

Museums are public places with exhibitions, events and activities designed for visitors. The people who visit your collections, take part in your activities and events are referred to in this document as audiences. The interaction audiences have with a museum can make a difference to them. There are many ways this can happen including increasing their understanding, learning new skills, improving their wellbeing, and socialising.

“Museum audiences are people who visit your museum or engage with your collections or activities either in person or online.” Museum Next

This resource will show you how to gather relevant information to demonstrate the difference that you make to your audiences. It will help you to answer the question “What impact does the museum have”?

IMPACT is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as:

“To have a strong effect or influence on a situation or person”

### Why Measure Impact?

Demonstrating the impact of your collections and programmes is an important way to show the value of your work and the difference that you make in your community. Quotes, case studies and personal testimony can speak to people in a way that statistics don't. They can motivate people to visit, volunteer and support your work.

Stakeholders, funders, and partners want to know what impact their support, funds or time is having on the museum's audiences. When visitors spend time exploring your collections, attending an event, or participating in activities – what difference does it make to them? Demonstrating your impact can help you to secure funding, forge new partnerships and prioritise your own resources.

### Planning

Start by deciding on the project aims and objectives and what it is that you want to measure. Next decide on the best methods to gather that data (see the qualitative data collection section below). When deciding on the best method to use, be aware of the time and resources you have to gather data, analyse it, and present it. Safeguarding, data protection and permissions will need to be planned for. If you attribute quotes or comments, you will need the permission of the person being quoted. If you anonymise quotes you will need to ensure that the person can't be identified (for example, if you only have one school in your village someone could reasonably guess who the headteacher is that you are quoting). Any images will also need relevant permissions and you will need to follow safeguarding requirements if young people or vulnerable adults are in the images or being quoted.

### Top tips:

Or more information on how to decide aims and objectives as well as methods, check out the [Effective Evaluation Planning resource](#).

## General Visitors or Target Audiences?

You can measure impact on all your visitors, attendees, and participants (general visitors) or focus on a section of people by age, location, community (target audience).

This will depend on the aims of your project (event / exhibition / workshop) and whether or not you are trying to reach a particular target audience.

For example: if the aim of your project is to help people understand better the impacts of pollution on your local river and encourage them to take action that will apply to all your visitors. The impact on all the exhibition visitors is what you want to measure.

If you run a project for people with dementia and their carers with the aim of providing an enjoyable and relaxing activity for carers to do with their family member, you will measure the impact on a specific target audience i.e., carers of people with dementia.

You may want to find out how a particular target audience has responded to an event or activity that is open to all visitors. This could be young people, people from a specific location or new visitors. You could invite those people to a targeted event allowing you to observe and discuss their responses. If they are part of your general visitors, you will need to identify your target audience. You could ask for data that allows you to identify that audience on a comment card or questionnaire. (e.g., a tick box question Have you been to the museum before? Yes / No)

If you have a team member asking questions, they can ask people in the target audience to answer some additional questions. The team member shouldn't assume they know what demographic category anyone falls in to, this could cause offence. A good approach is to provide the team member with a tablet or clipboard with the relevant demographic data e.g. age, where you live, gender, ethnic group. Explain to the visitor that you want to learn more about audiences and ask if they are happy to answer a few questions about themselves. Show them the demographic questions and allow them to indicate their answers ensuring there is a 'prefer not to say' option. Ask everyone the same question e.g. what do you think of your visit today and if someone matches your target audience, ask if they would be happy to answer a couple of extra questions.

## General Visitors or Target Audiences?

Impact data can be qualitative (language based) or quantitative (figures based)

Here are some examples:

- Qualitative (language-based)
  - Quote from comments cards: "old photos of the river shocked me, it was so polluted in the past"
  - Extract from conversation: "Looks aren't everything, you think the river is really clean but once you start testing the water it's not."
- Quantitative
  - 35% of visitors to the river exhibition pledged to throw away wipes instead of flushing.
  - 25% of workshop attendees wanted to continue monitoring water quality in the river using the skills they learnt.

## Qualitative data gathering methods

This resource focuses on using qualitative or language-based methods. These methods give several different ways to demonstrate your impact and can prove very effective at gathering the language-based data that has a real impact on the reader.

It is important to choose a method that is appropriate to the audience, engaging and fun to maximise responses. There is some great practice in museums and cultural organisations so do look at what is working well elsewhere.

### Popular Methods

Feedback wall – place questions or statements as a prompt and allow space for responses. Chalk board, whiteboards, flip chart can all be used as a background with the size of the wall to suit your space. You can give visitors a range of ways to respond; chalks, whiteboard pens, post-it notes, magazine cuttings, highlighters, and marker pens.

Pledge or feedback tree – use luggage tags or shaped tags (leaves/flowers/apples) for people to write a response or pledge and hang on the tree for others to read.

Poll – a quick poll asking people which statement they agree. You can vote with stickers on a board, tokens in containers, emojis on a tablet. Think carefully about the question you want to ask in a poll and ensure it is meaningful and relates to your evaluation plan.

Comment cards – a card with a prompt question relating to your evaluation plan can be located around the exhibition with post-boxes to gather data related to particular exhibits or the whole exhibition. Good prompt questions are open (not a yes or no answer) and invite a thoughtful response. You can make comments cards look like postcards or in any shape or colour you like. Making the activity simple to understand and fun will encourage more responses.

Ideas for comment card questions:

- Tell us something you learned today
- What will you do as a result of this talk?
- What was your favourite exhibit in the museum? Tell us why?
- What do you think people should do to address this issue?
- Write a postcard to someone telling them about this town
- Send us a text on 012345 telling us how we can improve your visit

Vox pop – a quick question or two asked by a person (or online) to gather data. Vox pop questions should be quick to ask and answer and usually gather an immediate response rather than a longer reply. It should feel quick and fun for the visitor e.g.

Describe the activity today in three words.

Finish this sentence, 'The town museum is . . . '

Interview – this is a longer and more detailed conversation with your audience. It is particularly suited to target audiences giving you the opportunity to gather more detailed information.

Remember that if you are asking someone to come at an arranged time and give you 20 minutes or more of their time you should be aware of any access needs they have and have a plan for meeting them, plus any travel costs or expenses they are incurring. If you are unable to offer to pay their expenses consider some other way of thanking them, a discount in your shop or café, free admission ticket or voucher.

Focus group – the same considerations for interviews are relevant for focus groups where a group of people attend a longer session to discuss questions or prompts that you put to them. Think carefully about why you want to run a focus group, who you want to ask and how you will manage it. You may want to employ someone with the right skillset and experience to run this for you or attend relevant training.

## Personal Testimony

For projects that work with the same group of people over several sessions, a case study or personal testimony can illustrate the changes that project has made to individual participants.

The method will need to be carefully chosen to be appropriate to the target audience. You can ask participants to keep a diary / photo diary / sketchbook; answer the same questions at the end of each session so you can map change; take baseline information before they start and compare it to data collected at the end of the project; ask for a personal statement about what the project has meant to them (written / audio / video).

*Remember to follow GDPR guidelines if you gather any personal data. Be aware of safeguarding requirements and ensure that you have permission to use the data you gather in print and online.*

## Presenting your Impact Data

Impact data should be presented with a clear narrative telling the reader what difference you have made for your audience. Readers should feel that they are hearing about the impact direct from your audience and their words should be used.

Word clouds can be a powerful visual method to show the results of vox pops or comment cards. Online programmes will generate a word cloud for you – search free word cloud generator. You will need time to collate the data first to feed into the word cloud generator.

Quotes are a powerful addition to reports and make great website and social media content. If you are anonymising the quote, give an indication of the type of audience you are reaching e.g., young person, carer, teacher

Ethical considerations are important. If you choose a quote from a larger piece of text, ensure that the selection is representative of the views expressed. Check back with the person you are quoting, to make sure they are happy with the choice of words. If most comments are negative, you need to reflect that in the narrative and your choice of quotes.

## Case study

Writing a case study is a good way to present personal testimony data. This method focuses on the impact on a single participant to illustrate the wider impact of the project. Typically, you will include their own words, images and maybe a quote from another appropriate person such as a teacher, carer, or family member.

## Reports

Reports usually contain factual information and quantitative data. Visitor numbers, income and expenditure, outreach activities, events and exhibition data are often included. Adding audience impact data with qualitative evaluation can be a very powerful way of illustrating the difference the museum has made to the people and community it supports.

*Remember to follow the GDPR guidelines if you share any personal data. Be aware of safeguarding requirements and ensure that you have permission to use the data you gather in print and online.*

## Further Reading

Association of Independent Museums (AIM) Success Guide: Understanding your Audiences 2020  
<https://www.aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Understanding-Your-Audiences-2020-1.pdf>

The Audience Agency: Museums Audience Report Nov 2018, information about audience segmentation  
<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/1995> (2018)

The Audience Agency: Visitor Guidelines How to design a visitor survey  
[https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BC\\_How-to-Design-a-Visitor-Survey-1.pdf](https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BC_How-to-Design-a-Visitor-Survey-1.pdf)

The Audience Agency: Visitor Guidelines How to carry out a visitor survey  
[https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BB\\_How-to-Carry-Out-a-Visitor-Survey-1.pdf](https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BB_How-to-Carry-Out-a-Visitor-Survey-1.pdf)

The Audience Agency: Visitor Guidelines How to analyse a visitor survey  
[https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AA\\_How-to-Analyse-Survey-Responses-1.pdf](https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AA_How-to-Analyse-Survey-Responses-1.pdf)

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