



Visitor Guidelines: Part 1

How to Design a Visitor Survey

Published by All About Audiences

Part 1 of this helpful guide explains how to design an effective visitor survey. You'll find advice and examples on survey design, how to select questions, what to consider with the wording of those questions and the overall format. Although a visitor survey cannot provide all your research needs, it is a good tool for getting a better understanding of the people coming through your doors and identifying ways in which your service can be improved.

The Audience Agency is a not-for-profit organisation created out of the merger between All About Audiences and Audiences London Plus in 2012.



Visitor Survey Guidelines

Part 1: Designing your visitor survey

This three-part guide sets out some principles for designing a visitor survey, for carrying out the survey, and for analysing the survey and making sense of the data. The guide has been produced with a museum or gallery with a small research budget in mind, but the principles are still relevant for any type or size of venue wishing to research and assess their visitors.

Part 1 considers issues of survey design, selection of questions, question wording and question format.

Types of research

The visitor survey is just one form of visitor research that fits into an overall research strategy. Other types of research include:

- Desk or secondary research
- Focus groups / panels
- Depth interviews
- Mystery shoppers / visitors
- Observational techniques
- On-the-street / postal surveys (targeting non-visitors)

Although a visitor survey cannot provide all your research needs, it is a good tool for getting a better understanding of the people coming through your doors and identifying ways in which your service can be improved.

Why carry out visitor surveys?

There are several reasons for carrying out visitor surveys. It may be that you collect visitor numbers and satisfaction ratings already for the purposes of funding applications, but a lot more quality information can be ascertained:

Understand your visitors better.

The more you know about your visitors, the more you can satisfy their needs. So gathering information about your visitors, such as age, location and other interests, all serves to provide a clearer picture of the people you are aiming to please.

Identify necessary improvements to services or facilities.

Satisfaction ratings can highlight the areas both where you are operating well and where there is room for improvement. Getting feedback on different exhibitions, accessibility, toilet facilities, staff helpfulness etc. can help you overcome areas of weakness and provide a better service.

Identify obstacles to visitor attendance.

Recording reactions on ease of travel and parking, accessibility, awareness of venue or event, preconception of organisation, can all help identify where obstacles to attendance may exist and where improvements can be made.

Inform marketing activity.

Understanding motivations for coming and levels of awareness can help you assess the effectiveness of various marketing and promotional methods, and inform the marketing mix in the future.

Validate spending or seek funding.

Survey results are a good way of presenting factual information to funding authorities or sponsors about services, facilities or future spending plans.

“For any activity to be carried out well, some form of feedback is needed. Try walking with your eyes shut, and you will soon bump into something. Even without your thinking about it, the feedback from your eyes is used to correct your steps. In the same way, any organization that does not keep its eyes open is likely to meet with an accident.”

Dennis List – Know Your Audience: A Practical Guide to Media Research

What information should I be asking?

Before writing your visitor survey it is worth asking yourself three important questions:

1. What do you already know about your visitors?

It may be worth writing a list of some basic facts about your visitors, or perhaps just general assumptions or expectations. Out of your list you need to decide which details you need confirmed by your survey, which facts are definitely true (meaning their inclusion in a survey is pointless), and which details you need to monitor over time. From observational techniques, you may believe that most of your visitors are over 40, but it may be worth examining this trend over time, particularly if you're attempting to reach out to a younger audience.

2. What do you need to find out about your visitors?

Beyond general assumptions you may have made about your visitors, there will also be information that you don't know but which would be very useful. This may be satisfaction ratings for various services, motivations for coming, or suggestions for improvements, knowledge about all which would help you to improve your services or processes.

3. How will you use the results of the survey?

It is crucial to consider at this stage how you will use your survey results. There is no point investing in designing and carrying out a survey if the completed forms are going to sit in the corner of the office gathering dust for years. Similarly, it is only worth asking questions about the things that you are prepared to act on. It is pointless asking about things that you cannot or will not change. For example, there is no use asking about the location of your venue if there's no possibility that it can be moved.

“Effective audience research is focused and practical. It does not involve collecting information ‘just for information’s sake’ – or collecting huge amounts across many topics...Generally, we use audience research to help us make better decisions, review past activities, understand past mistakes and identify missed opportunities.”

Arts Victoria – Audience Research Made Easy

The layout and structure of the questionnaire

Length of questionnaire

The ideal survey should be between 2 and 4 sides of A4. Any shorter and not enough information may be collected, any longer and the visitor may lose interest. Try not to cram in too many questions as this will confuse the reader.

Design of questionnaire

The layout and design should be simple, making the sequence of questions easy to follow and the questionnaire easy to complete. Fancy colours and pictures may look appealing, but can make the questionnaire appear confusing and cluttered. Any instructions should be easy to understand.

Sequence of questions

Questions should flow in a logical order. The questionnaire should ease the visitor in with a few questions at the start that are both interesting and easy to answer. Questions should then move gradually from the general to the specific, with more difficult questions later on. Sensitive questions or personal information should generally be to the end of the questionnaire. A general open-ended question to capture comment not yet covered is a good conclusion to a survey.

Question wording

Try to keep wording as clear and simple as possible, avoiding industry jargon, and employ a 2-line limit for each question. Only one interpretation of a question should be possible, and respondents should not be encouraged into giving a particular answer. Questions should also be kept precise. When wording each question, always consider each interpretation of the question and each possible answer. This will help you tighten your wording so that it is unambiguous.

Answer formats

Open-ended questions are useful in gauging visitor comments, but are difficult to collate and compare. Multiple-choice questions are far more suitable, though be careful to cover the majority of possible answers. Questions asking visitors to rank factors or services should be used with care as they can be very confusing.

Context and comparisons

Numbers on their own are useless if they can't be compared to anything. It is sometimes worth sticking with questions and answer formats that have been used in previous surveys (either your own or other organisations' published results), or perhaps general population studies, so that comparisons can be made. Alternatively, allow comparisons to be made within your survey, for example ask ratings on several services rather than just one or two, and possibly ask them to rate this against other venues or organisations.

Types of questions

A good questionnaire should have a combination of question formats to provide variety and improve data analysis.

Where necessary, include instructions about how to complete the question, eg. *Tick one box only* or *Tick all answers that apply*.

Open-ended

This type of question is good for gathering personal information and for recording general comments, but is less suited for collating and comparing responses. It requires sorting through the answers and grouping them into different categories, which can be fairly time-consuming and subjective. Thus it is best to restrict open-ended questions to a minimum and to those where qualitative information is required.

What improvements do you think should be made to the gallery and/or the services it provides?

Multiple-choice (single response)

This style of question, where you ask the respondent to select one option from a list of possible answers, is ideal when you are sure of all the possible answers. Try not to make the list of possible answers too long, as it will be difficult for the respondent to comprehend, and will make analysis less meaningful. Possibly group similar answers together in order to narrow down the options.

What is your age? (please tick one)

Under 16	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 to 24	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 to 34	<input type="checkbox"/>
35 to 44	<input type="checkbox"/>
45 to 54	<input type="checkbox"/>
55 to 64	<input type="checkbox"/>
65 or over	<input type="checkbox"/>

Multiple-choice (with other option)

It is sometimes useful to add an 'other' option at the end of your list of possible answers, to allow for any answers that you may have left out. The answers given in the 'Other' box will need to be later grouped into categories so that they can be used in analysis, but this will help highlight whether there were any possible answers that you should have included from the start.

How did you find out about this event?

Word of mouth	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>
TV / radio	<input type="checkbox"/>
Website / email	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poster	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flyer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input style="width: 100px;" type="text"/>

Multiple-choice (multiple response)

For questions beginning “Why” it may be better to encourage multiple answers, for people often do things for many reasons, not just one. Forcing respondents to choose one option may mean they either make unnecessarily difficult judgements between possible answers, or that they pick the first relevant answer they come across. Asking for several answers may give more accurate results. You may feel it necessary though to limit a respondent’s answers, eg. tick up to 3 boxes.

Why did you come to the event today? (tick all that apply)

Stumbled across it

Recommended by a friend / relative

Read a good review in the press

To meet new people

Sounded like good fun

For something different

Other (please specify)

Grid

This is used to record levels of satisfaction with different services or facilities, or perhaps levels of agreement with various statements. By asking respondents to rate different aspects of your venue, you can quickly identify which aspects are your strong points and which are the weak and hence the areas in need of improvement. In designing a grid, make sure the possible ratings are balanced, with equal positive and negative answers on both sides.

Please rate the following services:

	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of artwork	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brochure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exhibition space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Café	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other information to include

Introduction

Introduce your venue and describe why you are doing the survey, asking for the respondent’s support.

Privacy statement

Inform respondents that their answers will be treated confidentially at the beginning of the questionnaire. You may want to remind them about this confidentiality again at the end.

Date

It may be useful to leave a space for the date, so that trends can be analysed over time or across days of the week. You may feel that a space for recording the time is also appropriate.

How to return the survey

For self-completion surveys, provide clear instructions on how to return the survey, such as a drop box in the foyer. A postal address should also be included in case the respondent takes the survey away from the venue.

Thank you

Thank respondents for their participation at the end of the questionnaire.

Incentive

If you are using an incentive to encourage respondents to fill out the questionnaire, such as entry into a prize draw, you need to describe the offer in full at the end of the survey. You will also need to ask for their contact details so you can get in touch with the winner.

Further support...

All About Audiences can give advice and offer assistance on designing or carrying out visitor surveys. Contact **Chris Norwood, Head of Evidence & Engagement** at Chris.Norwood@allaboutaudiences.com on **0161 234 2960** for more information.