



CALL FOR PROPOSALS

VISITOR STUDIES GROUP CONFERENCE 2017

22nd and 23rd March 2017, Royal Geographical Society, London

'Measuring up': ways of capturing social value and more intangible outcomes

The Visitor Studies Group

The Visitor Studies Group is a membership organisation dedicated to championing excellent visitor experiences. We promote dialogue, facilitate debate and through skills-sharing opportunities provide continuing professional development for those working in visitor studies and related areas. Our annual conference is the key event for our members to engage with each other and to address those issues which impact visitor studies and the organisations within which we work.

The VSG conference

The annual VSG conference 2017 will be a two-day event bringing together delegates from across Europe working in a wide range of cultural organisations (including museums, galleries, zoos, heritage sites, botanical gardens, libraries, universities and visitor attractions) as well as cross-disciplinary consultants who all work in a range of positions (including audience research, evaluation, audience development, visitor studies, learning, education, community engagement and others).

The format of the two days is influenced by feedback we have received from delegates attending previous VSG Conferences. On each of the two days we will begin with inspirational keynote speakers who will set the tone and address our theme. Thereafter, the format ensures that delegates share skills and experiences through case studies and in a variety of interactive session formats. There is ample opportunity for networking (during and after each day's programme) and to gain insight into, and influence, the work of the VSG Committee.

The Visitor Studies Group: Championing excellent visitor experiences

The conference theme

The theme of the 2017 VSG Conference will be:

‘Measuring up’: ways of capturing social value and more intangible outcomes

Increasingly visitor studies is being asked to understand and demonstrate the value and impact that our cultural and heritage institutions have on broader public agendas such as health and wellbeing, social justice, inclusion, place making and the environment. Anecdotally we know that the engagement and learning that takes place in our cultural and heritage institutions is making a profound impact on the public and communities – but are we in the visitor studies profession doing enough to help our sector to really understand and evidence the positive changes we are making? Social outcomes are often difficult to measure and to quantify, yet the need to do so is growing. Once the provision of specialised practitioners, we see the task falling more and more to our group members when they are asked to practically evaluate the social impact and value of their programmes and exhibitions. However, accessing the tools and methodologies to meet this need remains a challenge.

Who in the arts, culture, and heritage sector is collecting this data and what is being done with it to affect change? What practical frameworks have been tested out to effectively demonstrate the successes, implications and challenges of these agendas in our organisations?

Some of the issues we hope to address through the conference sessions are addressed in the bullet points below. This list is by no means exhaustive nor is it meant to be too prescriptive – we welcome input from all those who can address the theme in a creative and meaningful way drawing clearly on their own experiences.

We are seeking examples of:

- Toolkits, frameworks or guidelines used to evaluate projects or programmes that have social impact, wellbeing or other hard-to-determine outcomes as part of their remit
- How the more theoretical approaches to thinking about impact and wellbeing can be translated into easy-to-understand, practical tools to be used by evaluators and practitioners
- Innovative/alternative research or evaluation methodologies used to capture difficult-to-measure outcomes especially around the ideas of wellbeing, social impact and community capacity building
- Approaches to capturing the more ephemeral or intangible outcomes of visitor engagement in museums and heritage sites – emotions, inclusion, representation,
- Case studies where outcomes that are extremely complex to measure have been successfully evaluated
- Projects or initiatives where the social impact evaluation/research findings have proved transformative for the organisation

- Effective ways of delivering evaluation outcomes which demonstrate often hard to measure or intangible impact
- How we demonstrate the value of visitor studies in this area of research and examples of where this has been done?

We welcome submissions from those who can share success stories with our delegates but also those submissions which provide honest accounts of where a study or approach may not have gone as well as expected. We can provide more intimate session formats if this feels more appropriate. Share your experiences and challenges with our delegates and contribute to the Conference. We also seek practical sessions that delegates can be inspired by and take away tools and tips to directly apply to their own work.

We are looking for contributions in a range of formats, lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour each, such as case studies, presentations, discussion sessions, workshops or panels. Opportunities to share and to engage fully with speakers and delegates is key to delivery. Please let us know what format best fits with your proposal – you may have other ideas which we would welcome, we want to make the conference as lively as possible. If you are offering a workshop or interactive session we will seek details of how this will be successfully delivered. On reviewing all submissions the VSG Committee may ask speakers whose sessions may have a similar approach/theme to collaborate. This has worked successfully in previous years.

Please note that skills sharing and knowledge exchange with and between delegates should underpin the sessions.

Final date for proposal submissions is [Friday 30th September 2016](#)

Please use the attached form and email your ideas to: admin@visitors.org.uk

Contact Nicole at admin@visitors.org.uk for more information or if you have any questions.

PROPOSAL

VISITOR STUDIES GROUP CONFERENCE 2017

Name
Organisation
Contact details (email address, telephone)

Please indicate in which format you would wish to participate	
Case study presentation plus Q&A	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactive workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>
Panel discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other format	<input type="checkbox"/> , please specify:

Abstract clearly indicating how it reflects our Conference theme (maximum 300 words)

Please communicate how you will deliver your session and what tools you will provide and/or require (maximum 300 words)

Please tell us why you believe your paper should be included in the 2017 VSG Conference Programme and what delegates will find out as a result of attending your session (maximum 100 words)

Short biography of proposed speaker/s or suggested panellists (maximum 100 words)

Return to admin@visitors.org.uk by 30September 2016

All submissions will be judged by the VSG Committee and you may be contacted to discuss your proposal in further detail and shape it to fit into the overall conference programme. Conference presentation or papers will be published on the VSG website after the conference.

The VSG is a member organisation and as such cannot offer speakers attendance at the event free-of-charge. There will be, however, a discounted rate for speakers available when booking opens.