

Evaluation allows you to reflect on the activities and experiences you offer, capturing lessons learnt and making positive changes. It helps you understand if the needs and expectations of your audience have been met, tells you if your outcomes have been achieved, and provides you with evidence-based research to report back to key stakeholders and funders.

Here we share some of our top tips and considerations for evaluating engagement experiences...

1

THINK ABOUT EVALUATION FROM THE START

What do you want your audience to take away from the experience? What would success look like – for you, your audience and your organisation? Consider these things before the experience is developed to help focus content and plan activities. Set outcomes that are observable, measurable and realistic.

2

KNOW YOUR REASONS FOR EVALUATING

Think about what and who the evaluation is for. Do you want to test out a new idea, capture lessons learnt to reflect on and make changes accordingly, or do you need to report to a funder? Consider objectivity; if you are asking your audience about your activity, would it be better if a colleague did the questioning?



3

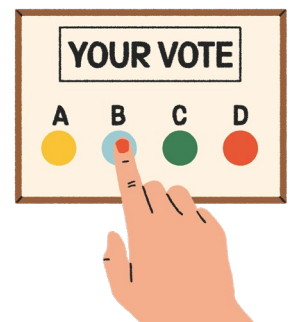
RECOGNISE WHO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE ARE AND HOW MANY RESPONSES YOU NEED

Are they families, adults or school groups? If you need lots of responses, could you make evaluation more interactive, eg pebble voting? For in-depth responses six to eight people is a good sample size. Think about when your target audience will come to the experience and where you will be able to find and talk to them.

4

HAVE CLEAR EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

When thinking about conducting evaluation, don't start with the 'how', start by deciding what you want to find out. Set clear aims for the evaluation and then plan the best method for recording it. There are lots of different ways you could structure your evaluation, including questionnaires, making observations and qualitative or quantitative methods. What methods might be best for your audience?



5

TIMING IS KEY

Start evaluating as soon as you can to give yourself enough time to conduct the evaluation and write it up. When talking to your audience, make sure you let them know how long the feedback will take. Try to keep it as short as possible, taking a maximum of ten minutes of their time.

6

ASK CLEAR AND SIMPLE QUESTIONS THAT FOCUS ON CONCRETE EXPERIENCES

Avoid jargon such as 'interactive' and 'interpretation' and loaded questions like 'What do you think of this amazing interactive?' Instead, keep language simple and neutral: 'What do you think of this experience?' Rather than asking hypothetical questions like 'Would you enjoy using the exhibit if the buttons were different?' ask 'Is there anything you would change about this activity/experience?'

7

ASK OPEN QUESTIONS TO GET DEEPER AND RICHER RESPONSES

This will help you understand why your audience do or think something. Follow up questions with probes such as 'What makes you say that?' and 'Can you tell me some more about that?' Avoid 'why' questions like 'You said that was your favourite topic – why?'



8

ONLY ASK FOR INFORMATION THAT WILL PROVIDE VALUABLE AND RELEVANT INSIGHTS

How will you use the data you collect? What is the most valuable information for you to find out? Think about what you are going to do with any data you collect and how important and relevant each question is. Adding extra questions will distract visitors' attention from the questions you really want them to answer.

9

TEST YOUR METHOD OF EVALUATION

Try it out on colleagues, friends or family before you use it with the public. This will help you understand if you are asking the right questions, how the questions flow, and whether visitors understand them and respond in the way you expect. In addition think about where you will conduct your evaluation; if possible find somewhere that isn't too busy or noisy.



10

KEEP CONVERSATIONS OPEN AND RELAXED

Reassure your audience that they can say whatever they want and that you are interested to hear their feedback: positives, negatives and how things could be improved. Remind them that it isn't a test and you are asking for their help to improve things for others.

EXPLORE MORE

To find out more about Science Museum Group Learning, including resources to use in informal learning experiences, at home and in the classroom, training opportunities, and insights and research around STEM engagement, visit: learning.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk

For further information, contact us at: SMGAcademy@sciencemuseum.ac.uk

Please write 'Top Tips: Evaluating Experiences' in your email subject line.