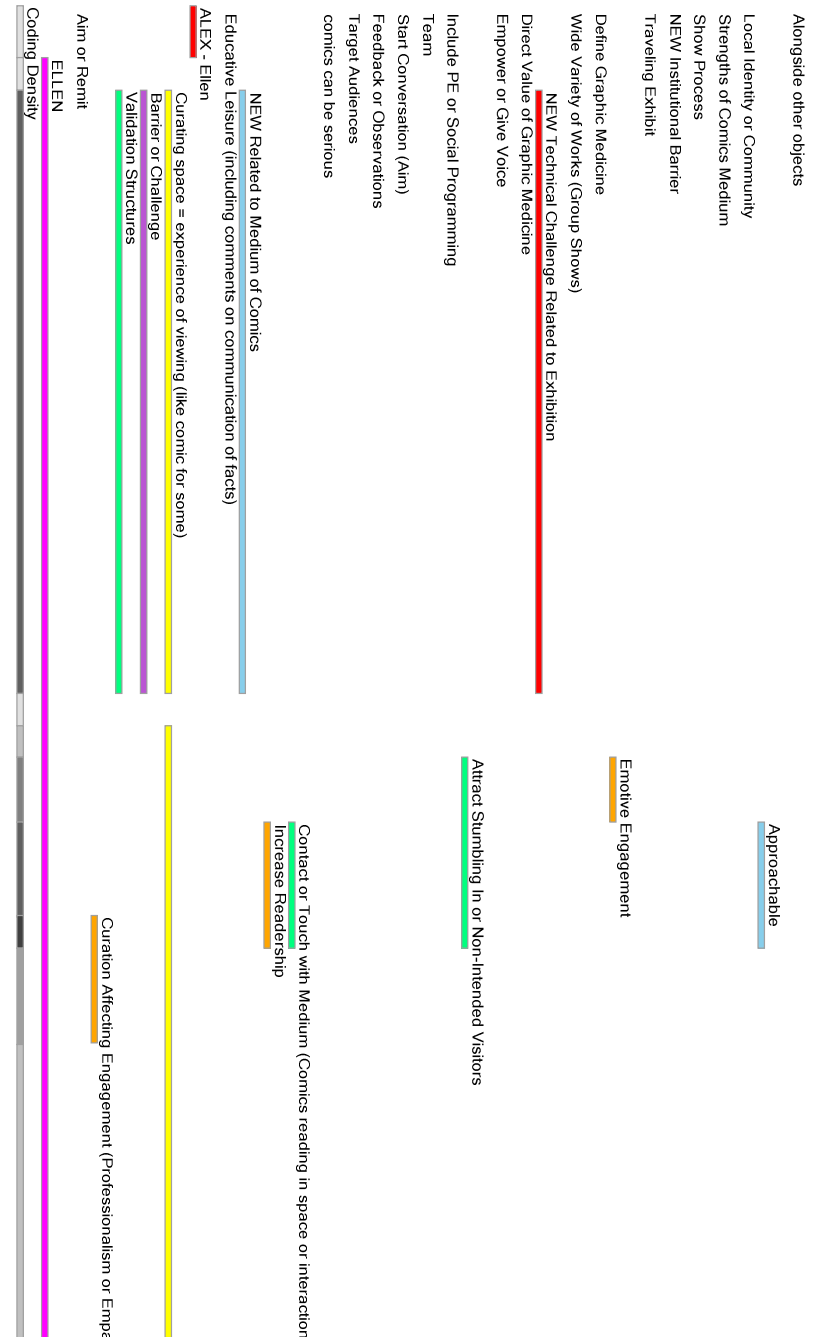


ELLEN:

with the way it seems to be coming together. I know I have some pretty strong feelings about Exhibitions of comics in general. I think it comes from my standpoint as a designer. I mean I think that different cartoonists really connect with different parts of putting comics together whether it's more on the writing side or more on the art side or for me. I don't know how much you know my work but the the way that I put my pages together are very much informed by the work that I've done, say, for posters or other kinds of design. Like where where do I want the eye to go and how and and so and so that's a large part of my of my thinking of my being in the world I guess making that broader. But one of the things that I think is a big problem with comics exhibitions is that it's generally - so if you're walking into a if you're walking into a gallery that's generally for art. And so you're kind of going into it with an art standpoint. But as so many of us who are in comics really like to emphasize it's a storytelling medium. So. So the way that a gallery our assumptions as people when we walk in with how we're gonna interact with things and just the way the spaces are designed generally are much more for looking than they are. Like taking things in. like you wouldn't have like poetry displayed on the wall quite the same way probably you know like some sort of very literary form it's just looking at something you know like trying to read something in a crowd of people on or on a wall this way. It's really not a natural way to digest so. So that that's so that's where you know like I don't know what it was that you wrestled with as a curator but it's definitely something that that I have thought about as a curator and also as someone who's been in a lot of shows and and certainly you know like seeing comics exhibits and so for me was really seems to be that I would say necessary in order to really bring people in and be engaging is to have some aspects that are big ideally and which which could mean this could just be from what the curator does and just like blowing up the cover of someone's book Big so. So that someone can be drawn in emphasizing the art in that way to kind of allow people to kind of come in have the have the books available as books and not I mean like like everybody we all want to have like a couchy area with the comics to sit and read. But I think like if you really think about architecture and the way that people ARE in different spaces it's not really the space to get internal that way. So like how like how can how can how can people interact with comics in a way that it's almost an adaptation. You know it's like it's like. So it's like like when you take a book and you put it on like now it's a theatrical performance you know like how am I going to make make this experience appropriate for this space which is going to be very different from reading comics . So I think things that are big things that have color and and as much as possible things that are 3-D like put some things in cases or or I know R. Crumbs much [maligned?] I'm not gonna get too far into how I feel about Crumbs work but I saw a really terrific exhibit of his work. And he has these huge I don't think that he made them I think somebody else made them these huge colorful sculptures of different characters and it's just really it was years ago and that and that really stayed in my



memory because because I remember how much it transformed the space. You know it was very much his work but at the same time it kind of was an entry way to seeing his stuff on the wall that was really dense. anyway so. So I I I think that - I mean this isn't even to answering any question that you asked

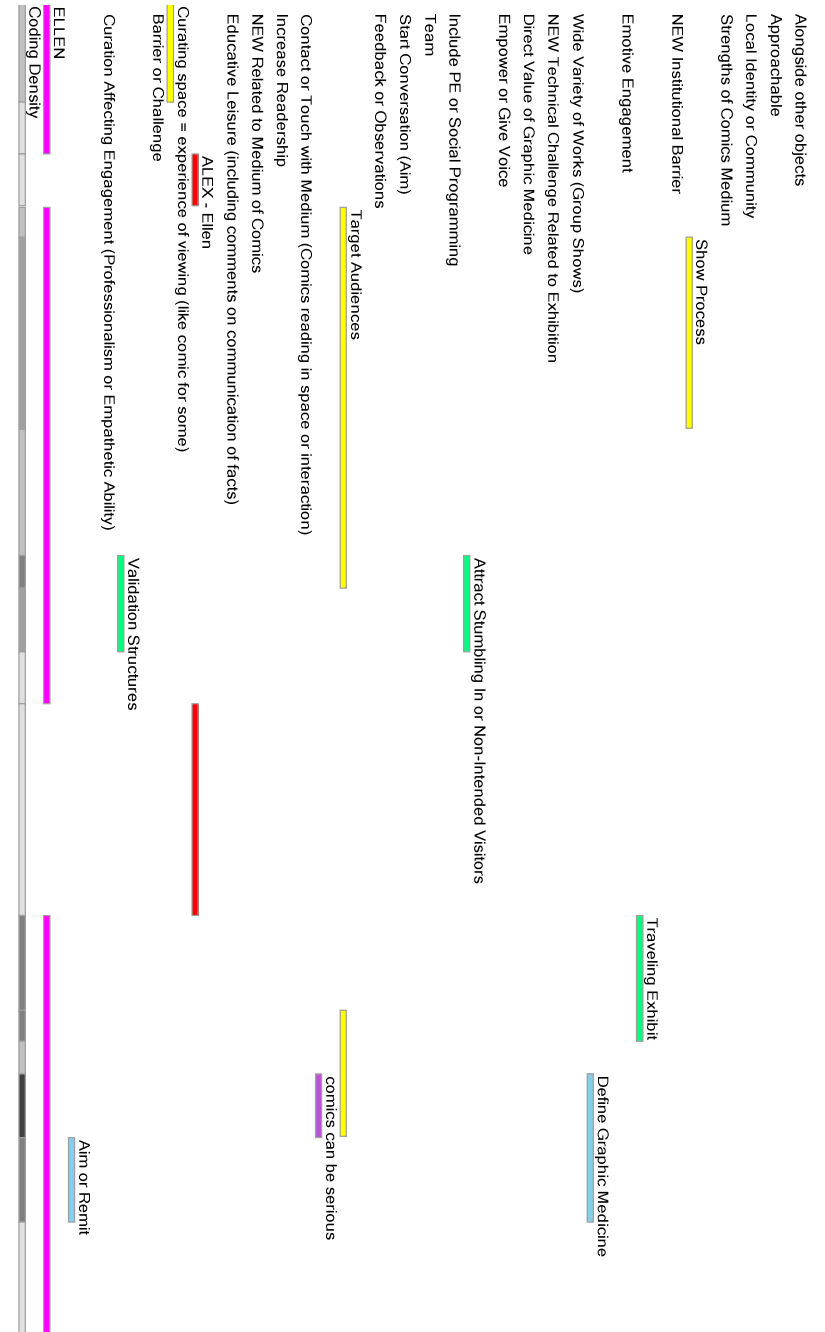
ALEX: but it's answering some I would.

ELLEN: OK good. OK. That basically figuring out who your audience is and what it is that you want to offer. Because there if it's certain kinds of certain kinds of readers and cartoonists and fans it's really interesting to see the process for example like I want to see pencils and they're you know scribbled notes and all of that stuff which is a very different show from something that's Oh that's much more framed, you know like that like that. That one that I think I want to see like a case that has you know like a big jar of all of their used brushes. So that kind of thing and you can have elements of that. I always think my like my mom what would my mom be interested in. And I don't think I don't think that that part of the process would interest her as much as seeing the more finished things and maybe maybe more of slick isn't quite the right word but much more like the produced end of things the printed end things being led through being led through that from the outside. So. So that anybody is setting up comics exhibit or and I have their ear. I will say that like make some things big. It's just it's it's just. Yeah, anyway, makes some things big. Color I don't know I'm just sort of summarizing what it is that I that I just said so, there, that's my piece.

ALEX: That was that was one of the questions that. I wanted to get at. It's like how would you achieve certain types of experiences. So that was great. And so would you - so the main exhibit that I've kind of been working with that you've been a part of is the graphic medicine ill conceived and well drawn. And so because you were talking about audiences I was wondering for that exhibition. What was your or Who was your intended intended audiences?

ELLEN: Well I knew that it was going to be in. It was part of their. It was part of a program of theirs that went primarily to libraries around the country universities some med schools - universities, med schools - pretty much you know for the most part other educational contexts. So I knew that it was going to mostly be for people who weren't familiar with comics. Weren't necessarily familiar with comics certainly not familiar with. Well I'll just say I'm not familiar with comics- not... familiar with the kinds of health topics that are covered that you know that relate but probably not like graphic medicine don't know about graphic but since I was going to be introducing people to graphic medicine and and people that probably ...

ELLEN: ... So there's a there's a guy I don't know if you can see there's a guy out the window and you see him (laughter) I don't know what he is training for but he does he does like all like he'll crawl up the street just like a little hill or crawl up and it'll come back down.



He's like (breath out) you know he'll because look like he's doing he has these weights so he's pushing on these weights anyway OK. Sorry I was just distracted - I'll go over here (angles computer away from window)...

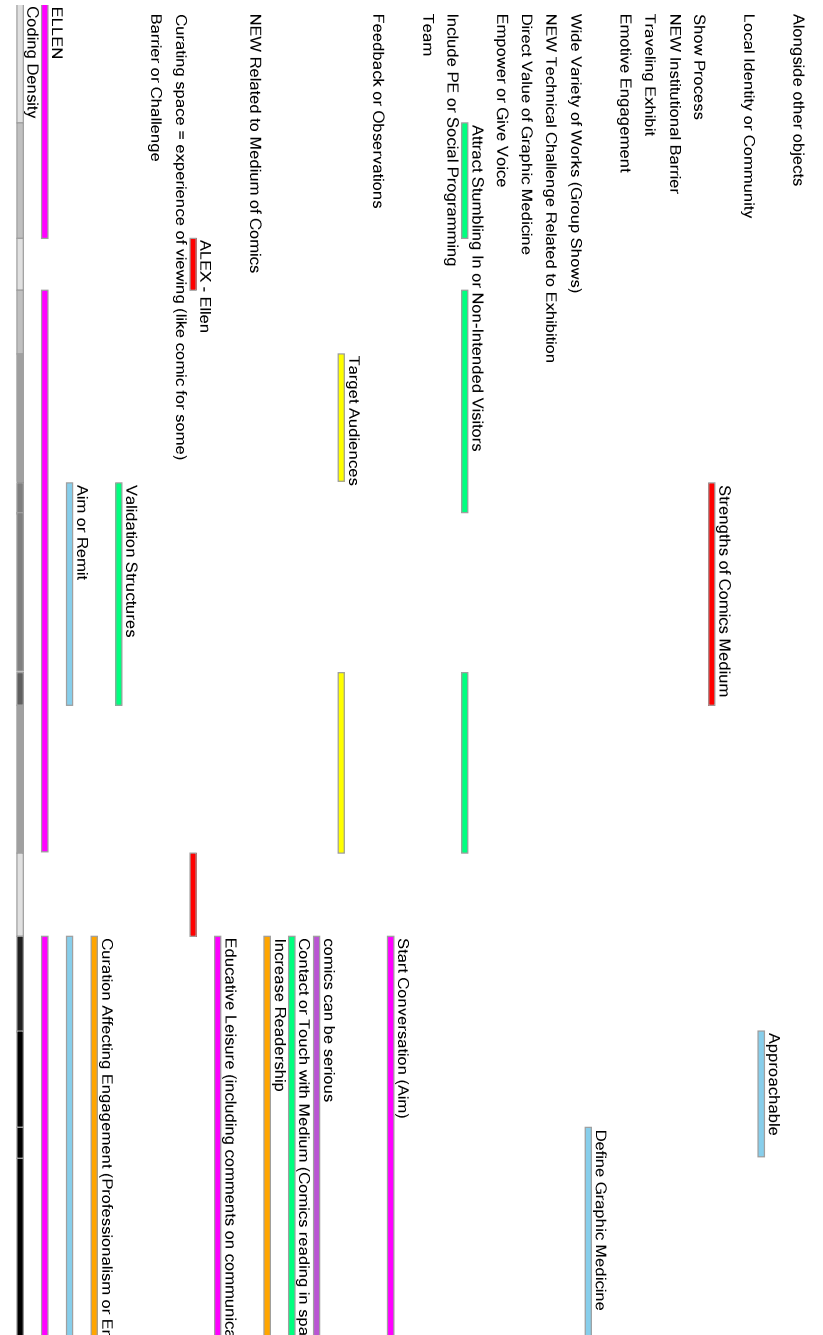
ELLEN: Okay now I've lost my place - Oh my audience right. And so I also knew it wasn't gonna be kids you know and I knew too that that it was going to need to be really eye catching because I think I mean you're familiar with libraries.

ALEX: Yeah.

ELLEN: And with the kind of display it's like right outside of libraries or like when you walk in. It's not that it's not - and I know this as a public artist too because I because I've done public art that it's not the intention of the person who is going to the library they're thinking about the research they have to do. They're thinking about the like for me like they're thinking about you know like how they're going to the airport whatever. And so it has to be it has to be a pretty simple splash. So that's that's why in order to catch their attention at all. And for the for the National Library of Medicine exhibit I wanted to make sure that I use a lot of things that comics have to offer which is vivid color and things really simplified black lines with flat color. I mean the kind of comics that I do and that is that that I think would appeal to my eye in particular for this for this kind of situation. I mean this is the kind of design that I did was again really related to the kind of let's say poster works and a that I've done you know just like how how is this going to land. At a glance. So it's definitely working with a population that I knew was going to be walking by without the intent of stopping to look so it needed to be eye catching. In a way that even beyond the things that I was just telling you about like how to a draw people in have a 3D element or whatever like my audience for people who are not planning to come across this exhibit at all. So.

ALEX: so was there - knowing that then was there a particular thing. Once you had caught them was there a particular thing you wanted them to take away or experience?

ELLEN: Well. That's a - sure. I mean that's a good question. Well I think the main thing is that just just as with any time that I mentioned graphic medicine people know of health and health issues that people know about comics. I mean like even if I'm saying people who aren't really familiar with my audience I knew people not necessarily familiar with comics but it's so much a part of our culture worldwide that it's not completely out of practically anyone's consciousness or understanding but putting the two of them together is really new for many many people. And so so that that was the main thing that I wanted to get across that it exists so that it exists that it exists in a way that is supported by the National Library of Medicine and is supported by whatever institution it is that they are in. And I'm assuming respect like their library at the University of Washington health sciences like oh graphic medicine here you know where I study you know so so. So an introduction to the idea if nothing else I would say that that's the



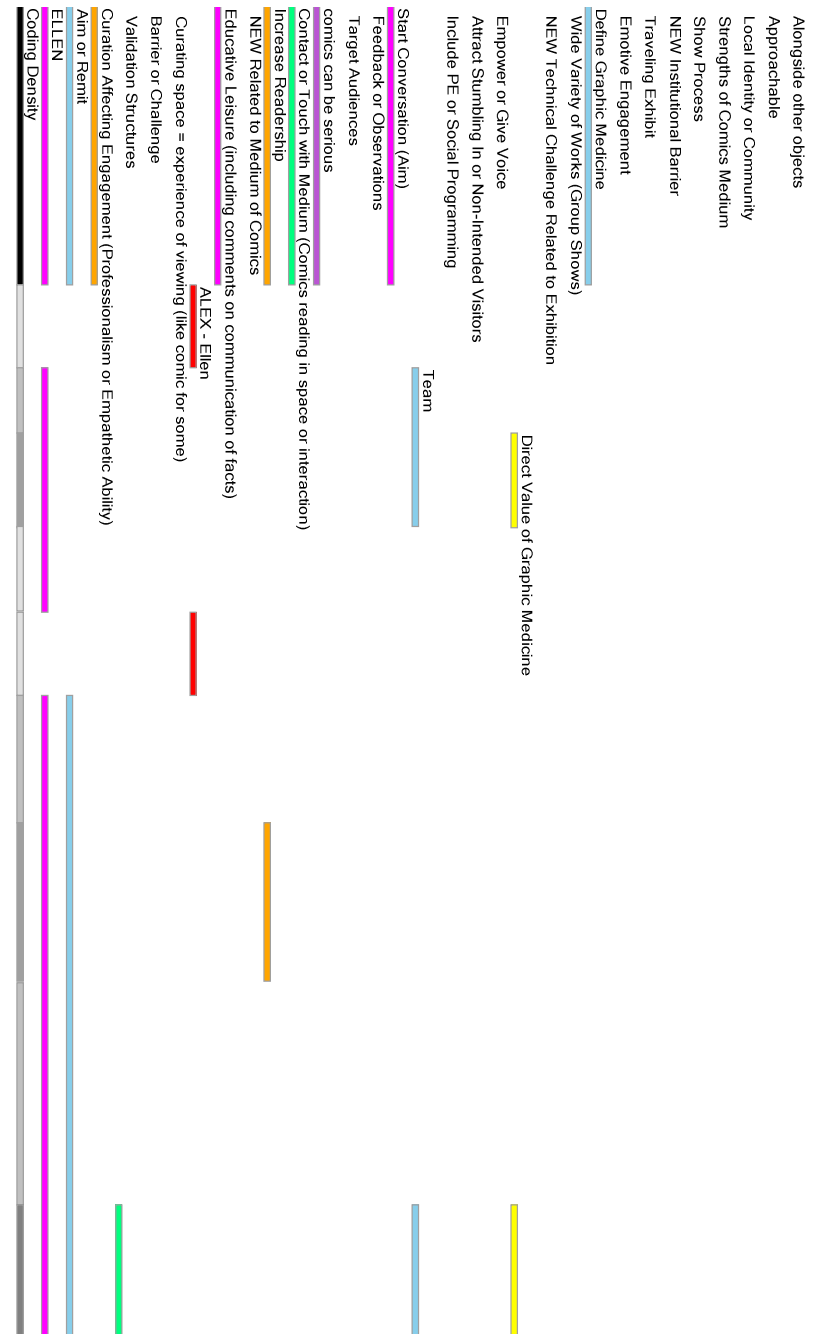
main thing . Just like introducing them. Introducing them to the idea . And as many layers as possible. I mean the first layer is just just seeing the title and just like oh comics and health. You know who knew . And then kind of beyond that like oh it's it's kind of catchy and funny it's not like it's not necessarily. If you get drawn in a little bit more maybe than you get to see more specific examples and then ideally brought in enough that the viewer wants to go look some up . And of course some of the libraries will have them available on the table. And so so that. So that's the hope. What one . One layer of those completely like as far in as possible

ALEX: and then were you did you come up with the exhibition idea or was that something you were approached about?

ELLEN: I was approached about. I gave I gave a keynote at the comics and Medicine Conference when it was at the when it was at Johns Hopkins in 2014 and the director of the traveling exhibition program from the National Library of Medicine was there. So she she already knew that it was something that she was interested in and she saw my talk and really liked my approach and got in touch with me in 2014. So it's been a long time in the making because it only it only just was finally released last year. January was four - four years getting things together.

ALEX: and was that it was their aim for the exhibition the same to kind of just introduce it or did they express any others to you.

ELLEN: Their main their main concern with or concern. Goal like their goal with the traveling with the traveling exhibition series and that's a series of them that's I don't know how many let's say 20 a dozen I don't know how long somewhere between a dozen and 20 different exhibitions. Maybe it's more like a dozen - I don't know anyone that is easily findable but anyway it's an established and established thing and it's to it's to show off their their collections or collections just as a way to say look here's the National Library of Medicine here is a corner but we have to offer . Here is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and here are all of the different scientific things that we have in the collection and that relate and they try to make it as engaging and relevant as they can . I mean the- usually- here's one thing that was funny about this exhibit is that usually the way they do it is if they - I don't think people pitch things to them . I think that they figure out something that they want to focus on. I know I spoke with one other person who curated one of their shows can't remember what is nurse. Nurses really like nurses and feminism and history . They have some really cool exhibits nurses and social activism. Something like that was really cool anyway . But she wasn't an expert in that but they hired her as a curator and she got that all together with the resources that they had now. So I think Pat , oh god now I can't remember her last name . Patricia the that the director really thought the graphic medicine was important . She was convinced the graphic medicine was really important and they really didn't have much in their collection. They had some early stuff on AIDS education that was important and



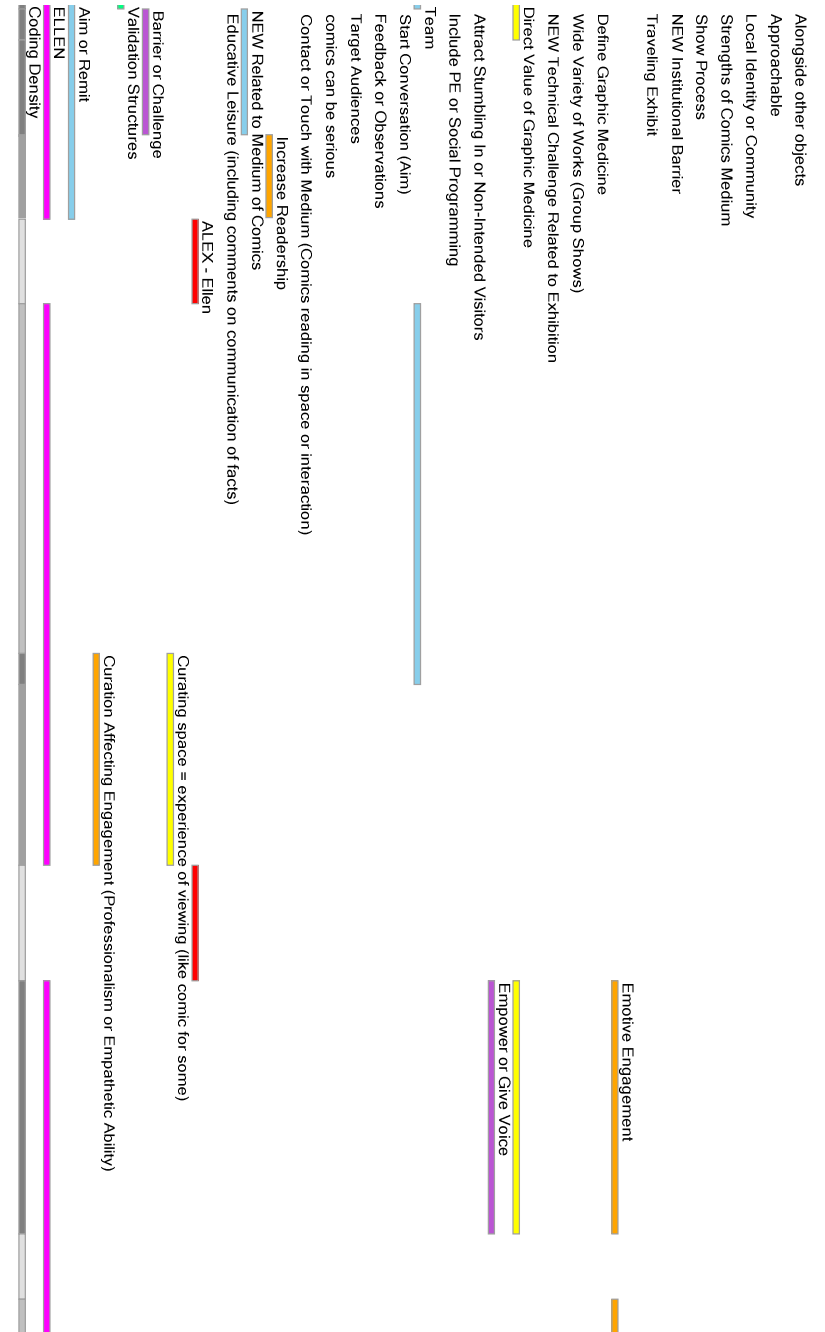
groundbreaking and it kind of helped along kind of bring these together but so they kind of . Wound up like collecting some to be in their collections. So it is a show off their collection but they just kind of like put a bunch of stuff in their collection in order to show their collection. So I thought that was kind of funny but that's not. But that's the point. That's their main point of the exhibitions is to introduce people to the National Library of Medicine.

ALEX: And then did you did you create kind of the banners yourself or did you have a team that helped you with that?

ELLEN: Well I had. They had they have designers that do it but they understood that they . It was it was really important to me to be part of the design because of that I couldn't officially be art director and I don't remember exactly why but you know it was something about dividing up tasks or what they could hire me for or not or like I officially be consultants or how could that work . But I I they they worked with the company to do the design and I wound up I wound up having you know I would say I wound up - art directing it . I did a lot of sketches like I did a lot of like you know like I don't like this color palette or the font needs to be different . You know like I really got in there and I was really happy that they they they were happy to work with me . I didn't get any sort of resentment from them. But but I would say that they really followed like along with that . I would say that I did a lot of the directing but that was I mean officially outside of my purview . But you know I didn't. That was a big part of the presentation and how it was going to land . So I mean if you if you look at the traveling exhibitions just like just like you might expect the color palette is very muted and the fonts are very you know like Helvetica or you know like Times New Roman you know just really everything is like really kind of institutional. And this needed to be not institutional so so . So I felt like I needed to have a hand in that if I cared. I did and I do.

ALEX: I was wondering if you could expand on what you just said like this one needed to not be institutional. What you mean by that and then kind of some of the choices you might have made if you remember

ELLEN: right. Well I think well so one of the things about graphic medicine is that one of the main points is about communication and giving subjectivity and life to a field the health care field that is generally very clinical and or is often very clinical and very has this sense of objectivity and. And boxes and institutional clarity that kind of thing . So sort of similar then you know the communication that goes along Oh just like the subjectivity and subjectivity and soul let's say that that's what this exhibit needed as well . So the the more institutional analytical approach wasn't going to have enough of the subjective soul organic quality that it really needed to have to prove its point. I mean there's a certain I mean you have to strike a balance there is the show. Show don't tell kind of you know like when you're analyzing something to a degree you have to kind of take a step back and be clinical. But at the same time if you completely lose





ELLEN: OK so this is can you say you see that.

ALEX: No I can't I still just see you.

ELLEN: Oh really. Oh. Oh here we go. That's because I have shared start sharing. Now can you see?

ALEX: I don't yet - do I have to okay something? Oh now I see it.

ELLEN: so this is set aside the the Library of Medicine so you can see . But wait a second. That's a different exhibit. Those are the cases but those are the different exhibit. Wait, hold on, let me think. Where would I have those. This is from the proposal I might need to find that I'm showing you how messy this is. So can you still see my screen.

ALEX: Yeah I can.

ELLEN: So . Wait. So. So those were the cases. I mean like I can I can show you them. When I when I find them I'm not sure where they are . It would be silly to take up that much time but they were there were cases that we put in the book and some original pages and there . Did you. Did you see the this exhibit did you. I only look at different.

Speaker: I only I saw the traveling exhibit in Vermont.

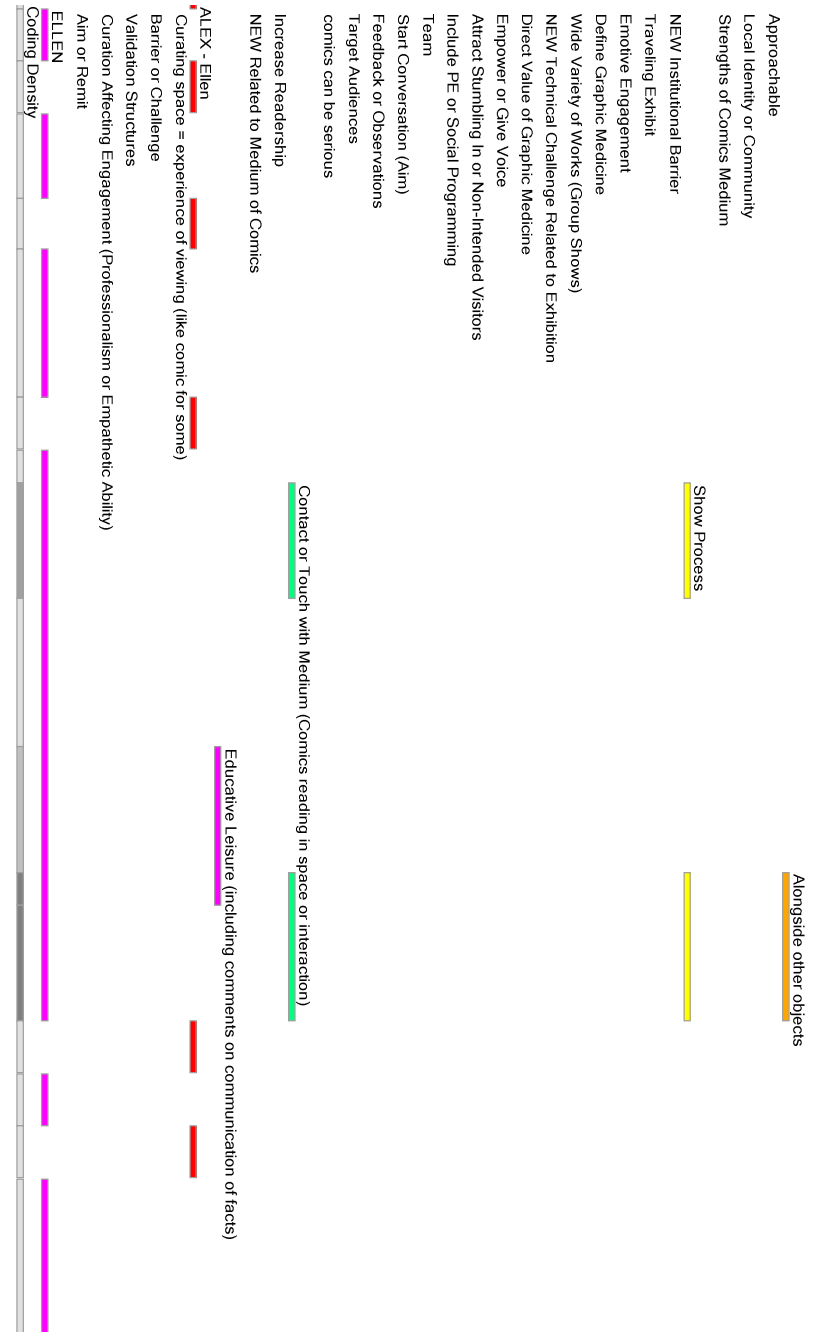
Speaker: Oh you did. OK. All right . So actually I mean that was a different thing for me too. You know that I was the curator but I was also kind of the star. You know like there was a lot about marbles and then and then. So the first one was like hey I'm Ellen Forney your you know. And then the second and then the second panel on reading comics. So that's something that I think most exhibit probably don't have I don't have that focus which is to educate that way. Here's how you might read comics here's how words and pictures come together . So it was a lot more educational sense than just an exhibit at least sort of objective from the beginning. And so in the case the one of the first cases the exhibit cases had a bunch of the books like I sent them my copy of the DSM that with my post-its in it and stuff that I used for marbles. And and I think like my brushes like that that did actually get a little bit more into those those objects .

ALEX: And how was that experience... O h go on

ELLEN: Ian was in it . Ian's stuff was in the exhibit.

ALEX: In the cases?

ELLEN: Definitely on the banner. Yeah I guess I don't remember if if. One is. One of the things that I really wanted was one of the drawings that he did to show OCD the experience of OCD. But I think that we actually didn't have room in that case I'd have to go look at up now. But yeah. Anyway.



ALEX: And then how did you choose the works for it?

ELLEN: That was hard. I wanted to include - I had to take a few things into consideration. One was what it looked like if it was gonna be splashy enough. I wanted to cover different health issues. We had already decided that it was going to be a few different takes on the patients standpoint and the caregivers standpoint . And so we had some different topics that I wanted to that I needed to work within and could only have like two maybe three for each . And so I also wanted to make sure that I had men and women and that it was as diverse bunch of cartoonists as I could . Which which wasn't easy balancing all of those things.

ALEX: And then you said that it was kind of a weird experience being both curator and kind of star And I wonder if you could...

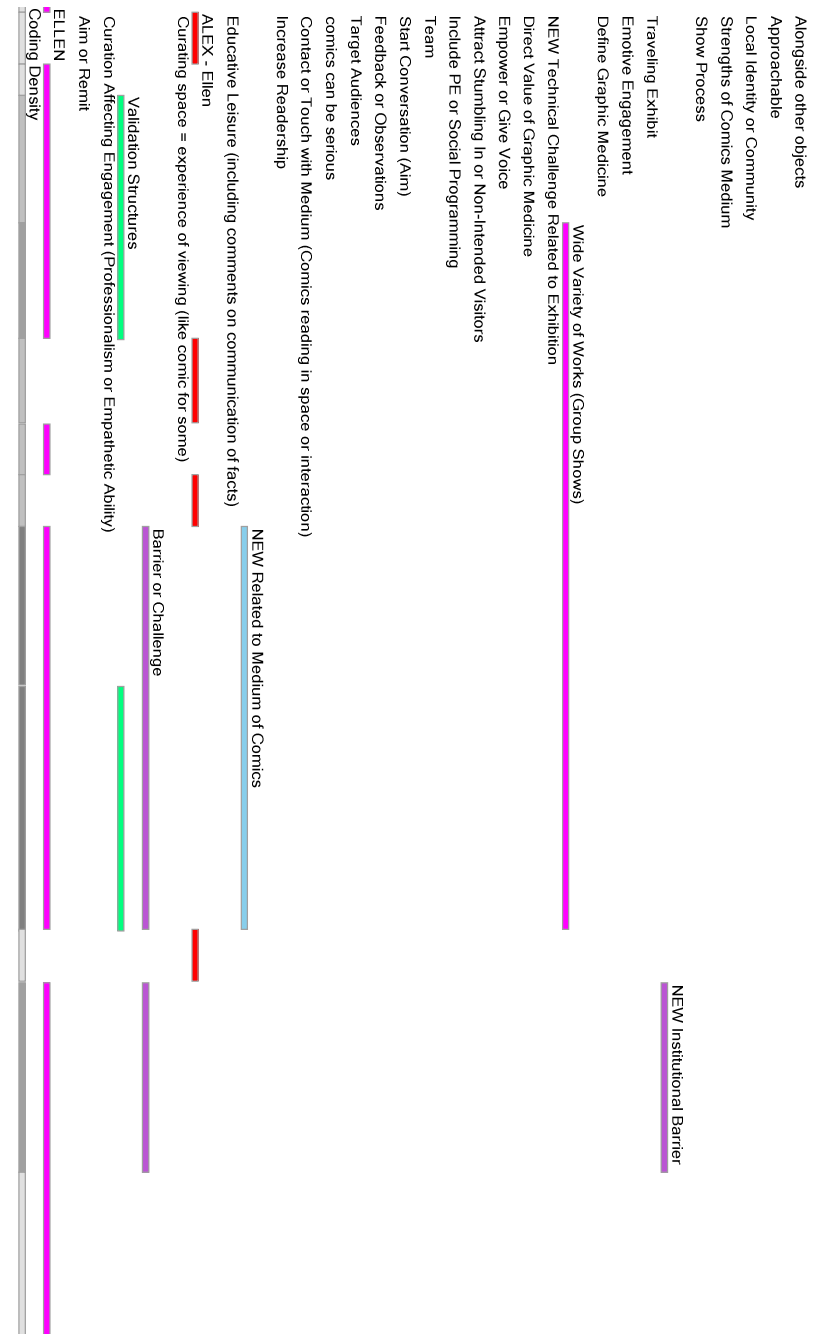
ELLEN: do you know what I'm going to add something to my last

ALEX: Oh of course.

ELLEN: Coming from a curatorial standpoint is that it is much easier. I haven't done the entire. No I don't. I've done all the counting or all the math but graphics medicine - memoirs in particular which is what I was focusing on. Well I guess that's part of it. I was focusing on memoir mostly white women. So I so I had to be very deliberate about making sure to include men and then also really be pretty proactive for finding cartoonists of color who were doing that work which also meant opening up what I had given myself as parameters like a book. I wanted it to be in a book. And I and I extended it to online and I wanted it to be just about like like a book about health and not just like folded in somehow. And I opened that up to. So. So I guess what I would say then is some of it was a whittling down because there was so much but then also it was really like pulling some things forward that aren't certainly aren't part of the canon like really needing to kind of get get in there and and look and network and ask around. Yeah.

ALEX: And then were there any other challenges to organizing this exhibition?

ELLEN: Well it took a lot. It took a lot of time . And so the span of time and keeping keeping that all together was was challenging working with bureaucracy meant that really I was really glad . Patricia who I worked with the director was really cool and she really she was just she was interesting to talk with on the phone and she really had great balance between really having a grip on her job and being really organized and also recognizing you know like this that just does the kind of knitting it all together with a human. That is not bureaucratic you know like not dealing with that but you know there are a lot of forms and things that we had to get through or like there is this there is there was a two page proposal that we just like went back and forth editing that thing like like I couldn't believe how much massaging we had to do . I get it. I mean I've done grant proposals it wasn't a grant proposal but it was a proposal for somebody that needed to get





something through. My God. So there were a lot of there were a lot of pieces like that. There were a lot of organizational pieces like that that were challenging. You know it's always challenging. As someone who works by myself most of the time to be working with a team that I'm not that I'm not familiar with. But but I really like I really like that too because it's really interesting to be pushed in different directions. I learned a lot. I am so proud of it. And I love saying that I did an exhibition for the National Library of Medicine. Well. You know . What. There are some things when I say I'm a cartoonist when I say that I like comics instructor and when I say I do that I'm in this field of graphic medicine to to be able to like counter someone's you know like I mean in my life it's not like people are like super skeptical generally about comics . You know like in my world probably not going to get blown out of the water by such thing but to be able to but to be able to say the National Library of Medicine embraces this . You know. And that I did this with the National Library of Medicine . So you know like look look look like you know any anytime . And the National - that is one of the reasons that the National Library of Medicine did it. I think if you like look this is something that that is worth paying attention to. And we're gonna throw our we're gonna throw our weight behind it and it really I think it really works. It's it's really it's really had an impact. When I've talked about it

ALEX: and then have you curated any other graphic medicine exhibitions.

ELLEN: No.

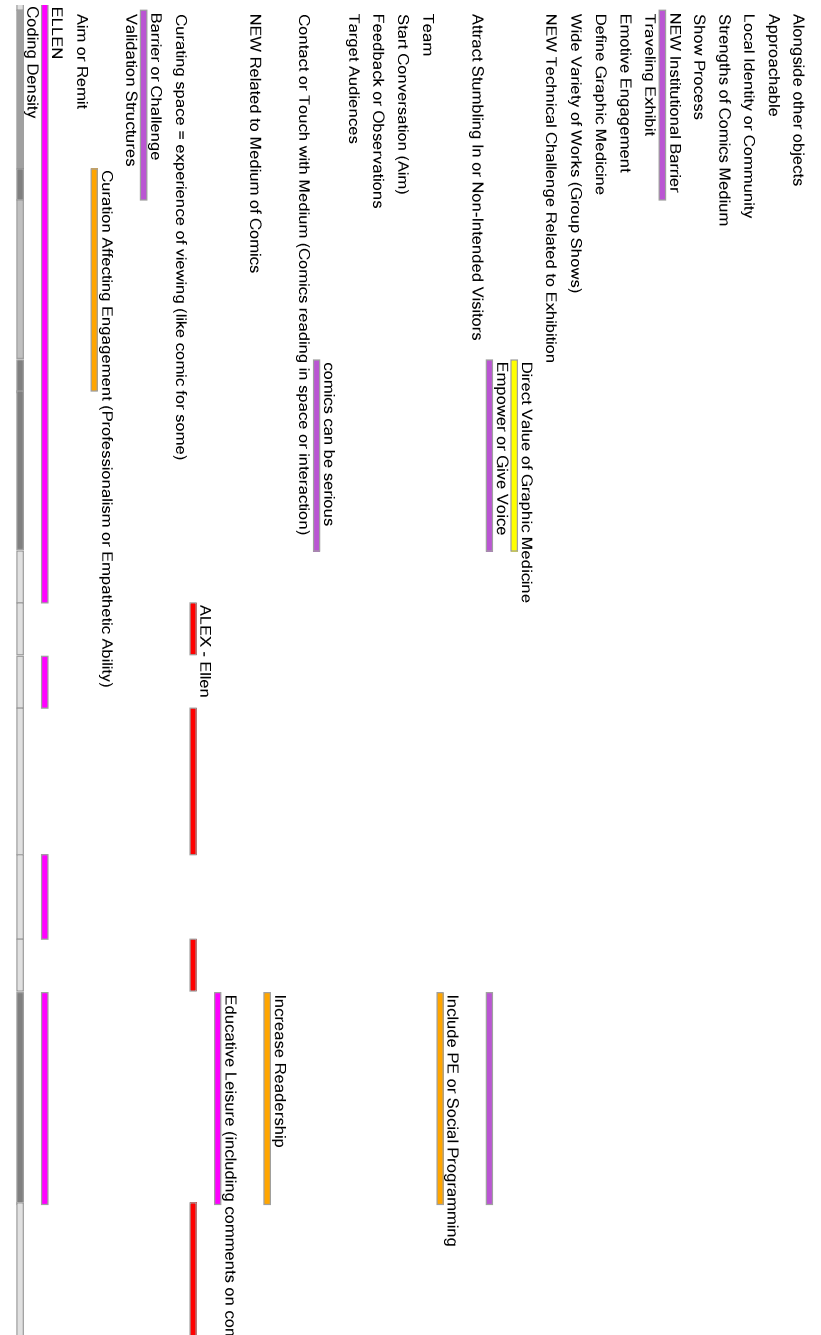
ALEX: And so back to ill conceived and well drawn. I was wondering if like a part of that and especially about the opening since there was both the travelling and the opening one if there was any public engagement you yourself have done as a part of that. Or was your role. Oh and what would those be.

ELLEN: Well there you can find this online at the National Library of Medicine site isn't entirely easy to navigate but I went there with you know. MK Czerwicz?

ALEX: Yeah.

ELLEN: So me and M.K. and Michael Green. Yeah. So the the three of us were flown in to be on a panel about graphic medicine with the director of the National Library of Medicine . And that's online so you can see that. And and I talk about we talk about graphic medicine. Talk about graphic medicine mostly. I don't I don't remember that I talked about the exhibit a whole lot . But but it's behind us the whole time. And you know like that was the impetus for it . If you . If you remind me I can send you the link.

ALEX: Did you At any point did you record any feedback from people on this or just received any informal feedback.



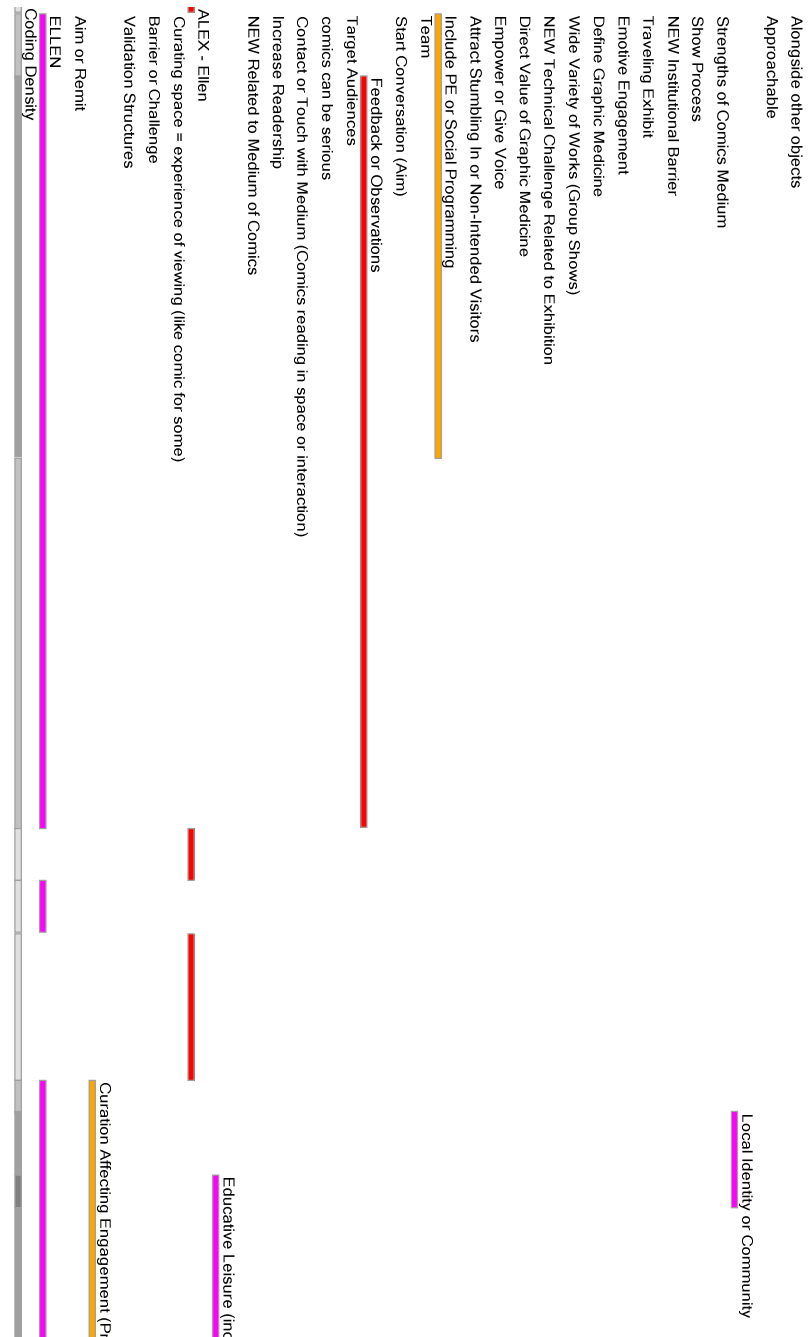
ELLEN: The - I know the National Library of Medicine does and has - and I I feel like I feel like I've been privy to it but some of it. But it was also. So my book marbles was chosen as the common read for the Health Sciences schools at the University of Washington. So like the med school and dentistry and public health and as part of that I gave a talk but also tied into that they had the exhibit they had the National Library of Medicine exhibit and so I got some of the feedback from that too. I think I know that I've got... you know I I don't think that I'm really going to be able to give you anything specific enough to be useful. I I don't I don't have like rousing endorsements which says something but also I know that it has gone out but that it has also gone over really well. I actually was at the opening for when it was at the Seattle Public Library the central public library and a lot of people came to see it and you know it's always fun introducing people to graphic medicine because it just makes complete sense. Once you kind of like focus in and get it like Oh of course this doesn't exists already because it makes so much sense. And I gave a talk on graphic medicine gave a talk of graphic medicine once and there was a guy who had never he had never put that together he'd never heard of that. And and I you know like you know I went through my whole thing and I'm very passionate about it. And he he he came up he came up to the microphone to ask questions. He was like thank you so much. But he was just like comics are the answer to everything know if we should have you know he was just like we should have you know like what you know I just know we're gonna change climate change. And you know he was just so blown away. At the climate change that it could make you know that it really just made so much sense to him they got really excited and that was the approach that we should have everything it was like. You know like I'm glad you feel so strongly We'll See. Some people are more inclined than others but I'm glad that it works for you. So well. I think so too.

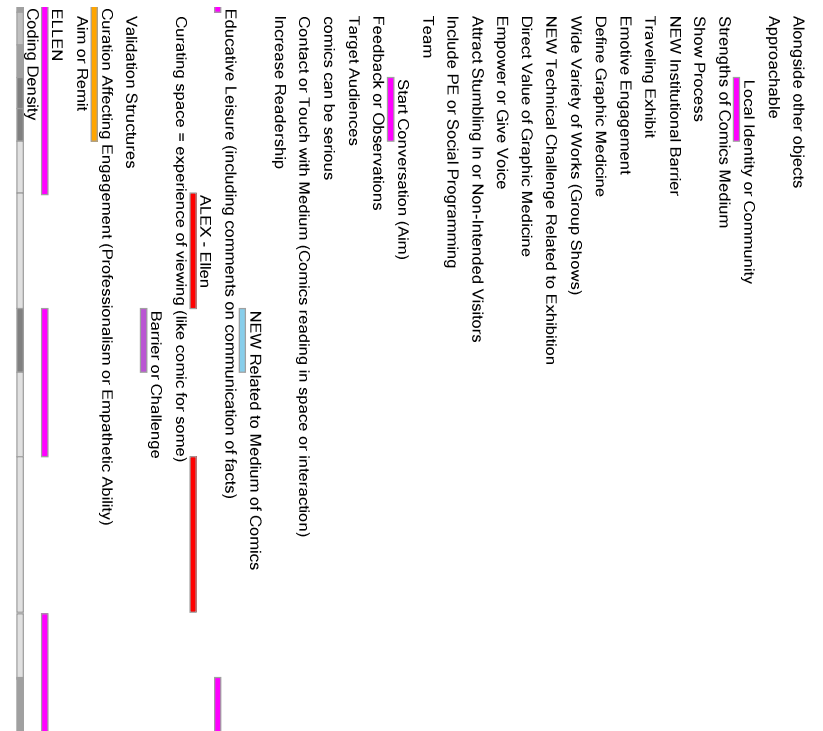
ALEX: That's really cool.

ELLEN: It was sweet. It was really sweet.

ALEX: Well I just have one more question for you. And then I'm going to open it up just in case there's something that you want to add that you didn't that you think my questions didn't get at but kind of what's what's your answer to this might be big. Why exhibit comics?

ELLEN: reaching another audience reaching readers in a different way. You know that's why I do a documentary. Why adaptive book into a film. You know. I think it also allows people to come together where reading comics reading or reading comics tends to be a solitary activity. So so. So it's really. So it's changing. Changing how you take it in so changing changing it's like changing it into a different medium. Like I was saying like making a film a book you know like just physically and mentally and emotionally how you take it in. And hopefully that gives you insights on the part of thanks to the curator. Thanks to the way that the material is presented and then and then the venue like how





much the architecture supports that and other people. And.And and it's also a perfect way to get other programming in there as well. like panels talks or comics workshop or stuff like that.You know as a as a as a hub or a crystallizing in a more social way. Like what does that mean. And you know like how can you use that to bring people together

ALEX: Oh cool. I think that's everything that I have for you and I am conscious that we're coming up to the end of our hour.But is there anything about graphic medicine the curation of it. Or comics that you would like to add that my questions don't get it.

ELLEN: I can't think of anything offhand. I immediately gave you my piece on the diff- the difficulties of adapting a medium to something that works in the exhibition space. But yeah. So I don't think so it's been a really interesting discussion. I really enjoyed thinking about that aspect of it.

ALEX: Oh well thank you.

Speaker:

Speaker: [extra note at end for workbook]

ELLEN: You know I just. Rock steady has a lot more information and so like data visualization is really what rock steady was all about. It was one of the things I mean it's one of the things that is big. I mean I'm an educator and I love doing that in my comics and that was what Rock Steady is.