**CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

**VISITOR STUDIES GROUP CONFERENCE 2018: Big data, big opportunities?**

8th and 9th March 2018,  Natural History Museum, London

**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 2018 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, unversities 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.

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**The conference theme**

The theme of the 2018 VSG Conference will be: **Big data, big opportunities?**

In visitor studies, we are constantly striving to respond to an ever-changing socio-political landscape. We are frequently tasked with helping our organisations understand and support evidence-informed decision making, in response to these often complex areas. As populations and communities change, and as societal, technological and financial goalposts shift, how do we begin to respond to these changes- and challenges- in the work that we do?

Building on discussions explored in previous conferences, the 2018 Visitor Studies Group Conference seeks to explore what can be gained by looking beyond our own primary research, and in some cases even the walls of our institutions, by examining and interrogating big data.

On a large scale, information about people is constantly being captured, stored and accessed by multiple stakeholders, each of whom apply their own meanings to the figures. This wealth of information exists ready to be mined by- and crucially interpreted by- visitor studies practitioners. We ask; what role does big data play in helping us to interpret, understand and respond to our visitors and the world around us? What opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration have been- and are presently being- utilised through access to large scale statistics? And what practical frameworks have been tried and tested, and how can visitor studies practitioners use them to demonstrate the successes, implications and challenges of identifying and understanding the needs of visitors?

We encourage you to bring fresh perspectives that can help us begin to make sense of, and respond to our ever-changing institutions, communities and societies. We welcome input from all those who can address the theme in a creative, participatory and meaningful way, drawing on their own experiences.

Some of the issues we hope to explore are addressed in the bullet points below. This list is by no means exhaustive, nor is it meant to be too prescriptive.

- Getting started with big data. What is it? What information sources are out there, are they reliable and how can we make sense of them?
- What experience have practitioners had with using big data, and what insights have they derived? How have they helped to support evidence-informed decision making at strategic and/or programming levels? Sources might include large external data sets such as Census data or segmentation models; or internal data sets such as marketing information, social media analytics or behavioural data.
- How can we practically work with large sets of unstructured data? What skills do we need and what support is available?
- How can we humanise big data? How do we generate meaning beyond the numbers? How can we combine big data with more qualitative insights?
- How can we visualise big data? What tools and techniques are available to practitoners?
- What are the ways our sector can pool large scale information together and make meaning from it? How can we contribute to big data? Should we?

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- How can we work with other sectors? Who should we work with? What skill-sets are required?
- Can big data help us to define and identify non-visitors? What information sources and research methods can we utilise to make this data usable and helpful so we can support our organisations to build a comprehensive understanding of non-visitors.
- How successful has work been around using evidence-informed decision making to attract and engage non-visitors both long and short term? How can this often small sample size research sit alongside large scale statistics?
- What challenges does big data present for visitor studies practitioners? What are the limitations of its use? What are the privacy and Data Protection implications?

We are looking for contributions in a range of formats lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour each. These can include, but are not limited to:

- discussion sessions/ provocations
- on-site learning opportunities
- practical workshops/ hackathon
- skills-based workshops/ training
- panel/ roundtable discussions
- case studies

Opportunties to share and to engage fully with speakers and delegates is actively encouraged to support and facilitate meaningful knowledge exchange. Please let us know what format best fits with your proposal – or you may have other ideas which we would welcome.

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, something which has worked successfully in previous years.

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.

**Final date for proposal submissions is Monday 2nd October 2017**

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.

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**PROPOSAL**

**VISITOR STUDIES GROUP CONFERENCE 2018**

| Name |
| --- |
| Organisation |
| Contact details (email address, telephone) |

| Please indicate in which format you would wish to participate | |
| --- | --- |
| Case study presentation plus Q&A | ☐ |
| Interactive workshop | ☐ |
| Panel discussion | ☐ |
| Other format | ☐ Please specify: |

| Abstract clearly indicating how it reflects our Conference theme (maximum 300 words) |
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| Please communicate how you will deliver your session and what tools you will provide and/or require (maximum 300 words) |
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| Please tell us why you believe your paper should be included in the 2018 VSG Conference Programme and what delegates will find out as a result of attending your session (maximum 100 words) |
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| Short biography of proposed speaker/s or suggested panellists (maximum 100 words) |
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Return to admin@visitors.org.uk by **2nd October 2017.**

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.

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