

MEMORANDUM

To: COVES Leadership Advisory Council

From: Marta Beyer and Keith Allison

Date: January 25, 2019

Subject: COVES Summative Evaluation Findings

The Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies (COVES) aims to help science centers gather and share data to better understand visitors' experiences. As described on its website, COVES "is designed to unite museums across the country to systematically collect, analyze, and report on visitor experience data" (Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies, 2019). This work grew out of a need to have a reliable system for science centers and museums of all sizes to collect and compare visitor data across sites. In response to this need, Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) support was received in 2012 (LG-66-12-0634-12) to host a forum of museum professionals charged with discussing the desirability and requirements of such a system for the field. This project, called "Creating a Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies" (C-COVES), identified and described in a White Paper key principles for establishing a data collection collaboration and a plan of action for moving this work forward.¹ Additional IMLS support was received in 2014 (MG-20-14-0060-14) to build the resulting system. Throughout the process, COVES has desired to raise the evaluation capacity of the field, in addition to providing timely, relevant data. COVES' efforts over the last four years have resulted in a collaborative currently involving 20 organizations from across the United States and Canada.²

Institutions that commit to participating in COVES first receive an onsite training to ensure that the goals of the project are thoroughly communicated to institutional stakeholders and so that data collectors receive systematic training in the sampling and data collection procedure common to all sites. A core survey instrument is then modified as necessary to ensure that each site is collecting relevant data that will be comparable to that of other participants. Monthly survey targets are set based on visitation numbers and the size of the institution, and data collection is staffed by personnel at each institution. COVES then works to assist Participating Institutions throughout the process by maintaining the electronic surveys, creating digital dashboards for reporting, providing supplementary training materials as necessary, and whenever possible, connecting sites in discussion to create a Community of Practice (CoP).

For the summative evaluation of COVES, the Museum of Science's Research and Evaluation Department studied the program's impacts on participating museums and museum professionals. Specifically, this evaluation was designed to:

¹ The C-COVES White Paper can be found online here: <http://www.informalscience.org/creating-collaboration-ongoing-visitor-experience-studies-c-coves-white-paper>

² The total number of active paying members as of January 1, 2019 was 23.

- Examine participants' overall satisfaction with the collaboration and their likelihood to recommend it to others;
- Understand the impact that COVES is having on Participating Institutions;
- Assess whether or not COVES is accomplishing the fundamental principles set out in the C-COVES White Paper; and
- Gain feedback that will help the program in the future, especially in terms of understanding how to build community and why some organizations decided to stop participating.

This report describes summative evaluation findings from surveys and interviews conducted in Fall of 2018. Surveys were sent to institutional stakeholders from all 20 Participating Institutions and included questions about how participants had engaged in COVES, as well as how participation may have affected their work and that of their organization. To gather the names and emails of these professionals, the evaluator reached out to the Data Collection Managers and Governing Body members at each site. These key project participants were asked to send along contact information for anyone else at their organization who was aware of or used COVES in order to invite them to the survey. The evaluator indicated that potential invitees might include people who had attended the COVES training, data collectors who were currently collecting the COVES surveys, and any individuals involved in using the results. Overall, online surveys were distributed to 221 museum professionals, and 95 individuals submitted completed surveys for a 43% response rate.

Beyond the surveys, interviews were conducted for the summative evaluation with professionals from organizations that no longer participate in COVES. The main aim of these half-hour interviews was to learn how the program worked for them and why they are no longer taking part in COVES. Invitations for these phone interviews were sent to six professionals. These individuals represented six of the seven sites that participated and/or helped pilot COVES yet are no longer taking part. Three individuals ultimately agreed to participate in the interview for a 50% response rate. Both the interview and survey instruments used for this evaluation can be found at the end of this report.

Data analysis included using descriptive statistics, such as counts and percentages, for close-ended questions, and an inductive coding process to identify themes emerging across several individuals' open-ended explanations (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participants' written responses were often split into multiple parts to address different themes. Thus, in the various tables in this report, some quotes have ellipses at the beginning or end to illustrate that they are part of a longer remark. Throughout the report, it is also important to note that individuals who chose "N/A" answer choices or skipped close-ended questions are not represented in the graphs. Adjusted sample numbers and percentages are used in the figures when this is the case.

Limitations to the study methods include the fact that the institutional contacts may have interpreted the request to provide contact information for those involved in COVES in a variety of ways. Thus, some museums included a wider range of individuals than others. Moreover, since membership has grown especially over the last two years, some respondents were from organizations that are newer to COVES. These individuals may have had fewer impacts to report, as they likely had less experience with the project or with using its data. Finally, the

interview sample size is small, so these findings may not represent all the reasons that caused museums to stop participating in COVES.

The remainder of this document is broken into two overarching sections: (1) findings from the survey and (2) findings from the interviews. Each section provides a brief overview of the respective sample and describes the main themes that emerged regarding participants' satisfaction and likelihood to recommend COVES, the impacts of the project, key accomplishments related to the guiding principles, and any suggestions for improvements.

A note about the positionality of the evaluators connected with this report:

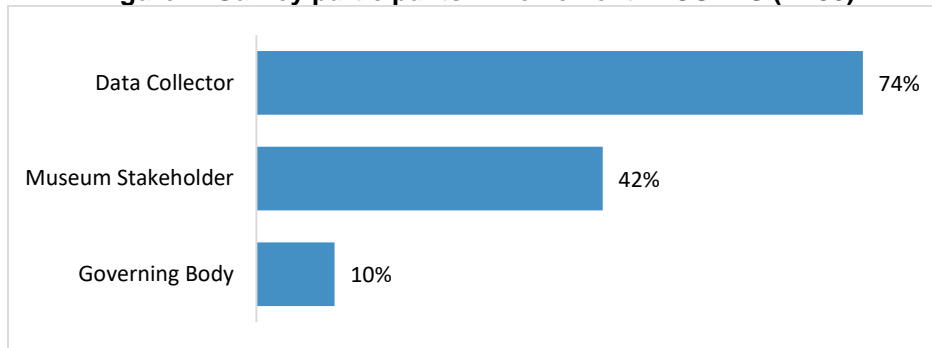
This summative evaluation was conducted by members of the Research and Evaluation Department at the Museum of Science, Boston, which is also where three members of the COVES Research Team are based. However, the evaluators involved with the summative evaluation have no connection to the running or management of the COVES project. Their only interaction with the project has been with data collection of the visitor exit survey at the Museum of Science, Boston, and in the case of the lead summative evaluator, these efforts have been extremely minimal. The evaluators did consult with Research Team members to help with the initial planning of the study, but these individuals had no input into the analysis, conclusions, or findings of this report.

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

Description of survey sample

Overall, the 95 survey participants' roles as a part of COVES varied, but most indicated that they had helped collect data. As can be seen in Figure 1, over 70% of the sample indicated that they performed data collection for COVES while 42% considered themselves to be a museum stakeholder. When given the opportunity to explain in more detail their role as a museum stakeholder, 38 of the individuals specified what their work entailed, with most saying it was either research/evaluation related (n=16) or administration (n=11). Of the survey respondents, 10% described being involved on the COVES Governing Body, the shared decision-making core team for the project.

Figure 1: Survey participants' involvement in COVES (N=95)



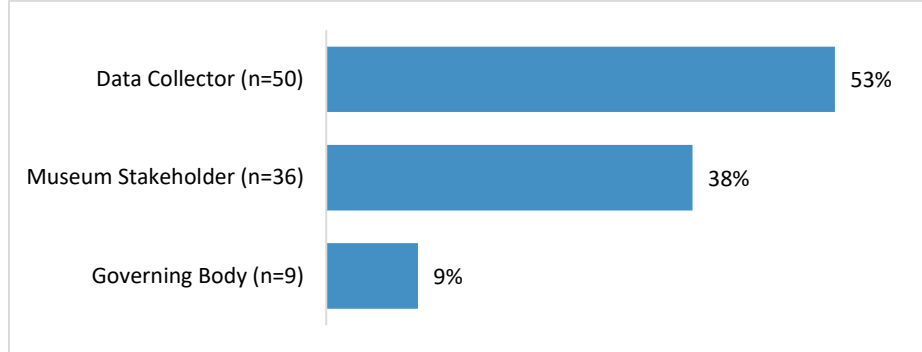
Note: participants could have checked more than one response.

While participants had the option of choosing multiple responses when filling out this question, and it was expected that individuals might have overlapping roles in COVES, analysis in this report often presents survey respondents broken out by one primary role. This re-categorizing was done in order to provide a better sense of how people with generally higher or lower levels of COVES involvement have been impacted by the project.

Thus, for the rest of the report, anyone who checked “Governing Body” was separated into the group referred to as Governing Body no matter what other categories they chose. This distinction is due to the fact that these individuals are considered part of the COVES core team and have extensive knowledge and interaction with the project. The category called Data Collectors for the remainder of the report includes those respondents who indicated that their *only* task in connection to COVES was to collect data. While this is an important role within the project, these individuals were typically less involved in the project and any organizational decisions that might result from the data. The remaining Stakeholders category includes participants who indicated that they were not a Governing Body member and yet were not solely a Data Collector. These individuals generally played a more involved role regardless of whether or not they have taken part in data collection, since they likely interacted with the data after it had been collected to think about how to apply the findings to their own work or the work of their institution. Figure

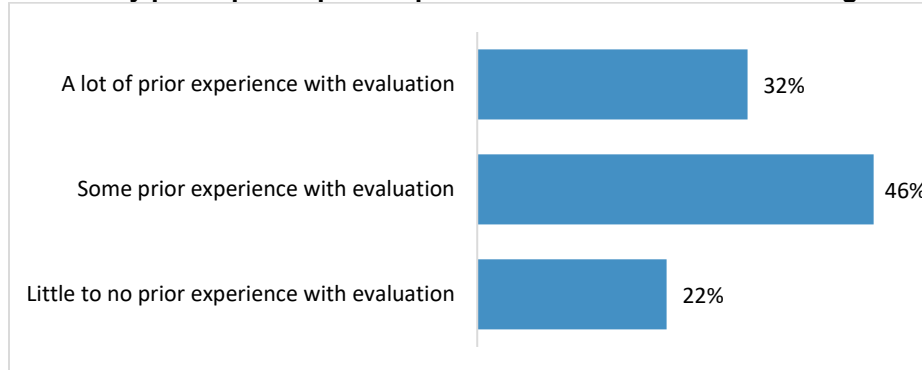
2 shows the breakdown of participants by primary role. Even when re-categorizing individuals in this way, it can be seen that the majority of survey respondents were Data Collectors.

Figure 2: Survey participants' involvement in COVES by primary role



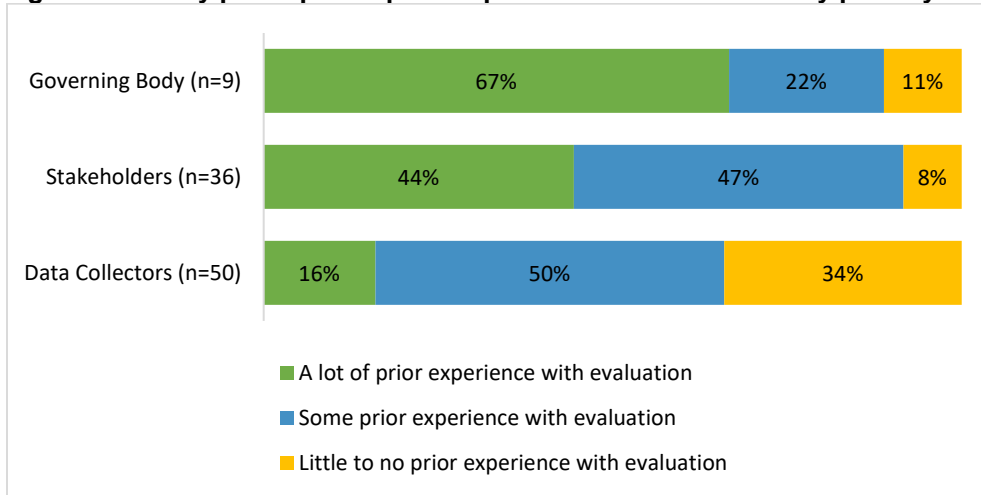
The demographic data also show that survey participants had a range of evaluation experience before joining COVES. Over 75% of survey respondents said they were already somewhat familiar with evaluation or using data, with 32% rating themselves as having “a lot” of experience with this type of work. However, evaluation was fairly new to some, as 22% said they had “little to no” experience with this topic prior to taking part in COVES. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Survey participants' prior experience with evaluation and using data (N=95)



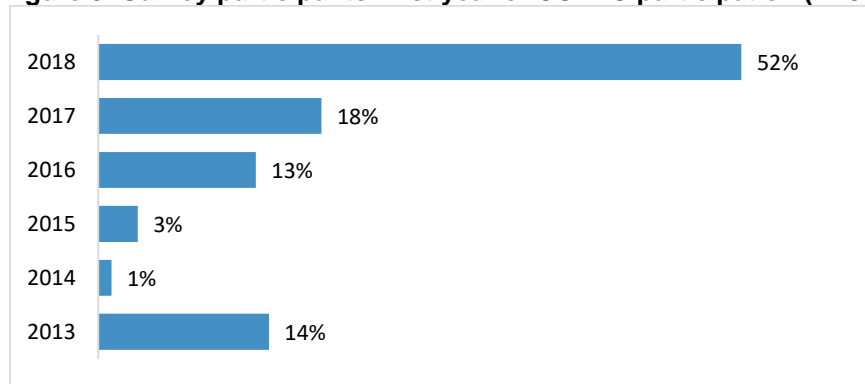
The data showing participants' previous evaluation experience by role suggest that Data Collectors in particular were newer to evaluation than those in other groups. Only 16% of Data Collectors said they had “a lot” of prior experience with evaluation as compared with 67% of Governing Body members and 44% of Stakeholders. See Figure 4.

Figure 4: Survey participants' prior experience with evaluation by primary role



Finally, survey participants indicated they were typically fairly new to COVES. Over half of respondents said they first began participating in the project in 2018. In addition, 31% said they had started participating in COVES in 2016 or 2017. However, 14% of the sample had been involved since 2013 as part of the original cohort from the C-COVES grant. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Survey participants' first year of COVES participation (N=95)



Altogether, these demographic data reflect the fact that COVES has grown in recent years and relies on the efforts of many individuals. Indeed, COVES has roughly tripled in size over the last four years, so it makes sense that many of the survey respondents would be fairly new to the collaborative. It is also understandable that the sample includes a high percentage of Data Collectors, as many people are needed as a part of the data collection process to ensure monthly survey data collection quotas are met. Lastly, it is not surprising to see that the Governing Body participants had the most evaluation experience coming into COVES, since they were chosen to advise this evaluation-based project and often brought this particular expertise.

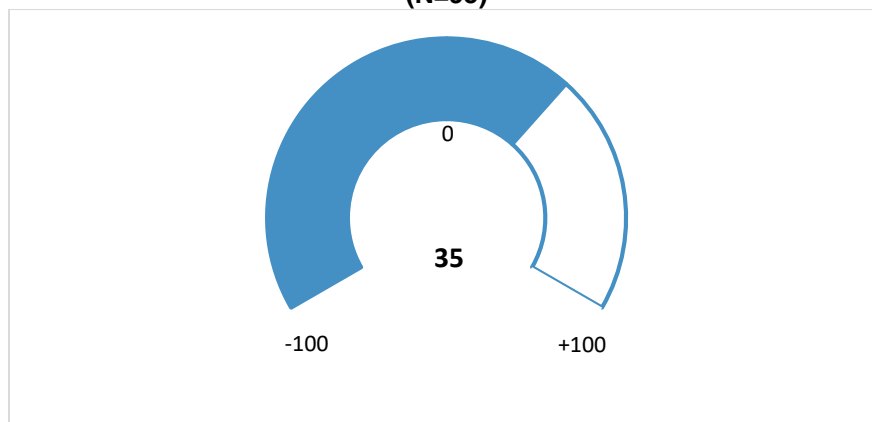
Survey findings related to overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend

To understand museum professionals' overall feelings about the project, the survey asked two questions from the official COVES instrument that capture individuals' Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Overall Experience Rating (OER). Participants were also asked to reflect on the usefulness of key aspects of COVES and describe elements that have been especially satisfying or could be improved. Evaluation results indicate that there is a range of satisfaction levels with the project, often dependent on one's role in COVES but that, on the whole, participants rate their experience with the project very positively. Findings also show that the trainings, dashboard, and instruments connected with COVES are viewed as especially useful aspects of the project.

Finding 1: Professionals who are involved in using COVES data are more likely to recommend COVES than professionals who are only a part of the data collection.

Just as visitors are asked on the official COVES survey to rate their likelihood to recommend the museum they attended, museum professionals were asked "On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend COVES to colleagues at other museums?" For this question, a Net Promoter Score (NPS) is calculated that can range from -100 to 100. As can be seen in Figure 6, participants' net score for COVES was a 35.³ In terms of the breakdown of participants' ratings, 48% were promoters and rated their likelihood to recommend as high (9 or 10), 38% were passives and gave a moderate rating (7 or 8), and 14% were detractors and gave a low rating (0-6).

Figure 6: Survey participants' likelihood to recommend COVES to colleagues at other museums (N=95)

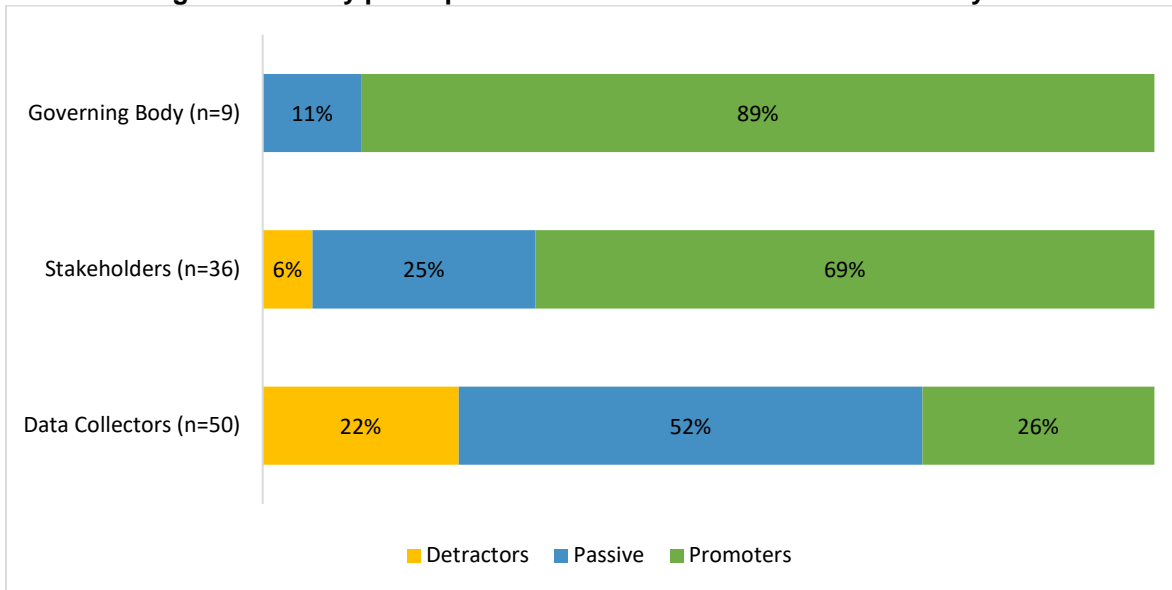


When analyzing participants' NPS ratings in terms of the three categories of COVES involvement, Governing Body and Stakeholders were more likely to recommend COVES than

³ Net Promoter Score is calculated by subtracting the percent of Detractors, or those who gave ratings of 0-6, from the percent of promoters, or those who gave ratings of 9-10. The percentage of Passives, or those who gave a rating of 7-8, are not included in the calculation.

Data Collectors. As can be seen in Figure 7, 89% of Governing Body members and 69% of Stakeholders were promoters. In contrast, only 26% of Data Collectors were promoters, with almost as many indicating they were detractors. Most Data Collectors rated COVES in the more uncertain, passive category with a rating of 7-8.

Figure 7: Survey participants' likelihood to recommend COVES by role



Follow-up open-ended responses helped provide a sense of why individuals were either willing to recommend COVES or not. In particular, the museum professionals who were highly satisfied with COVES often explained their rating by mentioning that the project allowed for comparisons to other museums (n=12), offered a service to the field (n=9), and gave them an understanding of the guest experience (n=6). Those who were more passive about the project rarely mentioned these aspects of COVES, and none of the detractors identified these benefits. Instead, participants who were less likely to recommend COVES were apt to mention challenges related to implementing the survey. For example, participants who gave passive ratings more frequently indicated concerns about the survey length (n=4), cost and staff time needed (n=3), and sampling (n=3). While on-the-floor issues were noted by individuals across the NPS categories (n=6), when considering if they would recommend COVES, promoters generally mentioned aspects they liked, detractors raised issues they ran into, and passive raters brought up aspects related to both areas. See Table 1 for additional codes, counts, and example quotes.

Table 1: Follow-up responses explaining rating of “On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend COVES to colleagues at other museums?” (n=76)

	Promoter (n=42)	Passive (n=24)	Detractor (n=10)	Total	Example Quote
It allows for comparisons to other museums	12	1		13	COVES provides a great metric for comparing audiences and audiences' perceptions across regions and museums, which is super useful! (#42)
It provides a valuable service	9			9	It's a thoughtful project that offers insights that are not available to science centers anywhere else. (#84)
It helps institutions understand the guest experience	6	3		9	It is a good way to acquire the voice and opinion of visitors/customers. (#24)
It provides useful information	6	2		8	It's very detailed. You can get a lot of insight from the data that is compiled. (#100)
It is a helpful tool for making data-informed decisions	5	1		6	I believe it's been an incredibly insightful tool that when utilized properly can influence decision making for our organization. (#20)
It has helped build evaluation capacity	5			5	COVES has helped build the capacity for evaluation and data collection in our museum. (#68)
It is easy to take part	2	4	1	7	Survey is already built, which would allow other museums without (or with minimal) evaluation capacity to use data to inform their practices.... (#31)
A general, positive comment	2	4		6	Great system, lots of trust. I have done so many times. (#28)
There can be challenges with the on-the-floor data collection	2	1	3	6	COVES depends heavily on reliable wifi, which is not always present. (#22)
Our institution hasn't had a chance to use the data yet	2	1	2	5	We are still early in our COVES journey and have not yet been able to use any of the data we have collected. Once that happens I will be a better judge of the program's value. (#104)
A positive comment about the instrument	2	1		3	I believe the instrument is comprehensive and balanced. It asks many useful questions yet still permits a degree of customization for local queries or site-specific concerns. (#103)
There can be challenges with the survey being so long	1	4		5	It takes a little too long for our guests to do and makes it hard to us to recruit participants. Also, people who don't know how to use technology struggle or don't take the survey at all. (#105)

	Promoter (n=42)	Passive (n=24)	Detractor (n=10)	Total	Example Quote
There can be challenges with the cost and staff time needed	1	3		4	While I think a lot of museums would benefit from the data that is collected, a lot of smaller museums might find the costs prohibitive, as well as the amount of effort required by staff. (#23)
We want more institutions to join	1		1	2	I think COVES is a valuable resource for museums and it will benefit COVES the more museums participate. (#65)
There can be challenges with sampling		3		3	In my opinion, COVES is a fairly comprehensive survey for science museum visitor experience. On the other hand, this is at a compromise. For example, many visitors are unable to spare 4-5 mins for the survey, and hence we might be selecting for certain groups that are more lenient with time. (#30)
I'm not sure of the impacts		1	3	4	I don't really know enough about the uses of it to recommend. (#60)
Other	2	5	1	8	...but I would not recommend it to colleagues from other institutions because it was not made for them. (#106)

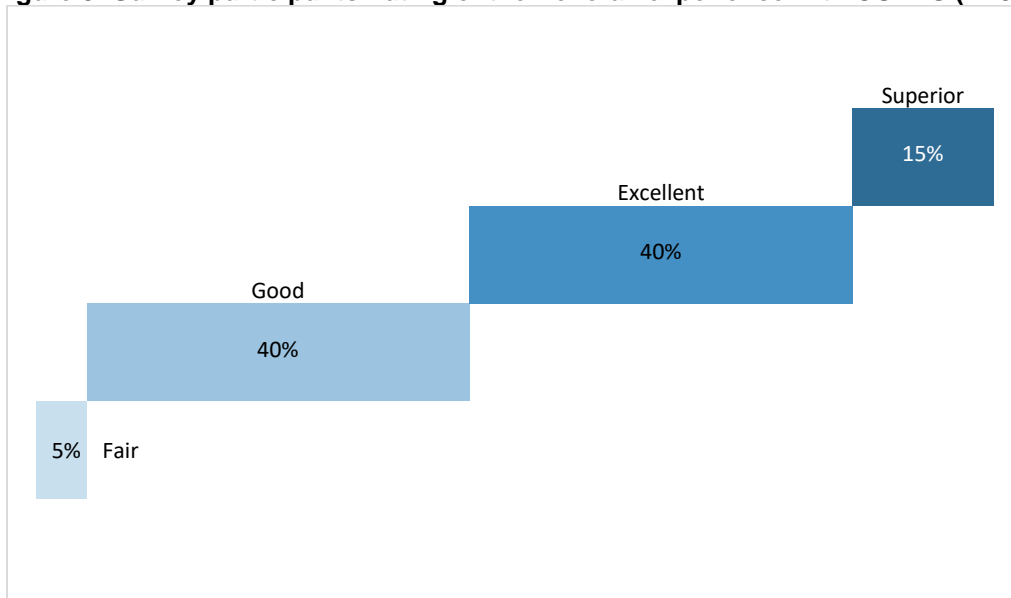
Altogether, these data suggest that those more involved in the project and with the usage of COVES, such as the Governing Body and Stakeholders, are more likely to recommend it than those who solely collect visitor feedback. Open-ended responses related to the NPS ratings emphasize that those who gave high Net Promoter Scores credit many of the core strengths of COVES whereas those less likely to recommend tend to bring up challenges. Although it is important to highlight the fact that Data Collectors, in general, seem to be less enthused with the project, it is encouraging to see the Stakeholder group rating COVES so highly. These individuals are often seen as key end-users of the data, since they are in positions to act on the findings.

Finding 2: Professionals generally gave high ratings when describing their experience with COVES and were especially satisfied with the ease of administering the survey and also the ability to make comparisons. They also typically provided positive ratings for the trainings, dashboard, and shared instruments.

Similar to the official COVES survey, the summative evaluation asked professionals to rate their experience with the project on a scale known as the Overall Experience Rating (OER). As COVES explains in their instrument documentation, this question provides the option “to distinguish truly Superior experiences from those that are still Excellent in nature but may not go ‘above and beyond’ – [as] recent research has suggested that while virtually all visitors rating Superior to OER are Promoters for NPS, only about 40% of Promoters on NPS also rate Superior” (Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies, 2017, p. 3). Figure 8 indicates that survey respondents typically rated their experience with COVES positively, with 95% of museum professionals rating it as “good” or above. More specifically, 40% of survey

respondents gave their overall experience with COVES a rating of “excellent” and 15% of survey respondents felt their experience was “superior.” There were no individuals who rated their experience as “poor.”

Figure 8: Survey participants’ rating of their overall experience with COVES (N=95)



A close look at the breakdown of who provided the highest ratings shows it was generally Stakeholders and Governing Body members who felt they were having a “superior” experience. In particular, nine Stakeholders, four Governing Body members, and one Data Collector chose the “superior” category. On the other hand, Data Collectors accounted for the majority of individuals who rated the project either “good” or “fair.”

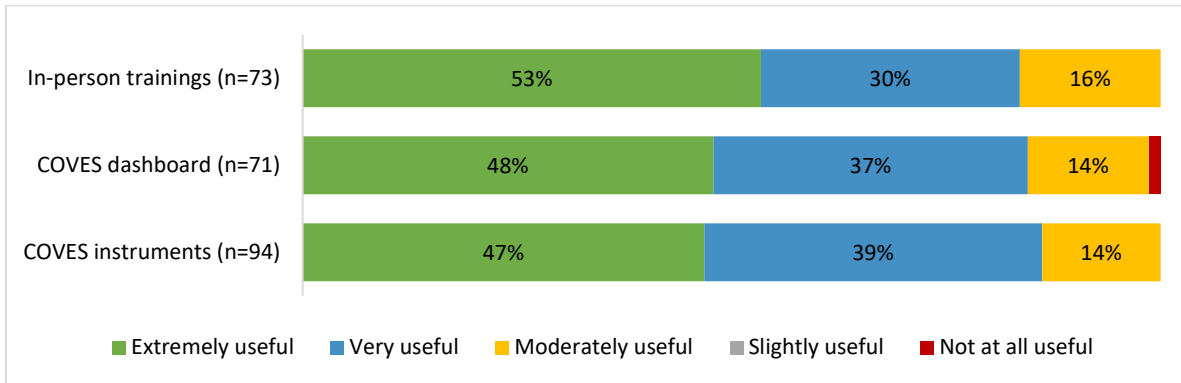
As a follow-up to the OER rating question, survey respondents were asked to explain what aspects of COVES were most satisfying. In describing the COVES features they felt were especially strong, many museum professionals noted parts of the data collection as well as pieces related to the data analysis. Specifically, when talking about data collection, professionals indicated how easy it was to administer the survey (n=21) and also highlighted the instrument (n=7), often saying it was beneficial to have a shared set of tested questions. When describing strengths of the analysis, professionals liked the fact that comparisons could be done with other organizations (n=17). They also appreciated the dashboard (n=12), the online portal where museums can make these comparisons, with some commenting that it was easy to use and provided accessible data. The support from the project team was mentioned as an asset of the project (n=12), with a few people describing the responsiveness of the core team. See Table 2 for quotes related to these aspects as well as other satisfying features of COVES.

Table 2: Responses to “What aspects of COVES are you most satisfied with?”(n=83)

Code	Counts	Example quote
The ease of administering the survey	21	Easy to use. iPad mini is easy for most users to handle. (#22)
The comparisons that can be done with other organizations	17	Being able to compare across the industry. (#42)
The dashboard	14	The dashboard is attractive. (#91)
The support from the project team	12	COVES was always very open to suggestions and changes. They also were easy to work with on implementing changes and were fast to respond to queries. (#65)
The instrument	7	We have an instrument that has been tested and will evolve as museums evolve. (#68)
The data and information	4	The data is a valuable resource. (#23)
The ability to filter the data	3	Being able to specifically identify influencing groups of visitors. (#20)
The trainings	3	The training...(#19)
The ability to get data about visitors	3	I like that we get feedback from people to see what we can improve on. (#24)
The customizable aspects of the survey or reports	3	...Ease of customizing aspects of the survey to our needs. (#27)
The overall concept of the project	3	The concept of museums collaborating and dedicating resources to evaluation of this kind with a substantial timeline over which to collect data. The focus on standards and ethics as well as re-enforcing this commitment to required training. Having opportunity to participate in an evaluation initiative and working in a team. (#29)
The impact it has had on many staff in our organization	3	...Culture of evaluation it has inspired in our staff (#88)
The fact that the survey platform works well	3	The website availability and reliability seems strong. (#103)
The ability to access our own data	2	Still receiving my institution's raw data so that I have the option to do more in-depth analyses as needed. (#108)
The ability to use the results	2	The ability to match COVES data with trends that we see around the museum. (#94)
The ability to collect ongoing data	2	The fact that we have a mechanism to collect on-going data about the museum. (#90)
The fact that it is affordable	2	...and the fact that COVES takes care of the data-crunching makes this affordable so that we can get long-term data instead of snap-shots. (#46)
The interaction with visitors	2	...and opportunity to talk to guest. (#83)
Other	9	How much the network has grown and how user-focused the study has been. (#117)

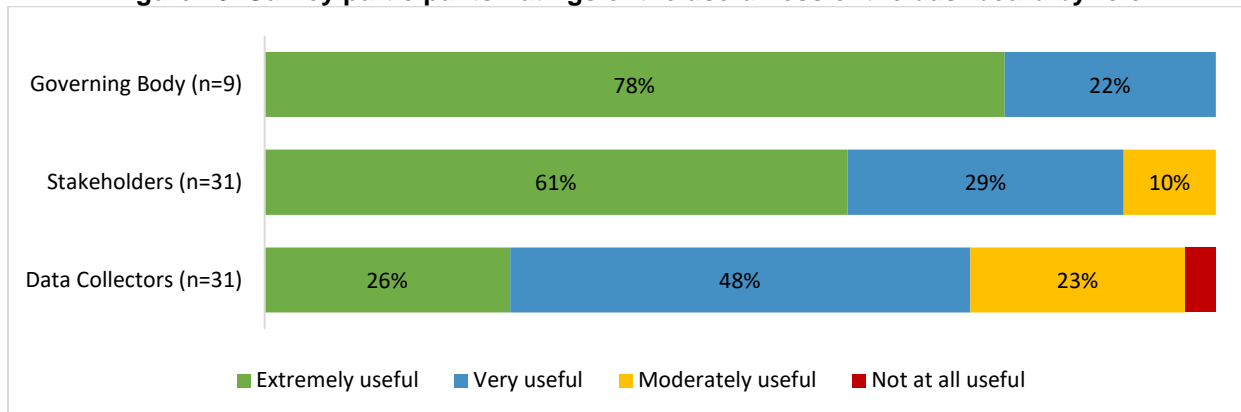
Several of the themes heard in the open-ended question about especially satisfying COVES features match participants' ratings of the usefulness of certain project aspects. When asked to provide close-ended feedback on key project areas, museum professionals gave high ratings to the trainings, dashboard, and instruments. Over 80% of respondents rated each of these key elements of COVES as “very useful” or “extremely useful.” See Figure 9.

Figure 9: Survey participants' ratings of the usefulness of the COVES trainings, dashboard, and instruments



A deeper analysis of the dashboard ratings shows that Governing Body members and Stakeholders were especially pleased with the dashboard of COVES data. Figure 10 highlights survey respondents' usefulness ratings broken down by primary role. As can be seen, 78% of Governing Body members and 61% of Stakeholders rated the dashboard as “extremely useful.” Data collectors, on the other hand, were less likely to rate the dashboard in this way, with only 26% saying it was “extremely useful” and 3% saying it was “not at all useful.” However, it is not surprising to see fewer Data Collectors giving high ratings to the dashboard, as they likely have less interaction with this resource. Indeed, 19 Data Collectors either skipped this question or said “N/A,” perhaps indicating a lack of involvement with the dashboard.

Figure 10: Survey participants' ratings of the usefulness of the dashboard by role



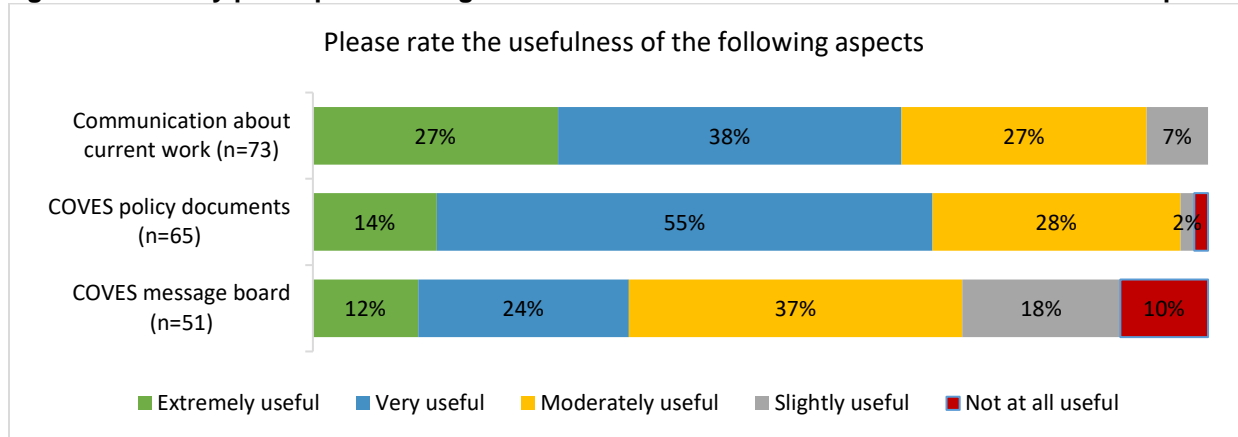
Overall, these findings show that participants are generally pleased with COVES. The ease of collecting the survey and the analytical ability to make comparisons to other museums are especially well regarded features. Findings also point out that participants view the trainings, dashboard, and instruments as especially useful aspects of the project. Nonetheless, these data indicate there is room to increase the number of museum professionals who rate the overall COVES experience as “superior.” Data Collectors, in particular, were less satisfied with their

participation. The findings suggest that seeing the data after it has been collected may improve their experience with the project.

Finding 3: Among the improvements suggested for COVES, professionals described communication as an area to enhance in the future.

When rating the usefulness of several COVES aspects, participants’ provided slightly less positive ratings for the communication features. As can be seen in Figure 11, 34% of respondents rated communication about current work of the project as either “moderately” or “slightly useful.” Similarly, the policy documents, which can also be seen as a piece of communication outlining the project’s overarching procedures, were rated by 32% of participants as “moderately,” “slightly,” or “not at all useful.” And, finally, 65% of respondents rated the message board within the ASTC CoP as “moderately,” “slightly,” or “not at all useful.”

Figure 11: Survey participants’ ratings of the usefulness of various COVES communication pieces



These data suggest room for improvement in project communication. The low response rate for each of these questions (73, 65, and 51 respondents out of a possible 95), also points to how some survey respondents likely did not experience project communication and felt unqualified to answer the questions. While it is expected that some museum professionals would interact more with COVES than others, these missing data suggest that even more individuals might benefit from increased communication.

In addition, some survey respondents made specific recommendations when answering a question about different forms of communications the team could use. The 52 respondents to this open-ended question were split in terms of whether or not they had an idea to pass along. Nineteen provided suggestions, 19 did not, and 14 wrote “N/A” or said that they were not very involved in project communication in their role. A main theme in the suggestions was to have more consistent updates from COVES (n=9). Many methods including emails, webinars, meetings, and blogs were mentioned as ways to communicate more frequently. There were also two additional comments about providing more regular updates specifically for Data Collectors. A few participations wanted ways for participating museums and professionals to learn from

each other (n=4) or options to see what others were doing with the data (n=2). See Table 3 for more details.

Table 3: Responses to “What suggestions do you have related to current (email updates, phone calls, and social and professional activities at conferences) or other types of communication that could be employed by the team?” (n=52)

Code	Counts	Example quote
Provide more consistent updates	9	I'd like to see the email updates myself! I'm at a larger institution with multiple data collectors and I'm not sure if the updates just go to our point person or where they're sent but it'd be good to hear from you. (#42)
I'm not very involved in project communication in my role	9	These typically do not reach me, as I think they would go to my superiors in the department, so I really can't comment to them or give any suggestions. (#33)
No suggestions	9	I can't say. This has to grow organically for a while. Ask me in 6 months. (#120)
Feel like communication is working well	7	Other types of communication via email and phone that I have experienced have been important and adequate. (#86)
N/A	5	N/A (#88)
Provide ways to get to know and learn from the other museums or staff	4	...regional conferences or webinars (get to know the other museums "closer" to your location who are participating. (#19)
Comment about the usefulness of the ASTC conference	4	I was made aware of COVES at an ASTC conference workshop. So glad I went! (#58)
Provide more consistent updates to Data Collectors	2	Again all the information goes to the head of the dept. and us, the actual collectors doing the job, are left in the dark on what is going on with the surveys, the amount put in, the statistics, it's like we just do the job and don't get to see the results of our work. It would be nice if there were a way we could see what our hard work is doing. (#81)
Share what other institutions are doing with the data	2	I like all that you do. If those of us who used COVES data in presentations could post this information to some list or clearing house, it could help us get ideas from each other on ways COVES can be leveraged for more effect in our institution. (#79)
Provide real time communication and support	2	maybe a chat feature for real time support. (#70)
Share findings	2	Blog posts about emerging findings. (#117)
Other	3	To communicate what? Depending on what you're communicating the channel should differ. (#60)

Table 4 provides further examples of communication suggestions that came up when participants were asked broadly about additional resources they would find useful. Not only did a few individuals mention specific communication related ideas (n=3), but they also felt that having additional general information about the project (n=4) and more promotion of the ASTC CoP (n=3) could be beneficial. See Table 4 for quotes related to these and other resource ideas participants offered.

Table 4: Responses to “What additional resources would you find useful?” (n=48)

Code	Counts	Example quote
No additional resources come to mind	10	None that I can think of. (#103)
In my role, I'm not very involved	7	For my situation, I don't know if anything else would be useful. I'm fairly removed from most processes other than data collection and occasional updates. (#32)
Explanation of earlier close-ended survey response(s)	6	I have not interacted with the resources above that I marked NA, though would anticipate they would be useful. (#31)
N/A	4	n/a. (#82)
Training-related resources	4	We are regularly training in new data collectors as staff leave and new staff join. I'd love something that explains some of the choices in the survey (i.e. why use a 10 point scale, why ask about LGBTQ+ status), so that data collectors have a solid understanding of why different questions are asked and asked in the way they are. Not being on the governing board, I don't know those explanations. (#48)
Dashboard-related resources	4	A consistent schedule for when new data is uploaded to dashboard. Would help me schedule my internal reporting work and dissemination. (#84)
General information about the project or the data	4	Maybe a Power Point summary or template that we can use to present about the project. (#67)
Communication related idea	3	As I mentioned before, a webinar might be useful for communication. I learned a lot from peers at ASTC, but not everyone can attend. (#109)
More promotion of the ASTC CoP	3	We often wish that the ASTC COP was more active so that questions/comments could be shared. (#27)
Tracking data collection resources	2	It would be more useful if there were a way for us data collectors to view the amount of surveys we have and need on a daily basis. (#81)
Other	6	Data analyzation Tips and tricks (#125)

Beyond describing ideas for additional communication, museum professionals also noted other aspects of COVES that could be improved. When answering an open-ended question about improvements, survey respondents' feedback generally fell into three main areas: suggestions related to the instrument (n=31), suggestions related to data reporting/analysis (n=15), and suggestions or comments about challenges related to the data collection process and staffing (n=15). See Table 5 for a description of the specific codes that made up each of these categories. For example, within the category of suggestions related to the instrument, individuals described wanting a shorter survey (n=19), feeling as if some of the question wording could be clarified (n=9), and being interested in more customization (n=4) or increased language options (n=2). Besides showing the sub-categories for these three main areas of feedback, Table 5 also presents a few additional themes that emerged, including the fact that 13 people could not think of any improvements.

Table 5: Responses to “What aspects of COVES would you like to see improved?” (n=79)

Code	Counts	Example quote
Suggestions related to the instrument (n= 31)		
Shortening the length of the survey	19	The length. I have had a few people stop the survey as they are near the end because it just takes too long, when really they were almost finished. (#107)
Clarifying the wording of some questions	9	Clearer wording on questions that involve more than one option a visitor can select. That way the visitor will know how many they can choose and not get frustrated when the next page won't load. (#18)
Having more customization options	4	Flexibility (within reason) in terms of decreasing the number of shared survey items included on an individual organization's instrument. (#55)
Having more language options	2	...Include other languages besides Spanish, making it easily accessible, e.g. French, Mandarin, Cantonese... (#29)
Suggestions related to data reporting/analysis (n=15)		
Having easier access to data or reports	7	...Have access to results more readily available to team members... (#29)
Providing more support on how to use the data	3	We've lost a little traction on the use of the data at our museum while we've been focused on getting COVES set up as a sustainable project. I think we can do more to help stakeholders and key leaders make meaning of the data and become adept at understanding and using the data to inform strategy. (#97)
Improving an aspect of the dashboard	3	There are still glitches in the data as it appears in the dashboard. It would be great to be able to do side-by-side comparisons within our own data (compare one season to another, weekdays to weekends, etc.) (#46)
Offering an additional analysis suggestion	2	It might be good to measure sample efficiency by comparing COVES estimates to more census-like data where possible (such as box office data which records adults vs. kids). The sample is stratified by month & weekend/weekday, but in the case of our museum, hour of day can be more important than day of week in some cases. (#53)
Suggestions/comments about challenges related to data collection process and staffing (n=15)		
Improving an aspect of the data collection process	5	- needs to count uses (it's easy to lose track) - needs to display at end of survey whether respondent has answered all questions. (users frequently hand ipad back with many questions unanswered. we need to know that so that we can approach another resp (#22)
Comment about how the amount of staff time needed is difficult	4	It is very time consuming for the staff to collect the data. It takes hours per month to meet the quotas that are administered by COVES. (#23)
Having additional staff support the data collection needs	3	Also having enough data collectors to cover large numbers in the summer is always something we need to think through solutions for. (#90)
Comment about how exit surveys are difficult	3	The fact that it is an exit survey is tough. (#49)
Having the ability to see the instrument	2	I would like it if we were able to look at the questions just to get an idea of what it's asking people. It's not super important. (#77)
Other comments (n=30)		
I can't think of any improvements at this time	13	None that I can think of off the top of my head. (#20)

Increasing the number of Participating Institutions	4	I would like to see it grow so that we can compare our data to other museums regionally/by size/by type and more. (#68)
Comment about improved communication from the team	2	Communication. What's happening, how to fine tune your own questions, etc. Depending on the size of the organization, not everyone can attend the conferences. Maybe a webinar update twice a year. (#109)
Adding motivations for data collectors	2	I don't think there are aspects of COVES to particularly improve. I think this data collection tends to be tedious and less motivating for data collectors to do (even though it's important)- but that's just a reflection on the work rather than an issue with COVES. (#90)
Improving aspect related to the cost	2	Cost of participation being inclusive of all trainings that may be needed to participate. (#88)
Other	9	My organization's involvement in COVES needs improvement. Cross-department collaboration and a cultural message that research is part of the museum's present and future. (#17)

Additional analyzes of these responses points to the need for more project communication, even though only a few respondents directly mentioned this in response to the above open-ended question. At times, people’s ideas from Table 5 related to their role and involvement in the project, indicating that some groups might benefit from additional information. For example, while ideas about improving the data collection process and the challenges of staffing COVES came from professionals in a range of roles, suggestions related to shortening the survey and changing some wordings generally came from Data Collectors. The feedback related to reporting and analysis features also came from individuals in a range of roles, but often were offered by Stakeholders. These data point to places where the different groups involved in COVES might need targeted support or additional understandings of the project.

Taken together, these data highlight potential areas for COVES to consider. In particular, the team may want to adjust its communication efforts, such as more frequent promoting and updating of the message board, using other methods to share news, and asking participating museums to report their COVES experiences. The team may want to consider some instrument suggestions that were mentioned. However, if shortening the survey or adjusting the questions is not possible, perhaps additional messaging specifically for Data Collectors could help this group better understand the constraints and opportunities connected with the survey items. At some point, the COVES team might also want to provide enhanced support for Stakeholders trying to use the data and consider ways to assist museums running into difficulty with staffing data collection.

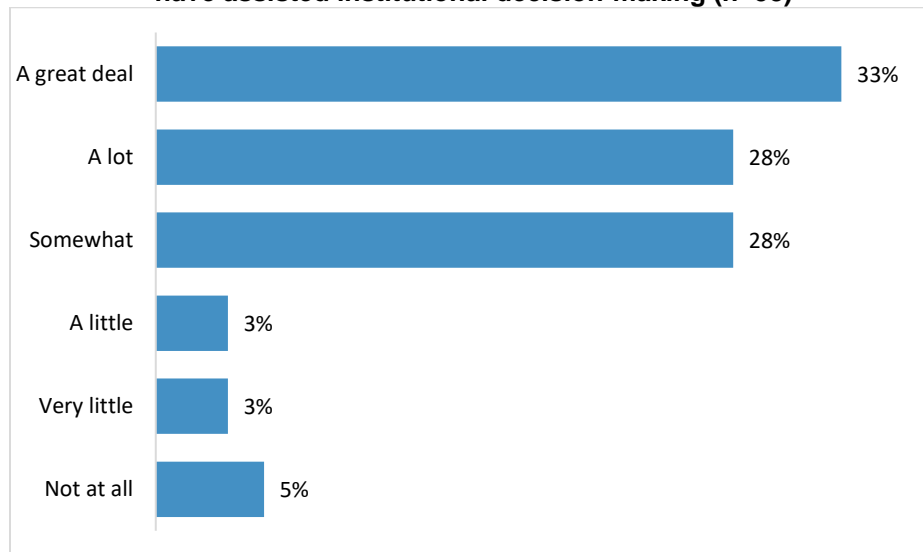
Survey findings related to the impact COVES is having on Participating Institutions

The survey asked museum professionals to describe how taking part in COVES had impacted their organization’s work. Findings suggest that COVES influenced various decisions the museums had undertaken as well as, at times, organizations’ future thinking and self-reflection.

Finding 4: Professionals felt COVES data, particularly about their own institution, had impacted their organizations' decisions on strategic initiatives, marketing, and exhibitions.

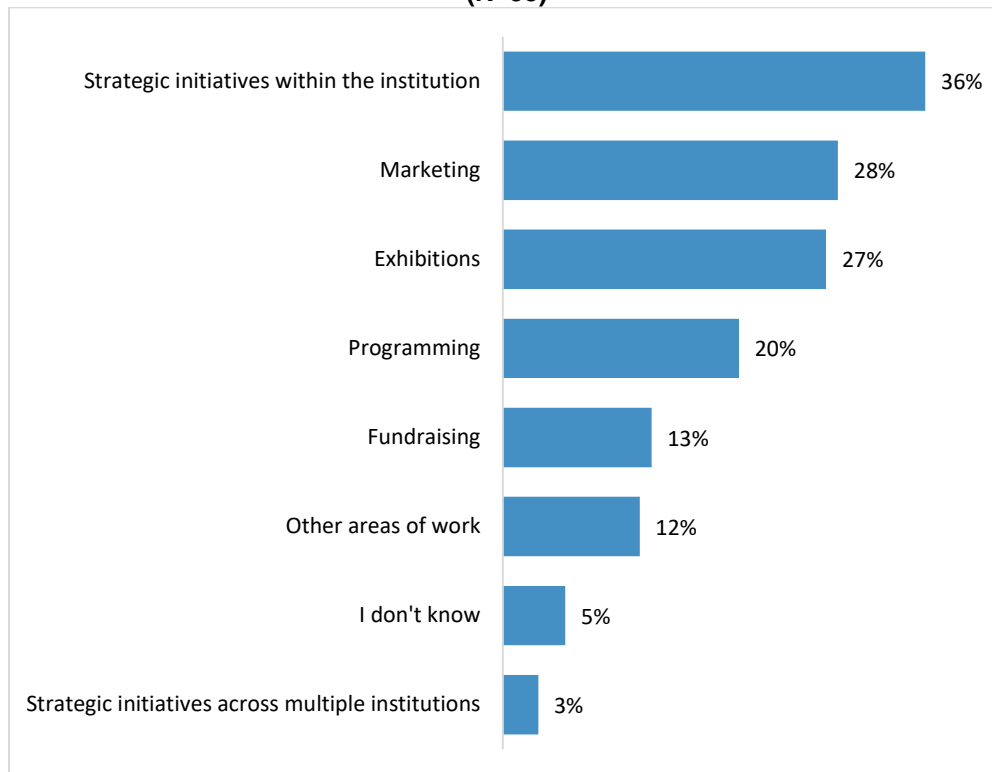
When asked “To what extent has COVES provided data that has assisted your institution’s decision making,” over 60% of participants replied “a lot” or “a great deal.” Three individuals, or 5% of the sample who answered the question, indicated “not at all.” Yet in a follow-up question asking these respondents to explain why COVES had been of no assistance, two of the three said they had not seen changes due to being newer to COVES. One individual explained, “We are just completing our first 90 days using COVES and have yet to see or have access to our results” (#58). Indeed, all of the respondents who felt COVES data had either “little,” “very little,” or “no” impact in this area had started participating in the collaborative in the last two years. See Figure 12 for a complete breakdown of how participants rated COVES’ impact on their institutional decision making.

Figure 12: Survey participants’ assessment of the extent to which COVES has provided data that have assisted institutional decision-making (n=58)



Participants were subsequently asked to explain which areas of work had been impacted by COVES. Findings from this close-ended question show that visitor data collected through the project had been used to inform various aspects of their work such as strategic initiatives within the institutions (36%), marketing (28%), and exhibition-related (27%) decisions. Additional types of work that had been affected by COVES, seen in Figure 13, included programming (20%), fundraising (13%), and even some strategic initiatives across institutions (3%).

Figure 13: Areas of work that survey participants feel have been informed by COVES visitor data (N=95)



Note: participants could have checked more than one response.

For this question, while some individuals said they weren't sure how data were being used (5%), several noted other areas of work that had been informed by COVES (12%). Write-in responses describing these other areas included examples of understanding the guest experience or funding-related work. Illustrative quotes for these responses can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Write-in responses to “Other areas of work” that “visitor data from COVES have informed.” (n=9)

Codes	Counts	Example Quotes
Understanding guest experience	3	General familiarity with the visiting audience (#108)
Funding-related	2	funding (#120)
Other	5	... and Operations (#97)

Further details about the strategies or decisions that organizations made based on visitor data from COVES emerged from two other open-ended questions. In particular, respondents provided many examples of work that have been informed by visitor data specific to their museum. Table 7 shows how data related to the sites influenced exhibition choices (n=8), informed organizations' measures of success (n=6), helped make decisions about specific demographic groups (n=5), and impacted marketing (n=5).

Table 7: Responses to “If you can, please describe at least one strategy or decision your organization was able to make based on *visitor data specific to your museum.*” (n=44)

Code	Counts	Example quote
Exhibitions-related decision	8	We used it to check on the impact of our temporary exhibitions. This helps us figure out the features of an exhibition that tend to resonate for more visitors. (#44)
It's informing our measures of success	6	We have carefully watched our NPS and OER and used them as target goals for VPs. The overall focus on these numbers have supported an ongoing effort to improve the visitor experience. (#28)
It's too early for us to be using the data to make decisions	6	...We are not yet at the point of making decisions/strategies, but we are considering how to integrate this type of data into our workflow. (#57)
Demographic-related decision	5	...We are interested in data on some targeted audiences. Thanks to one of our customized questions, we have been able to determine that we are reaching more of that audience than we thought. Therefore, we have decided we can save resources by not needing to identify and deploy strategies to reach that audience at this time. Very helpful. (#27)
Marketing-related decision	5	Our next marketing campaign will be featuring adult-only groups in part because COVES has [been] recording a steady decrease in the percent of groups that are adult-only... (#48)
Programming-related decision	4	I used the data extensively as I projected a potential business model related to the development of a new offering. (#97)
Food services-related decision	4	...This data also has provided the information we need to change our food service strategy. We knew some percentage of visitors were unhappy, but now we have numbers to support the anecdotal comments. (#27)
Strategic initiatives decision within the organization	4	We are just getting used to having the data. So far it's informed several grant proposals... (#120)
Generally learning more about our audiences	3	We use the COVES data as a baseline of knowledge about who our visitors are, useful for comparing to other groups such as "who are our members, who are the people in our local area" etc. (#42)
Specific diversity efforts	2	COVES data has informed a specific strategy in our business plan regarding advancing our diversity efforts...specifically serving diverse audiences. (#19)
Membership or Admission-related decision	2	Our adult membership structure was informed by our exit survey data. (#65)
I'm aware that others have used the visitor data	2	I know higher ups are always interested and curious, but I don't know the content of those meetings since I'm not present at them. (#32)
We are running into an issue with the data	2	We are struggling to gather and interpret a statistically significant sample of data through COVES... (#110)
Evaluation related-work	2	Able to use COVES data to provide some baseline data about visitors when comparing similar measures in other R&E projects. (#90)
Fundraising - related decision	1	...Related to fundraising, we didn't have any other way to extract data about our visitors - and their potential for giving - except from prior donor information we already had on file. COVES has helped us put more attention on ways to connect with the middle/higher income visitors we see through the door and how we could cultivate them to donate in the future... (#86)

Not aware of strategy or decision based on visitor data	1	At this time I am unaware of any organizational initiatives that have relied on the data from COVES for a strategy or decision. (#17)
Other	2	We are new to this program so just recently have enough data to start getting a real sense of performance. It has been helpful confirming areas where we need improvement. (#47)

When survey participants were asked how COVES aggregate data, or the data which brings together responses across all the participating organizations, had influenced their work, respondents provided fewer examples of its direct impact. While 70 % said they were aware of someone at their organization who had compared their institutional data to the COVES aggregate, only a few provided concrete instances of how this had affected their work. Indeed, some respondents specifically described how they haven't made any decisions (n=8) based on this information. The main two examples included organizations' considering their NPS in relation to others (n=7) and using the aggregate data to inform an internal strategic initiative decision (n=5). Other examples of how the aggregate data had influenced decisions were mentioned by a few people and can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Responses to “If you can, please describe at least one strategy or decision your organization was able to make based on the *collective data from the group.*” (n=38)

Code	Counts	Example quote
We've looked at the data, but have not made specific decisions	8	...The only other use I've seen is comparing percents of "out of town" groups, but I'm not sure of the decision made from that comparison. (#48)
We've considered our NPS in comparison with other organizations' scores	7	I have compared NPS to the aggregate to put my institution's numbers into context... (#48)
Strategic initiative decision within the organization	5	We have decided to renovate our bathrooms. We rated fairly well in most areas compared to the aggregate, except for the bathrooms. (#68)
I'm aware that others have used the collective data	4	I have heard it mentioned in passing, but I have no knowledge of specific details. (#31)
We are communicating data with other departments	3	We print out the dashboard and info for the different areas of the museum to see what they like and what we can fix. (#83)
It's too early for us to be using the data to make decisions	3	We're so new to COVES that we have only just started to get meaningful data. At this point we are not using the data explicitly to make decisions... (#63)
Specific diversity efforts	2	We were able to redefine ourselves as a museum that serves a racially and ethnically diverse audience, instead of just saying we serve a diverse audience. That is an important distinction that will allow us to initiate strategies to attract other social minority groups. Our work is not done. (#84)
Marketing-related decision	2	Knowing that the #1 reason people visit our and all other institutions is to spend family time together is enormously helpful! This is actively informing our marketing strategy. Sorry this isn't super specific. (#24)
Membership-related decision	2	We learned that our membership percentages differed from those of our peer orgs. This helped the membership team think about their work. (#44)
Food services-related decision	2	It was important to see that the Cafe is among the least satisfying aspects of the experience among the comparison group (aggregate). The Cafe is no one's favorite part of visiting a Science Center, and this alleviates the pressure that would otherwise exist when we encounter the Cafe rating at the bottom of the list at our own institution. (#53)
We are running into an issue with the data	2	We have not fully reviewed it yet. We were waiting to ensure we have a good enough set of data. (#118)
Not aware of strategy or decision based on comparative data	1	no one tells us this info (#74)
Other	1	That our visitors are just like visitors at other science centers. (#57)

These findings highlight how COVES has had a strong impact on the decision making of many organizations. Close-ended and open-ended responses show that museums have used visitor data from COVES to inform decisions about many areas including internal strategic initiatives,

marketing, and exhibitions. Findings also indicate that museums have looked at aggregate data from the entire collaboration and, at times, used this information when making choices. The fact that fewer organizations seem to be using the aggregate data than site-specific data to inform decisions is perhaps because many museums are newer to COVES and are first taking into account their own data. These findings suggest that supporting museums in using the aggregate data may be a place for future COVES focus.

Finding 5: In addition to impacting recent decisions and strategies, COVES has influenced participating organizations’ future thinking and self-reflection.

Figure 14 shows that there was high agreement by survey participants with the statement “Through COVES participation, my institution has thought of other institutional work we could pursue.” Of the participants who rated the statement, 71% “completely” or “mostly agreed.” Similarly, 75% of participants “completely” or “mostly agreed” that they had “ideas of new questions to investigate using the COVES instrument.” When asked to describe any specific question ideas they wanted to share with the core team, 13 individuals provided responses. While there was no overarching theme among these answers, a couple people said they would be interested in adding a specific question to the survey about audiences with autism spectrum disorder (n=2) and/or gaining more information on media/marketing feedback (n=2). See Table 9 for example quotes. Finally, when rating additional ways that COVES participation had impacted their organization, participants also generally noted that COVES had encouraged their organization to “challenge previously-held assumptions.” As can be seen in Figure 14, 66% of those who answered the question “completely” or “mostly agreed” with the statement and said that COVES has allowed their organization to reflect on their practice.

Figure 14: Survey participants’ ratings of whether or not COVES has influenced future work or challenged institutional assumptions

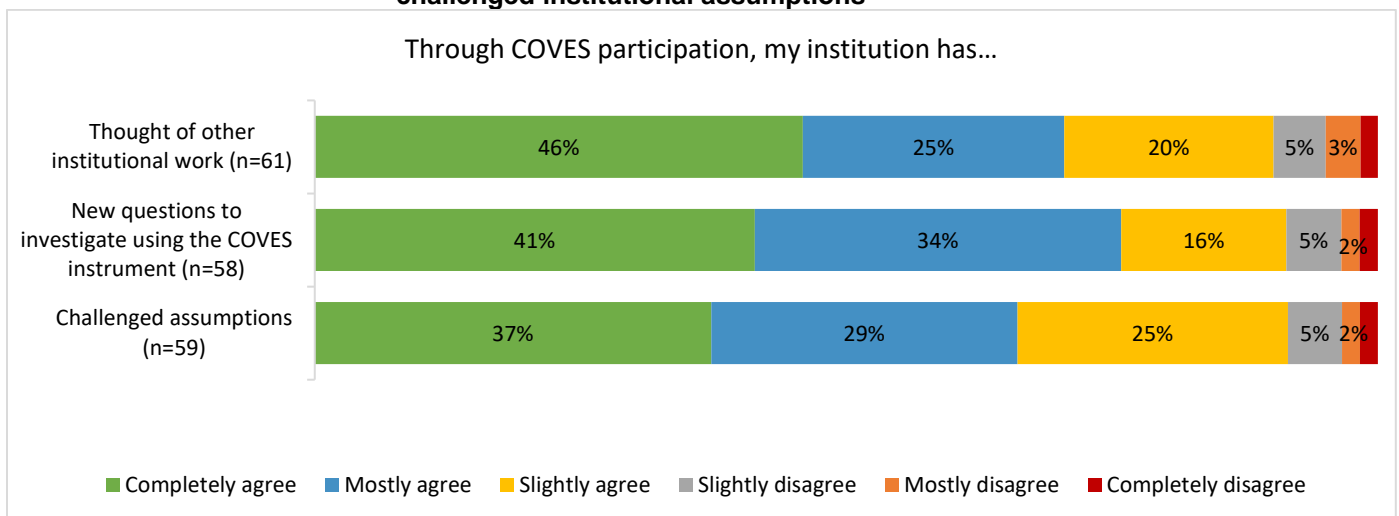


Table 9: Responses to “If you would like to share any of these new question ideas for the COVES Research Team to consider, please include them here.” (n=13)

Code	Counts	Example quote
Asking about autism spectrum disorder	2	Is there any way to break up the "other" category for visitors who identify as having a disability so that people with Autism Spectrum disorder can identify themselves? (#46)
Asking more about media/marketing feedback	2	visitors' media consumption habits (#84)
Other question ideas	3	I'd be curious if folks have any preferences or suggestions on how iPhone or Android devices could be used in the facility. This question would be difficult, due the large diversity among COVES institutions, yet it could still be interesting for exploration. (#103)
Other—not related to potential questions	7	We are trying NOT to think of other work we could pursue right now - we want to wait to take on more! We have a full plate... Thanks to the fabulous COVES team for including us in this initiative and for doing this important work for our community! Thanks for all your help and patience with our customization! :-) (#27)

Together, these data indicate that COVES is successful in two particular areas the project set out for itself in the original grant narrative. Specifically, the team had argued that this project would allow for field-wide impacts if “Institutions begin to challenge previously-held assumptions about themselves as they learn and continue to refine and rethink the questions the collaboration is able to pose” (Institute for Museum and Library Services, 2014, p.10). From these findings, it is clear that COVES is accomplishing these goals in addition to having a strong impact on the decision-making and strategy choices at the different institutions.

Survey findings related to whether or not COVES has accomplished the fundamental principles from the C-COVES White Paper

On the survey, participants were asked to rate their agreement with whether or not COVES was carrying out fundamental principles described in the C-COVES White Paper related to “establishing a collaborative data collection and analysis program” (Museum of Science Research & Evaluation Department, 2014). These overarching principles included six key elements that the team aimed to build into their work: shared ownership and trust, sustainability, being institutionally relevant and informative for the broader field, building evaluation capacity, having a whole-institution focus, and adaptability. Survey results show that participants typically felt COVES was meeting these objectives.

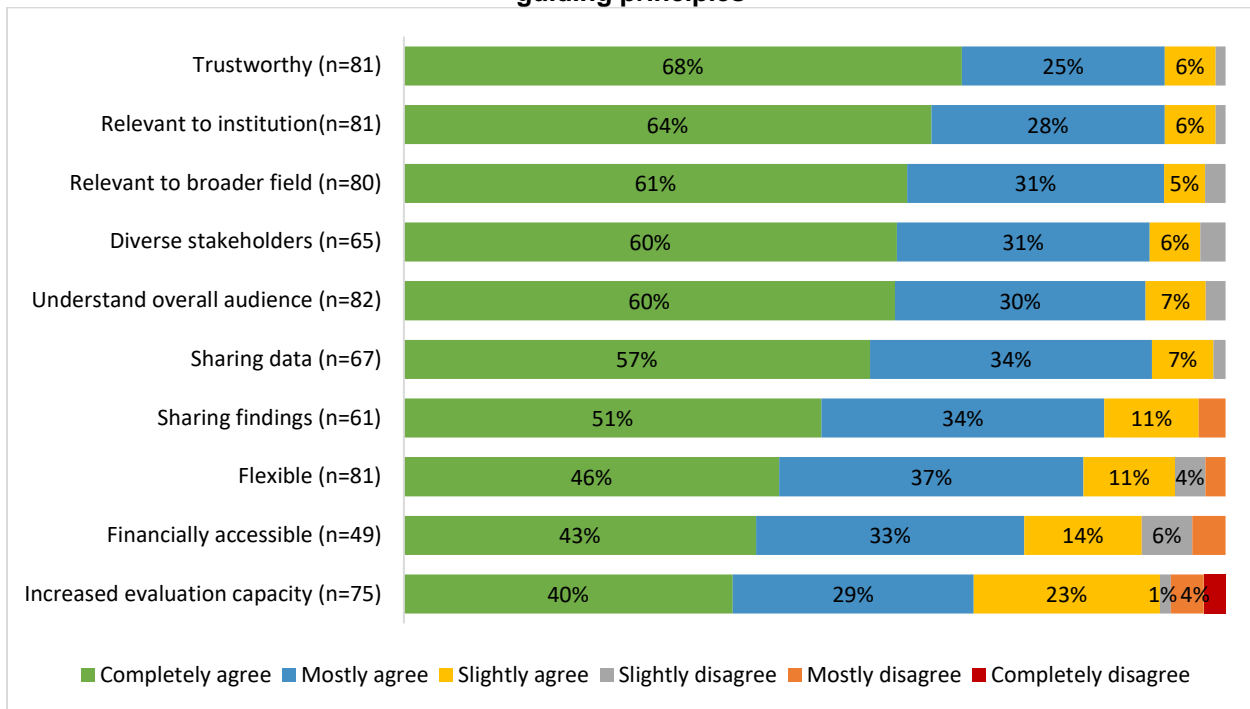
Finding 6: Professionals generally agreed that COVES provides a trustworthy system for gathering comparable data from multiple institutions, and that this work not only provides information that is relevant to them but also benefits the larger field.

As can be seen in Figure 15, museum professionals agreed that COVES was accomplishing the principles from the guiding White Paper. At least 69% of participants either “completely” or “mostly agreed” with the 10 statements depicting COVES’ work in these areas. The list below provides the full statements that participants were asked to rate and the corresponding variable names which are used in Figure 15.

- COVES has created a trustworthy system for gathering comparable data from a range of museums. (*Trustworthy*)
- COVES has created an evaluation system that provides relevant information for my institution about our audience(s). (*Relevant to institution*)
- COVES has created an evaluation system that provides relevant information for the broader field about visitors' experiences at informal learning institutions. (*Relevant to broader field*)
- COVES has created an evaluation system which has input from many different stakeholders. (*Diverse stakeholders*)
- COVES provides information about the overall experience at our institution. (*Understand overall experience*)
- COVES has a clearly identified process and system in place for sharing data. (*Sharing data*)
- COVES has a clearly identified process and system in place for sharing findings. (*Sharing findings*)
- COVES is flexible and can be adapted for the needs of my institution. (*Flexible*)
- COVES has created a model that is financially accessible for participating institutions. (*Financially accessible*)
- COVES has increased the capacity among professionals at my organization to conduct evaluation studies and use evaluation findings. (*Increased evaluation capacity*)

For the top three rated statements shown in Figure 15, pertaining to trustworthiness and the relevance of the information COVES is providing, over 60% of participants gave these the highest rating. Together, these data show that participants generally felt COVES implemented a trustworthy system for collecting comparable data while at the same time providing institutionally-relevant and useful information for the field of informal learning. Areas that were rated lower relate to themes that have already been discussed in this report, such as enhancing the process and system for sharing data or findings, with 57% and 51% of participants “completely agreeing” these mechanisms were in place. These data also indicate that improving COVES’ financial accessibility and focusing efforts on building evaluation capacity may be useful as less than 45% of participants “completely agreed” with these statements.

Figure 15: Survey participants' assessment of COVES' efforts related to the project's guiding principles



After rating these various statements, participants were given an opportunity to explain their responses. Although only a few individuals chose to do so, their open-ended answers provide additional insight about how survey respondents were interpreting and reflecting upon these key principles. In particular, their explanations helped clarify why some individuals may have given lower ratings or skipped the questions related to COVES creating an accessible financial model and increasing the evaluation capacity at their organization. For example, individuals sometimes said that they did not have an understanding of the finances related to COVES at their institution, let alone other museums. Other respondents noted that COVES did not necessarily increase evaluation capacity because their organization either had previous experience with this work or involved only a small group of people in the project. Table 10 presents the open-ended data where participants gave explanations of their ratings related to the project's fundamental principles.⁴

⁴ The order of these statements matches the sequence in Figure 15.

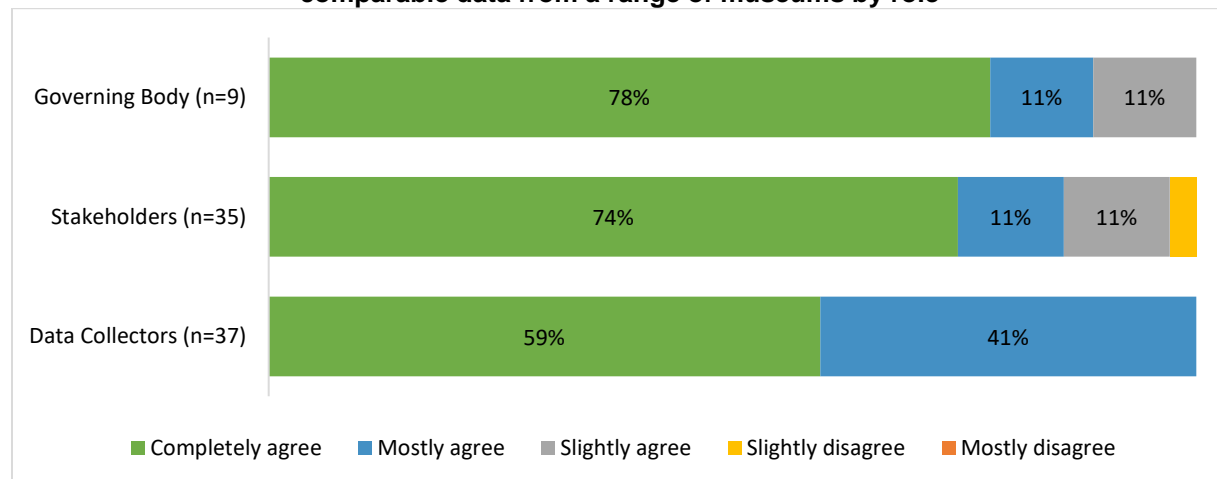
Table 10: Follow-up responses explaining rating of “COVES’ efforts related to the project’s guiding principles” (n=30)

Rating statement (in same order as Figure 15)	Counts	Example quote
COVES has created a trustworthy system for gathering comparable data from a range of museums <i>(Trustworthy)</i>	1	The trust worthy thing, really is that we have a lot of declines that leave out a large (stroller mom) portion of our population and COVES doesn't collect any observed demographics to make comparisons to reported demographics if data is skewed. (#102)
COVES has created an evaluation system that provides relevant information for my institution about our audience(s) <i>(Relevant to institution)</i>	2	"that provides relevant information for my institution about our audiences(s)" is rated "mostly agree" because we assume we are not getting enough responses from a large number of visitors who are ELL and/or from Latino audiences, and therefore not necessarily confident in their ability to answer questions in English, or perhaps otherwise fear sharing information that could put them at risk if they are undocumented. (#86)
COVES has created an evaluation system that provides relevant information for the broader field about visitors' experiences at informal learning institutions <i>(Relevant to broader field)</i>	1	Nothing to add. I believe Coves is a very valuable asset for data collection and informing museums about visitors' experiences. (#121)
COVES has created an evaluation system which has input from many different stakeholders <i>(Diverse stakeholders)</i>	1	...I don't believe I can comment on the input piece. I think the original museums had more of a role in the creation of the system. (#109)
COVES provides information about the overall audience experience at our institution <i>(Understand overall experience)</i>	1	With regard to the "overall experience" at our organization, my understanding is that by design, the COVES survey does not address learning/attitudinal impact of the experience, so I would not consider the assessment absolutely complete; however, again, this is (I think) intentional, so not a problem per se. (#55)
COVES has a clearly identified process and system in place for sharing data <i>(Sharing data)</i>	3	The sharing of COVES data internally is not spelled out. Other than granting access to the dashboard. The interpretation of COVES data is the next level for our organization. I could envision that some external interpretation could help a new organization adjust to interpreting and using the data more quickly by seeing "best cases" where other organizations are using COVES data for successful data-informed decisions... (#17)
COVES has a clearly identified process and system in place for sharing findings <i>(Sharing findings)</i>	2	"has a clearly identified process and system in place for sharing findings." - I know these processes exist, but rarely interact with them... (#31)
COVES is flexible and can be adapted for the needs of my institution <i>(Flexible)</i>	0	---
COVES has created a model that is financially accessible for participating institutions <i>(Financially accessible)</i>	5	I do think the pricing is fair but it is a bit higher for a smaller organization. The medium museum range is too broad. (#109)

COVES has increased the capacity among professionals at my organization to conduct evaluation studies and use evaluation findings <i>(Increased evaluation capacity)</i>	8	For "COVES has increased the capacity among professionals at my organization to conduct evaluation studies and use evaluation findings," our department was already heavily using evaluation so there isn't much professional gain here in that regard. For other institutions, I'm sure there would be more of an increase. (#32)
Could not answer question(s) due to role	8	I don't know that I see all the details of COVES so I wasn't sure about some of these. (#42)
Other	6	We have not yet received any of our data. I do not feel like I can agree or disagree with many of the questions until I see the data. (#104)

Deeper analysis suggests that individuals' involvement level with COVES influenced how they viewed these key principles. Roughly 75% of Governing Body members and Stakeholders, for example, "completely agreed" that the project created a trustworthy system for gathering comparable data from a range of museums. Fewer Data Collectors felt this way, with 59% "completely agreeing" that COVES was a dependable system in this regard. Even though there were some Governing Body and Stakeholders who were less certain that this type of system had been created, the main users of COVES generally had a stronger belief in the trust of the system as compared to those more peripherally involved. See Figure 16.

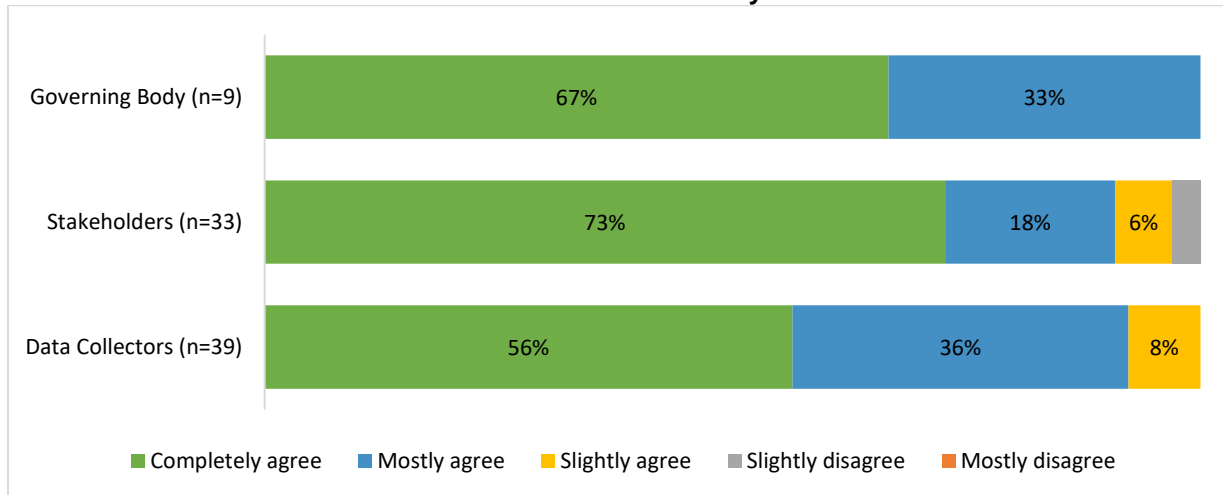
Figure 16: Survey participants' ratings of COVES' creation of a trustworthy system for gathering comparable data from a range of museums by role



Individuals' level of involvement with the project also influenced their feelings about whether or not the evaluation system provides institutionally relevant information. Although there were some individuals in the Stakeholder group who "slightly disagreed" with this sentiment, Stakeholders were the ones who most frequently felt relevant information was being obtained through COVES, with 73% "completely agreeing." Governing Body members also found COVES to be providing applicable information, even if not quite to the same extent, with 67% "completely agreeing." Data Collectors were the group with the lowest level of "complete agreement," with only 56% feeling strongly that COVES provided pertinent information for their

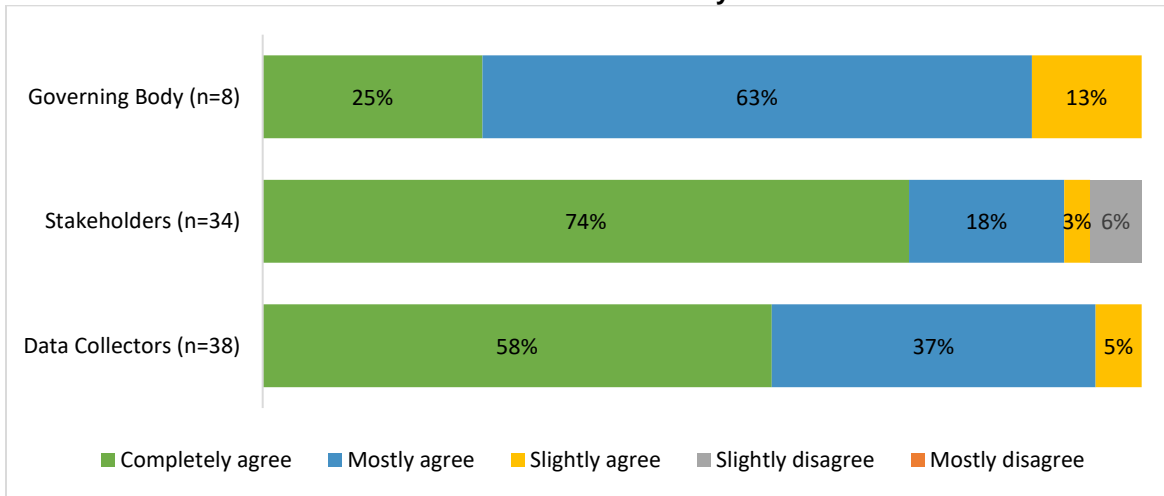
organization. This lower level of complete agreement likely relates to the fact that Data Collectors are often not very aware of how the data is being used. Figure 17 depicts survey participants’ responses to this question broken out by project role.

Figure 17: Survey participants’ ratings of COVES’ creation of a system that provides relevant institutional information by role



When rating whether or not COVES had built an evaluation system that provides relevant information for the broader field, Stakeholders were again the group of participants that agreed most strongly with this idea. Figure 18 shows that even though a few Stakeholders did not feel this aim was being fully accomplished, 74% “completely agreed” that it was. Data Collectors provided the next highest degree of “complete agreement,” with 58% feeling that COVES was offering broadly relevant information. Governing Body members, on the other hand, were less inclined to rate COVES’ work in this area as high. Although they all agreed that COVES had created a system that was useful for the field, only 25% of the Governing Body members were in “complete agreement” with this statement. Possible explanations for these ratings might be that Governing Body members believe the project could be doing more in this area or that further field-wide impacts will occur in the future.

Figure 18: Survey participants' ratings of COVES' creation of a system that provides relevant information for the field by role



In summary, participants' responses suggest that COVES has successfully worked towards achieving key principles for creating a data-based network. Respondents especially found the system to be trustworthy and relevant to their needs as well as those of the broader field. While very positive, the data highlight a few places where COVES may want to improve in the future. For example, these data support earlier findings in the report that suggest the project could do more in terms of communication, especially when it comes to sharing data or findings. The project may also want to consider additional ways that COVES can provide information for the field, as Governing Body members felt this was an area of work that was not as strong. Finally, these data underscore how the goal of evaluation capacity building has inherent challenges because some participants will have more experience than others.

Finding 7: Many professionals were able to identify evaluation methods that they learned or evaluation capacities that they strengthened through COVES including knowledge of random sampling and techniques for interacting with guests.

Although some survey respondents had previous evaluation experience or came from organizations that had high evaluation capacity to begin with, data indicate that museum professionals with a range of backgrounds gained new evaluation knowledge by participating in COVES. Indeed, individuals from all three COVES involvement levels and with prior evaluation experience ranging from “a lot” to a “little” described new methods they had learned or enhanced. Specifically, individuals mentioned augmenting their knowledge of survey best practices and data collection techniques. As can be seen in Table 11, staff identified several ways they became more knowledgeable about conducting surveys including understanding aspects of random sampling (n=10), survey design (n=5), and use of NPS ratings (n=3). When describing the types of skills they developed related to data collection, respondents talked about acquiring techniques for interacting with guests (n=9), understanding the importance of the consent process (n=2), and being able to better handle refusals (n=2). See Table 11 for further ways that staff grew in terms of their evaluation capacity.

Table 11: Responses to “If you can, please articulate up to two aspects of evaluation methods that you have learned or have been strengthened through COVES.” (n=40)

Code	Counts	Example quote
Aspects related to random sampling	10	As a team, learning what it means to be unbiased in our data collection and sampling. (#109)
Techniques for interacting with guests	9	I have a concise and comprehensive introduction of myself, the survey, and the consent language around it. This is useful both when approaching visitors for COVES and for my data collection efforts elsewhere. (#64)
Awareness of survey design	5	I think one thing I've thought to pay more attention to after collecting data for COVES is how survey questions are written. (#33)
Use of NPS	3	Our staff now understand NPS much better and are also paying attention to OER, which was never included in prior surveys. (#93)
Comment about the different methods piloted	3	Piloting data collection techniques helped us understand a little more about visitor habits when collecting data... (#90)
Importance of consent process	2	Maintaining guidelines for Consent. The need for consistency. (#17)
Group approach for recruiting	2	I guess because of COVES the group approach for surveys has been used more often in our methods. (#102)
Use of a tested instrument	2	First of all we have an instrument that has been tested. Before we would cobble together surveys with questions we found online... (#68)
Increased staff capacity for evaluation	2	...Even members of our senior team don't fully understand data so COVES is really helping. (#27)
Replicable demographic questions	2	A lot of thought has been put into the demographic questions and I appreciate how they've been worded. I know that this language has carried on to other projects in our institution. (#32)
Handling refusals	2	I'm better at accepting rejection. (#38)
I was new to this kind of work	2	I have come into this as a complete newbie regarding evaluation, so this has helped me to learn more about different evaluation methods... (#49)
Use of ongoing data collection	2	COVES has certainly given me appreciation for the importance of continuity of data collection efforts. In the past, we ran surveys when we needed to know things, and this inevitably leads to poor quality data, much bias, and difficulty in mobilizing the efforts needed to conduct the research. (#53)
Other	9	I have strengthened my understanding of 1) the considerations and complexity around sample size... (#48)

While the goal of increasing evaluation capacity brings challenges, partly due to everyone in the collaborative having different needs and levels of expertise, these data show that COVES has had an impact on museum professionals' evaluation skills. Even though some professionals were more knowledgeable than others coming into the project, participants from a range of roles and backgrounds provided examples of how they had grown. Not surprisingly, participants have gained insight into aspects related to the survey method employed by COVES and also the process of collecting data, which is a main element of COVES involvement.

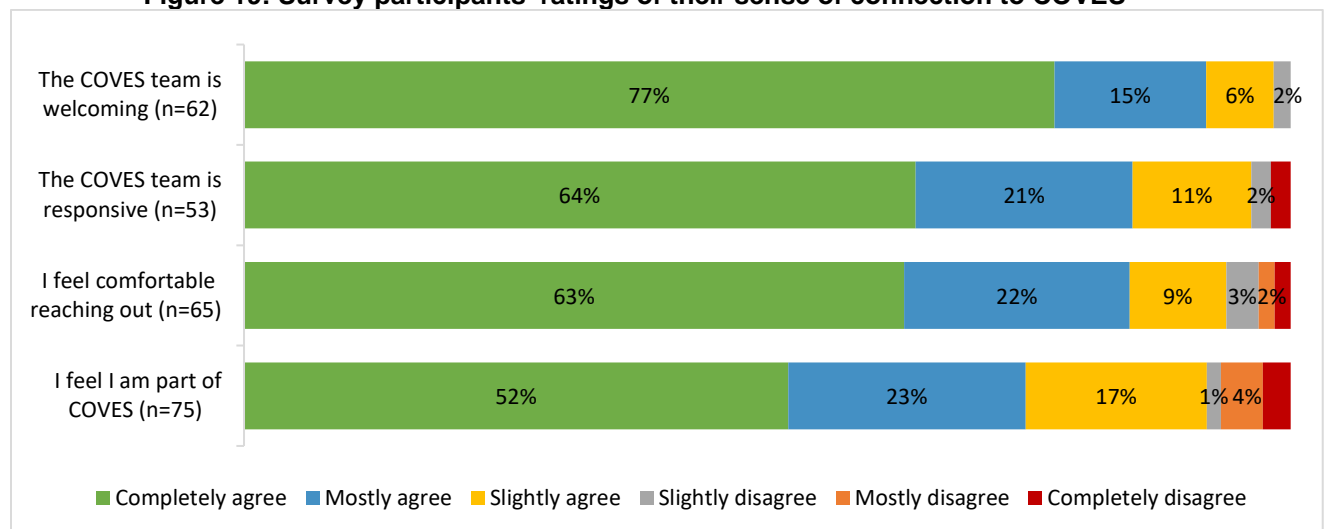
Survey findings related to building community

Besides learning about the impact COVES has had on participating organizations and individuals, the summative evaluation aimed to gather information that would help the project consider upcoming efforts. In order to do this, the survey included questions about participants' sense of community. Findings suggest that while COVES has created a welcoming community, future work should consider how to better connect Data Collectors with the project.

Finding 8: Overall, professionals felt the project was welcoming and responsive, with participants feeling comfortable reaching out to others. However, professionals wondered if in the future there could be more communication with the COVES team, other institutions, and among the Data Collectors.

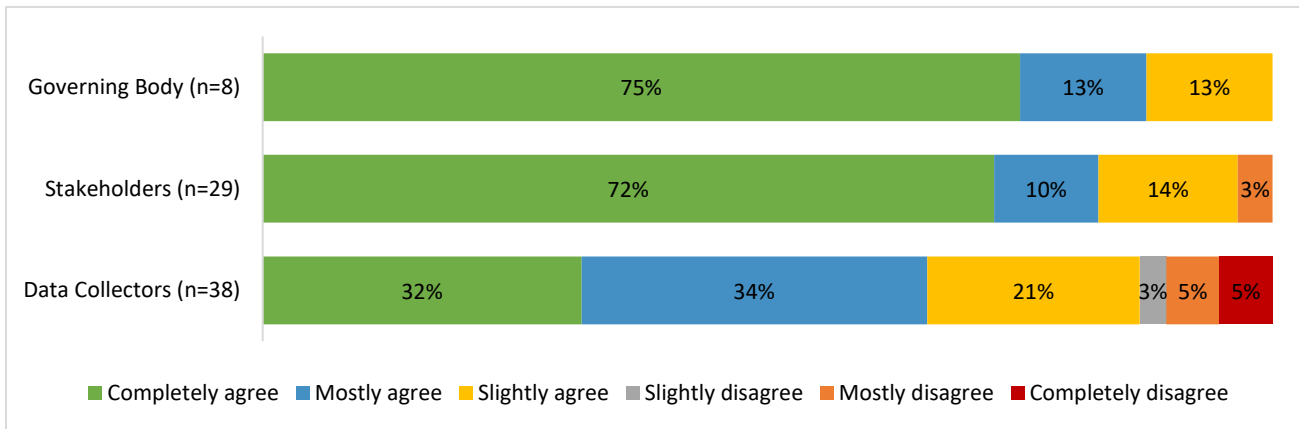
To learn about participants' sense of community, survey respondents were asked to rate a series of statements about their connection with COVES and the organizing core team. Of the respondents who answered these questions, most generally indicated they felt close to the project. Specifically, 92% of participants either "completely" or "mostly agreed" that the core team was "welcoming." They also gave high agreement ratings when considering the responsiveness and openness of the core team to listening to feedback, with 85% choosing the top two ratings. Similarly, 85% of participants "completely" or "mostly agreed" that they were comfortable getting in touch with others involved in the collaborative and not just those on the core team. Although the statement "I feel I am part of COVES" received the lowest ratings of these four questions, 75% of survey respondents indicated they "completely" or "mostly agreed" with this sentiment. See Figure 19.

Figure 19: Survey participants' ratings of their sense of connection to COVES



While most survey participants felt part of the collaborative, a further breakdown of the data shows that Data Collectors were the group that was less connected to the project. Only 32% “completely agreed” that they felt they were a part of COVES compared to 75% of Governing Body members and 72% of Stakeholders. As can be seen in Figure 20, Data Collectors expressed a wide range of feelings, including 13% of individuals who disagreed to some extent with this statement. There were a few Stakeholders who also disagreed with this phrase; however, Data Collectors seem to be the group that might need the most support in order to feel included in COVES. These data likely reflect the fact that Data Collectors as a group can be the hardest to reach out to, especially due to their turnover.

Figure 20: Survey participants’ ratings of “I feel I am part of COVES” by role



Further support for this finding can be seen in survey participants’ answers to the final question on the survey, “Is there anything else you would like to share?” In response to this wrap-up question, several individuals took the time to describe how they appreciate and value the work of COVES (n=7) and enjoy being part of the project, (n=6) yet a few noted feeling less involved as Data Collectors (n=3). See Table 12.

Table 12: Responses to “Is there anything else you would like to share?” (n=27)

Code	Counts	Example quote
Appreciate and value the work of COVES	7	I appreciate the work the COVES team does. It's a lot of hard and time consuming work, and it's a job position unto itself. I know that my institution really values it and it has allowed other stakeholders to think more about their audiences. It is, all in all, a valuable program for both individual institutions and the field at large... (#32)
Enjoy being part of COVES	6	Great work! I can't wait to see how the project will continue to develop. I'm very glad we are a part of COVES and I hope to continue to be involved for years to come. (#67)
Comment about issues related to COVES	5	...although it can be challenging to approach certain visitors. In addition, some of the visitors have commented that certain questions of Coves is way too personal and they feel uncomfortable in answering such as: income and that LBGTQ question. (#121)
Appreciate this summative evaluation process	4	I hope that this very evaluation helps my organization continue to realize the importance of research, evaluation, and data-informed decisions... (#17)
Feel less involved as a Data Collector	3	As a data collector I feel very disconnected from this project. I support what it is in theory and I like what it can be, but most of the time it is simply a screen on an iPad I hand to visitors. I would like to have more feedback about what is or isn't being used from the survey. (#31)
Other positive comment about COVES	3	Best project I've ever been a part of!!! (#84)
Too early for feedback	2	While I would like more time to formulate a better informed opinion, I am satisfied with what I've seen so far. (#96)
Other	6	I liked getting to meet the COVES core team in person! I'm curious to know more about you and know more about how COVES came about. (#42)

Finally, when asked to describe any suggestions they had for building a greater sense of community, participants raised many of the recommendations heard elsewhere on the survey. As can be seen in Table 13, when thinking about how to support the development of the collaborative, participants again noted the importance of having increased updates from the team (n=8), additional interactions with other institutions (n=6), and specific efforts aimed at Data Collectors (n=6). Table 13 includes example quotes related to these and other suggestions participants gave for creating community.

Table 13: Responses to “What suggestions do you have for building a greater sense of community among the participating collaborative institutions?” (n=41)

Code	Counts	Example quote
More communication updates from COVES	8	How about an annual Zoom call / webinar where the Governing Board gives updates and members can ask questions? (#44)
Increased interactions with other institutions	6	I'm not even sure who else is part of COVES. It would be really valuable to have a list of other institutions so we know who we are comparing ourselves to - how many are large vs small, free vs paid, etc. (#57)
Additional information for Data Collectors	6	I think there should be more ways to bring in the data collectors. Maybe include them in the community of practice? Or have once or twice a year video meetings where the data collectors get together and talk about any issues they have experienced (are these one offs? Is there something that can/should be changed about the survey?) (#48)
Learning about how others are using the data	4	I would suggest a user group or contact list of CEO's of museums participating in COVES. While we may not be involved in the application of the surveys, it would be useful to network with other CEO's to see how they are using the data in their decision making and case building. (#19)
Increased interactions with the COVES core team	4	I didn't even know there was a core team. (#60)
Not involved enough to say	4	not involved enough to know. (#66)
Comment about how the ASTC conference helps me feel part of community	3	...I only feel that community because I attended an ASTC and met members of COVES. (#102)
No suggestions	3	Nothing more to add. (#121)
Adding an in-person meeting opportunity	2	A gathering of participating collaborative institutions or visits to the institutions. (#99)
Other	7	I feel like people are like[!]y to reach out to others when there is a need to do so. That's the primary motivation. Because our Museum is a core member, I think our team is less likely to ask others for help or questions because we figure out a lot of things in-house. (#90)

Altogether the survey data show that COVES has built a strong collaboration after just four years. Participants generally feel appreciated by the core team and comfortable getting in touch with others involved in the network. However, these data echo findings from earlier in the report that suggest more could be done to connect Data Collectors to the project, since they were the group that was least likely to feel part of COVES. The data also suggest that increased communication about the project and interactions among the involved organizations could support efforts to build community.

FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The next section of the report summarizes findings from the phone interviews with people at sites that decided to stop being a part of COVES. Data include reasons why some sites stopped participating in COVES.

Description of interview sample

All three individuals who participated in a phone interview held administrative roles at their organizations and explained that they had joined the collaborative in order to gain evaluation experience and data. As they said,

We thought it'd be a great way to force us to be more thoughtful about getting data and also to see where we are compared to other museums. You know, [to see] if we're way off the mark or are doing okay. (#1)

We'd done no type of data collection before that and we knew we needed to find a way to train our staff and we've been looking for some tools to use. . . . We were looking and longing and desiring to find that tool to use to survey and collect relevant data. (#2)

We don't get an opportunity to do real evaluation very often. We feel like we're really connected to our customers and to what kids are learning that come to our classes and things like that, but that's our field. We didn't have a lot to confirm that or reassure that we're accurate in those ideas, and we surely wanted to know if we were way off. So that was our motivation to get into it. (#3)

The length of their COVES involvement ranged from roughly six months to two and a half years. And while all of the interviewees had been very involved with the COVES efforts at their organizations, their specific COVES work varied. One individual described taking part in the data collection while others mentioned overseeing data collectors or being active with sharing the project with their board and staff.

Interview findings related to why organizations decided to stop participating

One of the main goals of the interview was to learn why organizations decided to leave COVES. Findings show that, even though the price of COVES was not seen as extreme, aspects pertaining to cost played a role for two of the three organizations. Additional reasons that factored into why institutions left the collaborative included difficulty collecting data and feeling as if they wanted to use the information they had already received before gathering more.

Finding 9: Although they both felt the price was reasonable, two of the three interviewees mentioned cost as a main reason why their organization was no longer participating in COVES, and the other interviewee noted difficulties gathering enough data.

When describing why they had left the collaborative, two interviewees noted cost as the number one reason why they had stopped taking part in COVES. Specifically, one individual emphasized the fee associated with the project while the other stressed timing issues related to the price increase after the grant funding ended. For this individual, who is currently working on a 2020 budget, the news about the pricing change simply came too late to be considered. Yet, even though these interviewees had taken financial factors into account when deciding on continued participation, they felt the price was understandable. When recounting their decisions, they explained,

[W]hen it came to “Okay we can either pay a staff person or participate?” Yeah, I think, you know. The money sort of forced me to think about it. . . . [However,] the price point they had wasn’t jaw dropping (#1)

We knew when we started it was covered under a grant, didn’t know how long it would last and when the info came out about COVES wanting to charge, my budget was completely approved and I wasn’t able to adjust that and we just had to back out. (#2)

Moreover, both of these individuals mentioned how other reasons besides cost played into their choice not to renew their COVES membership. For one interviewee, the decision to leave was also influenced by the sense that some of the questions were less pertinent to their needs and the fact that there were few museums of comparable size in the collaboration. The other interviewee expressed interest in considering steps they could take based on the information at hand before gathering more data.

The third interviewee, when talking about why they had stopped participating, emphasized the difficulty they ran into gathering the data. For this organization, it was challenging to fit COVES data collection into all of their other work, and this reality drove their departure.

We were finding ourselves not being able to meet the quotas because of staff and volunteer limitations. We’d be busy and it wouldn’t rise to top of priority list to take time to do it. We didn’t feel like we were being a fair partner in it, so we opted out. (#3)

Overall, challenges related to the cost, such as covering the actual fee and also not being aware of when pricing increases were going to happen, affected organizations’ involvement in COVES. In addition, the demands of the data collection impacted one organization’s choice to participate.

Interview findings related to overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend

Just as survey respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend COVES, interview participants were asked to comment on these areas as well. The interviewees typically expressed being pleased with their time in COVES and felt they would

recommend the project to other museums. However, they did mention various suggestions for ways the collaborative could improve.

Finding 10: All three interviewees felt they would recommend COVES and provided examples of aspects they found useful including receiving the data, having trainings, and seeing the survey instrument.

The three interviewees generally talked positively about the project and felt they would recommend COVES. Even the interviewee who had mentioned challenges with collecting data said s/he would recommend the project if the situation made sense. When asked to further explain why they would endorse COVES, the museum professionals highlighted learning useful data, appreciating the straightforward system, and liking the survey and the core team. They described their likelihood to recommend in the following ways.

Very likely— I feel like we’re better at what we do because we looked at it in a much more formal way and it’s nice to have that benchmarking with others to be able to say we’re not performing as well as the aggregate on this and we’re doing okay on that and here’s [a] way we could tweak and improve, weaknesses and strengths. (#1)

I would recommend the COVES experience. I would be honest with them about our experience and why we’re not doing it. I think for other museums that had a little bit different situation it’s a really, really good and simple option. (#3)

I would recommend 100 percent. . . . Not like we didn’t like COVES, the folks. We liked the survey, facilitating that. I’d recommend for sure. (#2)

During the interviews, museum professionals talked about several aspects of COVES they found useful. In particular, all of the interviewees felt seeing the actual data about their audiences was valuable. The data helped them understand more about visitors’ perspectives and, at times, consider potential adjustments. As one individual stated,

Well, I think to some extent it was getting the actual data [that] was useful. We’ve started to look, now we know this, what changes could we do? Another part was – it was eye opening for us to realize we would make qualitative assumptions about our visitors and then looking at the data, “Whoah! I was off with that!” sort of reminding us we’re fallible in terms of understanding who people are. . . . I think being able to look at what other museums are doing and what their demographics are and things like that [was also useful]. (#1)

Moreover, two of the three interviewees noted how the trainings had been helpful. They liked how the trainings introduced staff at their organizations to the process of evaluation. One individual went on to mention the Human Subjects training aspect. The other emphasized liking how everyone participated in the training at once, explaining,

The training was a very good kind of primer for us to understand what scientific evaluation would look like. . . . I think everybody to get the training at the same time is a really nice valuable thing versus the option of if I were to have gone and been expected to train everybody else . . . It was [also] a nice little bonding experience. We don't do a lot of those things. Get the staff together to talk about things like that. . . . That was a fun and valuable thing to be able to talk about evaluation as a whole group. (#3)

The survey instrument was also described by two of the three museum professionals as being beneficial. In talking about how it was useful, one interviewee emphasized that the COVES instrument allowed them to better understand the types of questions to ask. Another interviewee explained that the survey questions generally allowed them to gather pertinent data. This individual remarked,

I think the tools were terrific. The survey that was provided to us was great. Couple questions that were a little not relevant to us and our needs, but other than that the majority were spot on. (#2)

Thus, even though their organizations are no longer participating, all three interviewees felt they would recommend COVES. They also identified especially useful features of the project including the data, the trainings, and the instrument.

Finding 11: Although the three interviewees felt COVES had done everything it could to encourage their continued participation, they offered a range of suggestions for improving COVES including better supporting of data collection and providing more communication and opportunities for the museums to interact.

Even though the museum professionals felt there was nothing, in particular, that COVES could have done to make it more likely for them to have continued, they had ideas for improvements. Specifically, two interviewees mentioned how additional reminders related to the data collection process would have been useful. In one case, the individual felt it would have been helpful to know how many surveys they had collected, as it had been difficult to keep track of this information. The other individual wondered if there could have been a targeted notice, either from COVES or set up internally, that would have alerted them if they were behind on quotas.

Communication was another piece that interviewees felt could be enhanced. For example, one individual felt it would have been helpful to have a list of which museums were participating and included in the aggregate data set, along with a brief description of “who they are and how they market themselves” (#1). A different interviewee talked about how networking opportunities would have been useful for understanding how others were using the survey. The third interviewee similarly remarked that there had been “very little interaction or knowledge of what the other museums or the other sites were doing” (#3).

Other ideas that were mentioned by one individual included that it would have been useful if, as part of the COVES requirements, organizations had to commit in advance to a certain number of volunteers or staff. Proactively planning and making sure these individuals could attend the

trainings might have been beneficial for the situation at this museum. A different interviewee commented that it would be important to provide organizations guidance about how many personalized questions they can add. In addition, this interviewee remembered a technical issue that would occur if visitors did not follow directions when picking the exact number of responses for one question and feeling that the motivation option of “poor weather” did not address underlying reasons why visitors may have come to the museum, but just the timing of their visit. Finally, one interviewee felt that the project should offer some conference sessions directed at people who have been involved in COVES, as the ones aimed at getting people involved were less relevant.

Overall, interview participants offered suggestions similar to those from survey respondents. They felt that COVES could focus future efforts on communication and issues in connection with data collecting.

Interview findings related to the impact COVES had on organizations that are no longer participating

During the interviews, participants were asked to describe how, if at all, COVES had informed the work of their organization. Each of the participants detailed at least one instance of how COVES had had an impact on their institution.

Finding 12: All of the interviewees had examples of ways they used the data; however, one individual talked about wanting further support in interpreting and using the data.

When talking about ways that COVES participation had affected their work, interviewees brought up several areas that had emerged in the survey responses. In particular, individuals shared details about how COVES data had impacted various programming, exhibitions, membership, and development initiatives at their museums. They explained,

Yeah, there were a few things that we got out of it. One was pushing us to think more clearly about attracting a diverse audience and what can we do? We saw that a slight skew towards male children - forced us to think about what we can do for encouraging girls. (#1)

[For exhibitions,] I think we wanted to have a hands-on piece, but I think we put a lot of effort and value on what is the quality of the educational things in here and maybe would have, maybe opted for something that had more educational value in our minds than “fun” value in the past. Whereas now, that “fun” factor has risen. I don’t think in our place it will ever supersede having some educational value, but this also helped remind us that “hey you gotta get them in the doors in order to teach them anything.” We know what brings them in the doors now and so we better make sure we’ve got some of that along with our educational value. (#3)

We’re reasonably new. . . . How could we get people [to] come back a second time? We instituted a new tiered lower membership of a six month admission pass to get people to

come back a second time because if you come back you realize “oh there’s a lot to do.” That was an outgrowth of looking at the data, thinking about it. (#1)

Development would look at income questions. They would look and see how many folks were coming here with a considerable salary and how could we reach out to people, or we have a substantial number coming in the 100k range, [and so we would consider how to] push out more individual giving opportunities. (#2)

While all of the interviewees provided examples of how COVES had been of use to their organization, one individual felt that more direction would have been beneficial. This participant said,

One thing we did struggle with was “now that we’ve got the data, what do we do with it?” Could be because we are new, and we don’t have anyone on staff [who does evaluation]. The one person who would look at it, I guess, would be me, but I don’t [know] how do I implement it into change? I think that’s something that could be learned as part of the whole process, and I just don’t know the end process of it, and, honestly, nobody else here does either. (#2)

Thus, even though more support could have been provided, all three participants had examples of how data had impacted their organization’s work.

Interview findings related to whether or not COVES has accomplished aspects from the C-COVES White Paper

While there was not enough time during the interview to ask interviewees about all six of the fundamental principles outlined in the C-COVES White Paper, participants explained how the project had affected their evaluation capacity and how they viewed COVES’ service to the field. In general, these participants felt that COVES had made an impact on both of these areas.

Finding 13: The three interviewees talked about how their organizations had gained some evaluation knowledge by taking part in COVES. Two of the three interviewees also felt COVES provided a service to the broader field.

Interviewees generally indicated that participating in COVES had increased the capacity among professionals in their organization to conduct evaluation studies or use evaluation findings. They mentioned knowing more about how to gather data and how to report on it. Although one participant was concerned that the Human Subjects training would have a fee in the future and noted that due to turnover, there were only a few people left who took part in this work, this individual felt their organization was continuing to consider data collection opportunities. Another interviewee, in describing how their evaluation skills had been affected, said,

This allowed us to experience a system that could be used, it trained us to know the rules and procedures of a scientific evaluation and we got to see the models of how to report it

out. We haven't gone and done it yet, but I think our level of understanding of what evaluation means is higher as a whole group. (#3)

As to COVES' service to the field, interviewee responses suggest that they see value in the project. One interviewee emphasized how the project can be especially helpful for organizations that aren't doing evaluation. Another pointed out how the project could be valuable to others, especially if they can commit to the data collection. And, finally, a third individual emphasized how COVES helps science museums consider their work, especially in comparison to each other.

Yes. I think it forces all of us to look at what we're doing and think about how we across the board are performing. You big guys have to think about the whole perception of science museums in the world and such and if people are feeling positive when they visit it helps for all of us. (#1)

Overall, like the survey respondents, interviewees felt they had seen increases in their evaluation capacity and saw ways the project was benefiting the larger field.

Interview findings related to rejoining the collaborative

Although the interviewees were not actively following COVES' recent work, two of the three individuals felt there was a chance that they would consider taking part in COVES again.

Finding 14: Two of the interviewees mentioned that rejoining COVES was something they might contemplate in the future.

While the three interviewees were not keeping up with COVES besides occasional interactions at conferences, two of the individuals said they might renew their membership at some point. In talking about whether or not they would consider rejoining COVES, these individuals stated,

Yes, I definitely will keep them in my radar and keep up on what they're up to and how we might somehow jump in. (#1)

I thought it was a great experience. I would recommend it and who knows where it'll be next year. We might be back, I don't know! . . . I would consider it and it's something we could possibly do. . . . We're looking at the options but it is on the table as part of the options. (#2)

Together, these data suggest that the act of leaving the collaborative does not necessarily mean institutions will never come back at a later date. Instead, it seems that more immediate concerns or higher organizational needs might keep some museums from constant participation in COVES, but they might be open to returning.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation indicates that the COVES project has been successful at building and expanding a collaborative evaluation model intended to provide museums with visitor experience data. Across both the surveys and the interviews, participants rated their overall experience with COVES positively and reported being satisfied with some of the main aspects of the project including the trainings, the data dashboard, and the instruments. Survey participants, in particular, described how easy it was to conduct the visitor survey as well as valuing the analytical comparisons that could be made through the dashboard. When reflecting on the project's accomplishments, survey participants strongly agreed that COVES had created a trustworthy system for gathering evaluation data that provided relevant information for their institutions and the larger field.

Beyond being pleased with the project, survey and interview participants noted how COVES had helped inform a variety of decisions at their organizations. Organizations had used institutional COVES data to make choices about internal strategic initiatives, marketing, and exhibitions. Findings show how these areas of work, among others, had sometimes been affected "a great deal" by COVES. Findings also illustrate specific ways COVES has contributed to the evaluation capacity at participating organizations and enhanced professionals' data collection skills and knowledge of survey methods. Likewise, data suggest that COVES helped institutions challenge previously held assumptions and consider future work.

However, this evaluation also points to areas where COVES may want to increase their efforts. In particular, suggestions related to communication were heard across the survey and interviews. For this work, COVES may want to reach out more directly to Data Collectors because individuals in this group often mentioned feeling less connected to the project and less satisfied with their experience. In addition, the core team may want to offer more frequent updates about the project to Participating Institutions, examples of how museums are using COVES data, and ways for partners to interact with each other. Offerings such as these could support professionals' sense of community and connection to COVES. They might also allow for opportunities for the core team to react to the concerns some participants had about the length of the instrument or challenges related to the data collection process.

While the findings indicate that Governing Body members and Stakeholders were more likely to recommend the project than Data Collectors, COVES may want to consider additional ways to support individuals who are closer to the project as well. In particular, the core team might contemplate ways to help these key groups make use of the data, especially in terms of taking advantage of the aggregate results.

Finally, the interviews not only provided insight into some of the areas described above, but they also offered a deeper understanding of why some organizations chose to stop participating. While challenges related to the cost of COVES factored into a couple of the organizations' decisions, the fee was not seen as unreasonable. Demands of the data collection were also described as one of the main aspects that made it difficult to participate. Nonetheless, the museums which end up leaving the collaborative still reported having had positive experiences with COVES, benefiting in a number of ways, and potentially being open to rejoining in the

future. These findings, together with the survey results, emphasize how COVES has grown into a strong collaborative that has advanced the work of the informal education field to be more data-driven.

REFERENCES

- Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies. (2017). *The COVES instrument, explained*. Boston, MA: Museum of Science.
- Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies. (2018). *Understanding our visitors: Multi-institutional science center study, July 2017-June 2018*. Retrieved from http://www.understandingvisitors.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/COVES-FY18-Aggregate-Report_spreads.pdf
- Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies. (2019). Our mission. Retrieved from <http://www.understandingvisitors.org/>
- Institute for Museum and Library Services, National Leadership Grant, Fiscal Year 2014, *Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies*, Grant Number MG-20-14-0060-14.
- Museum of Science Research & Evaluation Department. (2014). *Creating a Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies (C-COVES) White Paper*. Boston, MA: Museum of Science.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

INSTRUMENTS

Interview with professionals from organizations that no longer participate in COVES

1. Briefly describe your role at your museum.
2. Why did your organization originally join COVES?
3. How long did you participate in COVES?
4. What was your involvement with the project?
5. What particular reasons led you to no longer participate in COVES?
 - a. Probe: Logistical, pricing/cost, not meeting institution's needs/not-relevant.
 - b. Probe: Was there one reason in particular that was a barrier to participation?/ Were any reasons bigger impediments than others?
 - c. Probe: Was there anything that COVES could have done to make it more likely for your institution to stay involved/continue participation?
6. What parts of the program, if any, were useful for your organization?
 - a. Probe: Trainings, Tools/resources, Communication
 - b. Probe: (especially in relation to trainings) Do you feel there has been any increase in capacity among professionals at your organization to conduct evaluation studies and use evaluation findings? Explain why/why not.
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the program?
 - a. Probe about Trainings, Tools/resources, Communication, Creating sense of community,
8. How, if at all, did participating in the program inform the work of your organization?
 - a. If it did not—what difficulties did you run into in trying to use COVES data to inform your work?
9. How likely are you to recommend COVES to colleagues at other museums?
10. Overall, do you feel that COVES provides a valuable service to the field? Please explain why/why not.
 - a. Do you still follow or check-in with any of the COVES work? Why/why not.
11. Is there anything else you would like to share?

COVES Summative Evaluation

(untitled)

Please select how you have been involved in COVES. (select all that apply)

- Governing body member
- Data collector
- Museum stakeholder, please indicate your role:

What year did you first begin participating in COVES?

- 2013
- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018

How would you rate your experience with evaluation and using data prior to joining COVES? This could include time spent in previous jobs.

- Little to no prior experience with evaluation
- Some prior experience with evaluation
- A lot of prior experience with evaluation

(untitled)

On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend COVES to colleagues at other museums?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all likely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

Please briefly explain your response.

Please rate your overall experience with COVES.

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent
- Superior

What aspects of COVES are you most satisfied with?

Please briefly explain why you selected "Not at all."

Have visitor data from COVES been used to inform any of the following areas of work at your organization? (Select all that apply)

- Marketing
- Exhibitions
- Programming
- Fundraising
- Strategic initiatives within the institution
- Strategic initiatives across multiple institutions
- Other areas of work:
- I don't know
- Visitor data from COVES have not informed any areas of work

If you can, please describe at least one strategy or decision your organization was able to make based on ***visitor data specific to your museum.***

many different stakeholders.

COVES has a clearly identified process and system in place for sharing findings.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree	I don't know	

COVES has created a model that is financially accessible for participating institutions.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

COVES has created an evaluation system that provides relevant information for my institution about our audience(s).

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Feel free to explain your responses to any of these rating statements.

If you would like to share any of these new question ideas for the COVES Research Team to consider, please include them here.

(untitled)

Is there anything else you would like to share?