**Visitor Expectations and Satisfaction at Burke Museum**

**Family Day Events**

Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture

Summative Evaluation

*New Directions* Project

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**Executive Summary**

This mixed-methods evaluation, which was conducted at the request of the museum’s Communications department, answers two questions about a suite of special family events at the Burke Museum. First, this project sought to develop a profile of Family Day visitors – including any differences in audiences across individual events, and how visitors were receiving information about the events. Second, this evaluation sought to explore visitors’ expectations of and experiences at the events. Specific evaluation questions included the extent to which expectations and experiences aligned with one another, as well as which experiences visitors identified as most meaningful or unique about Family Days.

Pre-entry surveys (n=394) and exit interviews (n=91) provided the data set for this evaluation. Visitor profile questions were developed in consultation with the Burke Communications office; questions related to expectations and experiences were built around a set of seven verbs (see, touch, listen, talk, make, try, and learn) that echoed the types of experiences that are available at Family Day events.

The visitor profile, when discussing the majority of respondents, yielded information that was sometimes unsurprising – the prevalence of children under age 12 in visitor groups, for example. However several aspects of this data offer interesting opportunities for both further discussion and action steps. The significant proportions of young adult visitors and non-members among survey respondents are two striking examples.

In terms of visitors’ expectations and experiences, the Family Day audience seems to know what will happen at the event. Interviewees’ top expectations and top experiences generally tracked together; when they diverged, it usually indicated that visitors were engaging in activities that they had not expected (rather than expecting activities that did not occur). When visitors at the different events were asked what made Family Days different from other family activities, they volunteered a rich variety of observations. These unique or special elements varied from one event to another.

This evaluation was not conducted with the goal of recommending changes to the Burke’s suite of Family Day events. Rather, it was designed to shed light on one aspect of the museum’s audience, and offer clues about the extent to which the Communications department’s work effectively reaches audiences and represents one set of programs. Because the goals for this project were descriptive in nature, we hope that this report can serve as a starting point for further analysis and reflection among the Burke staff, so that they might decide for themselves how best to apply the findings to their work.

**Introduction**

**About The Burke Museum**

The Burke Museum was started by members of the Young Naturalists Society and in 1899 was designated as the Washington State Museum by the state legislature. The Burke moved into its current building on the University of Washington campus in 1962 and was renamed in honor of Judge Thomas Burke the same year.

The Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture’s (2011) mission statement reads:

The Burke Museum creates a better understanding of the world and our place in it. The museum is responsible for Washington State collections of natural and cultural heritage and sharing the knowledge that makes them meaningful. The Burke welcomes a broad and diverse audience and provides a community gathering place that nurtures life-long learning and encourages respect, responsibility and reflection. Additionally, the Burke Museum inspires people to value their connection with all life – and act accordingly. (para. 1)

**About Burke Family Days**

Each year, the Burke Museum offers a suite of five family-focused events that take place between September and May. Each event is centered on a different theme related to the Burke’s collections: Bug Blast, Archaeology Day, Meet the Mammals, Dinosaur Day and Mushroom Maynia. The events consist of a variety of family-centered activities that give visitors a chance to interact closely with the museum’s collections. These events are included with museum admission and are free to Burke Museum members.

**About Burke Family Day Communications**

The Burke Museum’s family day communications strategy will effectively represent the opportunities the Burke’s family day programs offer to visitors: to see and touch Burke collections and interact with experts. Ultimately, the visitors’ family day expectations and experiences will align with the unique family day opportunities that the Burke Museum communications department tries to communicate.

**About New Directions**

*New Directions* is an IMLS funded project designed to train museum studies graduate students to understand, support and engage in audience research. A key component of the training is using museums as laboratories where students work with an institution to conduct audience research, under the guidance of evaluation mentors and support staff.

**Evaluation Goals**

1. Develop a profile of Family Day visitors

* Who comes to Burke Family Days? With whom?
* Where do visitors learn about family events?
  + Burke Family Days
  + Other family activities

1. Discover visitor expectations and experiences at Burke Family Day

* How do visitor expectations and experiences align?
* What do visitors identify as the most important expectations and experiences?
* What characteristics of Burke Family Day experiences, if any, do visitors identify as special to these events?

**Literature Review**

Several authors in museum literature draw explicit connections between marketing goals and visitor studies, in terms of both parallel practices and related applications. In articles in consecutive issues of *Museum News*, Kotler (1999) and Aageson (1999) both argued for the value of museum marketing. Each wrote about one aspect of marketing that is germane to the present study. Aageson discussed the planning, analysis, and evaluation necessary for marketing to be an effective part of an institution’s overall strategy. Kotler, on the other hand, exhorts marketing professionals to identify and consider the full range of experiences museum visitors might seek; identifying that range of experiences is one of the goals of the present evaluation. Rentschler and Reussner (1998) bridge the gap between these two sets of suggestions by outlining how the strategies and overall culture of successful marketing fit into a museum setting. Audience-focused studies can help to inform practice with regard to communications, exhibits, and programs. A research-based marketing culture can also serve to re-orient an institution’s entire culture toward how to best serve the “customers” it attracts – museum visitors.

In a similar vein from a visitor studies perspective, described museums’ need for visitor-centered practice (and research) by describing visitors as “clients,” rather than simply “guests” – or, worse, as “strangers.” She asserts that increased pressure for museums to identify their performance and public value mean that the days of merely presenting objects and information are over. Instead, museums must “rethink their relationship with visitors” (p. 78) and re-orient museum practice so that meeting the various needs of visitors becomes the primary concern. To expand on this point Doering also outlines a framework for considering what types of experiences visitors find satisfying; this framework is explored and validated in more detail by Pekarik, Doering, & Karns (1999). Since some visitors appear to prefer object, cognitive, introspective, or social experiences, as their multi-site study at the Smithsonian Institution showed, museums certainly have a broad range of audience expectations to serve (p. 155-156).

Packer (2006) and Packer and Ballantyne (2002) have articulated how different types of enjoyable or satisfying experiences serve as a bridge to connect visitor motivations (especially fun-seeking) to museums’ desired outcomes. In 2002, Packer and Ballantyne identified five types of visitor motivations (learning and discovery, passive enjoyment, restoration, social interaction, and self-fulfillment) in a multi-site study (p. 189). Grounded in a number of previous theoretical frameworks, including both Doering and Pekarik et al., Packer then revisited this same data set to suggest some possible characteristics of “learning for fun” experiences. These are experiences that, again, connect visitor expectations to museums’ educational goals, even when visitors do not expressly report an interest in learning during their visit. Her key findings about “learning for fun” are:

* Its “mixture of discovery, exploration, mental stimulation and excitement”;
* Visitors consider learning to be mainly an enjoyable activity;
* Most visitors don’t report an explicit intention to learn, but do “seek or are unconsciously drawn into an experience that incorporates learning”;
* Visitors identify four aspects of a learning for fun experience: a sense of discovery or fascination, appeal to multiple senses, the appearance of effortlessness, and the availability of choice; and
* Visitors “value learning for fun because it is a potentially transformative experience.” (Packer, 2006, p. 333-339)

Together, these two studies shed light on what may be on museum visitors’ minds as they consider what qualities to seek out in an informal learning experience.

In 2008, Packer built still further upon this work by moving beyond the focus on learning. A qualitative, interview-based study identified the aspects of an overall experience that museum visitors found satisfying or beneficial. Many of them reported satisfying experiences related to setting (or “servicescape”) or to feelings of relaxation or restoration, and nearly all echoed the experience categories from Pekarik et al. categorizes the benefits that visitors drew from these positive experiences in three ways. Some outcomes focused on restoration; others on psychological well-being (including “personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations, and self-acceptance”); and a few others on subjective well-being, including “feeling good or feeling happy as a result of the visit” (p.40-49). Briseño-Garzón, Anderson, & Anderson (2007) approached visitor interests from a different angle, using pre- and post-visit interviews, visit observations, and follow-up interviews to study visitors’ expectations and pre-entry agendas at an aquarium. They found that families’ agendas “included recreational, learning, and social motivations, but that they were also so mediated, shaped by particular and personally relevant prior events and knowledge, that they can be difficult to generalize or predict in more specific categories (p. 87).

With so many existing frameworks addressing visitor expectations and satisfaction, this study took inspiration from Alexander’s (2010) experiment in adapting existing structures in new ways. She suggested that, just as with the National Research Council’s six strands of informal science learning, history museums could trace back their “basic premises” and identify a core framework of their own, rather than mimic the language of an existing one (p. 243). This research team thus felt empowered to weave the several threads of literature on visitor expectations and satisfaction into a single, custom framework that applies to Burke Museum Family Days, based on the programs’ key activities and goals. The framework for the present study was consequently grounded in existing frameworks for categorizing visitor expectations and experiences, but developed based on the Burke’s own reported program activities and program goals.

**Methodology**

Data was collected at three events: Meet the Mammals (November 20, 2010), Dino Day (March 5, 2011), and Mushroom Maynia (May 15, 2011).

**Audience**

All museum visitors who attend the Burke Museum during a Family Day event were potential participants in the study. Participants may have been approached to complete a short demographic survey upon entry, to complete a voluntary, semi-structured interview about their Family Day experience as they are leaving, or may have been asked to complete both the survey and the interview. In the case that visitors were asked to complete both the pre-visit survey and the post-visit interview, this data was not paired; rather, in each case, selection of the participant was random. The study assessed the audience demographics of Burke Family Day events, in addition to determining whether visitors’ family day expectations and experiences align with the unique family day opportunities that the Burke Museum tries to communicate.

**Sampling Methods**

Convenience sampling was used for both the surveys and the interviews. Two data collectors were responsible for collecting surveys from incoming visitors. Once a survey was completed, the data collector approached the first adult from the second group they saw approach the museum entrance. During times when visitors were waiting in a line to enter the museum, data collectors approached the first adult from the second group to cross a predetermined line.

Two different data collectors stationed outside the two museum exits used white boards and iPads to complete the exit interviews. Each interviewer began a new interview upon completion of the previous interview, including uploading the data from the iPad to iFormBuilder as necessary.

Exit interviews were not conducted at the Mushroom Maynia event. A new event setup significantly altered the population that would otherwise have been sampled and would have compromised the ability to compare populations across events.

**Sample Size**

Over all three events (Meet the Mammals, Dinosaur Day and Mushroom Maynia), 394 surveys were collected. Exit interviews were conducted with 91 visitors at the Meet the Mammals and Dinosaur Day events.

**Instruments**

Two separate instruments were used for the purposes of this study. Upon entry, visitors were presented with a short survey (found in Appendix A) that addressed basic demographic information in addition to information regarding how the visitor heard about the Burke Family Day event and how the visitor finds out about similar events in the area.

The post-visit interview was composed of two parts: a white-board activity that addressed visitors expectations and experiences for the particular family day event, and a few open-ended questions that addressed visitor enjoyment and acknowledgement of what makes the Burke Museum special. Additionally, the post-visit interview included a few demographic questions that echoed those included on the pre-visit survey. See Appendix B for a listing of interview questions.

**Findings**

**Visitor Profile: Who Comes to Burke Family Day Events?**

Survey data was used to create a profile of Burke Family Day visitors at three events. Survey respondents tended to be…

*…In groups with children under 12.*

Across all events, about equal proportions (about 45%) of groups included one or more children under 6 and ages 6 to 11. At Meet the Mammals, about 20% of groups included one or more children from both of these age ranges. There were significantly more young children at Dinosaur Day – nearly 2 out of three groups included a child age 5 or younger. About half as many children under 12 attended Mushroom Maynia as the other two events. Very few teens attended any of the events. (See Figure 1 for detail about children’s ages at each event.) However, it is also interesting to note the number of groups who attended without children: 26% of respondents at Meet the Mammals, 10% at Dinosaur Day, and 55.1% at Mushroom Maynia did not report anyone under age 18 in their group.

Figure 1. Percentage of Groups with Children in Age Ranges at Family Days (Survey Data)

*…Middle-aged.*

Overall, 47.3% of respondents were age 36 to 45; 82.6% were between 26 and 55. See Figure 2 for a table of reported ages. Many, but by no means all, of these visitors may have been parents – recall that a plurality of groups included no children. The population at Dinosaur Day was youngest overall, with the most visitors surveyed between the ages of 18 and 35 and the fewest over 46. Slightly more visitors to Mushroom Maynia were somewhat older, but the median ages for each event were all between 40 and 42. Overall, nearly one in five respondents were age 18 to 25 – a key audience for the Burke, but not for these events.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age Range | Meet the Mammals (n = 90) | Dinosaur Day (n = 208) | Mushroom Maynia (n = 78) | All Events (n = 376) |
| Under 18 | 3.3% | 0.0% | 1.3% | 1.1% |
| 18-25 | 7.8%% | 2.4% | 3.8% | 4.0% |
| 26-35 | 15.6% | 21.6% | 20.5% | 19.9% |
| 36-45 | 45.6% | 52.4% | 35.9% | 47.3% |
| 46-55 | 16.7% | 13.5% | 19.2% | 15.4% |
| 56-65 | 7.8%% | 6.3% | 12.8% | 8.0% |
| Over 65 | 3.3% | 3.8% | 6.4% | 4.3% |

Figure 2: Ages of Survey Respondents

*…Women.*

Overall, 58.4% of respondents were female, including 65.9% at Meet the Mammals and 55.1% at Dinosaur Day; however, only 46.8% were female at Mushroom Maynia. A statistically significant relationship exists between respondents’ reported gender and the event at which they were surveyed.

*…White and Non-Hispanic.*

Over 75% of those surveyed identified themselves this way overall. However, respondents had the opportunity to select multiple categories (adopted from the U.S. Census Bureau) with which to identify. A total of 22.6% also identified themselves as Black or African American; Native American or Alaska Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; and/or Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin. The racial or ethnic identities of respondents did not vary significantly from one event to another.

*…Local.*

The Burke Museum Communications Department’s own geographic categories, based on postal codes, were used to identify where visitors lived.[[1]](#footnote-1) Between 80% and 90% of respondents at each event provided ZIP codes that place them in either Seattle or nearby communities east of Lake Washington. Meet the Mammals draws the most local audience of the three events, while Dinosaur Day has the widest reach statewide. However, very few visitors from beyond the Puget Sound corridor seem to attend Family Days. See Figure 3 for detail across the three events.

*…In small groups.*

Between half and two-thirds of respondents arrived in groups of two or three for each event, but there were statistically significant differences between the events. Groups at Dinosaur Day were more likely to be larger (17% of groups at this event had five or more people, with as many as 12 in one group). More than one in eight visitors to Mushroom Maynia attended alone. See Figure 4 for detail across the three events.

Figure 3: Respondents’ Reported ZIP Codes by Region

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 or More |
| Meet the Mammals (n = 90) | 3.3% | 30.0% | 34.4% | 21.1% | 11.1% |
| Dinosaur Day (n = 207) | 1.5% | 20.4% | 33.0% | 28.2% | 17.0% |
| Mushroom Maynia (n = 77) | 13.0% | 40.3% | 18.2% | 15.6% | 13.0% |
| All Events (n = 374) | 4.3% | 26.8% | 30.3% | 23.9% | 14.7% |

Figure 4: Reported Group Size at Family Day Events\*

*…Return visitors to the Burke.*

At each event, a majority (62.2% overall) had visited the Burke Museum before. Meet the Mammals attracted the most return visitors, with 73.1%. Even at the event that attracted the most first-time visitors, Dinosaur Day, nearly 60% of respondents had been to the museum before.

*…But new to Family Days.*

Most respondents did not report having been to a Family Day before. However, a large minority (30.8% overall) reported doing so. Visitors to Meet the Mammals reported having been to other events more often than any other respondents – 12-16% had been to each of the events except Mushroom Maynia. Similarly, about 15% of visitors overall said they had been to Dinosaur Day in the past. In fact there was a correlation between where a visitor was surveyed and the events he or she reported having attended; this was true in all cases *except* for those who reported attending Dinosaur Day. Only visitors surveyed at Mushroom Maynia reported that they had attended that event in the past. See Figure 5 for more detail.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Event Attended | Bug Blast\* | Archaeology Day\* | Meet the Mammals\* | Dino Day | Mushroom Maynia\* | Can’t Recall | Any Event |
| All Events (n = 393) | 8.6% | 5.7% | 7.6% | 14.9% | 0.6% | 7.0% | 30.8% |
| Meet the Mammals (n = 96) | 14.6% | 12.5% | 14.6% | 15.6% | 1.0% | 7.3% | 39.6% |
| Dinosaur Day (n = 219) | 5.9% | 2.7% | 4.6% | 14.7% | 0.5% | 6.8% | 26.5% |
| Mushroom Maynia (n = 78) | 11.5% | 2.6% | 6.4% | 9.0% | 11.5% | 5.1% | 32.1% |

Figure 5: Percent of respondents who reported having been to a Burke Family Day before

*…Not museum members.*

Almost three in four survey respondents said they were not members of the museum; an additional 4.4% planned to join at the events. This number is lower than in the post-visit interviews, where 40.1% indicated that they *were* Burke members. Dinosaur Day respondents were least likely to report being members (17.1%), but most likely to plan to join at the event (6.9%). Responses about member status do vary significantly by event.

*…Using a variety of sources to hear about Family Day Events and family activities.* Overall, word of mouth and online media are the most common sources of information reported. However, a wide range of sources appeared in responses – each one listed in the survey, except emails from sources other than the Burke – was noted by between about 10 and 25% of respondents at the events. Of the various sources, only reliance on print media and the Burke member postcard varied significantly by event. (The former was much higher for Dinosaur Day, and the latter for Meet the Mammals.) When visitors were asked where they learn about family activities in general, they noted email, postal mail, and word-of-mouth sources about as often as they did when asked about Burke Family Days. Print and online media were far more common, however, indicated by between 50 and 70% of respondents across all events. (See Figures 6 and 7 for more details.) The range of reported sources for both Burke Family Days and for family activities in general points to the value of the Burke’s multi-channel publicity approach for these events; they also demonstrate the primacy of print and online media in current event attendees’ activity planning.

Figure 6: How Survey Respondents Heard About Burke Family Day Events

Figure 7: How Respondents Typically Hear About Family Activities

**Visitor Expectations and Experiences**

*Expectations and Experiences: Meet the Mammals*

During exit interviews, visitors were asked to mark which event activities they (or someone in their visitor group) expected to participate in before arriving, as well as which activities they actually did participate in at the day’s event. Looking at the comparison between these two categories, the difference between visitor experience and visitor expectations is revealed.

At Meet the Mammals (Figure 8), a large majority of respondents expected to see, touch and learn during their visit. An even greater proportion *did* participate in these activities. In fact, 100% reported seeing and touching, and 97% reported learning something new.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | % expecting to participate in this activity | % did participate in this activity |
| See Real Specimens | 93.9 | 100 |
| Touch Real Specimens | 87.9 | 100 |
| Listen to an Expert | 72.7 | 97.0 |
| Talk to an Expert | 63.6 | 93.9 |
| Make Something | 33.3 | 57.6 |
| Try Something New | 45.5 | 69.7 |
| Learn Something New | 87.9 | 97.0 |

Figure 8: Meet the Mammals comparison of expectations and experiences (n=33)

Other categories showed a larger percentage of difference between expectation and experience; generally, more interviewees experienced a given activity than expected to do so. In Figure 9, the two columns on the right show the percentage of visitors whose experiences with each

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | Did not expect activity, did not do activity (%) | Expected activity, did activity (%) | Did not expect activity, did activity (%) | Expected activity, did not do activity (%) |
| See Real Specimens | 0 | 93.9 | 6.1 | 0 |
| Touch Real Specimens | 0 | 87.9 | 12.1 | 0 |
| Listen to an Expert | 3.0 | 72.7 | 24.2 | 0 |
| Talk to an Expert | 6.1 | 63.6 | 30.3 | 0 |
| Make Something | 36.4 | 27.3 | 30.3 | 6.1 |
| Try Something New | 27.3 | 42.4 | 27.3 | 3.0 |
| Learn Something New | 3.0 | 87.9 | 9.1 | 0 |

Figure 9: Meet the Mammals comparison of expectations and experiences (n=33)

activity were different than they had expected. (The two columns on the left show the percentage of visitors whose experiences aligned with their expectations.) In every category, some visitors participated in activities they had not expected, but the acts of listening and talking to an expert, making something, and trying something new showed the greatest difference between expectation and experience. About 30% more visitors who did not expect to talk to an expert or make something reported doing so. This was also the case for 27.3% of visitors trying something new and 24.2% of visitors listening to an expert. However, there were also small percentages of visitors who expected to make something (6.1%) or try something new (3%) who did *not* actually do so.

It should be noted that the reasons visitors did not participate in an activity is unknown. They may have not encountered it, but they also may have run out of time, or been more excited about other opportunities.

*Expectations and Experiences: Dinosaur Day and Cross-Event Comparison*

Figure 10 shows the percentage of visitors who expected to and participated in each activity. Like Meet the Mammals, a large majority of visitors at Dinosaur Day expected to see real specimens (91.4%) and learn something new (89.7%); even more did so (94.8% and 93.1% respectively). The visitor expectations for making and trying something new were higher among Dinosaur Day visitors than they were among Meet the Mammals visitors. At Meet the Mammals, 33.3% of visitors expected to make something, compared to 56.9% of Dino Day visitors; 45.5% of Meet the Mammals visitors expected to try something new, compared to 65.5% of Dinosaur Day visitors. While more Meet the Mammals visitors reported making something than expected to do so, an almost identical percentage of visitors at Dinosaur Day both expected to make something (56.9%) and did so (58.6%).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | Expected to participate in this activity (%) | Did participate in this activity (%) |
| See Real Specimens | 91.4 | 94.8 |
| Touch Real Specimens | 79.3 | 91.4 |
| Listen to an Expert | 74.1 | 84.5 |
| Talk to an Expert | 69.0 | 77.6 |
| Make Something | 56.9 | 58.6 |
| Try Something New | 65.5 | 79.3 |
| Learn Something New | 89.7 | 93.1 |

Figure 10: Dinosaur Day comparison of expectations and experiences (n=58)

In Figure 11, the percentage of visitors whose expectations did and did not align for each activity can be found. Although in every category some percentage of Dinosaur Day visitors participated in activities they had not expected, the differences between visitors’ expectations and experiences were not as great at Dinosaur Day as they were at Meet the Mammals. The greatest within-category difference at Meet the Mammals was for talking with an expert, at 20.7%; four of the seven categories at Dinosaur Day had even greater differences between expectations and experiences. Like Meet the Mammals, the categories with the highest percentage of expectation (see and learn) showed the smallest difference among Dinosaur Day interviewees.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | Did not expect activity, did not do activity (%) | Expected activity, did activity (%) | Did not expect activity, did activity (%) | Expected activity, did not do activity (%) |
| See Real Specimens | 5.2 | 91.4 | 3.4 | 0 |
| Touch Real Specimens | 6.9 | 77.6 | 13.8 | 1.7 |
| Listen to an Expert | 13.8 | 72.4 | 12.1 | 1.7 |
| Talk to an Expert | 10.3 | 56.9 | 20.7 | 12.1 |
| Make Something | 29.3 | 44.8 | 13.8 | 12.1 |
| Try Something New | 19.0 | 63.8 | 15.5 | 1.7 |
| Learn Something New | 6.9 | 89.7 | 3.4 | 0 |

Figure 11: Dinosaur Day comparison of expectations and experiences (n=58)

In contrast, there were more categories in which visitors reported *not* participating in an activity they had expected at Dinosaur Day than at Meet the Mammals. Only 1.7% of visitors who expected to touch real specimens, listen to an expert, or try something new did not do so, and 12.1% of visitors expecting to talk to an expert or make something did not do so. Again, although we can speculate about potential reasons, the causes of this difference in expectation and experience are unknown.

*Top Expectations and Experiences at Each Event*

After identifying their expectations and experiences, interviewees were asked to rank up to three activities that were most important to them before arriving at the event—the activities they were most excited about or that inspired them to attend. They were also asked to think about their experiences at the event and then rank up to three activities that stood out the most for them as the most exciting or interesting parts of their experience. The following four word clouds represent the activities ranked first by visitors. The size of the words corresponds to the number of times that activity was ranked as the top expectation or experience by visitors. (It is important to note that while the text size is relative within each word cloud, it is not relative *between* word clouds.)

As can be seen in the Meet the Mammals word clouds in Figure 12, visitors were most excited about the *expectation* that they would see and touch real specimens, with learning something new a close third. Zero visitors ranked trying something new as their top priority, so it does not appear in the expectations word cloud. In the Meet the Mammals top *experience* word cloud, touching real specimens stands out as the most frequently cited favorite experience, with learning, talking, seeing, and making forming the second tier of responses. Despite not being cited as a top expectation, trying something new *is* cited as a top experience, but joins listening to an expert as the two least mentioned favorite experience.

MtM top do wordle.pdfMtM top expect wordle.pdf

Figure 12: Word Clouds of Meet the Mammals Visitors’ Expectations (at left) and Experiences (right).

A larger difference can be seen in the comparison of the Dinosaur Day top expectations and experiences word clouds (see Figure 13- DD expect AND do together). Although seeing real specimens is clearly the most frequently cited top *expectation* among Dinosaur Day visitors, trying something new is the most frequently cited top *experience* for visitors. Touching and seeing real specimens also rank highly. During their interviews, many visitors who talked about trying something new at Dino Day referred specifically to the Stone Rose fossil activity and the indoor dig pit activities.

Comparisons across the two events (see Figure 14 – the four together here) also reveal differences in visitor expectations and experiences. While seeing real specimens was ranked highest the most often by visitors at both events, visitors at Meet the Mammals ranked touching and learning almost as highly. The differences in top experiences are even more pronounced. Dinosaur Day visitors most often ranked trying something new as the top experience, but for visitors at Meet the Mammals, trying was one of the two least frequently mentioned top experiences. The emphasis on making something new and talking to experts also varied between events.

*Unique Aspects of Family Day Events: As Reported By Visitors*

In the exit interview, visitors were asked, “What makes a Burke family day event different from other family activities?” The responses to this question varied greatly. Word clouds were made from the compiled visitor responses (Figures 15 and 16), which revealed some of the most commonly mentioned aspects that

visitors identified as making Burke family days unique. In looking at the word clouds for both Meet the Mammals and Dinosaur Day, it becomes clear that visitors to these two events have different ideas about the special qualities of Burke family days.

Visitors at Meet the Mammals cited ‘touch’ as the most unique aspect of Burke family days. (Touch was also the most frequently ranked standout activity for Meet the Mammals. See Figure 12 above.) Other commonly mentioned aspects were ‘experts,’ ‘talk,’ ‘learning,’ ‘kids,’ ‘people,’ ‘fun,’ ‘content,’ and ‘science.’

Responses from Dinosaur Day, however, often emphasized the ‘educational’ aspect of Burke family days. The content of that particular event was also important to visitors, with ‘dinosaurs’ being mentioned almost as frequently. Family day experiences were frequently identified as ‘different’ as well. Other commonly mentioned aspects were ‘learn’ or ‘learning,’ ‘people,’ ‘real,’ ‘kids,’ ‘hands-on,’ ‘talk,’ ‘fossils,’ ‘science,’ and cool.’

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Figure 13: Word Clouds of Dinosaur Day Visitors’ Expectations (at left) and Experiences (right).

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Figure 14: Comparison of Meet the Mammals (top) and Dinosaur Day (bottom) Expectations and Experiences



Figure 15: Word Cloud of Unique Elements of Meet the Mammals



Figure 16: Word Cloud of Unique Elements of Dinosaur Day

**Recommendations**

The goals of this evaluation were to describe an audience, not to assess a program or exhibition. Consequently, this report does not include more traditional types of recommendations that might advise changes to staff activities or the museum’s content or design. The main suggestion that emerges from this study is instead to continue reflecting on and communicating about the findings and data from this evaluation. It is our hope that this information prompts further discussion and reflection about its possible meanings among the Burke staff members who are responsible for programming and communicating about Burke Family Days.

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**Appendix A: Survey Instrument**



**Appendix B: Interview Instrument Questions**

Post Interview.pdf

1. Metropolitan Seattle: ZIP codes 98100-98199; East Side: 98000-98099; Puget Sound Corridor / Western Washington: 98200-98599; Southwest Washington and Northwest Oregon: 98600-98799; Eastern Washington: 98600-99499. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)