Evaluation Toolkit

Visitor Use and Interaction Evaluation for Interactive Family Galleries

One objective of the FLING research study was to develop an evaluation toolkit that Art Museum practitioners could easily replicate and utilize to better understand how families use and interact with the activities and each other in family-based, interactive spaces. Specifically, the *Use and Interaction Evaluation* was designed to measure what differences, if any, exist between the original goals and objectives set forth by museum staff and ways that families actually use and interact with the family galleries.

It is important to note that this toolkit was designed to be a blue print only. It was developed with the idea that practitioners will adapt and amend the evaluation plan and instruments to fit the unique context and purpose of their individual organizations and family-based, interactive spaces. Please remember that there are many strategies for conducting observations, as well as additional methods (such as interviews, questionnaires, visitor feedback stations, and so on) for collecting data about visitors' use of the interactive galleries and this toolkit does not intend to be the only option.

If you are considering using the evaluation toolkit to evaluate your family space, we suggest you consider the following questions before getting started:

- Why do you want to conduct an evaluation? What do you hope to learn? What questions do you want to answer?
- What will you do with the findings? How will you utilize what you learn? Are there plans to share the results with other colleagues, stakeholders, or the public?
- What is your timeline for completing the evaluation? Who will work on the study? What resources are available?
- What were our original intentions in creating the dedicated, interactive family space? How do intend for visitors to use and interact with the interactive stations/activities?

Answering those questions will help you make informed decisions about what changes you need to make to the evaluation blueprint to ensure that it fits your unique needs and context.

STEP 1: Evaluation Planning Phase

What Resources Do We Need To Get Started?

We suggest you create a small working group that will oversee the development and implementation of the evaluation project. The evaluation team will work together to discuss the purpose of the study, decide on methods and data collection timeline and procedures, and produce an analysis plan and any plans for reporting on and disseminating results. Having an evaluation team will help to encourage ownership among staff and drive the project forward to meet internal goals and objectives.

How do you Collect the Data? What Methods Do You Use?

This study utilizes observations as a method to answer questions about visitors' use of the interactive family galleries. Researchers designed a one-page observation form that records visitors' basic demographics, attendance, types of interaction, behaviors and use of an interactive station or activity during a set period of time. In addition, an observation protocol was created that outlines specific instructions for how to use the observation form. These protocols are suggestions. Feel free to adapt or create your own system for recording your observations. You can do this on paper, using maps or a form like the one we provided, or you can create a way to enter your data on tablet using something like a Google form. Experiment and you will find you need to continually refine and simplify. It can get quickly get complicated.

How Long will It Take? Who Should We Observe?

For the sample study we have mapped out here, we suggest at least eight hours per month for each interactive station or activity. However, your evaluation team can discuss your own needs and decide that you want to spend more or less time observing an interactive experience. The length of each, individual observation can vary, but we suggest 30-minute segments per station until the full eight-hour quota has been met. In thinking about how to schedule times to observe, consider which times are your busiest. Observing during busy periods will allow you to assess how space is used when the most "stress" in put on the space. Additionally, it will ensure that there are visitors in the space to observe. Conducting observations during quiet and moderate times is also possible – it lets you see how effective the experience can be with no interference from other children. Again, it depends on what questions you ultimately want to answer.

Before collecting any data, you will want to identify your target audience. For example, the FLING study focused on intergenerational groups with children between the ages of five and twelve. Your museum may want to look at how the interactive space is being used by another age group, such as teenagers or school groups.

STEP 2: Data Collection Phase

CREATE A DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE

Once you have your working group set and you have outlined goals and objectives for your research, you need to create a data collection schedule, as well as identify the interactive experiences that will be the target of your observation. We suggest you create a plan that will outline the exact days, times, and data collector(s) who will conduct the observation at each interactive station/activity.

TRAIN THE DATA COLLECTORS

Before you fully implement your study, we suggest you conduct some basic training with your data collector(s). Visit the family gallery together and jointly decide where the observations should take place. For example, the observer will want to stand in an area that facilitates full view of the experience being observed without being so close as to make visitors uncomfortable. Discuss important observation strategies and troubleshoot potential issues that might arise. For example, in this type of observation the observer needs to be discreet with data gathering and observation, so you want to emphasize that s/he try to "blend in" and limit her/his influence on the visitors.

If a visitor should ask what the observer is doing the response should always be truthful, such as: *"I am conducing an observation activity to assess how visitors are using the interactive station/space. It is anonymous in nature and for our internal use only."* If the visitor is satisfied with the response and happy for the observation to continue, the data collector should do so, however, if there is any level of discomfort demonstrated by the visitor, instruct the data collector to halt the observation and reschedule for another time.

As part of the training, you will want to want to review the Observation Protocol with your data collectors. The document we provide on the website explains in detail how to record data into the Observation Form and what behaviors (or evidence) observers should be examining. You can use any sort of observation form so feel free to experiment.

STEP 3: DATA ENTRY PHASE

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE DATA AFTER YOU COLLECT IT?

After the data is collected, it needs to be systematically entered into a database. There are many different types of data entry software that range in functionality, pricing, and availability such as Google Forms or Spreadsheet, Excel, SPSS, and so on). For the purpose of this toolkit, researchers created a database in Excel that you can download from the website.

The Observation Database was designed so that information gathered from the Observation Form (on paper or you can transfer it to an online/tablet form) can be systematically entered and stored into one, organizing system. The Observation Database is intended to be a flexible document and is adaptable depending on the needs and focus of your project.

STEP 4: DATA ANALYSIS PHASE

THE DATA IS ENTERED, NOW HOW DO WE MAKE SENSE OF IT?

The Excel Observation Database was created to be user-friendly and adaptable to your organization's needs. The data base is set up with formulas that will run basic descriptive statistics. In order to for the formulas to run properly, care has to be given so that data are entered accurately. Refer to the Data Entry and Analysis Protocol on the website for detailed instructions on how to enter data and analyze results.

STEP 5: REPORTING PHASE

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO REPORT OUR FINDINGS?

There are many ways that you can chose to report your findings, including a traditional written report, a short memo or brief, a PowerPoint or Prezi/NearPod-type presentation, and/or an informal group discussion/seminar where someone takes notes on a flip chart and the group synthesizes 3-5 key take-aways. Save the final key take-aways chart for future reference. For this study, we produced a more traditional written report template that you can download from the website. Two example reports (from the Frist and High completed in 2011) are included for your reference.