Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies

Ryan Auster, Museum of Science, Boston

With generous support from:

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

COVES is designed to unite science centers in systematically collecting audience-level data, with a focus on institutional and field-wide improvement.

COVES provides common data to help decision-making.

How long did they stay /
What motivated them to visit /
Did they visit the gift shop /
What mode of transportation did they use to get here?

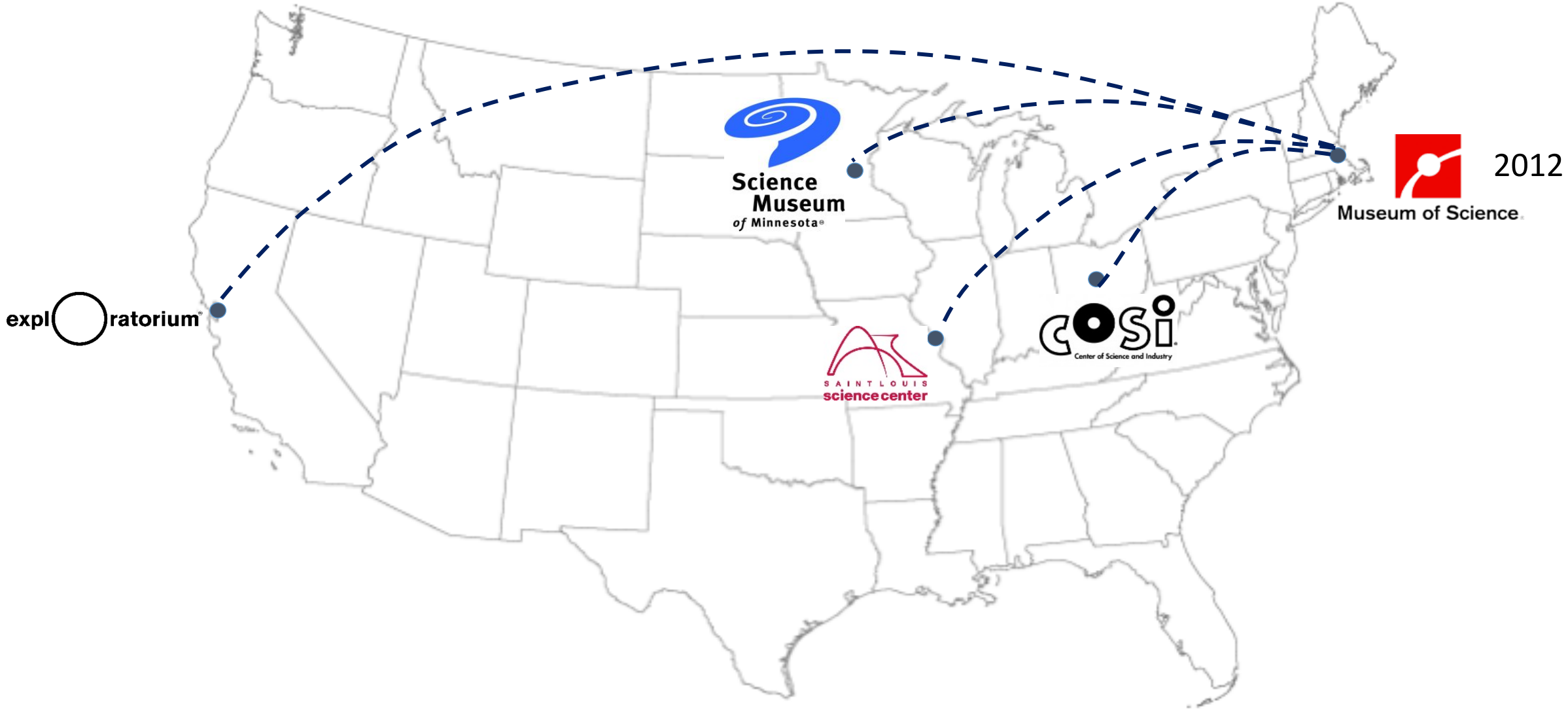
What percentage of visiting groups come with children under the age of 3?

What percentage of those groups have an additional child of any age in their group?

What is our Net Promoter Score?
Is that *good*?
What should it be?

WE ARE DROWNING IN
INFORMATION
WHILE STARVING FOR
WISDOM

How do we compare?



Siloed Studies…

Creating a unifying system

DISCOVERY
Center of Idaho
South Dakota
Discovery Center
Science Museum of Minnesota
GREAT LAKES
Science Center
LANCASTER SCIENCE FACTORY
ECOTARIUM
science.nature.explore.connect.
SCIENCE WORLD at TELUS WORLD of SCIENCE
discovery center MUSEUM
COSI
Center of Science and Industry
THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
exploratorium
COVES
Museum of Science
nysci
New York Hall of Science
CITY OF ROSEVILLE CALIFORNIA
MARYLAND SCIENCE CENTER
DISCOVERY PLACE
THE Discovery
Terry Lee Wells Nevada Discovery Museum
BRADBURY SCIENCE museum
THE DO SEUM
Scott Family AMAZEUM
SAINT LOUIS science center
PENSACOLA MESS HALL
ASTC

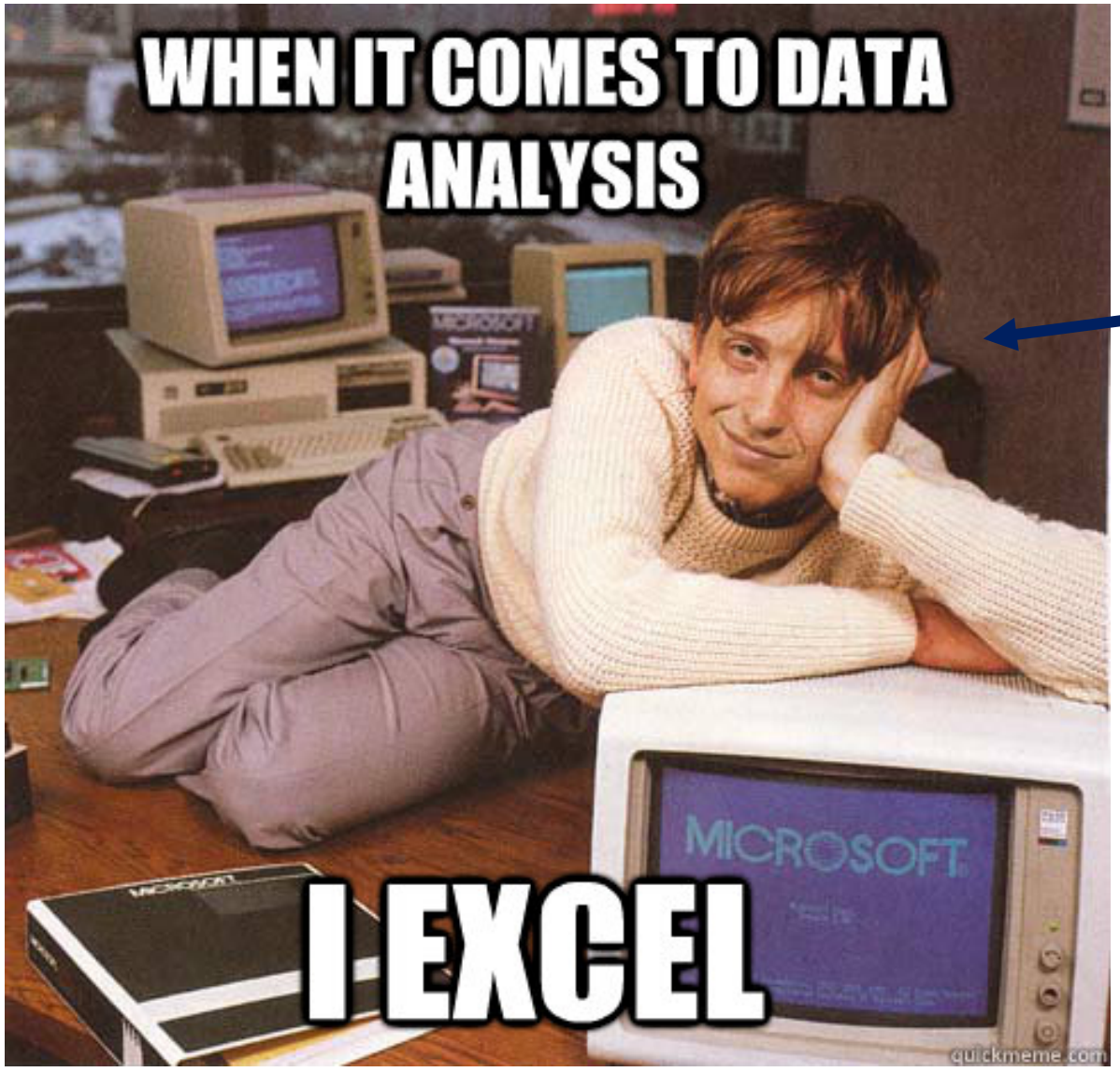
COVES provides:

- a common instrument & shared measures
- institutional flexibility
- analytical assistance
- evaluation capacity building resources
- dynamic reporting
- systematic comparison

Onsite trainings

Exit survey data collection

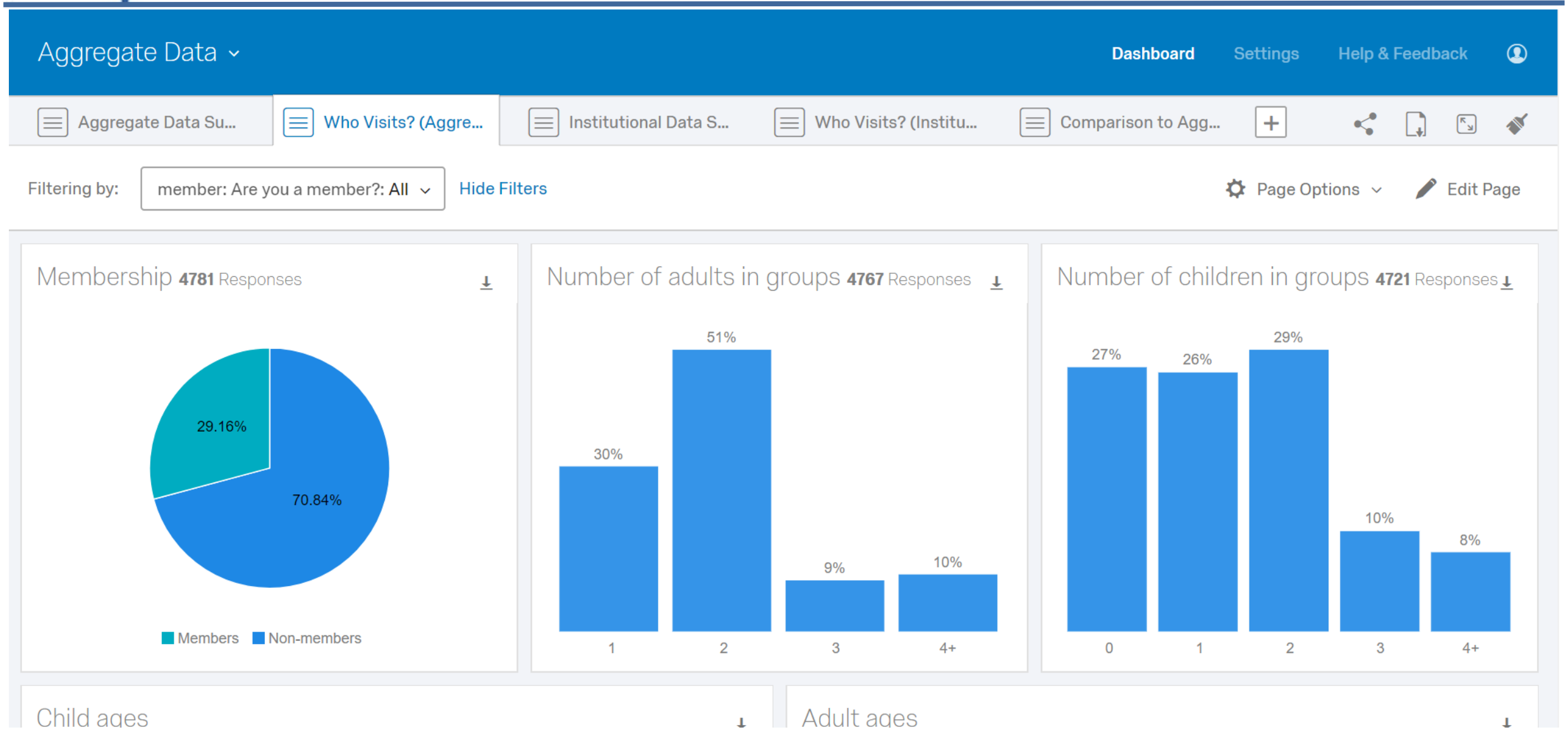
Centralized data cleaning / analysis



Ryan!

…strongly resembling a young Bill Gates…

Contextually relevant data



Community of Practice

Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies (COVES)

Settings

Community Home | Discussion 9 | Resources 5 | Events 0 | Members 31

LATEST DISCUSSION POSTS

Add

NEED DATA COLLECTION GUIDANCE? CHECK OUT THE COVES ...

By: Michelle M. Kenner , 16 days ago

New documents are up in the resource library! Check out Data Collection Key Points , which is a great document to train new data collectors who were not able to attend the onsite training. The 2016 Report Placemat Walk-through explains each section ...

VISITOR CONFUSION WITH EXPERIENCE RATING QUESTIONS

By: Alexander Lussenhop , 22 days ago

Hi all, I received a couple of questions from data collectors recently about visitor confusion with the museum experience ratings on the COVES survey and thought the answers might benefit more people. The museum experience rating questions display differently ...

COVES

Welcome to the COVES CoP! Here you can:

- Connect with members of the COVES team and staff at other participating institutions
- Access members-only resources, such as aggregate reports, training webinars, and capacity building documents
- Keep up-to-date with the latest COVES news and events

CoP Moderator:

We study:

Who visits

Why they visit

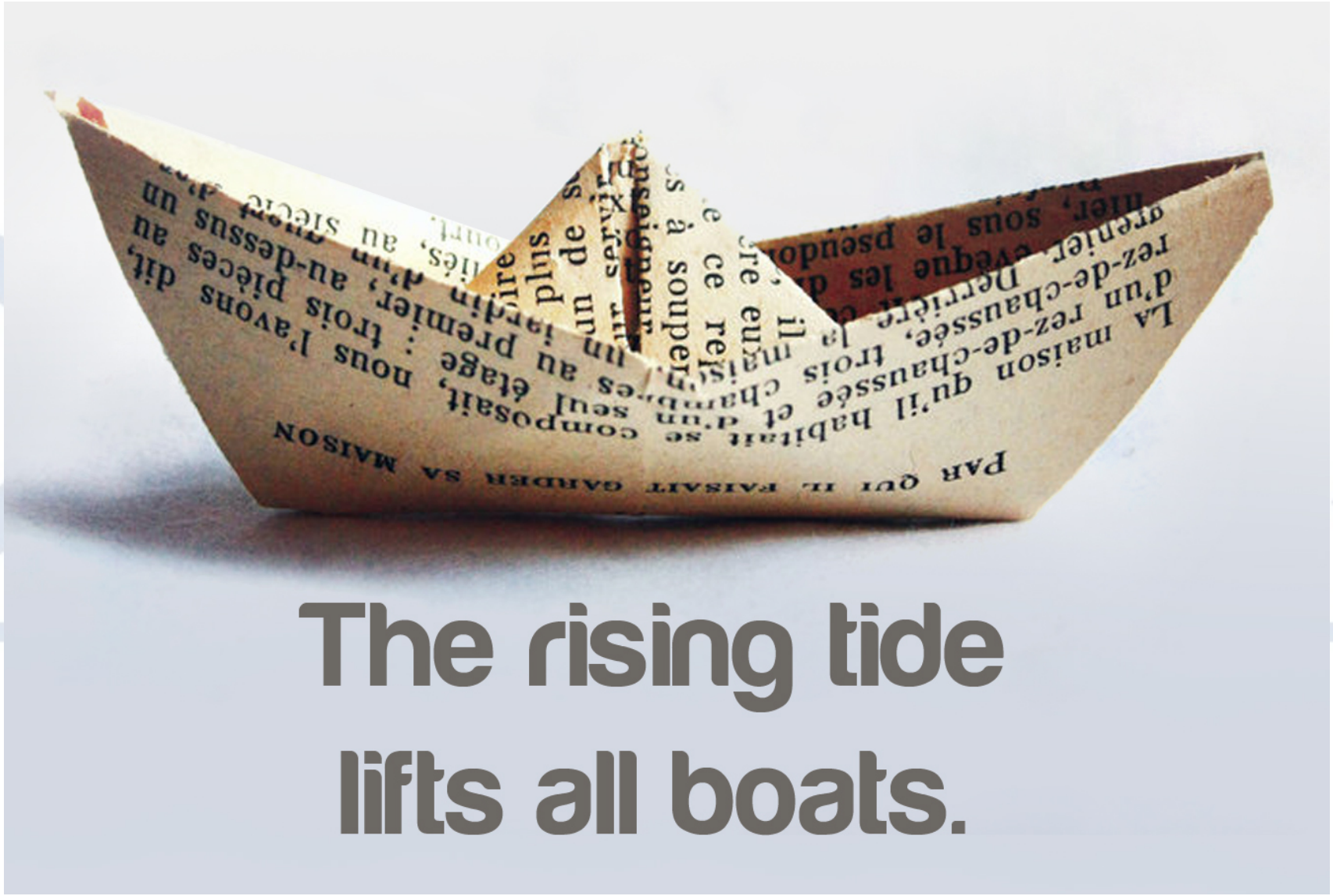
What they see & do

How they feel

Why develop the system?

Why develop the system?

Why develop the system?

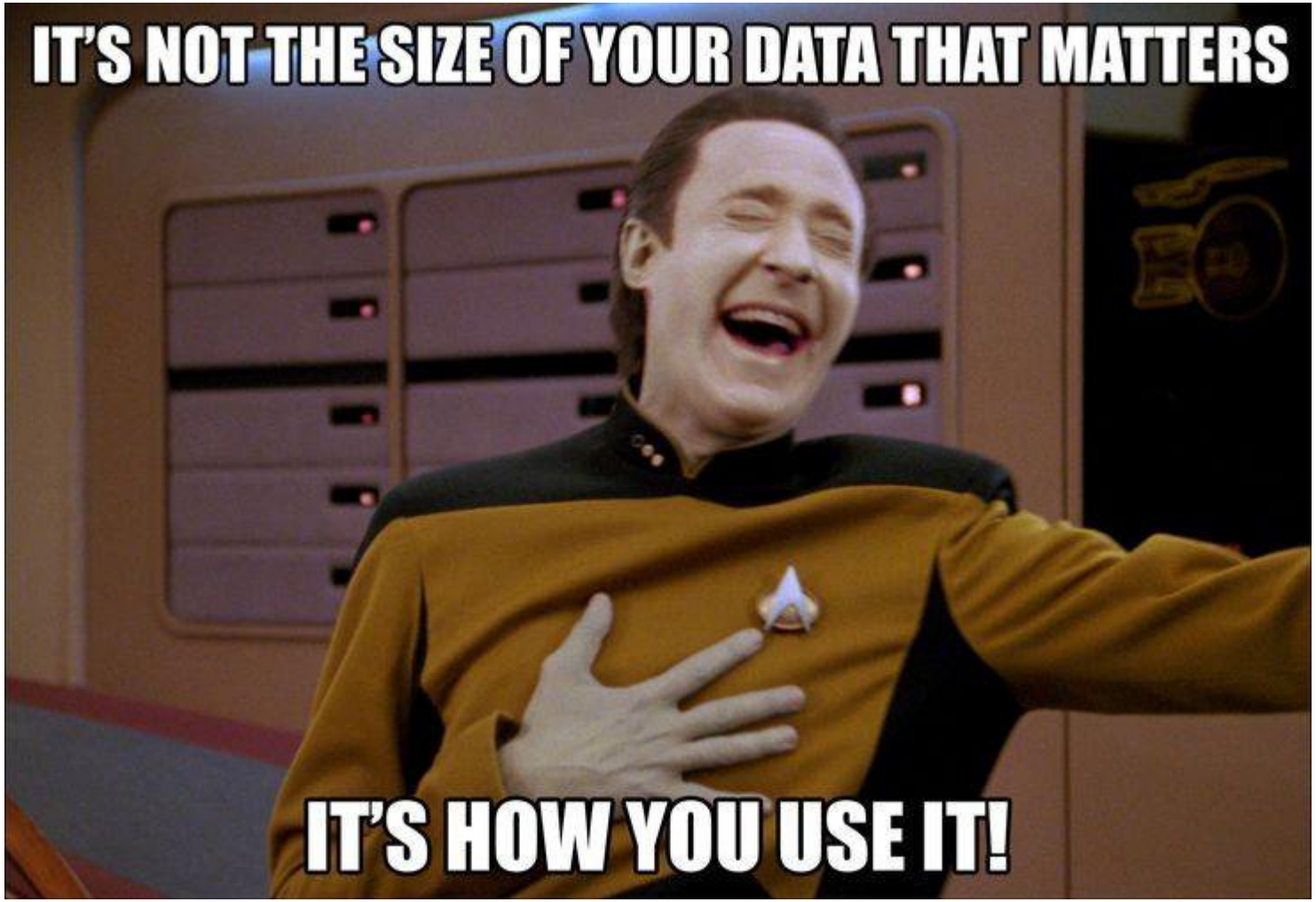


Using the data & insights

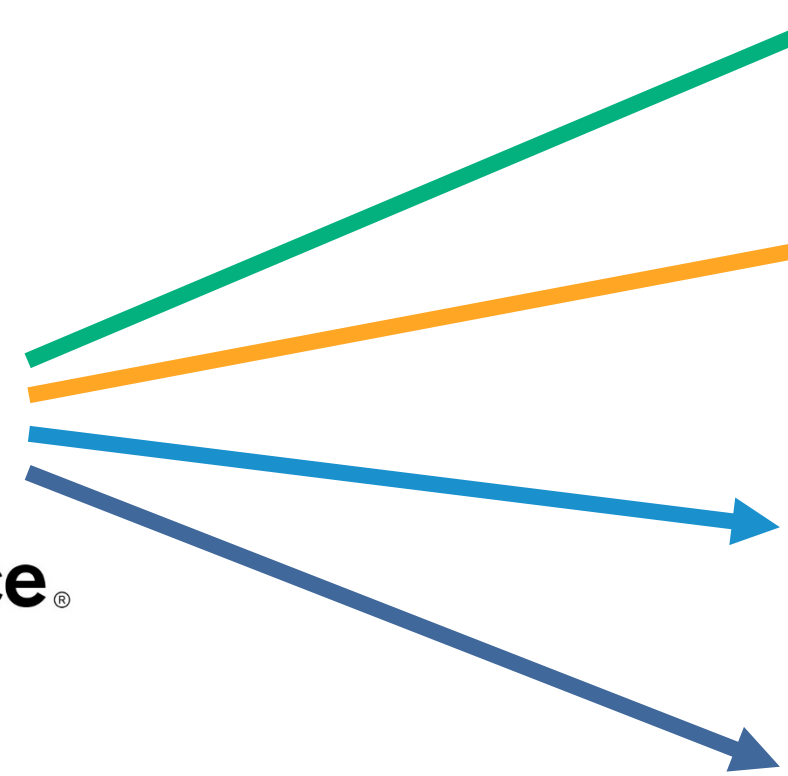
- To date: N > 13,000 (visiting groups)

- Avg. response rate 59%

  [institutional response rate range 33% to 95%]



The value of comparison



FY17

FY18

FY19

Museum of Science®

United States™ Census Bureau

COVES

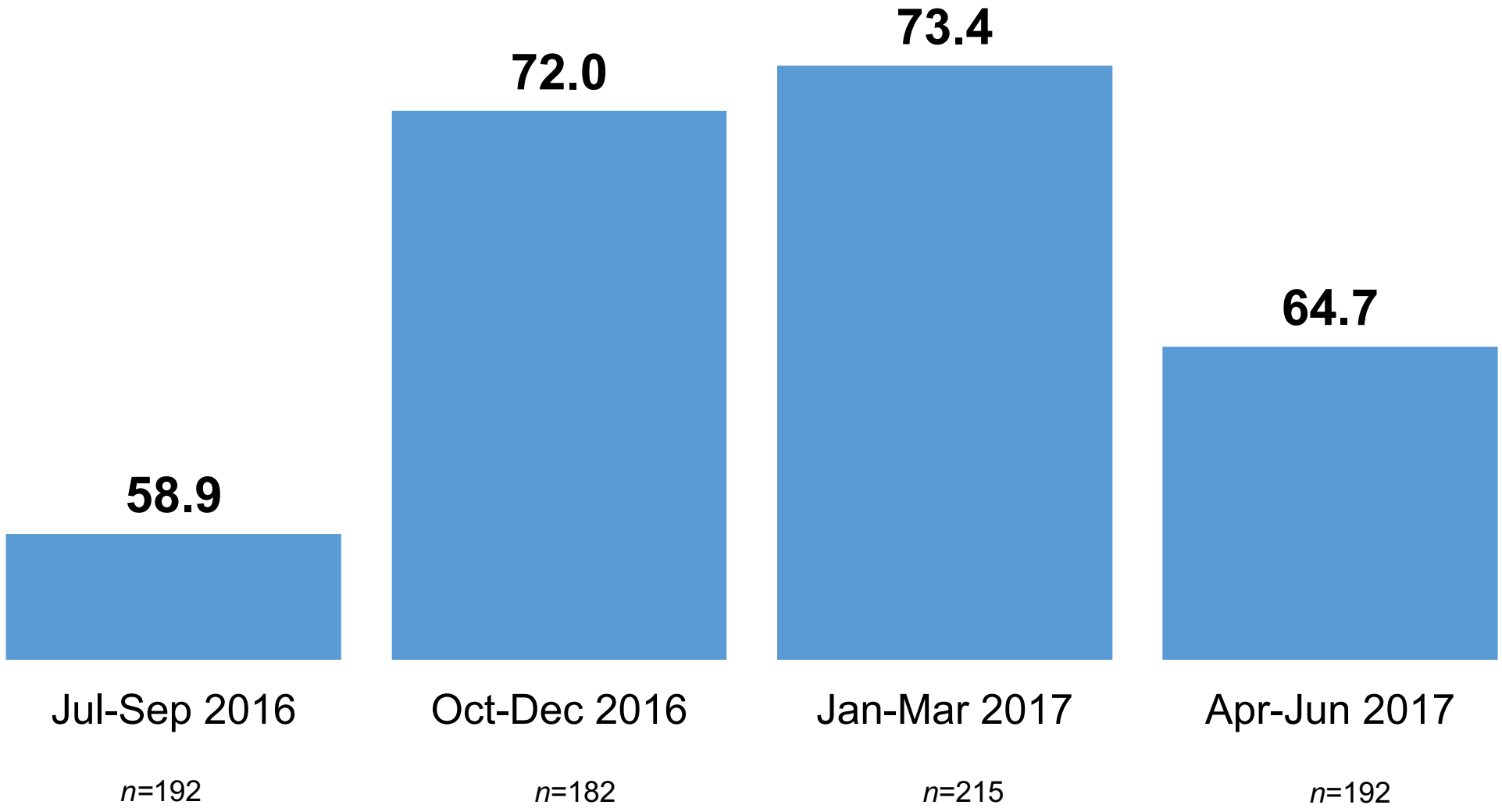
exploratorium®

COSI Center of Science and Industry

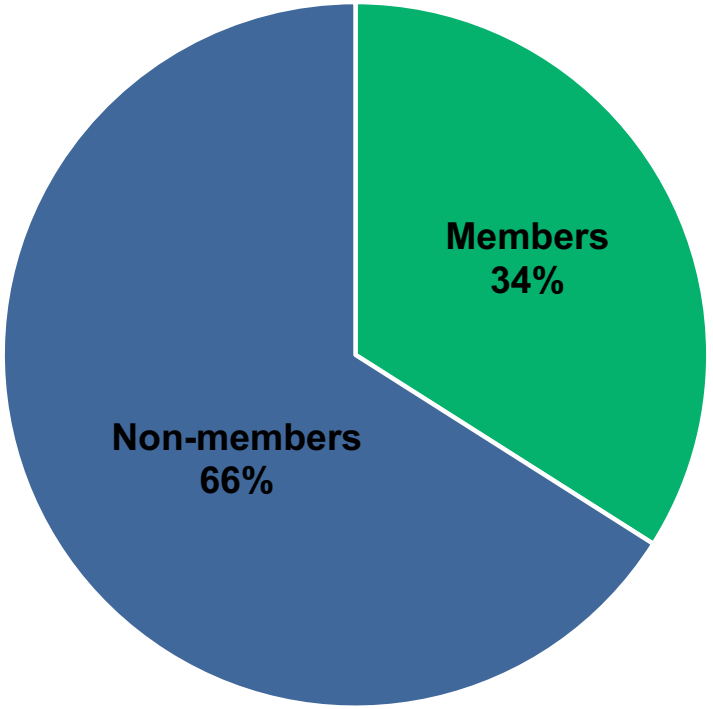
Science Museum of Minnesota®

SAINT LOUIS science center

Comparing over time



Net Promoter Score



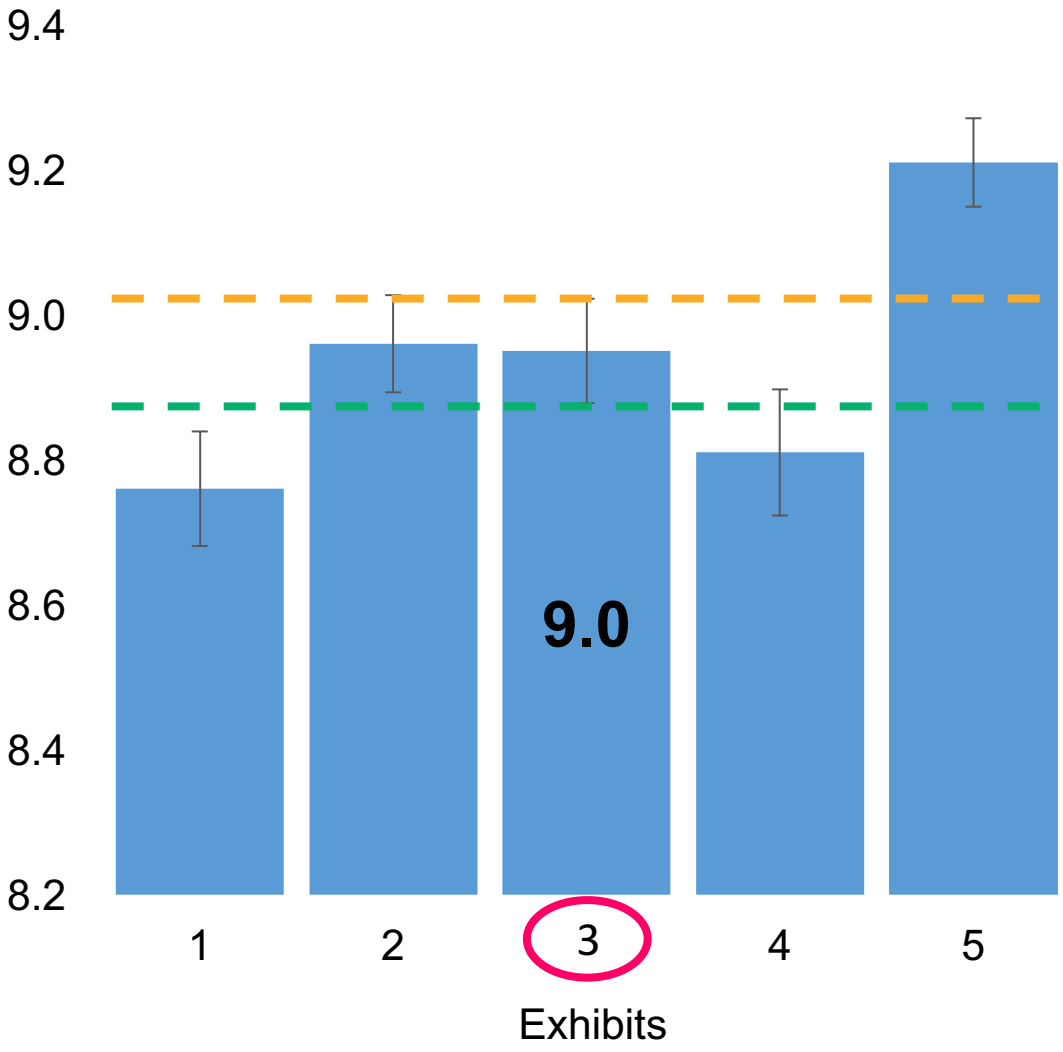
84.0

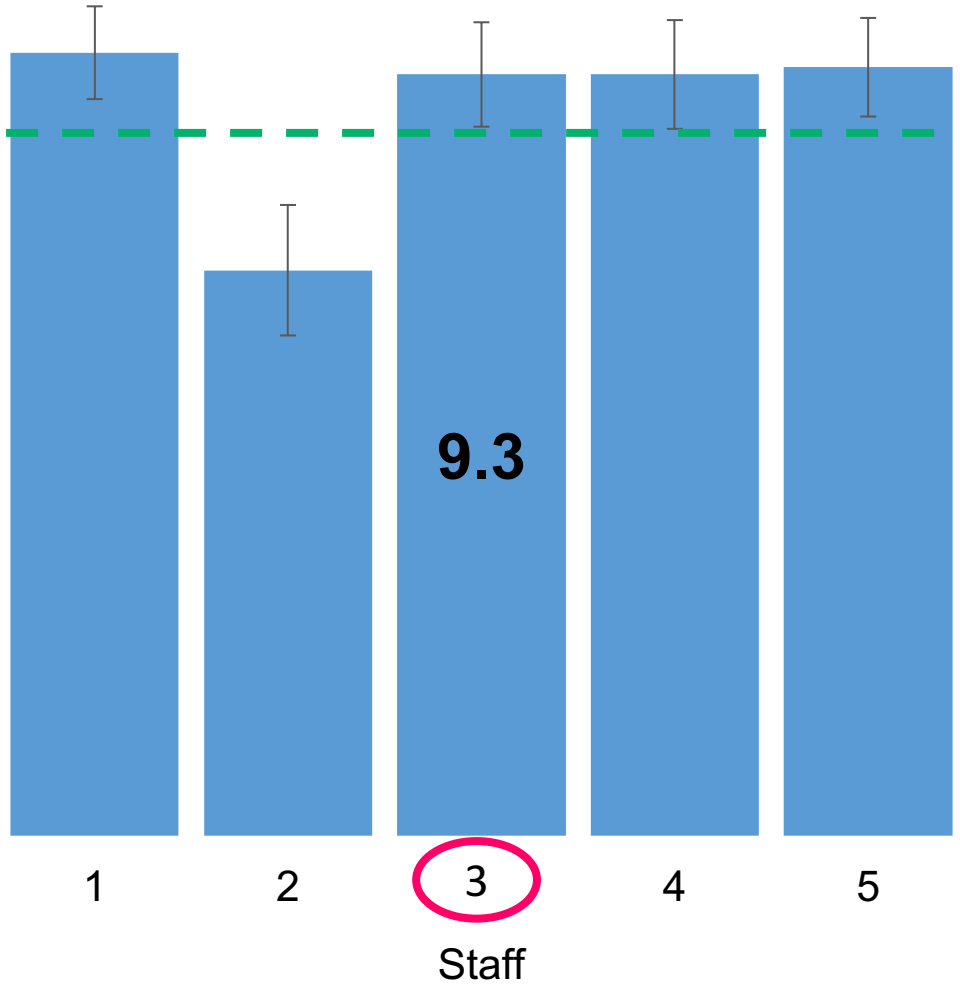
Members

58.8

Non-members

Comparison to peers (example)





Custom Analyses

Togetherness-oriented families

43%	23%	18%	16%
Togetherness-oriented families	**Experience-driven adult duos**	**Enrichment oriented families**	**Sightseeing groups**
Mostly-local visitors who come to the Museum to spend time together as a family.	Pairs of adults who visit the Museum largely to spend time together or to see a specific exhibit, program, or show.	Dedicated, local families who come to the Museum so that group members/children can have fun and learn.	Non-local groups who spend time together at the Museum while visiting Boston.
Motivations	**Motivations**	**Motivations**	**Motivations**
More likely* to visit: ▪ To **spend time** together ▪ For an **educational experience** for group members or children	**More likely* to visit:** ▪ To see a **specific exhibit, program, or show** ▪ For **fun or education** for self ▪ To bring **out-of-town guests**	**More likely* to visit:** ▪ For **fun** for group members or children ▪ For **education** for group members or children ▪ Something to do in bad weather	**More likely* to visit:** ▪ As something to **do in Boston**
Group Composition	**Group Composition**	**Group Composition**	**Group Composition**
100% Adult and child groups More likely to include children, especially teens* **75%** include 2 or more adults **62%** include 4 or more people	**98%** Adult-only groups More likely to include young adults (age 18-29) or adults age 50 and older* **65%** adult-only duos **84%** groups of 3 or fewer	**99%** Adult and child groups More likely to include children 11 and younger* **51%** include 2 or more adults **49%** include 4 or more people	**69%** Adult and child groups More likely to include adults age 50 and older* **56%** groups of 3 or fewer
Home ZIP Code	**Home ZIP Code**	**Home ZIP Code**	**Home ZIP Code**
80% live **within 60 mi** of MOS	**79%** live **within 60 mi** of MOS	**96%** live **within 60 mi** of MOS	**2%** live **within 60 mi** of MOS

Sightseeing groups

"Thanks to COVES, we have been reflecting on and improving our practices for surveying our visitors about their experiences. We've also been standardizing our questions and methods."

exploratorium®

Bruce Damonte

“Being a small/medium size museum, we do not have the resources that are required to gather valuable visitor information. This powerful tool enables our museum to serve our community better and thereby serve our mission.”

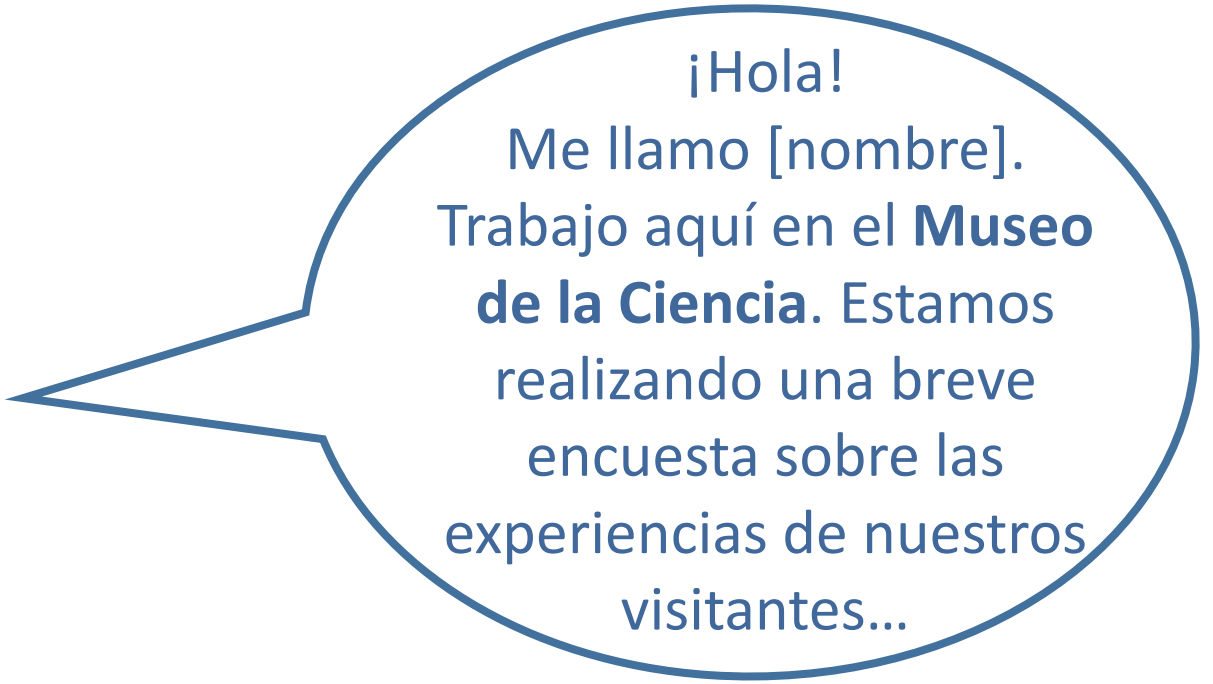
discovery center MUSEUM

Challenges

- Data collection → only a few sites
- Institutional buy-in → one “champion” often insufficient
- Creating a culture of change → must come from within
- Designing a better reporting mechanism → scalability and timeliness

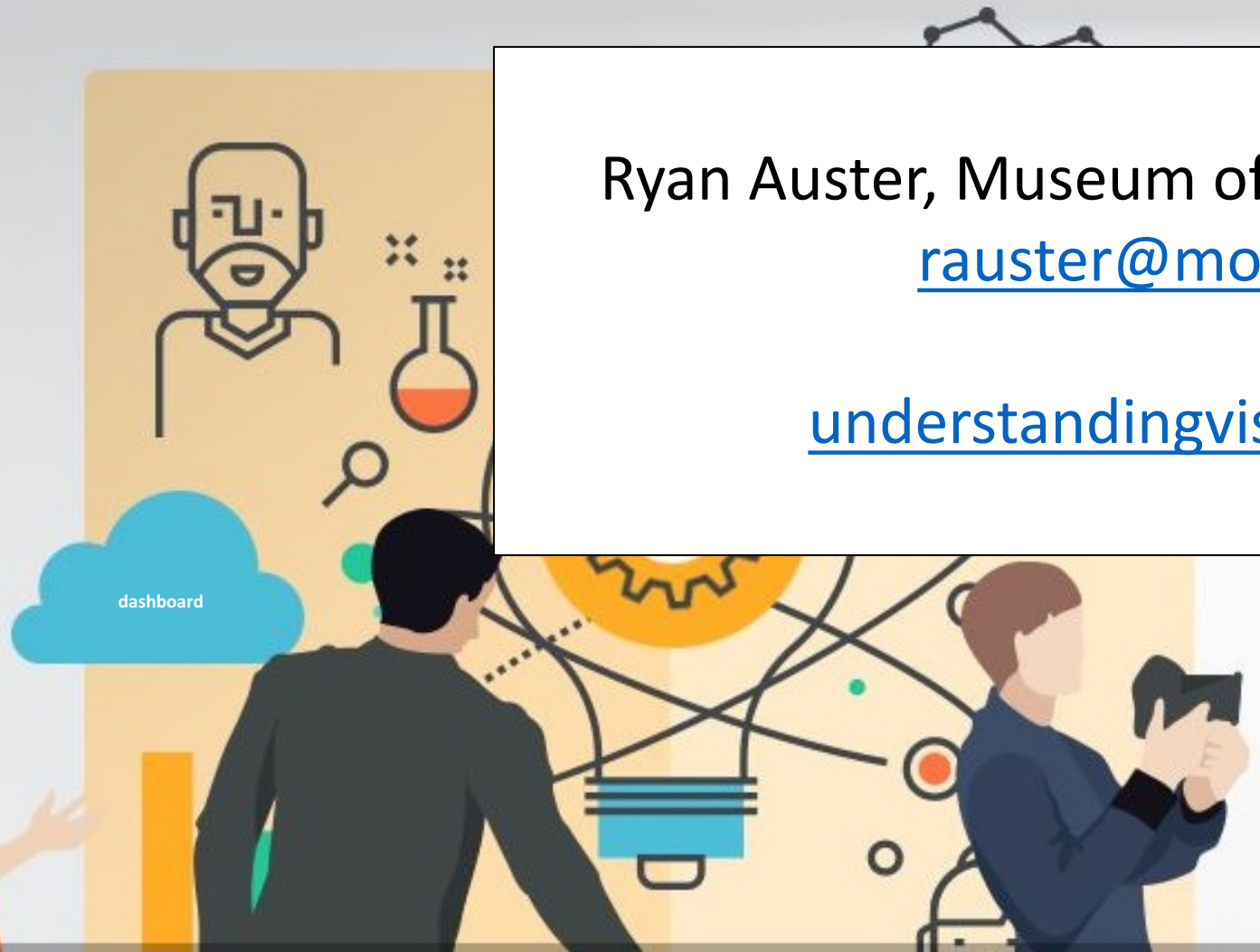
Opportunities

- Becoming a central hub for understanding museum visitors across fields (Evaluation Capacity Building)
- Field-wide research questions
- Continued expansion & language translation



COVES

ABOUT HOW TO JOIN COVES COMMUNITY BLOG CONTACT



Ryan Auster, Museum of Science, Boston
rauster@mos.org

understandingvisitors.org

ssion

ng Visitor Experience Studie

(COVES) is a transformative data service created by mus

professionals for museum professionals to help museum

more effective and economically strong through collabor

collection, analysis, and interpretation of visitor experienc

Learn more about COVES

View Our Goals