

How can I evaluate my event?

Quantitative evaluation – bums on seats

Albert Einstein once said: “Not everything that counts can be measured, and not everything that can be measured, counts.” Very true, success cannot always be expressed in figures and can look very different from place to place.

Absolute visitor numbers are always relative. If a venue can only take in six people at a time and therefore offers a series of timed tours, the total number of visitors will always look small, no matter how popular it was. But adding all individual numbers together can send out a really powerful message. That’s why we would appreciate it if as many places and events that take part in Heritage Open Days could count their visitors and feed back either by using our paper Organiser Feedback form or by using their online Organiser Portal. Your feedback is vital. We count on you!

How can I keep track of visitor numbers?

Here are some methods which other Heritage Open Days organisers have tried and tested:

- A simple ‘number clicker’ can be bought in many news agents or office supply stores. A volunteer at the door can use this to record visitor figures.
- Have some clear containers available for people to drop in coloured pebbles.
- Although you may wish simply to count numbers, if you decide to tally how many men, women and children attended, this can be done easily by using the above method and allocating different colours for males, females and visitors under 16.
- Give out raffle tickets as entrance tickets. To distinguish young and adult visitors you could use different colours.

Qualitative evaluation – visitor profile, motivations, impact

When you are interested in the impact of your efforts, you will want to know a little bit more about the people your event attracted.

- Is it the first time they have attended a Heritage Open Days event?
- How did they find out about it?
- Why did they decide to come?
- Did they enjoy the experience?
- Has it changed their attitudes towards heritage, culture and the area they visited?
- How old are they and to which cultural background do they belong?
- Did they come with children?

The answers to these questions will inform future strategies for audience development and marketing. They can also provide decision makers and funders with compelling evidence of the programme’s public value.

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Preparing your venue

Please photocopy both sides of our new Visitor Feedback Form and encourage visitors at your property to fill it in.

For visitors to comfortably fill in the forms it would be good to clear an area where people can sit down while doing so. A table and a couple chairs should suffice. If you offer refreshments at your venue, this may be a good place. Better a coffee stained feedback form than none. And why not provide a quiz or colour-in sheets to keep the children busy?

Prepare a box or in-tray where visitors can place the completed form.

You can either collect them on site and return them to English Heritage by 1 October, or encourage visitors to send them back to us directly.

There is also an online survey that visitors can access at www.heritageopendays.org.uk/about/visitor-book/

What if you have neither resources nor space?

We recognise that not every event can ask visitors to fill in forms. It is difficult for tour guides, outdoor events and smaller venues to collect written feedback. If you feel you don't have the space or capacities to hand out feedback forms, simply count your visitors. If you coordinate a larger programme locally, it might be a good idea to focus your evaluation on a few sites which are likely to be popular and can accommodate a table and some chairs for visitors to sit down while they fill out the forms.

Other ways of evaluating your event

HODs organisers are a very creative breed of people. Here are some of their ideas on how evaluation can be a fun part of your event.

- Use our Visitor Book template. This is an easy way to capture some really nice quotes, which you could use in a wrap-up report or press release.
- Provide a postcard or "post it" note wall, where visitors can leave comments.
- Tie luggage tags onto a branch in response to questions such as: *What have you enjoyed most about your visit?*
- Provide a circular target where visitors place sticky spots to grade the event, the "bull's eye" indicating an excellent event.

Online Evaluation Form

From 8 September, you will be able to fill in the Organiser Feedback form and submit visitor numbers online. Please go to the HODs Organiser Portal where you also registered your events. Click on 'Evaluation Tool Kit' in the right menu bar.

If you have any further questions, please contact Katja Condy, Heritage Open Days Manager, at katja.condy@english-heritage.org.uk or on 020 7539 7917.