

American Swedish Institute

Key findings from interviews with in-person workshop and tour participants

From 2019-2021, Wilder Research (Wilder) partnered with the American Swedish Institute (ASI) on a number of audience- and community-focused organizational learning projects. These projects were intended to generate insights about how ASI can maintain connections to their current audiences as well as how they can make new, meaningful connections with people in their community and beyond.

From May-July 2020, Wilder Research examined participant perceptions related to three of ASI's programs: Nordic Handcraft, Nordic Table, and Specialty Tours. We conducted 19 interviews with participants of in-person workshops and tours (7 with Nordic Handcraft participants, 6 with Nordic Table participants, and 6 with Specialty Tours participants).



Nordic Handcraft
7 interviewees



Nordic Table
6 interviewees



Specialty Tours
6 interviewees

Why did they participate?



Interest and experience in the topic, or general interest in crafts, food, or art

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“I saw the ASI newsletter and I went, ‘What a fascinating topic...!’ The topic itself is what drew me into the class.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant

“When they announced that the photography show would be happening, I was very interested in it because I am a photographer.”

–Specialty Tours participant

“I thought, ‘Well, this is a new craft that I haven’t tried. I have done carving, ceramics, Sami bracelets, felting, birch bark, cardholders, watercolor basics. This was just a new craft and thought it’d be good to learn.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant



Heard good things or had previous positive experiences with instructors or guides

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“Sometimes it’s hard to tell prior to getting there if an instructor will be good. You read their biography and that stuff, but most of it is word-of-mouth. Over time you ask people and you hear about the guy who’s really good at Adirondack chairs. You get a reference for people.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant

“The instructor had an incredible respect for the materials, an appreciation of what can be done with the materials. Their education about how and why it’s harvested in a certain way was very fascinating.”

–Nordic Handcrafts participant

“The instructor understood the importance of food, and what that means in terms of identity, what that means in terms of relationships and family. The concept of food along with identity and the connections it brings—she understood all of that.”

–Nordic Table participant



Hands-on, personalized experiences that felt special and exclusive

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“It was great just being able to get your hands dirty and do the work yourself. We created something decorative, beautiful, and lasting. It was unique!”

–Nordic Handcraft participant

“We cooked outside and did a typical Nordic feast cooking over Nordic fires on the lawn, using materials, foods, pots—everything that they could do as closely possible to how the Viking feast would have been done 500 years ago. It was amazing!”

–Nordic Table participant

“There might have been 12-15 people, but it wasn’t too big. You could really ask questions. You could get close to the work, you didn’t have to stand back five feet. It was great being able to see things that other people never see in the museum.”

–Specialty Tours participant



Instructors and guides are engaging and adept at catering to groups with diverse skill levels

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“The best part was their absolute patience in teaching us the skill. They were able to help 15 people at a wide range of skills and abilities.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant

“The audience was interacting with them. We asked a fair number of questions and they always had an answer or knew where to go where to find the answer. It was very good.”

–Specialty Tours participant

“You watch the instructor mix the paint, do the sketch—do it all in phases. After she does all that she takes a break and you start doing your own. As a learning artist, you want to see how the pros do it. That’s what I remember the most. That’s why I continue to be drawn to her.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant

What did they take away from the experience?



Learned new things



“Because of the class, I look at flowers in stores differently. It stopped me from purchasing products that are not local and that are out of season. It’s given me more of an awareness of what I’m buying and who I am supporting.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant

“The instructor talked about the history of the various dishes, how they were created, why they were created. You got a lot of history about the food, the region, and the culture. That was fun.”

–Nordic Table participant

“[The exhibit] opened my eyes to all kinds of things. It was very philosophical. The images were strange, but they made you think. It made you want to do something to help out and reminded you of what is important in the world.”

–Specialty Tours participant



Strengthened their skills



“We actually made a loaf of bread. Everyone got to handle the dough—how it feels, what it’s supposed to feel like. We were kneading it and some people were unfamiliar with that. You don’t just roll it up and put it in the pan. There are certain ways to put it in the pan. She taught us about the exterior of the loaf, that there’s a spine that makes it look nice.”

–Nordic Table participant

“I made a Swedish tabletop tree carved with ornaments. I’d never carved before. I was being instructed in how to use the knife and the glove, learning how to carve this tree that stands about 18-20 inches tall. And then make a dozen ornaments—trees and candles that hang from the branches. That was the most involved workshop that I’ve ever been to.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant



Connected with family, friends, and others



“I saw they were offering the class and I thought it would be a fun class for my daughter and me to take together.”

–Nordic Table participant

“After signing up, I talked a friend of mine into taking it as well. He does baking and cooking as well. We both liked it.”

–Nordic Table participant

“I’m always looking for ways to connect with other moms in the community. There’s not a lot of options that you can do with kids under two years old. I’ve kept in touch with one of the moms that I met and we plan to sign up for another event.”

–Specialty Tours participant



Learned more about their own and others’ cultural heritage



“I come from a Nordic family and being able to do ASI’s programs with my family has been a special thing.”

–Nordic Table participant

“We had to wait a long time for the water to drain out of the skyre, so the instructor had a slide show about Icelandic culture and the Nordic people who migrated to Iceland 1,000 years ago. It was a fun and interesting way to fill in the time while the water drained.”

–Nordic Table participant

“I liked learning about culture and about Indigenous peoples. In Minnesota, birch is so symbolic for so many great things. Indigenous peoples hold birch in high regard. It’s a symbol of Minnesota.”

–Nordic Handcraft participant

