Broadening participation in language science at a language museum

What?
Newly begun NSF-funded collaborative project to engage Planet Word visitors in language science
• We conduct language science research studies using Planet Word visitors as participants, then use their participation as a jumping-off point for doing language science communication

Where?
Planet Word, a new museum housed in Washington DC’s historic Franklin School, with a focus on literacy, language arts (literature, humor, oratory), & language science (language acquisition, world languages, forensic linguistics, etc.)

Who?
We’re broadening participation among:
• The public we reach with our science communication (typically limited, since there are not many public sites devoted to language)
• The participants who contribute data to language science studies (typically WEIRD/college-student population)
• The students we train in social science research & science communication (so far, students from: 7 DC-area universities, including 3 MSIs)

How?
• Design museum-friendly, gamified studies across a range of topics + methods, each with an accompanying educational message and activity
• Undergrad and grad students as research assistants + science communicators trained via summer course (beginning this summer!)
• The project builds infrastructure to lower the barrier to entry for other language researchers interested in public-facing research and engagement

Example topics
• What makes certain ASL signs easier to learn than others?
• How does our language change when we’re talking about something we know a lot about?
• What aspects of language are affected when you have a concussion?

Museum visitors
Opportunities
• Interact with visitors around a domain of science often overlooked in the public stage, but that is centered at Planet Word (from language arts to language science enthusiasts!)
• Increased diversity of participants in language science research

Challenges in implementing
• Must keep scientific rigor of studies while holding interest of visitors across all age groups
• How best to assess impact on public, researchers, and museum staff

Undergrad + Grad trainees
Opportunities
• First hand practice in research, science communication, especially for students with less access and who are underrepresented in the field
• Gain skills that cross over from academia into other areas

Challenges in implementing
• Cover content specific background, and science communication principles in a short time
• How to sustainably offer and fund training into the future, especially across a multi-university partnership