Whether looking at personal or self-guided programming the **keys are**:  
1. knowing what information you’ll elicit and generate  
2. **and** how you’ll use that data to make improvements.

**Kinds of Evaluation**

**Front end** – at the beginning of a project to establish some initial parameters or to gain some initial feedback (audience knowledge base, expectations, desires, etc.)

**Formative** – “testing” phase during program or exhibit development (do exhibit instructions work, people gleaning desired information)

**Summative** – how well is the final product working, measured against initial objectives, often critical for grant funded programs.

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Evaluation tools:

Interviews and surveys:
- face-to-face
- phone
- mail / email / web (Survey Monkey!)

Visitor observation: tracking and timing studies (look at total time, number of stops, types of interaction or engagement with exhibit)

Focus groups: Facilitated discussion with limited appropriate participants from members of a target audience.

Resource analyses: Altered impacts on resources? Limits of Acceptable Change?

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Using evaluation data:

- **tweak materials** during development (ideally) or perhaps post-development so they function as desired
- attract desired or maybe new audience?
- **improve** future products and efforts
- attract **funders & grants**

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Front End Evaluation Results:

Evaluation prior to renovation planning for the visitor center at the Hatfield Marine Sciences Center (HMSC). Evaluations are expected to aid the development of a communications plan and selection of concepts for visitors' interpretive experience. Data were collected using both a questionnaire and face to face semi-structured interviews. Major results of the evaluation covered:

1. reasons for attending the HMSC;
2. visitor expectations;
3. visitors' knowledge of general science and of marine life and environments;
4. visitors' level of interest and attitudes toward exhibit themes;
5. issue areas of greatest interest; Visitors to the HMSC had a strong orientation toward seeing and closely interacting with marine life and environments.

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Formative Evaluation Results: Reactions to Prototypes of Selected Exhibits for the Interpretive Center at the African Burial Ground

What would have made it a “10” for you?

- 30% more information/ history/biographies
- 13% less reading and more hands-on
- 12% seeing it completed
- 11% video / graphics
- 11% artifacts / bones/ documents
- 8% more space/ more exhibits
- 8% more photographs
- 7% more for kids
- 7% more historical context
- 5% audio
- 5% more about the research / discovery
- 11% other
- 6% don’t know/ no answer

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Summative interpretive evaluation results

To what extent did the new signage at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden succeed in providing the desired outcomes? Specifically:

1. Do visitors notice and read the new signs?
2. Can they remember something from the text?
3. Do they find the signs engaging?
4. Do they come away with some sense of the overarching theme, “Plants are essential to life”?
5. Does the signage convey the subtopics and their relevance to tropical plants?

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Summative evaluation results

1. Overall Appeal: About how many signs did you read?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency N=72</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All or most of them</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About half</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Do visitors perceive a central message in the Tropical Pavilion, and if so, what is it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency N=50</th>
<th>Percent*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global dependence on the tropics</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin of products we use</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation, preservation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence of life within the tropics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the rainforest, tropical plants (general)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
Interpretive Evaluation

Resources and References

*Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, by Beverly Serrell, 1996.


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Interpretive Evaluation

Resources and References

NPS Social Science Program: http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/

Parks Studies Unit at the University of Idaho http://www.psu.uidaho.edu/
(good focus group info!)

These professional organizations include exhibit evaluation foci:

American Association of Museums (AAM) http://www.aam-us.org/

Good annual conference, have offered free registration with commensurate volunteer time!

Visitor Studies Association (VSA) http://visitorstudies.org/

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