

SparkLab General and Sensory Information



Hours and Location

SparkLab is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day except for Tuesdays and December 25.

SparkLab is located at the National Museum of American History, first floor, West Wing.

Entering the Museum

All visitors must go through the security process at the entrance, which includes a hand check of bags and walking through a metal detector. If your child has difficulty waiting quietly in line, plan accordingly and bring fidget spinners, music headphones, or a manipulative toy.

Enter museum at the Constitution Avenue entrance between 12 and 14 Streets.

You will be greeted by a Security Guard.

The Security Guard will check all bags.

You and your child will have to walk through a security scanner.

The Lobby is a large open space and can be loud if crowded.

The Lobby has display cases along the walls filled with a variety of artifacts.

Items such as markers, colored pencils, Silly Putty, Play-Doh, food, and drinks (except water) are not allowed in the museum.

What You Can Do in SparkLab

When you arrive at SparkLab, a greeter in a yellow apron will welcome you and tell you about the space.

SparkLab has hands-on invention stations throughout the room.

You can find the invention challenge for each station on the purple signs.

You and your child can work together to create inventions that solve the challenges.

You and your child can create your own invention at the make and take station called The Hub and take it home.

Staff and volunteers in yellow aprons can help you if you have questions or need anything.

Visual Stimuli

SparkLab is brightly lit with brightly-colored walls and decor.

There could be large touch-screen monitors at a few of the stations.

Some of the invention stations may have bright lights or moving objects.

There is a wall of windows looking into Wegman's Wonderplace, a hands-on space for children 0-6.

Auditory Stimuli

SparkLab is often full of young children and adults, so there is substantial crowd noise.

Some activities could make noise, such as beeping, scraping, or humming.

There are occasionally young children who cry or yell, and sounds can come in from Wegman's Wonderplace.

The doors to SparkLab occasionally close with a loud bang.

Tables and chairs might scrape against the floor, or be knocked over.

The Thinking Spot can be a quieter area.

If your child is sensitive to sound, consider bringing noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs.

Tactile Experiences

Chalkboards and chalk are available for drawing.

All SparkLab activities and invention stations are hands-on.

Materials include Tinker toys, Legos, K'nex pieces, pipe cleaners, straws, cardboard, rubber bands, and construction paper.

Movement Opportunities

SparkLab has many tables and chairs that are close together.

Movement around SparkLab can be limited when it is busy.

SparkLab is less crowded in the back of the space, near the Thinking Spot.

Temperature

SparkLab is often cold, even on hot days.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms are located throughout the museum.

A Family/Companion Care bathroom is located inside Wegman's Wonderplace next door to SparkLab.

Public restrooms are located on the right side of the first floor, directly before you enter the West Wing.

Automatic toilet flush, on/off sinks, and hand dryers.

Loud and powerful hand dryers.

Loud toilet flush.