
Factsheet:

Recording visitor figures to report against SPIs

SCOTTISH
MUSEUMS
COUNCIL



What do I have to do and why do I have to do it?

The new SPI (statutory performance indicator) asks museums to record

- a) the number of visits to/usages of council funded or part funded museums per 1000 population.
- b) the number of those visits that were in person per 1000 population.

The requirement for museums to record and report this information comes from the Scottish Executive Accounts Commission. Specifically it relates to those museums that benefit, either directly or indirectly, from government funding. That is, local authority museums and any independent museums that they subsequently fund or actively support. The Accounts Commission requires that information about how government money is spent is made public.

Museums will make their first report to the Accounts Commission using figures recorded during the year 2006-7. Reports will be required annually, to demonstrate to the Scottish Executive that public money is being used appropriately. Independent museums that receive financial or significant in-kind support should liaise with their local authority to help provide visitor figures for these annual reports.

How do I do it?

To record the number of visits to/usages of council funded or part funded museums you will need to combine

- records of visits made in person to your museum site (see below)
- numbers of enquiries for research purposes (ie enquiries relating specifically to collections, not to opening times, location etc)
- web hits for research (see SMC fact sheet 'Recording web hits to report against SPIs. FAQs')
- presentations by staff to specific audiences (including schools, community groups, use of loan boxes etc)

To record the number of visits made in person you will need a systematic approach, based either on manual effort or the use of an electronic device.

How do I carry out a manual count?

To record visitor figures manually involves a member of staff or volunteer standing at the entrance or exit of your museum or display area and physically counting visitors as they pass by. The data gathered can then be uploaded onto a computer for storage, manipulation and reference. To gather representative figures, counts do not need to take place every day but should be of sufficient duration and frequency to cover variations in daily and seasonal footfall, for example a count for two weeks of every season. In order to not deter visitors counting should also be discrete.

What electronic systems could I use?

The most common electronic system in use is the simple body counter. An infra red beam crosses a doorway or entry point to your museum. Every time the beam is broken a count is made. Body counters can either make a count *every* time the beam is broken, in to and out of the museum (in which case to get your actual number of visitors you should halve the number counted) or they can be set to count in a *single* direction only (no further calculation is necessary). A record of the count would either need to be transcribed manually or, with some models, could be downloaded direct to a computer.

A more advanced method, giving a more accurate count, involves the use of CCTV. A camera installed above the entrance to a museum will record each visitor that passes below and transfer those results direct to a computer. Where cameras are installed to the entrance of different galleries within the museum calculations can also be made regarding visitor flow and duration of visit.

Will it be expensive?

Counting visitors need not be expensive. And where you do have some financial outlay this should be outweighed by the benefits of gaining knowledge about who visits your museum and when.

Manual counting systems will rely largely on staff or volunteer time, otherwise you would need to pay for an additional casual member of staff to complete the work.

Basic body counters, that count every time a person crosses an infra red beam, cost as little as £100. More sophisticated models that record a specific direction of count and download results to a pc cost approx. £350. Installation costs also need to be taken into account.

CCTV cameras cost around £250 per camera. You will also need to purchase relevant software for your computer and pay for installation and any ongoing maintenance.

SMC can assist with the cost of purchasing equipment through our Small Grants Scheme.

Will it take up a lot of time?

A manual system of recording will obviously be the most time consuming. Ideally you would need to set aside a two week period at least once each season (the count for which could then be adjusted to give a count for the full year) to get a broad and representative spread of results. Time would also be required to collate this information, perhaps transferring to a computer spreadsheet, and to interpreting results.

Electronic systems are less time consuming to use, but results still need to be downloaded and interpreted on a regular basis. Electronic equipment also requires occasional maintenance and recalibration according to manufacturers' instructions.

My museum/collection is located within a Tourist Information Centre, Library or other larger facility. How can I make a separate record of my visitors?

If your space is quite open plan and you don't have a manageable doorway/entrance to the museum area you have several options.

Most simply you could select a point within your displays and make a manual record of each visitor that passes. However, this could potentially be rather indiscrete, or open to inaccuracy depending on the clarity of your display layout.

Alternatively, if manual observation has shown that the majority of visitors pass a particular point within the display area, you could install a body counter there instead. Occasional manual counts would highlight if any adjustment of results was needed.

If the Tourist Information Centre, Library etc makes an electronic record of who enters the building, their figures could be used as a basis for working out your own. By carrying out a few manual counts within your display area, and comparing with the main electronic count, you could work out the proportion of visitors to the building that proceed to visit the museum display area. This calculation could then be repeated regularly using just the electronic record. However, further manual counts should be made periodically to pick up any alteration in your proportion of visitors and therefore any change to the calculation to be made.

How should I record survey results?

For greatest flexibility it is worth recording your results on a computer generated spreadsheet. This will allow you to make easy comparison of seasonal and annual trends as well as allowing for visual representation of results.

Results need to be reported as per 1000 population. Where can I obtain local population figures?

Your local authority contact will tell you in what format they wish to receive your visitor figure information. They may do the conversion to per 1000 population for you. If not, for consistency they should be able to share with you the local population statistics they use to make their own visitor figure calculations.

How else can I use the visitor information gathered?

The visitor figures you gather can be used for a variety of purposes. At the very least trends observed in the number and annual distribution of your visitors should inform your forward planning process. And in relation to this, you could also use them to demonstrate need and success and so gain increased political support for what you do. Records of visitor figures will also provide important supporting evidence for any future funding applications that you make.

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