TOOLKIT

“365 Days of Camp East Montana” Immersive Installation

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ACLU Texas

“365 Days of Camp East Montana” Toolkit

Toolkit written by Guadalupe Lucero. Exhibition designed and created by the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (ACLU of Texas) and partners.

Table of Contents

Overview **2**

About the Toolkit 2

About Camp East Montana 2

About the “365 Days of Camp East Montana” Exhibition 3

How to Recreate “365 Days of Camp East Montana” **4**

Material Checklist 4

Exhibition Installation 7

How to Create an Immersive Installation to Highlight Another Detention Center ... **8**

Brainstorming 8

Research 9

Exhibition Preparation 9

Exhibition Programming 10

Promoting Your Immersive Installation **10**

Additional Resources **10**

Overview

About the Toolkit

The "365 Days of Camp East Montana" toolkit is intended as a guide for community members and cultural organizations to construct an immersive installation recreating cells where detainees are held within the Fort Bliss tent encampment in El Paso, Texas.

Camp East Montana, the largest immigrant detention center in the United States, has been a core site of the Trump administration's catastrophic mass internment initiative. People detained there have been subjected to alleged human rights violations. This toolkit is meant to provide resources for a community-oriented recreation of the multisensory exhibition, in order to foster collective awareness of the lived experiences of people held and dehumanized at immigrant detention centers across the country. The documentation process is key to exposing the conditions in different detention centers and amplifying the voices of people detained.

Included here is a list of materials used to create the exhibition and step-by-step instructions on how to replicate the interactive display. Additional information for knowing one's rights when interacting with law enforcement and immigration officials is provided by the ACLU of Texas at the end of the toolkit.

Images and a video tour of the "365 Days of Camp East Montana" exhibition are provided by the ACLU of Texas, with video filmed by Ingrid Leyva.

Access images and video clips here:
https://aclutx.dash.app/sharing/type/collection/n2ev6-camp-east-montana

Access the video tour here: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/AGS_9lCi7q8

About Camp East Montana

Situated inside Fort Bliss military base in El Paso, Texas, Camp East Montana is the largest immigrant detention facility in the United States, with a purported capacity of 5,000 people. The center opened in August 2025 under the directive of the Trump administration and is operated by U.S. Immigration and Customs

Enforcement (ICE). With over 2,700 people detained and multiple recorded deaths since its inception, the center has been denounced for severe human rights violations, including violent abuse by guards, disease outbreaks, and gruesome confinement conditions lacking proper hygiene. The dangerous practices carried out by ICE at the facility have drawn widespread condemnation from government officials, civil rights organizations, and communities nationwide. The ACLU of Texas, in collaboration with multiple legal and human rights organizations, has called for the immediate closure of Camp East Montana.

Fort Bliss previously housed mass concentration camps for Japanese and Japanese American people during World War II. The contemporary use of Camp East Montana has repeated historic patterns of forced removal, relocation, family separation, and xenophobia. Testimonials from detainees describe the inhumane conditions within the facility. The physical, emotional, and mental harm experienced by people who have been detained has resulted in long-lasting injuries and psychological aftereffects.

About the "365 Days of Camp East Montana" Exhibition

The "365 Days of Camp East Montana" exhibition recreates the hostile conditions of the tent encampment and publicly shares the perspectives of the individuals detained there. The exhibition was created to mark the one-year anniversary of the opening of the camp. The installation consists of a soft-walled white tent with stacks of sandbags around the exterior. The sandbags are symbolic of the desert surrounding the camp, where sand often seeps inside the tent during inclement weather. Inside is a cramped room with a few items, including a small flat-screen television, a round lunch table with hanging stools, and a toilet. There is no spatial separation for resting, eating, and using to the bathroom, or showering.

On the lunch table are paper cups, water bottles, and metal trays with inedible model food containing a raw chicken drumstick, pasty dough fries, a rancid scoopful of mushy white rice with raw beans, and an assortment of vegetable kibble. Beside the table is a small makeshift bunk bed with a white frame and thin sleeping pad in a blue plastic cover. A thin medical blanket is folded on top of the pad. The lack of proper bedding reveals that the resting space is designed to feel uncomfortable.

A bright white light beam hangs from the top-center of the tent, generating harsh overhead illumination that can result in sensory overwhelm. The security camera at

the top corner of the tent oversees all areas, including the bathroom, violating bodily privacy and serving as a constant reminder of surveillance.

The flooring used at Camp East Montana has been referred to as a "floating floor," made of foam placed over wood pallets. There are no windows or clocks present, creating a trapped sense of temporal disorientation.

Hung on the walls are numerous sheets of paper with textual anecdotes from real testimonials in English and Spanish. The core of the exhibition lies in highlighting these words as a means of recognizing the humanity of the individuals who have endured or are currently held at the detention center.

As a whole, the simulation allows viewers to have a visceral experience of the conditions within the tent, briefly replicating the infringement of personal space and psychological stress endured by detainees.

"365 Days of Camp East Montana" demonstrates how community-led projects can amplify marginalized voices and provide a platform to share suppressed stories. By centering these silenced narratives, we embolden the call for the end of these detention facilities and reinforce the right to life, dignity, and health.

How to Recreate "365 Days of Camp East Montana"

Material Checklist

Below is a list of recommended materials to recreate the "365 Days of Camp East Montana" exhibition. We have also included links for suggested places to buy the materials, although we sourced many of our materials from local vendors. We encourage you to be resourceful — feel free to use other props as substitutes or create your own. Additional tools for setting up electrical and technological equipment may be required and should be sourced accordingly.

Exterior Equipment

The use of outdoor equipment is meant to make the living quarters appear uninhabitable, with constant exposure to varying temperatures and volatile environmental conditions. The white monochrome palette of the tent and sandbags creates a bare and sterile exterior appearance.

- Outdoor camping tent (solid white and soft-walled)
    - Available to buy at Home Depot for $65.88.
- Empty sandbags (total of 40 bags recommended). Sand must be obtained separately.
    - Inquire with your local fire department, as they may be willing to donate these materials.
    - 10-pack available to buy at Walmart for $4.42.

Interior Furniture

The large moveable items inside the tent are intended for sleeping, eating, and washroom areas. The metal bunk bed frame and thin sleeping pad covered in a plastic sheet are designed to feel stiff, cold, and uncomfortable, preventing detainees from obtaining proper rest. The lunch table and toilet should be placed close together to highlight the likelihood of contamination, revealing the lack of hygiene standards within the facility units.

- Flooring; 24 x 24-inch interlocking foam (set of 6)
    - Available to buy at Lowe's for $29.98.
- Twin bunk bed
    - Can be constructed from wood, screws, and metal L-shaped brackets.
    - Available to buy on Amazon for $80.02.
- Two sleeping pads or mats
    - Can be constructed from cardboard.
    - Available to buy on Amazon for $66.49.
- Multiple plastic tablecloths to cover sleeping pads/mats
    - Available to buy at Dollar Tree for $1.25.
- White blanket
    - Any thin blanket can be used. Can be sourced from the Red Cross.
    - Available to buy on Amazon for $11.99.
- Cafeteria lunch table with hanging stools
    - Can be constructed out of wood and plastic, then painted with silver spray paint.
    - Limited stock is available to buy on School Excess. Price may range from $250 to $800.
- Toilet bowl
    - Any ceramic or other material toilet bowl can be used and painted with silver spray paint.

    - Metal toilet bowl available to buy on Quality Plumbing Supply for $1,000.
    - Alternate 3D-printed version prop available to buy on Etsy for $100.
- Small table to place a small flat-screen television
    - Can be sourced from any resell shop.

Lighting

Interior illumination comes from a single light source located at the top-center of the ceiling. The intense fluorescent lighting is intentionally harsh and glaring, reflecting brightly against the white tent walls and fostering a dizzying sensory overload. The light intrudes upon the privacy of people being detained, interrogating and surveilling their every action.

- 4-pack of utility LED light beams (hanging and ceiling mount included)
    - Available to buy on Amazon for $39.

Tech and Sound

While detainees report that they try to keep silent to allow others to rest, the background sound from the television is likely notable and continuous throughout the day. The security camera faces the bed and toilet, constantly monitoring and invading personal privacy, thus creating a deep sense of discomfort.

- Flat-screen television (size is optional / 24-inch is recommended)
    - Available to buy at Walmart for $54.97.
- Security camera (prop recommended)
    - Available to buy at Lowe's for $21.02.

Food

The mushy texture, dull color, and unappealing shape of the model food should mirror the inedible and rancid quality of the food fed to detainees. While the material does not emit smell, viewers should note the subpar nutritional standard and spoiled conditions.

- Air-Dry modeling clay, 8.8 oz
    - Available to buy at Dollar Tree for $1.25.
- Metal cafeteria trays (2 per table)

    - Any plastic tray can be used and painted with silver spray paint.
    - Metal cafeteria trays available to buy at Walmart for $0.79 each.
- Paper cups
    - Available to buy at Walmart for $2.77.
- Water bottles
    - Available to buy at Walmart for $3.43.

Text Materials

The original text is provided by the ACLU of Texas and includes written excerpts from multiple detainee testimonials. The text is a key component of the exhibition and should be visibly emphasized throughout the installation.

- Testimonials were selected from this report: https://www.aclu.org/documents/youre-only-getting-out-deported-or-dead-abusive-us-immigration-detention-at-ft-bliss

Exhibition Installation

Step 1: Begin the exhibition installation by setting up the exterior equipment. Follow the assembling instructions provided by the product manufacturer to set up the tent. Once the tent is built, secure the tent to the floor by placing even stacks of filled sandbags above the bottom rim of the exterior walls.

Step 2: Inside the tent, install the interlocking foam flooring to completely cover the interior floor space. Then, install the hanging LED light beam on the ceiling mount. The light beam should be placed at the top-center of the tent ceiling. Carefully follow product installation instructions and electrical safety protocols.

Step 3: Prior to filling the tent with furniture, create the mud handprints on the interior tent walls.

Step 4: Prepare the arrangement of large furniture items. Assemble the bunk bed frame near the back of the tent, following the manufacturer's instructions. Place a sleeping pad on top of each bed frame and cover each pad with a plastic or vinyl sheet. Fold and set a blanket on top of each sleeping pad.

Step 5: Next, assemble the lunch table based on the product guide. Place two lunch trays on top of the table and add the model clay food. Place paper cups and water bottles beside the trays on the table.

Step 6: Prepare the assemblage of props. Place the TV atop a small table or supporting framework. Follow the product manual to set up and connect the TV.

Step 7: Place the toilet on the floor near the lunch table. Add dirt and paper to demonstrate the conditions of the toilet.

Step 8: Set up the security camera on the tent wall with a hanging ceiling mount. Make sure that the camera faces the toilet and bed.

Step 9: Place the printed text materials on the tent walls and lunch table. The materials may be adhered to the walls with sticky tape or fishing line and tape. Arrange the text at eye-level to ensure accessibility for visitors.

Step 10: Spread sand throughout the interior of the tent — on the floor and on top of the furniture.

How to Create an Immersive Installation to Highlight Another Detention Center

Brainstorming

Using an arts-advocacy approach, generate ideas for your own version of the installation.

Ask:

- What immigrant detention center do you want to recreate?
- Is there an existing facility in your city or area?
- How has your community been affected by detention centers and anti-immigration policies?
- How can this project foster local outreach and resistance in my community?

Remember:

- This exhibition serves as a tool for documenting the experiences of people who have been detained and building public awareness of the severity of these detention centers.

Research

Prior to developing the exhibition, investigate and provide context about the specific detention center you will simulate. As access to detention centers may be limited to the public, contact your state ACLU affiliate or local immigrant advocacy organizations for information and resources specific to your area.

- Consider the facility's location, history, and current use, researching the conditions in the camp and collecting testimonials from people who have been detained in the facility.
- Be sure to communicate clearly with people how their words and stories will be utilized and ensure that they provide consent for their words to be used in this way.
- Note that the core message of the installation centers on the lived experiences of the individuals held in the camp.
- Emphasize the sensory elements present inside the detention cells, including sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

Exhibition Preparation

As this is a grassroots-led project, we encourage a DIY-approach and community participation throughout the preparation process.

- Find an open space or facility to set up the installation.
- Create a checklist and source the required materials. Some materials should be prepared prior to the installation process.
- Create and hand-shape the food with dry air model clay. These foods should be based on the descriptions provided by people who have been detained in the facility you are replicating. In the case of Camp East Montana, the highlighted foods include a chicken drumstick, vegetable kibble, and a mushy rice scoop with raw beans.
- Fill the empty sandbags with your choice of soil or gravel composition.
- Print the wall text detailing testimonial excerpts.
- Pre-assemble large furniture (bed frame, lunch table, and toilet) and technology (television and security camera).

We highly recommend that all instructions and safety protocols for technology, furniture, and lighting assemblage are reviewed prior to the actual installation. It is also advised that at least two to three people assist with the assemblage of the tent and large furniture.

Exhibition Programming

To accompany the exhibition, we encourage the development of programming and community events to emphasize the installation as a site of empathy and resistance. Invite participants to share their thoughts about the experience, allowing them to reflect on the testimonials and experiences of the detainees. Be sure to share images and videos of your installation on social media.

Follow and connect with us:

- Bluesky: @aclutx.bsky.social
- Facebook: ACLU of Texas
- Instagram: @aclutx
- Threads: @aclutx
- X: @ACLUTx

Promoting Your Immersive Installation

- Media advisory template to share the exhibit with the press: https://www.aclutx.org/app/uploads/2026/11/365-Days-of-Camp-East-Montana-Toolkit_Media-Advisory-Template-1.docx

- Graphic template for social media: https://canva.link/meww81ryodsdqrh

- To ask for support, contact the ACLU of Texas at arts@aclutx.org. Let us know when your installation is on view and share images of it.

- To request that an ACLU of Texas staff member speak at an event, submit a speaking engagement request here: https://form.asana.com/?k=OYlGkRcQOx2uzRYgayPUBw&d=25535823564359

Additional Resources

Know Your Rights — Interacting with Law Enforcement and Immigration Officials: https://www.aclutx.org/knowyour-rights/know-your-rights-interacting-law-enforcement-and-immigrationofficials/

Know Your Rights — Locating Someone Who Has Been Detained: https://www.aclutx.org/know-your-rights/how-find-someone-who-has-been-arrested-or-detained/

Contact the ACLU of Texas to provide "Know Your Rights" training: https://action.aclu.org/webform/tx-kyrpresentations