

Visitor Studies 101

Systematic Tools for Reporting about the Visitor Experience

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Overview

- Two systems used at the Saint Louis Science Center to report about visitor experience:
 - Visitor Satisfaction Rating/Comment Cards
 - General experience of on-site visitors
 - SAMI – System for Assessing Mission Impact
 - Experience of participants in Science Center educational programs

Description of Comment Card System

- In use since 1996
- Based on system used by May Co.
- A tracking tool, not a full evaluation tool
- Monthly report
 - rating score
 - card distribution patterns
 - coded comments
- On-going use has allowed it to become a meaningful tool for staff across the Science Center.

Distribution

- Number of cards per month pre-determined based on anticipated attendance
 - typically 2000-7000 cards
 - ~5% of general public attendance.
- 3 distribution points:
 - Research and Eval. staff walking throughout facility
 - Box Office staff - with ticket sales
 - Parking Lot attendants - when visitors pay for parking as they leave
- ~5% return rate

Analysis – Monthly Rating Score

- Calculating the monthly rating:
 - Rating is an average of the received ratings, using point values for each rating level:
 - "1" = 0 points
 - "2" = 0 points
 - "3" = 67 points
 - "4" = 100 points
- Over time, this rating calculation has developed meaning among staff.

Analysis – Coded Comments

- Up to 5 comments per card
- 2 levels of coding:
 - Opportunities for Improvement / Positive & General Comments
 - Specific areas - e.g. Omnimax, Gift Shop, Programs, Exhibits, Food Service, Exhibit Maintenance, etc.
- Codes for specific areas developed over time, but are now a set group.

Areas Monitored

■ Reactions to ticketed venues

- educational content
- perceived value
- advertising messages

■ Visitor Amenities

- parking - cost, availability
- facility cleanliness
- food service quality
- staff interactions

■ Galleries & Programs

- content
- exhibit maintenance

Annual Reporting

- Reports on:
 - Frequencies with which comments in specific topics arise
 - Overall trends in positive comments & opportunity comments
 - Distribution of topics across the year

Strengths & Limitations

■ Strengths

- Systematic format to present visitor feedback - real data, not anecdotal.
- Rating system helps institution identify patterns and make connections between services and activities offered and visitor satisfaction.
- Longitudinal data makes comparisons over time possible.

■ Limitations

- No demographic information
- Self-selected respondents
- Monitoring/tracking tool only

SAMI - Overview

- System for Assessing Mission Impact
- SAMI collects and summarizes key performance indicators for educational programs at the Saint Louis Science Center.
- A tool to capture a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the overall impact of Science Center programs.



Development Process

- Literature review
 - Develop a common language
- Put educational philosophy in writing
 - Create a formal document
- Define impact
 - Need to define it in order to determine how to measure it
- Determine how to measure impact





Definition of Impact at the Saint Louis Science Center

“On an individual level, impact results from a Science Center offering that enables a participant to make personal connections between the content and experience of the offering and their own knowledge and experiences. In the short-term, **this is illustrated by a change in knowledge, understanding, attitude, interest, or enjoyment.**”

Sample SAMI Card



ADULTS: Tell us what you think!

				
	No, not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	Yes, definitely!
Did you, or others in your group, learn content and/or skills from this program?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did you enjoy this program?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did this program make you want to try another experience with science or technology?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did this program reinforce or increase any positive attitudes you have towards science or technology?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please describe what you got out of this program:

How could we improve this program?

Including today, how often have you tried a Science Center program or visited the Science Center? (Check one.)

- 1st time ever
 1st time in last 12 months
 1-2 times/year
 3-4 times/year
 5+ times/year

To receive information about other programs and/or membership, please give us your e-mail address:

Gender: M F

Science Center Member? Yes No

ZIP _____

Sample



Reporting on Impact

■ Quantitative

Mean ratings of the 4 rating questions (each on a 4-point scale)

- Knowledge
- Enjoyment
- Interest
- Attitude

Impact =

Knowledge + Enjoyment + Interest + Attitude

Reporting on Impact

■ Qualitative

- Coded responses to open-ended question, "Please describe what you got out of this program."
- Codes are based on the Impact definition

Reporting on Impact

- Monthly, Quarterly, Annual reports
- Reports by program, as requested
- *Opening Minds to Science* – an annual report to the community

Strengths & Limitations

■ Strengths

- Comparisons across programs.
- Longitudinal data makes comparisons over time possible.
- Provides a quantitative measure for programs.

■ Limitations

- Not a full evaluation of any particular program.
- Primarily addresses short-term impact.

Final thoughts

- Need buy-in.
- Takes time to develop on-going systems.
- Can start by addressing basic needs and refine over time.
- Consider your institution's mission, vision, etc. when developing tools, especially those to assess impact.

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