Inclusive Practice: Broadening the Field by Welcoming New Perspectives

35th Annual Visitor Studies Association
Virtual Conference • July 11–13, 2023

VSA
Visitor Studies Association

2023 CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

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Introduction

Welcome to the 2023 Visitor Studies Association Annual Conference Abstracts!

The Abstracts serve as a preview of the vibrant conversations that will take place this year as we explore reimagining and rebuilding after a year of change.

The Abstracts also serve an important role in recording the conversations for the future.

Previous Conference Abstracts are available online at https://www.visitorstudies.org/past-conferences

The 2023 VSA Conference Abstracts were compiled by Kari Ross Nelson.

Contents

Tuesday, July 11
2:00-2:30 PM Concurrent Sessions

Striking the Right Tone in a Racially Sensitive Exhibit
Claire Thoma Emmons, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis
Tricia O'Conner, Museum Consultant

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: In 2020, staff at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis embarked on a process of exhibit development for a traveling exhibit telling the story of Emmett Till's lynching murder in 1955 at the age of 14, the impact of his open casket funeral on the Civil Rights Movement, and contemporary vandalism to Emmett Till historic markers that represent ongoing racism in American society. With the concurrent public interest in anti-racism and DEAI work, the exhibit team was very conscious of the fact that most team members were White and decided to take steps outside of our normal process and practice to ensure that the exhibit was both family-friendly and racially inclusive. The exhibit developer and evaluator for this project will share the breadth of perspectives they invited and incorporated to meet that goal. For example, in addition to the typical practice of having partners and advisors review the exhibit content, key to the process was community review of the content in graphic layout. Presenters will share several examples of valuable feedback that came from the community, sometimes in conflict with advisor feedback, and how it shaped the final product.

Abstract: The exhibit development team faced a number of challenges in developing the Emmett Till traveling exhibit's storyline and tone, including making the charged content appropriate for children, delivering a story about racism in a racially inclusive manner, and crafting an exhibit that would be informative and compelling for visitors hearing the story for the first time as well as those who remember the events firsthand. As is a typical part of our exhibit development process, TCMI staff relied heavily on partners and advisors including the Till family members, historians, and diversity/inclusion consultant who were assembled for the project when vetting the exhibit content. But equally important to language used in labels is the visual design of an exhibit in setting its tone. So, for the first time in our experience, an early draft of exhibit content in graphic layout was also shown to a series of focus group participants from 3 different host venue locations. These participants were mostly Black museum-goers recruited from Chicago, Mississippi, and Indianapolis to gain diverse racial, generational, and geographical perspectives. Another focus group was also convened with Indianapolis families to give feedback on the sound and light show while it was still in process. Special care was taken during recruitment and the sessions due to the traumatic nature of the content. The exhibit developer and evaluator will show examples and describe how feedback from the focus groups, which was sometimes in conflict with the opinions of partners and advisors, guided changes to the exhibit's graphic design and content throughout the remainder of the project. The team

learned the value of gathering feedback from diverse knowledge-holders to weigh all perspectives in making final decisions. The exhibit opened in Fall 2022, and evaluation of the exhibit has confirmed that it is perceived as appropriate and meaningful for visitors of all ages and backgrounds.

2:00-2:45 PM Concurrent Sessions

Embedded Measures as a Strategy for Context-Friendly, Inclusive Studies

Donnelley Hayde, COSI
Joe E. Heimlich, COSI
Laura Weiss, COSI

Facilitated Discussion

Purpose and Importance: The purpose of this session is to help evaluators, researchers, and other visitor-facing practitioners ensure that approaches to measurement make sense for how and where learning takes place. Embedded measures can make visitor studies more authentic to their contexts and inclusive of more informal learning professionals. This facilitated discussion will explore ways to make embedded measures easier to implement as a methodological option. Drawing from the presenters' own project examples and experience with this approach, the session will start with an introduction to embedded measures, including definitions, foundational scholarship, and some framing of their value in informal learning settings. The remaining time in the session will be devoted to a facilitated discussion in which participants will discuss possibilities for applying embedded measures in their work. This discussion will be organized around three major issues related to embedded measures: (1) how to translate guidance from formal learning settings to informal learning settings, (2) decision-making criteria for balancing contextual considerations in the development and use of embedded measures, and (3) what kind of supports and resources related to embedded measures participants see as potentially helpful to the field.

Abstract: This session will explore embedded measures, a methodological approach that holds significant promise for improving not just learning, but the experience of research on learning. The study of learning often includes the use of surveys, interviews, tests, or other common social science methods, but an inherent reality of these methods is that they require inputs above and beyond the learning experience itself. Though there is substantial interest in context-sensitive ways to measure learning, their use has been limited and remains understudied (Becker-Klein et al., 2016). Embedded measures provide a mechanism for making studies part of the learning experience, whether as a barely discernible built-in process, or in some situations, via elements that themselves add value (Shute, 2011; Shute et al., 2009.). Since embedded measures do not disrupt the processes of learning, they hold some clear

advantages for improving the quality of a learner's experience (Zapata-Rivera, 2012). They also provide timely evaluative feedback to educators, who are inherently involved in their implementation. Accordingly, embedded measures can do a lot to support higher quality, data-driven practice in informal learning settings, and they stand out as a way to include more perspectives in research. Despite these advantages, embedded measures can represent a heavy implementation lift due to the necessary capacity, resources, and understanding of context. Furthermore, professional learning opportunities specific to embedded measures remain limited (Becker-Klein et al., 2016). With these challenges in mind, we consider embedded measures to be a timely and meaningful area for skill-building within visitor studies; we will frame and introduce them with key definitions and some examples from our work. This session will then explore resource gaps related to developing and implementing embedded measures, as well as considerations for usability, credibility, and standards of evidence within informal learning settings (cf. Fu et al., 2019; Allen & Peterman, 2019).

References

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2:00-3:00 Concurrent Sessions

Exhibition Content Statistics: What are we really saying?

Tom Beatman, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium
Melissa Mair, Houston Zoo
Jocelyn Harrison, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: This session focuses on evaluating interpretive content and how institutions can better understand how their content aligns with their goals through statistical means. The presenters will share a method for coding signage by content domains using label transcriptions. The applications of this data are wide-ranging, as these statistics can allow for comparisons of content distribution within individual exhibits, throughout an entire Zoo, and even across multiple organizations. When combined with other data points, such as word count, further findings can be made, such as the density of information. The goal of this statistical analysis is to allow staff to see how much of their signage aligns with their outcomes and what implications this might have on visitor learning.

The method shared is a tool that can be replicated and tailored to individual needs by a variety of informal learning organizations. As an example of this, two Zoos will share how they have used these findings during their interpretive planning process to help them make decisions regarding approach to content and exhibit development. The presenters hope that the audience will walk away with a better understanding of how they can evaluate their interpretive content and even use this tool themselves.

Abstract: For many cultural institutions, signage remains a key component of their educational offerings. The goal of this content is to align with the institution's mission and support the exhibition's defined outcomes. The hope is that by reading the text, visitors will engage with new ideas, shift perspectives, and take action or change their behaviors. How much of their signage, however, actively supports this goal?

In this session, we will share a method for coding interpretive materials that can help institutions get a clearer picture of how their content aligns with their outcomes. First, we will review the methodology of the content assessment, including an overview of the process for coding signage transcripts and how the content domains were determined. We will then highlight some practical applications of the use of this method and its resulting data through the presentation of two case studies.

At Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium, the Conservation Education team is using this data to inform their interpretive planning for the development of an upcoming exhibit, Orangutan Forest, opening in 2024. They are also using the results of this study to align conservation messaging across exhibits and incorporate new interpretive technologies into their communication strategies. The Houston Zoo is similarly applying this method to guide their interpretive planning efforts for future exhibits. They are also using this data to inform the

creation of a signage remediation plan that prioritizes signs for replacement and updating across Zoo grounds.

Following these case studies, we will discuss how this methodology can be tailored and applied at cultural institutions outside of zoos. Finally, we will elaborate on the future development and implementation of this method and how it can be used for both evaluation and research, including additional variables and media that could be incorporated.

By Community, For Community: Three Case Studies with Community-Based Data Collectors

Ellen Roth, Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Madeleine Pope, HG&Co.
Megan Goeke, The Science Museum of Minnesota
Santiague Deprez, Miami-based Art Practitioner, Teacher, and Museum Professional

Panel Presentation

Purpose and Importance: The focus of this session is to explore outcomes of community-based data collection for museums and their surrounding communities. With recognition of the racism and classism that has imbued the museum field, we will present 3 case studies in which community was involved in data collection processes. The case studies include contrasts of museum topics, types of evaluation (internal vs. external), and geography. Participants will consider the benefits of hiring data collectors from the community where their studies are situated, adding to their knowledge of and practices with social science research and evaluation methods and analysis. To further the understanding of possibilities, participants will share what hiring data collectors from the community could look like for them, and/or existing examples of this practice.

Abstract: Who can collect data? What is good data? How can we broaden our field to support more meaningful community engagement? It is essential for the Visitor Studies field to recognize those not always defined as "researchers" or "evaluators" who can offer a valuable lens into our broader communities. This session will examine three methods for meaningful data collection by hiring data collectors that are connected to and reflective of site communities.

HG&Co, an external evaluation firm, was hired by Perez Art Museum Miami to explore non-visitor awareness and perception of the Museum. HG&Co hired Santiague Deprez, a Miami Haitian fluent in both English and Creole, to survey community members in Haitian community centers and other communities where local visitorship was lacking. Deprez and evaluator Madeleine Pope will share benefits and challenges to this case study of hiring a new data collector with deep ties to multiple missing communities which the Museum sought to learn from.

At the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, the Community Research & Collaboration team employs episodic employees called Research Assistants. This team collects data onsite at the Museum and outside in community. Ellen Roth will share about the evolution of this position, the importance of paying people for their time and connections, and how we train community connectors in data collection to ensure that data integrity and community responsiveness remain at the core of our practice.

The Science Museum of Minnesota relies on collaborative relationships with community members called Design Partners, who are recruited through collaboration with community partner organizations. Design Partners participate in meaning-making sessions to understand and iterate on new conceptualizations of engineering. Megan Goeke will share insights from this process, discuss the benefits of empowering community members to have agency over their own data collection, the ongoing consent process and sense-making.

Additional Links:

https://www.hgandco.com/

https://www.pamm.org/en/

https://www.dmns.org/

https://new.smm.org/

2:30-3:00 Concurrent Sessions

Inclusive to Some: Examining Immigrant Interactions with Museum Practice
Alia Reza, University of Maryland

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: This session asks audiences to consider the role of museums in shaping immigrant interactions with and perceptions of museums by examining how immigrants are studied and discussed in modern museums and museum scholarship. It begins with an exploration of the colonial history of museums and exhibitions, and continues by examining current literature around immigrant information access, museology, and immigrants in museums. The session helps initiate a conversation regarding how museum workers can create more inclusive museum environments for immigrants. Museum workers are asked to reflect on who they are serving, who they are working with, and, most importantly, what resources they are using to further visitor inclusion in their professional sphere. By the end of the session, participants will have a better understanding of immigrant information access and how it relates to immigrants' relationships with museums. They will then be able to consider immigrants and other marginalized populations while developing future visitor programming.

Abstract: Historically, museum curation and programming efforts in the United States have excluded marginalized populations, such as immigrants. While many museums are trying to be more inclusive, the vast majority of museum visitors in the U.S. are still White, middle- and upper-class Americans. Immigrant populations, in particular, are overlooked by cultural heritage institutions, in part because research on how these groups view and interact with museums, and what they need from them, is lacking. To increase our understanding of how U.S. museums do and do not serve immigrants, I offer a literature review focused on three research areas: immigrant information access, museum studies and museology, and immigrants in museums. I examine immigrant interactions with museums, which influence how museums create programming for immigrant communities. It is important to note that not all immigrant groups are the same or have the same experiences with museums and cultural heritage institutions. However, as the literature is lacking overall, this discussion will concentrate on immigrant studies as a whole and will note differences in groups as they arise. I focus on academic research in an effort to engage with museum scholars, directors, and curators, who make most decisions regarding museums. The review reveals a gap in literature regarding first-hand immigrant interactions and experiences. By addressing the gap, I aim to increase awareness of relevant research and outline new avenues for future research regarding immigrant populations in modern museums. The session will allow for a greater understanding of how museums can better contribute to immigrant communities in their area and help discover more innovative and inclusive ways to develop programming and content for immigrants and other marginalized communities.

Additional Links

https://aliareza.weebly.com/

3:15-4:15 PM Concurrent Sessions

Shifting the Power Dynamics: Frontline Staff as Action Researchers
Johanna Jones, OMCA
Mercy Bertero, OMCA
Niya Paul, OMCA
Helen Ng, OMCA

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: This presentation will illustrate the importance of equipping frontline workers with the agency to be active researchers, collaborators, and changemakers. Museum frontline staff are often the first point of contact for daily visitors, and they play an essential role in fostering a sense of connection, welcome, and belonging. As their day-to-day world is embedded within the external community that museums aim to serve, their perspectives and

experiences are invaluable to understanding how to better serve that community. When museums honor frontline staff's interactions, observations, and analyses as valuable data, more comprehensive and inclusive decision-making can be made. The Visitor Insights Specialist (VIS) position at the Oakland Museum of California is a new frontline position that not only fosters connection with visitors in the galleries but also collects, analyzes, and interprets visitor feedback that influences decision-making at every level of the organization. Three members of OMCA's VIS team will discuss their roles at OMCA as well as their individual audience-based research projects. Audience members will be encouraged to think of new ways in which they can recognize the perspectives of frontline staff as crucial data and how they can help in fostering agency for frontline staff at their institution.

Abstract: In 2020, staff at the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) began examining our work processes and structure in light of the pandemic and racial justice uprisings. This resulted in a reorganization that has enabled us to rethink how we staff exhibitions and collect visitor data. A new position was created, Visitor Insights Specialist (VIS), which replaced in-gallery "explainers" and data collectors. The VIS role was born out of the idea that frontline staff have strong relationships with visitors and have deep knowledge about them that is undervalued. There were two main reasons for this: (1) traditional institutional power dynamics for entry-level staff and (2) lack of training and tools to help frontline staff move from hearing anecdotes to collecting evidence. The new role sought to change the power dynamics, build skills, and provide opportunities for VIS staff to become action researchers in the exhibitions.

VIS staff have a wide range of responsibilities from facilitating conversations with visitors, addressing customer service needs, and monitoring the exhibits to conducting observations, interviews, and data analyses. This combination of roles and skills has enabled VIS staff to provide valuable data insights across the institution. For example, VIS staff have documented problematic aspects of exhibitions and worked with other departments to create solutions. Through their own research projects, VIS staff have analyzed visitor responses to "talk-back" exhibits, utilizing a data source never studied before. Another VIS research project has examined the usability of the museum's new website with young adults, non-visitors–an audience the VIS staff member was uniquely suited to approach and study. These three examples illustrate the unique function and impact that the VIS role has at OMCA and will hopefully encourage audience members to rethink the roles that frontline staff play in their institutions and what can be valued as impactful data.

Data! Perspectives from the Field

Tricia Edwards, Smithsonian Institution
Samia Khan, Smithsonian Institution
Pei Koay, Smithsonian Institution
Pino Monaco, Smithsonian Institution

Panel Presentation

Purpose and Importance: By sharing our diverse perspectives and experience we aim to provide audience members insights as to how museum evaluation is currently being considered and conducted in different museum environments as well, by opening up Q/A and comment to audience members, we seek to provide participants a collective learning experience where we can share tips and ideas on what we may have to do to move towards broader perspectives and meaningful evaluation.

Abstract: This moderated panel presentation will explore the conference theme of inclusive practice through the perspectives of three different museum professionals: a decision-maker executive, a digital data collector and analyst, and a social scientist all from diverse units at the Smithsonian: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), the National Air & Space Museum (NASM), and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). As we convey our experience, we will explore questions about what data is collected and by whom, foundational questions about evidence and data, and what data does and doesn't get used to make decisions. By sharing our diverse perspectives and experience with audience research and evaluation we aim to provide audience members insights as to how museum evaluation is currently being considered and conducted in different museum environments, opening the conversation about what inclusive practice means for visitor studies.

3:15-3:45 Concurrent Sessions

Improving Cultural Institutions through a Harm Reduction Lens
Alyssa Carr, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
Akira Alves, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: As museums, we are confronting questions about our historical practices and how we can ensure that institutions operate from a place of racial justice. This session will focus on the efforts of one art museum to operate from a place of harm reduction in revising in-gallery texts. This session will discuss 1) The responsibility cultural institutions have to their communities to be a welcoming and inclusive space for all visitors; 2) The responsibility to reduce harm in evaluation activities; and 3) Share a model for collaborative, cross-institutional conversation geared towards building accessibility and inclusivity in interpretive materials.

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic and the amplified voice of the Black Lives Matter movement have revealed the fragility of cultural institutions and that fragility has made us question our systems. Language has the power to exclude, dehumanize, and uphold a system of power.

This session will describe the process of identifying what "harm" entails and how it can present itself in art labels that are often outdated and lengthy. We will present our approach and the outcomes of evaluating this initiative through in-depth visitor interviews while working through the challenge of Covid-19.

The Interpretation Department of the museum spearheaded this work by reimagining how art object labels can be used to create a more equitable museum. This project was created and evaluated through a framework of decolonization and racial equity. Colleagues from across the museum were included in the process to build a common language around harm and harm reduction in interpretive text.

The interpretive team engaged colleagues across the institution to gain valuable perspectives and developed new guidelines and principles for interpretive text. This information was used to identify types of harm and where they may be seen in object labels throughout the galleries. Internal workshops were held to identify and define harm and then reimagine labels with the goal of creating more inclusive interpretation for audiences that have historically been disempowered in museums.

Allowing space for feedback from community members was an important aspect of the evaluation process. Participants were recruited through partnerships with community programs and were previous museum visitors. This session will emphasize how to work with community participants and partners, along with an overview of evaluation activities through a harm reduction lens. Presenters will share examples of artworks, new and old label text, and specific evaluation findings.

Additional Links

https://keracollective.com/blog/improving-our-museum-labels-through-a-harm-reduction-lens-part-1

3:45-4:15 PM Concurrent Sessions

Empowering Disabled Youth in the Research and Co-creation of Anti-Ableist Art/Making Education
Zainab Adisa, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh
KT Todd, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Disability resides at the intersection of human diversity and design; it is created when we develop environments, products, and experiences that privilege certain abilities over others. This session shares research from a project that: 1) explored the ways in which museum-based art and making programming often creates ableist conditions via choices about tools, materials, and facilitation and 2) worked with youth, educators and aides to collaboratively envision and enact new forms of programming that embody disability justice. Session attendees will engage with findings from the research that illuminate anti-ableist practices of art and making in a museum context and reflections about research practices that mirror and deepen the project's commitments to advancing and sustaining this work. Presenters will candidly reflect on the successes and challenges of engaged research with disabled youth. In particular, we will discuss areas where our field can continue to push boundaries by challenging ableist norms and assumptions about what counts as research and disrupting our bias towards written and verbal communication. We will also attend to ways we can care for ourselves as people with access needs within our professional roles. The session can benefit both researchers and practitioners who are interested in the ways art, making, and research can advance disability justice.

Abstract: This session shares about Children's Museum of Pittsburgh's Moonshot Project, supported by Remake Learning, which aims to renegotiate power imbalances in the design, research, and delivery of art and making education in informal learning environments through centering the voices, needs, and dreams of learners with disabilities. Ableist norms have and continue to influence the way we, as individuals, communities, institutions, and societies, think about education and research. As a result, deficit thinking and scarcity mindsets are common in education and research practices in both formal and informal learning environments, which undermine the creativity, potential, and beings of disabled youth. In the project's first phase, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh worked towards inclusive, anti-ableist practice in art and making education through collaboration with schools who serve K-12 youth with disabilities. We facilitated and iterated on field trips and outreach visit formats, providing a space for youth to explore new forms of art and making and exceed the assumptions and expectations of their support staff. We designed and iterated with disabled youth, while promoting the capacity of Museum staff to foster inclusive and accessible learning environments through staff exchanges, professional development, and opportunities to learn from disabled youth. We then hosted a charrette in the spring with a cohort of disabled youth and their families to create a dialogue on disability-inclusivity in museums, while nurturing youth's agency, self/community advocacy skills, and creativity through exploring art and making tools, materials, and processes. Throughout this work, we also iterated on our research practices and worked with youth to develop forms of data collection that embraced a Universal Design for Learning approach—providing many options for communication. The session will discuss strategies and challenges for disrupting ableist research paradigms that privilege disability justice over traditional forms of data quality.

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Wexler, A. (2022). An anti-ableist framework in art education. Art Education, 75(1), 30-35.

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Wednesday, July 12

1:00-1:30 Concurrent Sessions

Addressing the Art Museum Visitor Research Gap with Undergraduate Students

Melissa Forstrom, Purchase College
Damon Chatas, Purchase College

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: This presentation aims to inform and discuss new collaborative directions in visitor studies and higher education. The discussion portion of the presentation will focus on the findings of the previous studies and a conversation around scalability and translatability with other university/museum partnerships.

Abstract: This presentation details a diversity and inclusion inspired collaborative undertaking led by Professor Melissa Forstrom (Purchase College) and the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York City) to train undergraduates to execute summative exhibition evaluations. This undertaking began in 2019, when Professor Forstrom designed the first ever visitor study for the New Museum. Thwarted by the pandemic, the next study to took place in Spring 2022 and will run again in Spring 2023- this time as an undergraduate practicum course titled, "Museum Visitor Research".

The aims of this collaboration are three-fold:

- To give diverse undergraduates (Purchase College is a Hispanic serving institution) exposure and experience in working with visitors in a museum setting.
- This has the potential to address diversity issues in museum employment as well as experience requirements for museums/visitor studies entry-level jobs.
- To supply the New Museum with data and findings about their visitors (including their first visitor study ever conducted) with the intention of broadening community engagement and visitor demographics.

As such, this undertaking is mutually beneficial for both students and the New Museum while tackling diversity issues and experience requirements in museum employment. Furthermore, the data collected and findings have the potential to address diversity and inclusion issues in visitor attendance.

Detailing the inception of this initiative, the process of this collaboration, including research, student training program/course development, teaching experiential learning, field trips, and importantly lessons-learned, this presentation aims to inform and discuss new collaborative directions in visitor studies and higher education. The discussion portion of the presentation will focus on the findings of the previous studies and a conversation around scalability and translatability with other university/museum partnerships.

1:00-2:00 Concurrent Session

Reaching Out: Building Capacity and Measuring Impact with a Teen Council
Erin Milbeck Wilcox, Detroit Institute of Arts
Sade Benjamin, Detroit Institute of Arts
Members of the Detroit Institute of Arts Teen Council

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: This session presents a case study of the Teen Council program at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) by the evaluator, the facilitating educator, and teen representatives from the

Council with two points of focus: evaluation of the program's impact on teen members, and evaluation capacity building for teen members to investigate and evaluate their events for teen visitors.

Session attendees will gain an understanding about the purpose, design, and facilitation of an informal learning program for teens in an art museum. Presenters will provide a summary of findings related to program participation, including the extent to which Teen Council members developed skills, built friendships, and expanded their thinking about art and cultural institutions.

Furthermore, members of the Teen Council will talk about their experience building their own capacity for evaluation work identifying and exploring new questions related to audience interest in their events and perceptions of the museum. Session attendees will hear about the collaboration between the teens and the evaluation staff to plan and conduct a survey, analyze the data, and use the findings to plan future Teen Council events.

Abstract: The DIA launched a Teen Council program in 2017, gathering 12 participants from three counties. The Teen Council meets weekly during the school year on Friday evenings, and occasionally on Saturdays. During their sessions, the Teen Council members plan events, explore their interests through gallery visits and field trips to other museums, and participate in art making activities. Program outcomes relate to encouraging the voice and participation of teens in the museum, building personal and professional skills for program participants, fostering art experiences, and introducing possible career paths into museum work.

To gain a holistic understanding of the achievement of these outcomes, the evaluation team uses a mixed-methods approach which includes:

- Event experience surveys developed and conducted by Teen Council members.
- Mid-year and end of year reflection on program experience by Teen Council members.
- Teen Council graduate and alumni interviews.

Overall, evaluation findings have shown that all members reported developing skills as a result of their participation, including communication and leadership skills. All members also report building strong, friendly relationships with other members. Additionally, more than half of members expand their understanding and appreciation for art and cultural experiences as a result of participation. About one quarter of members also report gaining self-confidence from their participation in the Teen Council.

In addition to conducting program evaluation of Teen Council members, the evaluation staff collaborated with the Teen Council members to investigate questions related to teen audience interest in events, motivations for visiting the DIA, and perception of the DIA. Evaluation staff supported the Teen Council to plan and conduct a survey, analyze the data, and use the findings to plan future Teen Council events. Through this project, Teen Council members are learning how to do evaluation while also gaining insights from their peers.

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Findings and Use: The Measurement of Museum Social Impact Project

Kari Ross Nelson, Thanksgiving Point Institute
Amy Niedbalski, St. Louis Zoo
Jeremy Joslin, Morton Arboretum
Rachel Lindsey, Crystal Bridges

Panel Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Over the past three years, the Measurement of Museum Social Impact (MOMSI) project has worked to develop a validated instrument to measure the social impact museums have on their communities. Rooted in earlier iterations of social impact research conducted by Thanksgiving Point Institute and the Utah Division of Arts and Museums, the IMLS-funded MOMSI project engaged 38 museums across the country to learn if the same patterns of impact are evident at a national scale, and to validate survey and generalize processes for broader use by individual museums. Now that the study has concluded, the team will share findings from the survey data, the successes and challenges faced by host sites throughout this national study, and information on the toolkit available for use by other museums. This presentation will be both a follow up and continuation of prior MOMSI presentations at the 2021 and 2022 VSA conferences. In those well-received presentations, attendees provided important feedback that has helped us increase rigor in the development of the social impact measurement tool (2021) and shape features of the toolkit (2022).

Abstract: The MOMSI project was developed in response to calls for the museum field's to demonstrate impact and use data to inform decision making. In 2003, Weil (2003) observed, "the museum field will need to develop... richer and more persuasive ways to...demonstrate the myriad and beneficial outcomes that may occur for their individual visitors and have impact on the community beyond." A dozen years later Jacobsen (2016) continued, "the field needs to adopt a shared framework and language because we still lack an accepted way to measure our impact." Lee and Linett (2013) pointed out that while we have no shortage of data, "...the long-term health, sustainability, and effectiveness of cultural organizations depends critically on investment in and collective action around enhancing the field's capacity for using data strategically and thoughtfully to inform decision-making." MOMSI strives to provide a tool and co-created strategies to serve these purposes.

Building on pilots conducted by Thanksgiving Point Institute and Utah's Division of Arts & Museums, the MOMSI team has worked to develop a validated instrument to measure the

social impact museums have on their communities. Administered by the Utah Division of Arts and Museums and funded by IMLS, the MOMSI team built a social impact survey and tested it with the help of 38 museums across the United States. In this session, the team will share findings from the survey data, the successes and challenges faced by host sites throughout this national study, and information on the toolkit available for use by other museums. Partner museums who tested the survey will describe their participation in the study, responses to the social impact survey, and how they and their museums are using the resulting data.

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Additional Links
https://museumsocialimpact.org/

Reporting for internal audiences: Making Sense of Our Own Work
Gretchen Haupt, Science Museum of Minnesota
Claire Thoma Emmons, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis
Stephen Ashton Ph.D., Thanksgiving Point Institute

Panel Presentation

Purpose and Importance: It is important to consider how the programs, exhibits, and other experiences offered by any single organization collectively contribute to achieving an institution's broader goals and impacts. This session is intended to get participants thinking about using audience data beyond specific projects by sharing how evaluation staff at three museums approach internal dissemination of their work and support that internal use within their organizations. As part of exploring how to support internal use of audience data beyond specific projects, session participants will see examples of ways to incorporate audience data into broader internal organizational metrics and reporting, and hear how these three organizations manage aggregating and sensemaking of different sources of audience data.

Abstract: Panelists will share relevant work happening at their organizations during the first half of the session:

Thanksgiving Point Stephen Ashton will describe the integral role audience research and evaluation play in the work that Thanksgiving Point does on a daily basis, and how they have created several systems to help share what we are learning with the rest of the organization, because it helps the entire organization to grow and improve. He will also share what they have done to make data more accessible for all decision makers in the organization.

Science Museum of Minnesota Gretchen Haupt will share how SMM documents and interprets a year's worth of work in two key reports to give all staff easy access to key data and a broad view of what we've accomplished: the Annual Impact Report and the School Report. These reports include audience data (generated by the Science Museum of Minnesota as well as pulled in from outside) that is aggregated, synthesized, and shared out with an eye for utilization in decision-making and goal setting.

Children's Museum of Indianapolis Claire Thoma Emmons will describe three examples of internal dissemination:

- Individual project findings are shared in cross-departmental staff meetings to foster broader institutional understanding.
- The R&E department leads an annual all-division reflection on "lessons learned" in experience development.
- Two departments developed a set of learning outcomes that they apply in all of their programs; evaluation of individual programs can thus be more easily compared, leading to the identification of successful strategies that are then applied to practice.

After hearing examples of how audience data is collected, aggregated, shared, and interpreted, session participants will have the opportunity to engage in a facilitated discussion to consider possibilities for broader internal reporting at their organizations.

1:30-2:00 PM Concurrent Sessions

Virtual Art Galleries as Tools for Research into Visitor Behavior
Rebekah M. Rodriguez-Boerwinkle, University of North Carolina

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Virtual gallery tools have gained wide usage by art museums for increasing visitorship, but their value as tools for basic and applied research are not yet capitalized on. This talk discusses their potential for use as an alternative to or complement for in-person studies and as an important context of study itself.

During this session, participants will learn about the benefits of virtual gallery use in three situations through discussion and personal engagement with a virtual gallery tool (accessible via https://ogarvisit.net/vsa2023 on a laptop or desktop computer):

1. Virtual galleries are useful in situations where traditional museum research is not realistic or achievable.
2. Virtual galleries can complement in-person work, especially for diverse scholars.
3. Virtual galleries are important to study as an important context itself.

Abstract: Digital tools, particularly virtual environments in which users navigate and interact with 3D spaces, have led to an alternative type of museum that promises to disseminate knowledge and culture beyond the physical walls of the institution. Scholars have become interested in the experience that virtual galleries offer visitors. However, the potential for virtual gallery tools as a resource for research into visitor behavior—as opposed to simply an end-user product aimed at museum visitors—has not been widely recognized by the museum community. Thus, I aim to broaden the field by taking the position that the lateral use of virtual galleries as a tool for research offers a new perspective and significant advantages to the field of visitor studies.

To address this claim, I will articulate the following learning objectives, which highlight the virtues of virtual galleries along three lines of research use related to visiting art museums. First, I will discuss how virtual galleries are useful in situations where traditional museum research is not realistic or achievable. Second, I will describe how virtual galleries can complement in-person work, especially for diverse scholars. Finally, I will expand on the importance of studying virtual galleries as an important context itself.

Each section will include a theoretical discussion of the contention as well specific findings addressing the topic from recent field-based and virtual gallery research. As a practical basis, examples will be grounded in terms of the Open Gallery for Arts Research (OGAR), an open-source virtual gallery tool designed for academic research (Rodriguez-Boerwinkle et al., 2022). Throughout, I will engage the audience by posing questions related to their practice, designating question periods at the end of each contention, and providing a link to OGAR (https://ogarvisit.net/vsa2023) for people to navigate themselves.

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2:15-2:45 PM Concurrent Sessions

Harnessing the Voice of Young Adults in Guided Nature Experiences

Joy Kubarek, Inform Evaluation and Research
Brian Johnson, Inform Evaluation and Research
Loren Smith, National Audubon Society
Bria Wimberly, The Discovery Center

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: This session shares the methods and findings of a National Audubon Society project to design STEM-infused guided nature experiences for diverse young adult audiences. This is an NSF-supported project aimed at a) engaging an underrepresented audience, b) elevating the importance of STEM in understanding and solving for climate issues, and c) broadening informal learning opportunities for young adults. The methodology focused on tapping into the young adult perspective from multiple angles. From nationwide surveys to young adult staff focus groups, to design charrettes, this session focuses on approaches to tap into young adult voices to inform new programming. Attendees to this session will:

Understand the benefits of multiple modalities of data collection and co-creation of programs to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives.

Deepen their understanding of qualitative data analysis and its utility in inclusive evaluation practices.

In addition, one of the co-presenters is a representative from the intended audience and they will share their story of how they have engaged to help inform these new programs.

Abstract: The National Audubon Society supports an extensive network of Audubon Centers which aim to engage visitors from the community in nature-based programming. In 2020, the National Audubon Society was awarded a three-year NSF grant to rethink these nature-based programs, specifically guided nature experiences, to engage a more diverse young adult population. The reimagined guided nature experiences are intended to move beyond traditional birding and other led experiences toward more participatory, STEM- and climate-science-infused programs that resonate with a young adult audience. This audience is typically underrepresented in Audubon programming, while also being poised to positively address climate change in communities across the country. This session highlights the work of the National Audubon Society, partnering with Inform Evaluation & Research, to tap into a diverse young adult audience's perspective to inform the new programs. The presenters will share details of multiple modes of data collection as well as design activities that included young adults in the co-creation of new guided nature experiences. From nation-wide surveys of young adults, to focus groups of diverse early career staff, to participatory design charrettes to co-design a suite of guided nature experiences, this project implemented an extensive array of activities to ensure young adults were integral to the creation of the next generation of Audubon programming. The presenters will also share the findings of these efforts which may benefit attendees looking to engage young adults in similar programming. Lastly, members of the project team - including a representative of the young adults who participated - will share their reflections on lessons learned throughout the process and implications for future program design and evaluation.

Additional Links

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18-YIoqQkjuXDa-diMXR7qLw1gBjbmOIk/view

2:15-3:15 Concurrent Sessions

Deepening Understanding Through Peer to Peer Listening with Community Advocates
Lisa Incatasciato, The Tech Interactive
Michaela Yamashita, The Tech Interactive

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: A persistent barrier that is encountered when conducting audience research, or listening, via approaches such as survey distribution or focus groups is a lack of trust and/or unfamiliarity some community members may experience with museums or similar organizations. Peer-to-peer listening as a way to collect feedback and input has been beneficial for The Tech Interactive in addressing this issue by allowing them to interact and discuss with people they trust.

This presentation focuses on two community listening projects conducted by The Tech's Inclusive Research, Development, and Impact Measurement team to learn from and with members of our community through a peer-to-peer listening model. Through these projects, staff members aimed to better understand and elevate community perspectives, particularly those that are historically marginalized in the STEM fields, by involving them in the collecting and interpreting of data that will feed into future decisions. Some key learnings of these projects include:

- Intentional planning of logistical factors to ensure meaningful community involvement including recruitment methods, translations, and Zoom interpretation.

- Adapting to follow the direction of the discussions as we worked with community members to identify themes and make meaning together from the data collected.

Abstract:

Background

In 2021, The Tech Interactive created a new Inclusive Research, Development, and Impact Measurement (IR&D) Department with the goal of conducting research and development projects in collaboration with community as a part of our efforts to ensure we are providing inclusive and accessible programming, specifically to those who are underserved or historically underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

The Tech has implemented listening approaches such as distributing surveys and hosting focus groups and interviews, however a persistent barrier we encounter is a lack of trust and/or unfamiliarity some community members may experience with museums and science centers. Peer-to-peer listening as a way to collect feedback and input has been beneficial in addressing this issue by allowing them to interact and discuss with people they trust.

Project Descriptions

The first project we will discuss focuses on our work done in collaboration with local Spanish & Vietnamese speaking parents to begin identifying: 1) what creates a welcoming physical space and 2) our role in supporting those traditionally underrepresented and marginalized in STEM. Our second project will dive deeper into this second point and focus specifically on our youth listening projects in which staff members worked with high school youth to create recommendations for building career pathways programming that engages students of backgrounds that are underrepresented in STEM fields.

Discussion

We will discuss the goals, challenges, and outcomes of each project and invite attendees to reflect on their own research processes and how implementing a similar strategy may help them identify and mitigate unintentional biases within their work. The Tech is still continuing to refine its community listening practices and hopes to use these projects to frame a discussion

with other researchers and practitioners that lead to more inclusive practices and ensure community voices are heard.

An Exploration of Evaluation Practices Beyond the Survey

Fran Mast, Morton Arboretum
Ellen Roth, Denver Museum of Nature and Science
Kristen Witte, Museum of Science and Industry
Lauren Applebaum, Museum of Science and Industry

Panel Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Many evaluators rely on surveys to gather information about their current and potential guests. However, surveys can feel not only anachronistic in engaging cultural institution spaces, but they also can come with language barriers. In the current session, we explore alternative evaluation methods to interact with guests.

Abstract: Surveys are one of the most common forms of evaluation methods. They are easy to administer and results can be readily generated. However, the survey lacks in other areas. In spaces like cultural centers, a survey can appear anachronistic to the engaging, interactive, and hands-on experiences available to guests. Surveys can also come with language barriers, both due to age and English-language experience, that are hard to overcome. In the current session presenters from an arboretum and two science museums share survey alternatives that have appealed to guests and maintained high standards of information collection.

Ellen Roth will discuss how non-traditional methods were used during the Covid-19 pandemic to capture the community's vision for building a nature play space and restore a historic waterway in Denver's City Park. Fran Mast will share case study examples of interactive and participatory interview formats used in front-end and formative exhibition evaluation as an alternative to surveys or more formal, highly structured interviews. Finally, Kristen Witte and Lauren Applebaum will share a front-end exhibit evaluation that evaluated guests' interest in and knowledge of a "quest" by using activities that asked guests to order the events of a quest, map the emotional arc a hero takes, and create their own quest narrative.

After the panelists share their work, we will invite attendees to share their experience with creative methods. Many researchers and evaluators have used creative methodologies internally, but few of these methods have been documented in professional publications, making them hard to find and share with colleagues. We will also invite attendees to enter those methods into a shared, public Google Doc that will act as a repository of alternative-to-survey methodologies.

Flipping Tables for Organizational Change

Jeremy Foutz, STEAM Workgroup

Kenzie Freeman-Doran

Facilitated Discussion

Purpose and Importance: When evaluators use equitable evaluation practices, evaluation results can become an uncomfortable change agent for organizations. Especially over the last 20 years, many museums have struggled with the interactions of their histories, missions, and roles in education, preservation, and advocacy. The need for organizational change is real. Often, equitable evaluation leads us to challenging situations and conversations with leaders, funders, and community members about organizational approaches. Engaging with organizational change as an evaluator means asking hard questions about our organizations, and an axiological stance for advocacy brings real risks.

These challenges can lead evaluation to be misused or ignored, especially in the broader context of organizational change. Apprehension about evaluation and a lack of sustainability of evaluation can increase as a result. However, the evolving placement of museums in society highlights the tensions between their financial and (inherent if not always accepted) social responsibilities – along with our own identities and roles as individuals.

Through candid discussion, we hope that participants will increase awareness and confidence in the following areas:

- Barriers and successes in evaluation use for organizational change at other organizations.
- Evaluative thinking around promoting organizational change.
- Advocating for visitors and marginalized group values in decision-making contexts

Abstract: Using two reflections from the presenters on the intersections of values, change, and evaluation at individual and organizational levels, we invite others to discuss barriers to change that our evaluations suggest and/or demand. Practicing an equitable evaluation approach, we'll strategize together about possible solutions to tensions around use and accountability in the context of organizational change. The discussion will lead with our vulnerability, and we invite attendees to respond as they are able to become participants, sharing their reflections. Because of the nature of this discussion, VSA will not be recording the session. Please feel free to keep your video off, use a pseudonym, and/or to use the chat - whatever methods that will help you participate in the discussion in healthy and mindful ways.

We don't claim to be experts in equitable evaluation frameworks or culturally responsive methodologies, and there are many paths even within these paradigms. To be clear, we accept that this work will continue to be iterative, yet in our view it can't remain glacially incremental

if our organizations truly claim their broad mission and vision statements.

Alongside session participants, we hope to explore some background questions to frame the discussion:

- What are our roles in addressing these tensions?
- What does authentic application of evaluation mean in an organizational change context?
- What are the barriers to using evaluation as an agent of organizational change?
- How have others negotiated these challenges?
- What are indicators of real organizational change?

Depending on the number of participants, we may split into two groups so that more people can share and respond.

At the close of the session, people will be able to opt-in to receive our summary of the discussion - with details removed to protect and respect the vulnerability we've asked of you - shortly after the conference.

2:45-3:15 Concurrent Sessions

Remote Summative Evaluation: *The Bias Inside Us* Traveling Exhibition
Jason Allen, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service
Gretchen Haupt, Science Museum of Minnesota

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: This Individual Paper presentation presents findings from a fully remote summative evaluation at three organizations that hosted the Smithsonian traveling exhibition *The Bias Inside Us*. This session focuses on the methodologies utilized in a fully remote setting, including how COVID required team members to rethink the project strategy to remove the need for travel. Benefits and hurdles will be discussed with consideration for further projects that may benefit from a fully remote strategy including cost, time, and effort.
The summative evaluation project focused on understanding if the exhibition provided venues and communities the tools, supports, and resources needed to engage in dialogue center on bias. Session attendees will consider a fully remote approach to evaluation studies and discuss the key findings of the three hosting organizations, each having vastly different needs, resources, and audiences.

Abstract: *The Bias Us Inside Us* traveling exhibition is a part of a larger project initiative lead by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), designed to help individuals understand and counter implicit biases, as well as build capacity around resources to convene

and aid in communitywide dialogue on bias. The intention is to increase empathy among individuals and groups, as well as create more inclusive schools, workplaces, and communities.

SITES worked with the Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM) to develop an evaluation plan for the project, which included a summative study on the impacts of hosting the traveling exhibition. Three hosting organizations were selected for participation in the summative evaluation, specifically attempting to understand if and how venues and communities utilized the tools, supports, and resources to engage in dialogue on bias in their communities.

Given the need for a fully remote study, SMM and SITES' approach included an online post-visit visitor survey and video interviews with community leaders and venue stakeholders. Both methods required support from local host-site staff to recruit participants but were developed to minimize the level of effort required by our collaborators while still enabling sufficient data collection.

Signage posted at the exhibit's exits invited potential survey respondents to use their phones to scan a QR code or type in a short URL link to access the questionnaire, which generated 240 responses across the three data collection sites. Local staff were asked only to post signage, and casually monitor engagement. SMM recruited 12 individuals across all three sites to participate in video interviews about broader community impacts. Interview participants were invited based on recommendations from SITES and the primary host site contacts.

Thursday, July 13

12:45-1:45 PM Concurrent Sessions

Voices & Choices: A Soft-Systems Approach for More Equitable Program Design
Maggy Benson, National Museum of Natural History

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Visitor-focused institutions are making important headway into broadening participation and improving diversity, inclusion, and co-creation at every level – from learning participation to board of trustee membership. To support these efforts, we recognize the need for structured processes that ensure equitable inclusion of each value-holder perspective. "Voices & Choices Planning for Self Determination" provides a working model for such a structure.

This interactive session will introduce, apply, and generate discussion about this structured process and how it supports program designers to make choices that invite, honor, and

incorporate multiple value-holder voices. After learning about the process's soft-systems foundation (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) and its use to date, participants will apply the process to a program design scenario and discuss reflections and recommendations for improvement. Participants will:

- Gain familiarity with soft systems methodology and how this approach can promote stakeholder participation for more equitable program planning and design.
- Experience application of the process to program design.
- Understand how the Voices & Choices process and approach enhances program outcome planning and implementation, along with some of the opportunities and constraints of the process.
- Contribute to the iterative design of the Voices & Choices process for improvement to meet goals for more equitable program design and planning.

Abstract: Based on Peter Checkland's soft systems approach (Checkland and Poulter, 2006), the Voices & Choices process recognizes that each value holder brings to the planning table a unique worldview, set of environmental constraints or context, and a "transformation" or programming result relevant to their worldview and context. From this unique perspective, each valueholder explores program design and implementation from each of three roles: as "customer, "owner," and "change agent."

Enriched perspective from each of these roles amplifies voice resulting in program planning based on choices that accommodate the multiple needs, constraints, world views, and resources. It is an organized process for inquiry and learning to make program design choices by defining outcomes and implementations that accommodate various valueholder world views.

After identifying community valueholders and establishing trusting relationships, this process provides a structure for equalizing power and creating space for each valueholder's voice. The process supports valueholders' self-determined engagement in the decision-making process (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wasserman, 2010). They should feel competent (able to set and reach learning goals), related (cared about and caring), and autonomous (their choice to participate is free from pressure, tension, or ambiguity). Stronger programming results from the process because the choices made will benefit multiple value holders' self-identified needs. This self-determination process can be employed at various program stages and levels.

This working session will include four parts:

1. an introduction to the Voices & Choices process and its soft-systems foundation,
2. an interactive opportunity to apply the process to a use case,
3. sharing and discussion of results and lessons learned from using the process, and
4. a discussion that will contribute to the Voices & Choices process's ongoing design and development.

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Found Poetry Methodology

Alice Anderson, Minneapolis Institute of Art
KT Todd, Children's Museum of Pittsburg
Zainab Adisa, Children's Museum of Pittsburg
Amber Simpson, SUNY Binghamton

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: The purpose of this session is to introduce participants to found poetry, a methodology that is rarely used in museum research. However, we know that methods are best when they match the needs of the project, and often in informal learning spaces the projects can be very creative. Our session will give participants a chance to practice with this methodology and to see how it has worked for two research teams.

Abstract: In this interactive presentation, participants will practice using found poetry as a research methodology. Found poetry is an approach that takes existing text sources and reframes them by omitting and reorganizing words, changing spacing, and infusing additional sources. Embracing notions that researchers are always excerpting and placing their own emphasis on qualitative data, found poetry has been used as a way to make this research power explicit while bringing art into the research process (Bhattacarya, 2013; Butler-Kisber, 2002). Two research teams will share their processes for using found poetry as a research methodology; one will describe how their self-study as facilitators of a community of practice

led them to identify moments of professional vulnerability, and the second team will share its use of poetry to explore researcher positionality.

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12:45-1:15 PM Concurrent Sessions

Finally, Some Hope: Communicating Systemic Climate Change Mitigation Efforts
Jens Astrup, Natural History Museum of Denmark

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Inspiring climate action is a major challenge for science communicators. Many intervention studies have sought to identify messages that increase mitigation actions, but they have largely found only marginal effects on behavioral intentions.

While the study that I'll be presenting also didn't find a silver bullet, we did observe large differences in the emotions that respondents expressed, depending on which of three climate messages we presented to them. In turn, those emotions mediated behavioral intentions on certain climate actions, positively and negatively, and this has important implications for how museums should communicate about climate change. This will be the main outcome of the session.

The study used the Extended Parallel Processes Model as the analytical framework, and I'll discuss methodological aspects as well. The study was carried out in Denmark, with Danish respondents, but it was a collaboration with US-based sociologists, based on a survey template designed for US citizens. Some interesting cultural differences materialized, which made it a challenge to make the survey template work for Danish respondents.

Finally, I'll also be pointing out where the findings have relevance for the biodiversity crisis.

Abstract:

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1:15-1:45 Concurrent Sessions

Deeper Empathy Insights from Into the Deep (En Io Profundo)
Brian Johnson, Inform Evaluation and Research
Erica Kelly, Monterey Bay Aquarium
Amanda Lindell, Inform Evaluation and Research

Individual Paper Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Into the Deep (En Lo Profundo), a new 7,000+ square-foot exhibition at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, showcases characteristics of the deep sea and the animals that live there. It also highlights deep-sea research being carried out by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI) and the presence of microplastics in the deep sea.

As part of a larger summative evaluation, Inform Evaluation & Research explored affective outcomes related to empathy. Into the Deep (En lo Profundo) is the largest collection of deep-sea animals in North America. Few visitors have seen or even heard of most of the animals on display. Therefore, the exhibition team at the Aquarium wondered whether it was even possible to elicit empathy for such mysterious life forms. The guiding questions related to empathy explored in the evaluation were: (1) Is the exhibition inspiring empathy for these animals? (2) Is there any connection between experiencing empathy for the animals and feeling that it is important to protect the deep sea?

The overall findings presented in this session will have implications for exhibit practitioners and educators interested in fostering empathy for wildlife, especially animals that are not traditionally "charismatic" or well known to visitors.

Abstract: In addition to traditional visitor intercept interviews (n=121) and post-surveys (n=802), we employed two empathy-specific tools: a modified version of the visitor observation tool (n=209) developed by the Measuring Empathy Collaborative Assessment Project (MECAP); and a card-sort activity and follow-up interview (n=131) in which visitors matched images of a deep-sea animal and words from a list that best described how they felt about that animal.

Our findings suggest that for some visitors, Into the Deep (En lo Profundo) elicited expressions of empathy for deep-sea life. We found evidence related to three aspects of empathy:

Stimulated emotional state: Visitors frequently expressed feelings of awe, wonder, and curiosity in response to their exhibition experience. Based on the feelings of awe and wonder the exhibition often evoked, it would appear that encountering the "otherness" of the animals in the exhibition may actually have enabled visitors to connect with deep-sea life.

Perceiving and understanding: Some visitors provided evidence of "perspective taking," an important aspect of empathy. Perspective taking typically related to the threat deep-sea animals face from microplastics.

Care: Survey and interview data suggested that Into the Deep (En lo Profundo) elicited compassionate empathy in some visitors. Visitors frequently discussed how deep-sea life is under threat from plastic pollution.

While a more in-depth study of empathy in relation to deep-sea life is required to make stronger claims about the relationship between empathy and Into the Deep (En lo Profundo), including which specific exhibition components were most instrumental in bringing about these expressions, these findings are encouraging for exhibit practitioners interested in fostering empathy in visitors.

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Additional Links

Evaluation Report:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s9erBURmTH5Y026n6_mYr0c_UmNYMBHL/view?usp=sharing

Into the Deep Online Exhibition: https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/visit/exhibits/into-the-deep

3:15-4:00 PM Concurrent Sessions

Engaging Teen Volunteers as Researchers & Evaluators
Brian Ogle, Brevard Zoo
Amy Shea, Brevard Zoo

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Attendees will be able to describe how to create a program in which teen volunteers serve as competent evaluators and are routinely integrated into the organization's evaluation practices. Additionally, attendees will identify the training required and how to recognize organizational limitations to including teens as data collectors.

Abstract: Teen volunteers are often an underutilized and underappreciated group of individuals that can enhance institutional goals and practices when provided with a structured environment. Brevard Zoo has successfully integrated teen volunteers as collaborators and data collectors. During this session, we will share how teen volunteers can be included as competent evaluators by examining Brevard Zoo's own practices, successes, and challenges. Outcomes from new programs launched in 2023 will be shared with attendees. These efforts include piloting a new program in which teen leaders serve as collaborative evaluators who engage in evaluating the interpretative skills of their peers and associated visitor outcomes.

During this interactive session, attendees will brainstorm ways they are able to invite teen volunteers to participate in evaluation or visitor studies projects. Throughout this workshop, we hope to inspire others to think about non-traditional data collectors and collaborators for their research and evaluation programs. In addition, we will examine how the inclusion of teen volunteers is not only an option for capacity building, but also serves as a vital educational

opportunity to increase interest in research as a potential career path and develops real-world skills that will help participants be competitive post-graduation.

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3:15-4:15 Concurrent Sessions

Exploring the Role of Museums in Crafting Inclusive Community Collaborations
Laycca Umer, New York Hall of Science
Priya Mohabir, New York Hall of Science
Leyla Bermudez, Elmcor Youth and Adult Activities, Inc.

Jennifer Jocz, Education Development Center

Panel Presentation

Purpose and Importance: Museums are increasingly looking for ways to create programming that is relevant and meaningful to their visitors; and that also reaches beyond the walls of the physical museum to welcome, engage, and collaborate with a broad spectrum of community stakeholders. Critical questions for consideration when crafting these kinds of experiences are: What are museums' roles and responsibilities in bringing together community stakeholders in ways that allow institutions to learn with (not just from) the community, and design learning experiences with (not just for) the community?

The New York Hall of Science (NYSCI), Elmcor Youth and Adult Activity Inc. (Elmcor), and Education Development Center (EDC) are working to shift perspectives about how museums can leverage their reputations as learning environments that bring together all people. We are doing this by exploring how museums can act as mediators bringing together community stakeholders with different viewpoints to share their perspectives through productive dialogue in the museum as well as other community settings. We are utilizing the learnings from these experiences to inform the future development of inclusive research and community collaboration approaches, as well as educational and exhibit experiences. These learnings will contribute to cultural institutions' ability to support authentic community engagement.

Abstract: The New York Hall of Science (NYSCI), Elmcor Youth and Adult Activity Inc. (Elmcor), and Education Development Center (EDC) have embarked on a five-year National Institute of Health-Science Education Partnership Award (NIH-SEPA) program initiative focused on exploring public health careers with Black and Latino youth.

NYSCI and Elmcor hosted a series of community listening sessions to better understand how local residents perceive the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our community of Corona and Elmhurst, Queens, New York City. Focus groups with community members and conversations with local medical experts provided critical insight about how to support dialogue amongst stakeholders around shared issues of importance. Community members' lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and medical and public health workers' experiences serving community members, provided humanizing evidence of the people behind the news reports and statistics.

These insights informed the co-design of three community conversations and one youth town hall which brought together community members and medical and public health experts to further reflect on how their lived experiences relate to empirical evidence, and engage in future thinking about professional roles, careers, structures, and systems in public health that can help address inequitable health outcomes. An important element of the co-design process were

planning meetings facilitated by NYSCI, which included Elmcor, EDC, local youth, and medical and public health experts.

Panelists in this session will: 1) examine how museums can foster authentic community engagement by establishing themselves as critical mediators amongst stakeholders, 2) discuss the importance of inviting community members and field experts to share their lived experiences and perspectives as anecdotal evidence complementary to empirical evidence, 3) share best practices for crafting productive dialogues that value the voices of diverse community members and community stakeholders, and 4) reflect on how lessons learned can inform future research approaches and learning experiences.

Additional Links

https://nysci.org/exploring-public-health-careers-with-black-and-latino-youth

Community Informed Design: Working Together and Scoping our Practice

Megan Goeke, Science Museum of Minnesota
Jennings Mergenthal, Science Museum of Minnesota
Kaiah Goodman, Kaiah Goodman
Evelyn Christian Ronning, Evelyn Christian Ronning

Panel Presentation

Purpose and Importance: What does community collaboration look like when spanning years of work? How does an organization turn community engagement into the ongoing "way we work"? This session brings together multiple people and projects from one institution to discuss how the community-museum relationships undergirding individual and collective change work are established and maintained. Our goal in sharing our experiences is not to claim that our work has been perfect in process or outcomes, but to share ideas and practices that may be generative to others that seek to sustain community collaboration and ultimately, organizational change within their museums. This panel includes two evaluators/researchers and two community engagement specialists from the same institution and shares four distinct projects that reflect our collective and ongoing approach to community collaboration. We will share 5 practices that undergird our work: naming our values and assumptions, emergent planning, flexible and distributed staffing, organization-to-organization relationships, and layered data.

Abstract: In 2022, an SMM-led panel focused on turning community vision into action resulted in robust discussion of how the community-museum relationships undergirding the individual projects were established and maintained. This session, by bringing multiple people and projects from one institution together, will continue that conversation. We will unpack how different lines of work happen in concert as an institution-wide vision of Community Informed Design within respectful, ongoing museum-community organization relationships. In sharing our institutional experiences, we intend to provide useful examples, insights, and inspiration for

colleagues also engaged in broadening the voices we hear from in our field. We specifically share 5 practices - identified through reflective thematic analysis of project documents - that now undergird community collaboration work across our institution. These practices are paired with stories from our practice and include…

> Naming our values and assumptions: We describe listening sessions with three affinity groups – Regional Indigenous (Dakota and Ojibwe), Hmong, and Maya groups – who participated in focus groups to better understand values and assumptions around collections access.

> Emergent planning: We will describe how the youth-focused program evaluation of the Kitty Andersen Youth Science Center reflects the program's core value/framework of STEM Justice - encouraging youth to critically appraise data collection processes, interpretation, and usage.

> Flexible and distributed staffing: We will describe flexible and distributed museum staffing on two exhibition design projects, as a bulwark against burnout and support for a shared responsibility for equity-focused work.

> Organization-to-organization relationships: We will describe their process of mutually beneficial relationship development with community organizations across the Twin Cities, moving from presence, to invitation, through collaboration and co-creation opportunities.

> Layered data: We will discuss how projects are designed to collect multiple data types with differing levels of participant investment to protect against tokenization.

Iterative Research and Prototyping to Increase Audio Engagement in a Contemporary Genocide Exhibition

Lynne Venart, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Molly Bruns, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Hosted Presentation

Purpose and Importance: How do we increase visitation and audio use in our contemporary exhibition on Burma's genocide when visitors are confused by the exhibition entrance and mentally exhausted? And how do we measure success? We engaged non-evaluation staff in observation, interviewing, and prototyping to learn about our visitors' barriers and how we can overcome them. In this presentation, we share our methods for data collection and analysis, our learnings, and our approach to prototyping with a case study and group exercises.

Participants will learn what we discovered about visitor behavior in our temporary exhibition and how to use quick prototyping to test solutions. Participants will also learn how to create

baseline data, determine measurable data points for success, and analyze data using pivot tables to compare the baseline data to data collected during prototyping. We hope that our collaborative approach to evaluation will inspire participants to involve colleagues from across their organizations in their visitor studies research.

Abstract: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum launched a temporary exhibition, Burma's Path to Genocide, in 2021 with audio featuring firsthand accounts from Rohingya fleeing genocide in Burma (Myanmar). While the experience is well received by those that enter the exhibition and engage with the audio, visitation was low and few were using the audio devices. In this session, we will present our approach to the remediation of the exhibition to increase visitation and engagement. We will describe our methods and instruments for understanding visitors' barriers for entry and low audio use, and how we increased engagement.

In this case study, we will show how we worked with colleagues in Exhibition Design and Visitor Services to create and test a series of prototypes for new signage and audio distribution methods. We will describe how, through consistent data collection and analysis, we were able to reduce friction at the entrance. We will share rapid prototyping techniques to test solutions without investing time and money to build final designs that may not solve the real problems. We will also examine how we used visitor observations, interviews, insight from visitor services, and prototyping to learn about our visitors, identify pain points, and modify the exhibition entrance to increase engagement.

Participants will learn methods for creating baseline data, identifying key success metrics, and using rapid prototyping. And, they will learn how to compare baseline and prototype data with pivot tables in Google Sheets, so they can confidently communicate findings. In addition to a presentation on our project, methods, and findings, we will have small group discussions and hands-on instruction so that participants can implement similar methods at their own institutions.

Additional Links
https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/museum-exhibitions/burmas-path-to-genocide

How-To Session Series

In service of the conference theme, *Inclusive Practice: Broadening the Field by Welcoming New Perspectives*, The Visitors Studies Association coordinated the development of a How-to series of sessions that provided straight-forward evaluation practices from survey development to capacity building. Sessions we're offered throughout the conference and consistent of:

The Visitor Studies Journal: Where we are now, how you can get involved, and what is our collective vision for the future?
Presented Tuesday, July 11 by Jill Stein, Reimagine Research Group and VSA President

The Visitor Studies journal is a way for members and others in the visitor studies and informal learning fields to share their work and engage with content relevant to our work. Join this session with the Visitor Studies journal editors and VSA board members to learn more about the journal, including the current status of the journal, how you can get involved as an author or reviewer, what types of articles the journal is looking for and how to submit your work. The session will wrap up with a community dialogue about future directions for the journal and what role it can play in advancing research and practice.

Finely Tuned Surveys
Presented Tuesday, July 11 by Kari Ross Nelson and Stephen Ashton, Thanksgiving Point Institute

Surveys are one of the most widely used and flexible tools used by evaluators. In this session we'll discuss best practices for creating and conducting effective, accurate, equitable surveys, and together critique a fictious survey to see what it all looks like in action. We will also discuss basic principles of sampling and the pros and cons of the different methods of administering surveys (electronic, paper, etc.). This workshop is intended for early career museum and visitor studies professionals or for those who are looking to update their understanding of effective surveying.

Creative Problem-Solving in Visitor Studies Methods
Presented Wednesday, July 12 by Donnelly Hayde and Laura Weiss, COSI

What do you do when traditional data collection tools just won't work for your project? This session will explore strategies for learning from visitors in tricky physical contexts, in hard-to-wrangle programmatic situations, and in leisure experiences you just don't want to interrupt. Come for the practical tools to support your planning processes; stay for a sense of fun and a focus on positive visitor experiences.

Madness to my Methods: When to do what, and why
Presented Wednesday, July 12 by Ryan Auster, Museum of Science, Boston

There are many ways to collect survey data from museum visitors, but all are *not* equal when it comes to data quality, efficiency, and feasibility. This session will present an overview of several common methods – onsite intercepts, QR codes, kiosks, and email campaigns – to discuss the tradeoffs when using them. Using examples from prior research, we'll think about sampling, ease of use, and interpretability as guiding factors when helping you decide which method to use for your data collection needs.

Words and Numbers: Demystifying qualitative and quantitative analysis
Presented Thursday, July 13 by Ryan Auster, Museum of Science, Boston and Michelle Lentzner, J. Sickler Consulting.

Analyzing your data can seem daunting, but fear not! This session will present an overview of qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods, helping you understand how these two approaches can be combined to gain valuable insights and drive informed decisions. We'll cover planning, implementation, and reporting on your data, covering topics like coding open-text data and descriptive/inferential statistics, while providing ample time for questions and discussion.

Creating a Data Collection Team
Presented Thursday, July 13 by Meghan Kroning, Exploratorium and Chelsea Leingang, Seattle Art Museum

Join this final how-to session to learn creative and practical approaches to hiring a data collection team from the perspectives of two museums: one with an established evaluation team, and one that is reimagining and empowering frontline employees through evaluation. We'll share tips and tricks for capacity building for organizations of all sizes, and look forward to an active Q&A about what matters most to you!