

Evaluation in practice: Stories from the front-line

Institutional Highlights

Great Lakes Science Center: We now think, “let’s get some data!”

Having the time and brain space to conduct evaluation is a major barrier. It's hard to fit evaluation on the plate with everything else you may have going on.

- Front-end studies may be the easiest form of evaluation to integrate into fast-moving projects and processes.
- Quick efforts, i.e., a big sheet posted to ask for staff and volunteer input on a name for a new area or a quick member survey to find out what they want to see in an adult science event are great ways to collect some data to help projects more confidently make decisions.
- The evaluation community is wonderfully generous, non-judgmental, and resource-rich. There are so many people willing to help you if you just ask!

Children’s Discovery Museum: Evaluation can be simple, and we do it every day; most of the time we just need to write it down.

Buy-in can be difficult. Most people believe that evaluation is overly time consuming, and it is hard to get the results you want or are looking/hoping for.

- Helping staff take a step back when initially thinking about evaluation and thinking about the big picture problems is one of the best way to get people excited and involved.
- Many times we have found that we already have some of the data we need in house – we just need to use it.
- Volunteers are a great resource of time.

Powerhouse Science Center: We think about what evaluation is in different ways now. Talking to colleagues and reflecting with your team is evaluation!

Sometimes, the data you collect will not be useful. Though frustrating, it helps to catch this and change your strategy, even if you can’t use all of the data you collected.

- Rely on your colleagues. Use your networks to help you find answers that you are grappling with at your institution.
- Sometimes you get surprising and super helpful information that you did not expect to hear.
- Data-driven studies can provide immediately useable, useful information.

Evaluation in practice: Stories from the front-line

Resources

Associations and Topical Interest groups

- Visitor Studies Association (visitorstudies.org)
- American Alliance of Museums – Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE)
- ASTC – Research and Evaluation Community of Practice (RECoP)
- American Association for State and Local History – Visitor Voices

Tools & Guides

- *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Michael Quinn Patton. Sage Publication, 2008.
- *Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for museums and other informal educational settings*. Judy Diamond, Jessica J. Luke, David Henry Uttal. AltaMira Press, 2009.
- *Program Evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines*. Jody Fitzpatrick, Jmes Sanders, Blaine Worthen. Pearson Education, 2004.
- *Team-Based Inquiry Guide* and related tools
 - nisenet.org/catalog/tools_guides/team-based_inquiry_guide
- University of Wisconsin Extension has resources on program development and evaluation
 - www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/
- Visitor Studies Association conference, workshops, and competencies
 - visitorstudies.org/news/3/185/Visitor-Studies-Theory-Research-and-Practice/d,vsa-detail
- American Evaluation Association conference and institute
 - www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=99
- Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education website and resources
 - informalscience.org/evaluation