompted.

A common example of this is a pop-up window that
prompts us to subscribe to a newsletter when we visit a website. Designers make it very easy to subscribe and they often offer a discount or freebie to make it more motivating. You can imagine how likely you'd be to subscribe if it wasn't triggered (the pop-up), or if you had to fill out a bunch of information (ability) and there wasn't any incentive or reward promised (motivation).

This theory is built upon work on the work of BF Skinner called operant conditioning and variable rewards.¹⁴

Skinner famously put animals in cages with a lever that delivered food. If the animals got food everytime they pressed the lever, they would only eat if they were hungry. If the only sometimes received the food, they became addicted to pressing the lever.
The technology that we use has essentially become a Skinner's box, variably rewarding us with "food" in the form of notifications and content. We don't need to be rewarded, we just need to see if there is a reward. This knowledge satisfies our impulse.

Instagram is a good example of how companies use behavior design to capture our attention. Whistle blowers have revealed that the company would hide how many likes a photo had so that they could batch them in higher numbers later, increasing the reward and making it more likely we'd check again soon.¹⁵

Instagram didn't start by dosing dopamine to addict its users. It started as "Send the sunshine," an app that notified users if it was raining where their friend was and encouraged them to send a sunny photo.¹⁶
Competing in the attention economy morphed Instagram into the kind of app it is today. And every app (and increasingly things that aren't apps, like thermostats, doorbells, and cars) competes in that economy. It's why we can feel so powerless in the face of technology. It's tapping vulnerabilities to engage us, promising pleasure, acceptance, and hope; threatening us with pain, fear, and social rejection.17

Restorative environments and contemplative practices aren't the solution to this manipulation, but they are allies in balancing the effects technology has on our attention, our relationships, and how we spend our lives.

As James Williams, a contemporary technology ethicist says, "Attention is paid in possible futures forgone."18 When we pay with our attention, we pay with our lives—the things we did or didn't do with that time, the people we did or didn't see, the person we do or don't become.
USING THE CARDS

This field guide is one part of a suite of tools created to support you in designing and discovering restorative environments. The activity cards, which come in both printed and digital versions, are an essential component. This guide gives context for the cards. The work of design and discovery are facilitated through the cards.

The cards are organized by call numbers because they are intended to grow over time. In general, the 000 cards are focused on discovery and the 100 cards are focused on design. They work together, and sometimes overlap, but build different skills.

Expansion packs are planned in the future. They will feature activities specific to certain library roles, types, and sizes. The call number system will allow new activities to be added.
The cards cover a range of activities and some may need more or less space for the instructions. Because of this, the cards accordion so they can still fit in the card catalog, while also conveying the information needed.

In general, all cards plainly state how much time is required, if any materials or other people are involved, and how to do the activity. All cards list reflection questions for you to consider. The website, available by tapping your phone on the card catalog and typing in the card number, provides worksheets and examples.

**USING THE WEBSITE**

A robust website accompanies the field guide. It contains a link to a PDF download of the field guide and interactive pages for all activity cards, which often include templates and examples. There are details on community meetups to learn about and discuss specific activities with other library workers.
To access the website, you can type in the website address, which is `restorativelibrary.org`, or you can simply tap your phone on the card catalog drawer pull, which contains a near-field communication tag, the same technology that allows our phones to pay for things at the grocery store. In this case, the phone loads a page on the website that prompts you to type in the call number of the card you’re wanting to look up. It will load the page for that card.
The website also provides a way for you to submit your own card ideas and print out any cards that aren't in your set. It is the forever home of the dissertation work that led to these tools.

BUILDING A REFLECTIVE HABIT

A critical component of designing and discovering restorative environments is the clarity and understanding you will develop through reflection. Every design and discovery activity card prompts reflection and will benefit from it.

Many things today ask us to reflect and we don't because we don't have time. For this work, reflection is probably the most important work you can do. It will work magic in your life. Use whatever methods you already prefer to reflect on things. If you don't have a preferred method, many of the discovery cards will invite you to try out various modes: freewriting, solitude, conversation, moving your body, drawing.

FINDING COMMUNITY

This guide was developed in community. Dozens of library workers, creative professionals, and informatics students devoted time and effort to the design and evaluation of this field guide.
These tools would not exist without community and they are not intended to be used in isolation. The activities themselves invite you to involve others in the work. Meetups are regularly scheduled to talk about specific activities and your experiences at your library. Meetups are an open invitation. You can learn more about them on the website, or subscribe to the newsletter to be notified of when they occur.

CONTRIBUTING

The guide was developed through participatory design and it remains a participatory project. You are invited to share feedback of your experience, your own activities and ideas for directions the project might go, and to build upon the work yourself. It has a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial ShareAlike 4.0 International license.
ENDNOTES

1  p. 18
The toolkit and reading list can be accessed by visiting the following website:
http://designthinkingforlibraries.com

2  p. 18
Rachel Ivy Clarke's faculty website is here:
https://ischool.syr.edu/rachel-ivy-clarke/

Here is the citation for the article referenced:

3  p. 20
Coined in 2001, the attention economy was originally defined as a way for businesses to succeed through understanding and managing our attention.


4  p. 21


10 p. 23
See note 6.

11 p. 25

See or download an image of the tree here:
http://contemplativemind.org/practices/tree

12 p. 27

13 p. 28

See also https://behaviormodel.org

14 p. 29


See note 13.