

MUSEUM VISITOR EVALUATION

Ross Loomis (1987). Museum Visitor Evaluation: New Tool for Management. Vol. 3 AASLH Management Series. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History. \$19.95 for AASLH members; \$21.95 for non-members.

Looking for a textbook on visitor evaluation? If so, you will find Loomis' book exactly what you need. It is also a valuable resource for those who study visitor behavior. And finally, it is an extremely useful reference book for professionals in exhibition-type settings. The following gives a brief synopsis of the book, chapter by chapter.

Chapter 1: Understanding Museum Visitors: Evaluation and Management

This chapter "discusses the nature of visitor evaluation and its relationship to management, provides suggestions for using evaluation in museums, and concludes with a brief history of museum visitor research".

Chapter 2: Evaluating Attendances: Making Figures Count.

This chapter describes a number of different methods for collecting attendance data, some important evaluation issues, and a few practical tips for improving attendance evaluation.

Chapter 3: The Visitor Survey

Chapter 3 provides a basic rationale for undertaking surveys, numerous examples of visitor-survey topics, and guidelines for conducting surveys.

Chapter 4: Evaluation, Marketing, and Audience Development

This chapter: (1) "shows how a marketing plan for nonprofit organizations needs the kind of evaluation discussed throughout this book;" (2) presents surveys conducted in the community rather than at the museum as a tool for measuring public perceptions of institutional identity and specific barriers to visitation; and (3) focuses on "ways to analyze the reasons people do or do not visit and suggests ways to develop an external survey to help with audience development."

Chapter 5: Evaluating Visitor Orientation

Chapter 5 "discusses the psychological basis of orientation and provides suggestions for evaluating orientation needs of visitors throughout the course of a museum visit."

Chapter 6: Exhibit Evaluation

This chapter "provides ideas for evaluating questions about exhibits and analyzing whether these environments meet the needs of visitors." Some of the questions include: "Does my exhibit work the way I intended?" "Do circulation patterns support or conflict with interpretation goals?" "Are visitors reading labels and learning from them?"

Chapter 7: Using Evaluation to Improve Programs

Program evaluation is similar to the exhibit-evaluation process except that events and programs become the focus of attention.

General Comments: One of the features that makes this book useful to both the novice and experienced evaluator is the generous use of sample surveys and forms. This book should be an important part of your library if you are involved with visitor evaluation.

This book may be ordered from:

American Association for State & Local History
172 Second Avenue North, Suite 102
Nashville, TN 37201

HOW TO USE EVALUATION

Marcia Linn (1976). Exhibit Evaluation - Informed Decision Making. Curator, 19:4, 291-302.

In this article Linn suggested how evaluation can serve science and technology centers. One of her points in this paper was to describe the following five ways that information from evaluation can be used:

1. To make minor changes to exhibits already installed (for example, provide stools so small visitors can see an exhibit).
2. To decide which exhibits to withdraw when there is crowding (the unpopular ones).
3. To develop new exhibits matched to the people who are now visiting.
4. To design new exhibits that will make the center more appealing to a particular group.
5. To plan an effective publicity campaign.