

# Visitor Studies 101

American Association of Museums

Los Angeles, California, 2010

Surveys & Focus Groups

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# Visitor Studies 101

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## Surveys

- Self-completed questionnaires
- Interview-style surveys  
= “Structured Interviews”

## Focus groups



# Surveys - Common Uses

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- Exhibits & Programs
- Front-end, Summative, Remedial
- Post-program surveys often include questions about future programs
- A survey is often one part of a multi-pronged study (triangulate on your findings)



# Surveys - Research Basics

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Well defined...

- Research questions
- Evidence of impacts (summative)
- Target audience
- Roles of personnel

Research design is suitable for...

- Research questions
- Target audience
- Available resources
- Paper vs. electronic



# Surveys - Variety of Question Types

- Open-ended
- Fixed response
- Rating
  - individual items on a scale
- Ranking
  - pitting items against each other for comparison
- Every question for a reason



# Surveys - Instrument design

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- Keep it short
- Brief explanation of why
- Logical progression of questions
- Easier questions first
- More thoughtful or tricky questions later
- Demographics last
- Thank you



# Surveys - Sampling

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- Random Sampling
  - “Probability-based sample”
  - Systematic; removes bias
  - Every Nth visitor
  - Statistically reliable data; Predictive findings
- Self-selected samples (on-line)
- Sample size



# Surveys - Other Considerations

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- Thank you gifts
- Special situations
  - federal property
  - university IRB (ERB) requirements (ethical treatment of human subjects)
- Multi-lingual



# Self-Completed Questionnaire

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## Data collection

- + Easier and less labor intensive
- Quality of data is difficult to control

# Interview- Style Survey

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## Data collection

- Requires more skill
- More labor intensive
- + Interviewer can ensure complete responses and probe for clarity
- + Can use sorting activities



# Self-Completed Questionnaire

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## Research needs

- Simple questions
- Some questions are easier to answer privately, e.g. Uncomfortable content

# Interview- Style Survey

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## Research needs

- More complex questions that require exploration and probing



# Self-Completed Questionnaire

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## Demographics

- Easier to answer privately
- Include a brief explanation of why you need this
- “The museum hopes to serve a diverse audience, please tell us a bit about yourself...”

# Interview- Style Survey

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## Demographics

- Can be awkward to ask face-to-face
- Back of the clipboard technique



# Surveys - Analysis

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- On-line survey services, Excel
- Fixed responses: tally to find frequency
- Ratings & Ranking: tally to find most highly and lowly rated items
- Open-ended responses: quantitative and qualitative data
  - Coding = read and categorize responses
  - Tally responses by code to quantify
  - easy to do in a spreadsheet



| Case # | 2. What do you think is the primary mission or purpose of the Big City Botanical Garden? |  |  |  |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1      | Educate people about plants                                                              |  |  |  |
| 2      | Recreation – education, then preservation                                                |  |  |  |
| 3      | Education                                                                                |  |  |  |
| 4      | Nice place – green space for relaxing – education                                        |  |  |  |
| 5      | To preserve & educate                                                                    |  |  |  |
| 7      | Education – about plants, conservation & environment                                     |  |  |  |



# Focus Groups - Common Uses

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- Exhibits & Programs
- Front-end, Formative, Summative
- When you need to hear people discuss an issue/content
- To generate ideas and suggestions



# Focus Groups - Typical

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- Community Conversation, or Group Interview
- Typical to invite members or other facility participants (in-house projects)
- 1.5 to 2 hours
- 10 to 12 participants
- Refreshments !
- Thank you gifts



# Focus Groups - Pros/Cons

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- + Allow for conversation among participants
- + Great for brainstorming
- + Teachers
- Time consuming to arrange
- Experienced staff to facilitate
- Bulky data can be slow to analyze



# Focus Groups - How To

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- Welcome
- Permission to record
- Reason for the meeting
  - how will findings be used
- Rules and housekeeping
- 3 to 5 main questions to address
- Additional questions/issues in case time allows



# Focus Groups - Tips

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- Audio record
- Good listening, eye contact
- Repeat and clarify
- Bring focus back on target as necessary
- Pull in quiet participants
- Gently handle big talkers



# Focus Groups - Analysis

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- Qualitative data
- Review entire session transcript
- Identify areas of agreement, controversy, other trends
- Group comments on common themes and summarize
- Include quotes in report



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[www.visitorstudies.com](http://www.visitorstudies.com)