The COVES instrument, explained

So, we have this survey our visitors are completing, or are going to in the near future. Why are these questions the main questions we are asking of all COVES museum participants? And what are all of the questions, anyway? This document offers you a review of the entire instrument and explains the purpose of each question. Hopefully this will help you and your team to answer any questions that may arise for your visitors as they are taking the survey.

Q1 Thank you for visiting [INSTITUTION NAME]. Please answer a short survey about your visit to help us improve the quality of the museum experience. Your response is anonymous, and the survey takes only a few minutes of your time. We are glad you chose to visit today and we look forward to receiving your feedback. If you have any questions about this survey, please email info@understandingvisitors.org.

Introductory language. This gives people a basic understanding of what is to come (and also covers some of the material you should have noted in visitor recruitment per our IRB).

Q2a On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend [INSTITUTION NAME] to a friend or colleague?

This question is known as the Net Promoter Score (NPS). Crafted in the 50s for big business, it is a single question that can get to a person's overall feeling about a company or place. The Net Promoter Score has become a very common way to measure overall customer or visitor satisfaction (have you seen this question come from your credit card company or airline?). For COVES, a visitor ranks their likelihood to recommend our museum to their friends or colleagues. Each response then falls into one of three segments: 0-6 are "Detractors," 7-8 are "Passives," and 9-10 are "Promoters." The overall NPS is then calculated by subtracting the % of Detractors from the % of Promoters. Passives are not included in the calculation, as they are regarded as people who are more ambivalent about the museum or action in question. Because of this way of calculating NPS, the range of possible scores is from -100 to 100.

Q2b What is the most important reason for the rating you gave?

Understanding *why* visitors responded to the NPS question as they did may be critical in helping you understand the visitor experience. NOTE: This open-ended follow-up to NPS is only randomly displayed to half of your surveyed visitors (the other half receive the same follow-up to the Overall Experience Rating question, as noted below).

Q3a Why did you decide to visit today? (Select up to two.)
- ❑ To spend time together as a group/family
- ❑ To bring out of town friends/family
- ❑ For an educational experience for group members/children
- ❑ For an educational experience for myself
- ❑ For fun/entertainment for group members/children
- ❑ To see a specific exhibit, program, or show
- ❑ For fun/entertainment for myself
- ❑ Wanted something to do in poor weather
- ❑ Had a coupon/free pass
- ❑ Something to do while visiting the area
- ❑ Because that's what good parents do

This list of options has been culled from years of asking this question in an open-ended manner at a number of Governing Body museums. Instead of continuing to ask it an open-ended way, the COVES instrument team looked at the answers and related codes that multiple museums had created from past visitor responses to generate this list. The options are broad enough to cover both very specific reasons for visiting ("I'm going to a show across the street later tonight" would fall under Something to do while visiting the area) to really broad reasons ("Just for fun" would fall under For fun/entertainment…).

The list of options could certainly be longer and more specific, but we would overwhelm survey takers if it were longer. To create an effective survey, you don't want to give more than 12 or so options. This list offers 11 options.

Respondents are allowed to choose two reasons from the list. Often, people will say things like, "Oh, we were in the area and looking for something fun to do." If we were doing this as an interview or as an open-ended question, that comment would be coded into both "For fun/entertainment for group members/children" and "Something to do while visiting the area." By allowing people to select two, they can identify the main reasons that brought them to the museum without overthinking it.

LOGIC: **If** To see a specific exhibit, program, or show is selected

Q3b Because you indicated you came to see a specific exhibit, program, or show, please select which one(s):

Understanding the specific attractions you offer that drives attendance can be incredibly valuable, especially if you offer temporary experiences or traveling exhibitions. The responses to this question are updated along with your experience list (Q5 below).

Q4 Approximately what time did you arrive at [INSTITUTION NAME] today?
   [Dropdown response option with museum-specific hours from open to close in 15-minute increments]

How long do people actually spend at your museum? If you are able to watch visitors come and go AND remember when they arrived, you are a rare bird! Most museums either have staff rotations or duties for front desk staff that don't allow them to be able to monitor visitors in that way.

By asking the visit length question in this way, we are able to get an approximation of the length of their museum visit. Visitors are better able to recall generally when they arrived at the museum or the museum's parking lot than they are at estimating a length of time. Between reporting when they arrived and capturing the time that they are taking the survey and leaving the museum, we have an estimate of the length of their stay!

Q5 Which of the following did you and/or your group do at [INSTITUTION NAME] today?
- ❑ Visited the Exhibit Halls
- ❑ Visited the [featured/traveling exhibit name]
- ❑ Saw a Live Show
- ❑ Visited the [young children's space name]
- ❑ Saw an Omni film
- ❑ Saw a Planetarium show
- ❑ Went to the gift shop
- ❑ Ate in the Café
- ❑ Other, please specify _____
- ❑ None of the above

The options available in this question are based on what visitors can actually do at your museum. Traveling exhibits, temporary or special galleries, and other experiences that come and go will be included and removed from this list as they occur at your museum.

Instead of getting at what got people to the museum in Question 4 above, this question gets at what they actually did, saw, or experienced once in the museum. These two questions are a great pairing: the first gets at what drives people to the museum while the second reflects what they did once inside. Are people doing what they intended to? If not, why not? And, if they came for fun, they saw specific pieces, and then they later report that they did not have fun, what happened or how could the experience be changed to offer future visitors more fun or entertaining moments?

Q6a Please rate your overall experience for this visit to [INSTITUTION NAME].

Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Superior

This question is known as the Overall Experience Rating (OER). It was added to the COVES survey in the fall of 2017 to distinguish truly Superior experiences from those that are still Excellent in nature but may not go "above and beyond" – recent research has suggested that while virtually all visitors rating Superior to OER are Promoters for NPS, only about 40% of Promoters on NPS also rate Superior. This question allows us to keep the industry-recognized NPS rating for comparison while evaluating the Overall Experience Rating to see where there is room for growth.

Q6b What is the most important reason for the rating you gave?

Understanding *why* visitors responded to the OER question as they did may be critical in helping you understand the visitor experience. NOTE: This open-ended follow-up to OER is only randomly

displayed to half of your surveyed visitors (the other half receive the same follow-up to the Net Promoter Score question, as noted above).

Q7 Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

Strongly disagree 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Strongly agree 10	Not applicable
The museum provided a high quality educational experience.											
The museum provided a high quality entertainment experience.											
The museum provided a good value for the cost of the experience.											
The exhibits were in good working order.											
The staff members were helpful.											
The restrooms were clean.											
I was pleased with my overall café/restaurant experience.											
I was pleased with my experience in the gift shop(s).											

These eight statements are able to get at how satisfied survey takers were about overall aspects of the museum. In general, they show how comfortable and happy people were with their experience, some of which is broad and some of which is specific to particular areas of the museum. Ideally, all visitors will strongly agree with each statement, but we know that there are bad days at the museum… exhibits break down, prices feel too high, people don't get to do what they want to do. This set of statements will allow you to understand how visitors, in general, feel about their visit.

Q8a Do you currently live in the United States?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

LOGIC: **If** Do you currently live in the United States? **Yes** is selected
Q8b What is your zip code?

Where are your visitors actually coming from? You probably know where your members are coming from, since we get so much more information from them. But, that doesn't mean everyone comes from 10 miles away! This set of questions allows you to understand what your international draw is AND helps clarify what your region is for pulling in more consistent attendance (is it 10 miles or 30 miles?). It can also help identify whether you are serving a particular geographical segment of your community.

Q9 Please tell us about your group, including yourself:
- ○ My group included locals only
- ○ My group included locals and out-of-towners
- ○ My group included out-of-towners only

In addition to Q7b, this helps clarify if others in the group are from further away. It could also help us better understand how our more local visitors think about the community. Is 10 miles local, or are you located at such a distance or in such a place that more people think they are from out of town? We allow people to self-identify both because it is difficult to define "local" and "out-of-town" for all 13 participating science centers and because visitors' self-perception is likely to be more relevant to their museum experiences.

Q10 Prior to today's visit, when was the last time you visited [INSTITUTION NAME]?
- ❍ Within the past three months
- ❍ 3-6 months ago
- ❍ 6 months to within the last year
- ❍ 1-2 years ago
- ❍ 2-5 years ago
- ❍ 5-10 years ago
- ❍ More than 10 years ago
- ❍ Never
- ❍ Not sure

As someone brilliant once said, past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Looking at what people have done is the best way to know how they will behave in the future, and tracking most recent visitation is one way of doing so.

LOGIC: **If** Prior to today's visit, when was the last time you visited? any of **Within the past three months / 3-6 months ago / 6 months to within the last year** are selected

Q11 Including today, how many times in the past 12 months have you visited?

For example, if you visited today and one other time in the past 12 months, you would enter the number 2.

For those visitors who *have* visited in the past year, understanding the frequency of their visits may help you track your heavy users and their experiences to better understand how people are using your museum.

Q12 Are you a member of [INSTITUTION NAME]?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q13 How many adults (18 years or older) including yourself were in your group?
[Dropdown response option from 1 to "10 or more"]

Q14 How many children or adolescents (younger than 18) were in your group?
[Dropdown response option from 0 to "10 or more"]

Q15 With which racial or ethnic group(s) do you identify? (Select all that apply.)

- ❑ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Black or African American
- ❑ Hispanic or Latino
- ❑ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ❑ White or Caucasian
- ❑ Other: _____
- ❑ Prefer not to say

There are so many ways to think about race and ethnicity. For this study, we use categories that developed based on a combination of Census categories and those used by some of our Governing Body institutions on other surveys. People can select as many categories as apply to them, so we can get to detail or to broad categories as is appropriate for each organization and community.

Q16 Do you identify as LGBT+? (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, +)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not sure or questioning
- ○ Prefer not to say

Probably the top question causing confusion on the part of respondents, the COVES project has chosen to ask about sexuality (and culture and community) with this question. We have included this question, in addition to asking about visitors' gender, for a number of reasons: (1) it is a very important question to include for a number of our museums' communities, as it is a major demographic element for their patrons, (2) the identification is becoming more and more important for numerous communities and cultural groups, and (3) the inclusion of the question suggests that your museum is seeking to be all-inclusive and welcoming.

Q17 Which of the following categories best represents your highest level of education?

- ○ Some high school
- ○ High school degree
- ○ Some college
- ○ College degree
- ○ Some graduate work
- ○ Graduate degree
- ○ Other: _____
- ○ Prefer not to say

This question runs a bit askew of the census data questions, but it is detailed enough for us to know, generally, what the education levels of our visitors are. And, the census ranges will roll up into these categories.

Q18 What is your yearly household income?
- ○ Under $25,000
- ○ $25,000 - $49,999
- ○ $50,000 - $74,999
- ○ $75,000 - $99,999
- ○ $100,000 - $149,999
- ○ $150,000 - $199,999
- ○ $200,000 - $249,999
- ○ $250,000 - $300,000
- ○ More than $300,000
- ○ Don't know
- ○ Prefer not to say

This set of ranges is based on a combination of Census categories and those used by some of our Governing Body institutions on other surveys. It will work for comparing your visitors' income with your local or statewide income ratings.

Q19a Do you, or does anyone you visited with, have a permanent or temporary disability?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to say

LOGIC: **If** Do you, or does anyone you visited with, have a permanent or temporary disability? **Yes** is selected

Q19b How would you describe the disability? (Please select all that apply.)
- ❑ Mobility
- ❑ Visual
- ❑ Auditory
- ❑ Learning
- ❑ Cognitive
- ❑ Other: _____
- ❑ Prefer not to say

These five categories are the top five categories, and they cover nearly all disabilities. Universal design, accessibility, and inclusion are high priorities for several of our 13 institutions, and knowing about visitors' disabilities helps to inform this work.

Q20 What is your age?

Though we will cluster the answers for our analysis, we are leaving the question completely open to allow for as much digging in as you and your team would like to do! By getting actual ages, you will be able to break down the data in whatever way is best for your organization.

Q21 What is your gender?

- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female
- ❑ Another category--please specify: _____
- ❑ Prefer not to say

One of a few questions that may cause a bit of consternation, this question seeks to be all-encompassing without being overwhelming. Male and female are the two standard, "normalized" genders. However, those two categories do not include some people, such as those who have intersex conditions or consider their gender identity to be "non-binary" (i.e. existing outside of the male-female binary). Thus, we have added "Another category," allowing people to share without making the list 5+ options long.

Q22a Please tell us about the other adults in your group.

[NOTE: the table below has a dynamic number of rows based on the number of adults reported]

	Age								Gender			
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Prefer not to say	Don't know	Male	Female	Another category	Prefer not to say
Adult	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

LOGIC: **If** How many adults (18 years or older) including yourself were in your group? **10 or more** is selected

Q22b In the text box below, please enter the genders and ages of the rest of the adults in your group:

Q23a Please tell us about the children/adolescents in your group.

[NOTE: the table below has a dynamic number of rows based on the number of children/adolescents reported]

	Age						Gender			
	0-3	4-7	8-12	13-17	Prefer not to say	Don't know	Male	Female	Another category	Prefer not to say
Child/ Adolescent	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

LOGIC: **If** How many children or adolescents (younger than 18) were in your group? **10 or more** is selected

Q23b In the text box below, please enter the genders and ages of the rest of the children and/or adolescents in your group:

Q24 Is there anything else you would like to add? Please enter any comments in the box below.

Good survey design includes at least one open-ended response option for guests to voice any other aspects of their visit to the museum that was not included in specific questioning. These comments are not collected to be coded and compared across institutions, but will be provided directly to each institution to make use of as necessary.