

Museum Evaluation: A Vehicle for Social Betterment

Visitor Studies Association

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Museum: Understanding the Origins

- Museum: Role in Ancient Society
- Museums and the Muses:
 - “Seat of the Muses”
 - Philosophical contemplation of culture, beauty, and social contribution
- Modern role of museums
 - Social Betterment

Evaluation in Modern Museums

Evaluation Practice must balance BOTH:

Methodological Expertise: Research methodology and practice

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Organization Culture: Advancing evaluation in the organization's management and programming culture.

VSA Members wished to...

- Identify the major 'internal organizational' evaluation capacity and utilization challenges they faced;
- Identify the major challenges facing museums in capturing philanthropic/corporate grant support;
- Ascertain if museums had 'social betterment' role and function and if so, how museum staff evaluation practices addressing this objective.

Internal Challenges for Evaluation Capacity and Utilization in Museum...

- Financial constraints on museums/ nonprofits.
- Lack of 'common language' among internal evaluators and program stakeholders or internal and external evaluators
- Balancing evaluation needs/ questions for all relevant stakeholders.
- Evaluations that focuses on one exhibit/ program at a time;
- Evaluations that largely focus on visitor satisfaction and/or learning instead of higher level impacts and outcomes.

Museum Mission Statements: Focus on Social Betterment...

- To function responsibly and to serve the public without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, religious dogma;
- To have the power...to transform lives...;
- To inspire and foster the learning of science and mathematics for all...especially those who have limited access to science;
- To...forge emotional connections between visitors and immigrants...in shaping America's national identity;
- To...create an environment that fosters understanding in a place where everyone feels welcome...

Museums & Social Betterment...

- How can museums become more conscious of their role and function in supporting a more just and equitable society? How important is developing programs that equally attracts representative ethnic and racial groups to the museums?
- What features of museum programming, communications, exhibit narrative and interpretation, marketing, public/ community relations may be assessed/modified to enhance their 'social justice/equity impact'?
- What is the past and current museum visitor profile? What programming, marketing, communications, educational strategies could be undertaken to reach and impact a more diverse racial/ethnic visitor profile? What program design and implementation opportunities elevate the social values and legitimacy of 'human equality'?
- How can one apply evaluation methodology to address the above questions in contexts relevant to the museum's management and programming interest?
- How do museums develop 'learning communities' in the field of practice interested in the how best to captured and data to strategically inform "Social betterment' programming outcomes?

Best Practices for Visitor Studies Evaluation...

- What are the **assumptions underlying how current museum programming** leads to achieving desired outcomes?
- What **outcome metrics** are most practical and easy to apply to capture and document program implementation efforts?
- What **practical qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods and reporting strategies** are useful for museum stakeholders?
- Which **stakeholders have proven useful to discerning insights/implications for informing program design and implementation** improvement?
- Others...

Questions? Comments?

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