

Visitor studies and audience development

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What is visitor studies?

- Visitor studies provide a practical framework for thinking which empowers organisations to engage with and meet the needs of their visitors.

www.visitors.org.uk

Really listening to and learning from visitors and non-visitors is a powerful way to:

- gather real evidence about how your organisation is meeting its core aims and objectives
- gather real evidence of what impact your organisation is having on visitors
- develop ongoing relationships with your visitors
- encourage ongoing improvements within your organisation

Before you begin...

You need to know:

- what you want to find out
- why you want to find it out
- how you are going to find it out
- who you are going to ask
- who the information is for
- how you are going to tell them
- what you will do with the information

When to undertake visitor studies?

- Baseline – where are you starting from
- Front end – sounding people out before you start
- Formative – testing ideas during development
- Summative – was it successful?
- Longer term – what do people remember about it?

Evaluation terms

- Quantitative data
 - numbers, statistics, facts
- Qualitative data
 - attitudes, feelings, ideas
- Triangulation and validity
 - using more than one evaluation tool
- Aim and objectives
 - need to be clearly identified at start

Good practice

- Build evaluation in from the beginning
- Consult your target audience
- Agree clear aim and objectives
- Test your ideas
- Integrate evaluation activities
- Ensure evaluation tools are suited to the target audience, eg. child-friendly
- Choose tools appropriate to the project itself

Questionnaires

(or feedback forms)

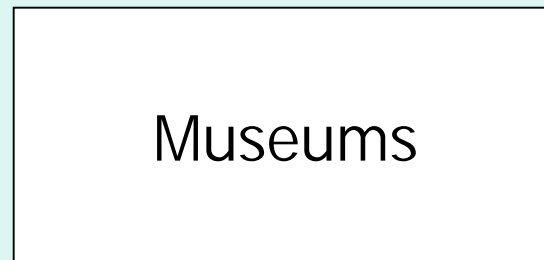
- Ensure representative sample
(more important than sample size)
- Can include closed/open questions, also multiple choice and scale questions
- Provide quantitative and qualitative data
- Always pilot questions with small sample
- Can be time-consuming to analyse
- No opportunity for follow-up

Interviews

- Structured or unstructured
- Open or closed questions
- Quantitative and qualitative data
- Can be recorded (audio tape/digital)
- Can include other techniques such as Personal Meaning Mapping
- Opportunity to clarify/follow up
- Time-consuming

Personal Meaning Mapping

- Blank paper with central heading, eg.



- Write down any ideas, associations, etc.
- Researcher clarifies then visitor views display
- Can use before and after an experience for comparison (4 stages/colours on each chart)
- Brief interview before/after
- Qualitative data on charts can provide quantitative data re impact/learning

Focus groups

- Group interview – 5-8 people
- Lasts 1-2 hours
- Can incorporate other evaluation tools and visual material
- Open-ended questions
- Opportunity to clarify/follow up
- Provides qualitative data – ideas, feelings, opinions, etc.
- Led by facilitator
- Can be recorded (audio-tape/digital) and transcribed

Observation and tracking

- Provides quantitative data: numbers, time spent, etc.
- Provides qualitative data, eg. level of engagement, behaviour, conversation
- Useful to have floor plan and checklist
- Also record unexpected behaviour
- Information about what visitors really do
- Time-consuming
- Risk of making assumptions

Accompanied visits

- Join a visitor or group of visitors
(with permission)
- Observe route taken, problems, time spent, interactions, reactions, etc.
- Try not to influence decisions
- Ask questions, record conversation
- Make notes and record route taken
- Follow up interview (demographics, etc.)

Collecting comments

- Comments book, board or box
- Visitors like to see what other visitors think
- More creative responses, eg. pictures
- Can ask a question(s) to encourage responses
- May need to edit responses
- Can provide contact details for follow up
- Self-selecting so not representative
- Analyse by grouping into categories
- Can provide information for further evaluation

Asking questions

When drafting questions, consider for each:

- Why you have included it
- What information it will give you
- How you will analyse the data it will provide
- How you will act on the findings (after analysis)

Guidelines

- Keep them simple
 - short, direct, easily understood
- Don't make assumptions
- Avoid leading or biased questions
- Don't ask two questions in one
- Try not to cause offence
- Only ask what you really need to know
- Give clear instructions

Pre-coded questions

- Allow respondents to choose from a range of answers
- Easier to answer and easier to analyse, but harder to design
- Can design by piloting a set of open questions with a reasonable sized group to produce most of the options needed for multiple-choice questions
- Include an option for responses you may not have anticipated ('other')
- Can be used to find out about feelings and attitudes by asking people to rank their level of agreement from a list or scale you have devised

Open questions

- Open questions allow respondents to tell you what's important to them in their own words
- They make it possible to collect richer detail and more diverse responses but are more difficult to analyse

Sampling

Qualitative data

- Involves smaller sample sizes. You will find that you don't need to consult very many people before you start getting the same kind of information
- A smaller sample is more appropriate when the purpose is to gather ideas or identify problems and issues
- You don't necessarily need to ensure you consult a wide range of people

Quantitative data

- Involves larger sample sizes
- You need to be asked by at least 100 people before you can start expressing results as percentages
- A rule of thumb is to aim for 10-20% of your total group
- Consulting a greater number of people does not make your results more valid or more representative. What is more important is who you ask – you need to ensure they are representative of the group or audience overall

At the end

- Analyse the information gathered
- Feedback findings to those involved
- Value their contribution and thank them
- Make sure the findings are acted upon

Analysis

- Allow plenty of time
- Refer back to original aim and objectives
- Group data into categories
- Use highlighter to mark key points
- Look for patterns and trends and themes
- Find representative quotes
- Look for contradictory data
- Be critical of your interpretation of data
- Ideally discuss data with colleagues

Ethical guidelines

- Be professional and treat participants with respect
- Inform people that evaluation is taking place
- Inform participants about purpose of research
- Ask permission to record
- Be honest about constraints influencing decisions
- Keep names and contact details confidential
- Use a range of methods
- Use open-ended methods
- Do not leap to conclusions without evidence
- Ensure research is part of a larger strategy