Top Tips in Audience Development – your data

This guide is designed by South West Museum Development to support museums with audience development. It provides tips to help you at different stages of your audience data gathering journey. It combines key learning and advice from and the NHLF-funded project, *Rebuilding the Foundations : Gloucestershire's Museums*, as well as South West Museum Development's *South West Visitor Insights* programme. Links for further support and information to support gathering and applying audience data are included at the end of this document.

If you remember nothing else from this guide…

Remember how important data is! Evidence-based evaluation is an essential tool allowing organisations to have a clear understanding of their current and potential audiences and how to target them. It is also a requirement of all major funders, and can help you:

- Write informed, evidence based funding applications
- Advocate to current and potential partners of the value and reach of their audiences
- Prioritise areas of work e.g. programming or outreach
- Spend limited marketing budgets more effectively
- Engage with new audiences locally and nationally
- Understand why people engage, their interests and what they value
- Understand the impact of tourism on your audiences

So: collect, utilize, and keep collecting!

1. Preparing to collect audience data

Deciding what data you need and how you will approach collecting it is a key starting point. It is important also to consider how much data you are aiming to collect and ensure you have the resource to analyse it and apply it afterwards.

➢ If you choose to use a visitor survey, questions should be designed around the characteristics that are most important to you, and the reasons you want to collect data. Ideally this would be linked to your organisation's strategic plan, but this may be a longer-term aim for further rounds of data gathering or evaluation.

➢ Key areas to collect data in are:
- Demographic – e.g. questions around age, gender, ethnicity etc.
- Geographic – e.g. questions around how far people have travelled or where they live
- Behavioural – e.g. questions to establish patterns of behaviour, such as why people are visiting or who with
- Psychographic – e.g. questions to establish what people enjoyed or didn't enjoy

➢ Questions should:
- Use clear, everyday language, avoiding jargon or the assumption that people have anything but the most general know of the subject areas of the museum or exhibition
- Give unambiguous, clearly defined and described options
- Ensure there are 'none of the above' or 'prefer not to say' options

- Use where appropriate open-ended, free text response to gather more qualitative data and responses that you might not have considered.

➢ Be aware of GDPR rules and be careful not to collect any identifying personal information unless you understand the implications as to how that information should be requested, used and stored. Postcode information is not classified as personal data, however email addresses are.

2. Analysing your data

Once you have collected your data, you will need to invest some time in analysing and understanding what it is telling you. If you are asking your audiences for their goodwill and effort to provide quality feedback, then you have a responsibility to appropriately make use of it.

➢ Ideally you should aim for a minimum of 150 responses before analysing your data. Your data only represents a sub-section of your audience, but any survey that has been properly implemented should generate data that is robust enough to offer a percentage representation of your audiences as whole.

➢ People often think that their data will explicitly tell them all the answers they need, but that's not really the case – a little bit of work and consideration is needed to really pull out the key statistics, or headlines, from your data results. To make it easier you might want to consider the following:
    ➢ If you have access to anything like Microsoft Office and Excel, then that is all you need to turn your data into something useable
    ➢ Google forms are widely used, user friendly and are free. There are many guides on how to set them up and use a QR code, also known as a 3D barcode, as an easy way for visitors to access your survey. If you use Google forms, this will do much of the data aggregation for you under the 'responses' tab
    ➢ The important part is doing it frequently enough so that you continue to develop your own understanding and ensure your data is manageable and useful

3. Understanding your audiences

From the data and analysis you carry out, you can begin to understand the audiences you are or are not reaching, depending where you have gathered your date from.

➢ Audiences broadly fall into two categories – Core and Priority. They can also be called Current or Potential.
    - **Core audiences** can be identified from a museum's existing, established audiences; they are most frequently represented in a museum's data and have no specific barriers to engagement.
    - **Priority Audiences** can be identified from groups that are currently under-represented within the established audiences; they are seen less frequently in a museum's data, or sometimes not at all, because they do have specific barriers which prevent them from engaging with the museum.

4. Using your collected data

Once you have collected and analysed your data, you can begin to apply it in your future planning and to support other key areas. It will provide effective evidence to support your plans to improve what you are doing, to show how visible you are in your local community and to demonstrate the impact that you have. It will also help you articulate where the gaps are – i.e. who you are not currently engaging with – and how you plan to change that.

➢ Audience data that is being presented to funders should be precise, clear and include some of your statistics and findings.

➢ When planning an engagement activity, it is good practice to identify at least one **priority audience** and specific measures should be planned in order to increase engagement with that audience. This is a good first step in diversifying your audiences!

- In some instances you may have **Niche Audiences**. These are very specific audiences for whom certain engagement activities or particular subject matters may appeal as they have identifiable interests in the topic of the activity.

- It is important to carry out further evaluation at a later date to assess how audiences have changed as a result of any actions you have taken, and as a result of external factors. Surveying 150+ visitors in each of 2 to 4 time periods in a year is an ideal target. You might survey during holidays and then term time, or in line with changing temporary exhibitions, or other major changes in marketing, messaging or types of experience developed based on audience data.

Useful links

A template you can use to create a baseline summary of your audience data
https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/resources/audience-data-template/

SHARE Museums East evaluation toolkit
https://www.sharemuseumseast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SHARE_Evaluation_Toolkit_FINAL_PRINT_FRIENDLY.pdf

Some useful links to further explore geographic and demographic information…

CACI Acorn is a paid-for classification system which segments people through their postcodes; Acorn groups can be understood as going from more privileged, in terms of socio-economics, to less privileged:

https://acorn.caci.co.uk/

https://acorn.caci.co.uk/downloads/Acorn-User-guide.pdf

Search for your local authority's 'statistical population profiles', 'statistical ward profile', or 'local authority population statistics'. Below is an example of a statistical ward profile from Bristol City Council:

https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/436737/Central.pdf/0b6f8ef0-3403-416d-868e-576156418762

You can also look at the 2011 UK Census results through your Local Authority website or the ONS.

The English Indices of Deprivation is another useful resource and includes an 'explorer' system through which postcodes can be mapped:

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod_index.html