

Making your Benchmarking data count: presenting the evidence to different stakeholders

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Your Benchmarking Data and its Use

The reasons why you might use your Benchmarking data could be many and varied. As well as using it to track museum performance year on year, for example for internal planning purposes, you could also use it to present information about your museum to a range of different people for **advocacy** purposes. It can be put to best use when trying to illustrate other 'stories', for example how well an exhibition went (reflected by higher visitor numbers), how you are contributing to 'social agendas' (how many volunteers you have and the hours they give to your museum) or how effectively you are spending public or charitable money (the amount of match funding secured and the different things you've been able to deliver as a result, such as increased numbers of people attending outreach sessions).

Benchmarking data is usually quantitative information so it's important to support the statements you make with more qualitative information where possible – e.g. not only are you delivering more visits, but visitors have an enjoyable or educational time as proved by feedback you also might collect. Nevertheless, Benchmarking data (and other quantitative data you may keep) will provide you with **a bedrock of evidence** on which you can build arguments to advocate for your museum.

"The strongest argument is always the proof of your achievement, so it's a question of creating an evidence base of what you do but also ensuring what you do has lots of profile. Make sure there are lots of positive press stories so that people are consistently reading good things about you."

(Alec Coles, former director of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, quoted in Museum Practice Issue 49, 2010).

What is Advocacy?

"'Advocacy' is the process whereby an organisation seeks to influence others in order to gain support for its mission, interests or course of action. In order to achieve this, networks of support are developed and used to lend credibility, wield influence and offer third-party endorsement" (Museums Association, 'What is Advocacy Guide' 2010).

Influencing others can work in a number of ways because it can be about...

- Working towards a specific outcome (e.g. getting people to 'endorse' your museum at an event or in the media)
- Having ongoing support and 'allies' if needed at a future date
- Affecting decision making
- Maintaining a positive high profile

It should always be about cultivating a two-way conversation - it's not just about telling people things, but listening to what they respond with.

But why do it at all?

In very simple terms, communication with others is important because you can tell them:

- What the museum stands for
- How it goes about its work
- What its value is socially, culturally and economically

In listening to their opinions of your museum, you can find out:

- How people outside the organisation perceive the museum (and whether this matches up with the museum's view or not)
- If there are any misconceptions, how to address these and so change attitudes
- If you are delivering what stakeholders think is important

Who is your audience?

This is important to consider as it will affect the way in which you communicate with them. Some examples might include:

'Internal'

- Board Members / Trustees
- Volunteers
- Friends
- Staff
- Local authority / University / 'Mother' organisation

'External'

- Funders
- Press
- MPs / Local Councillors
- Current / potential partners
- Members of the public (although sometimes this is more about marketing)

It is important to see internal audiences as champions of your museum – encourage them to be advocates of the organisation and they in turn will reach a far wider audience. So, internal audiences should be your first 'port of call' when you publicise any results from the Benchmarking survey. Some things to ask yourself first of all are:

- Does everyone in your organisation know what the Benchmarking survey is?
- Do they know what information it collects?
- Do they know how it is used across the region, by Museum Development Officers and in your museum?

You can direct people to the link below or print off the summary of information there to share with them:

http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/renaissance/regions/east_of_england/info_for_sector/museum_development/advocacy

What message(s) do you need to get across?

You need to decide this for yourself! Try to keep them simple and to the point and it will be easier for people to remember. Your messages will also be affected by your audience – Trustees are likely to be interested in having more detail than the media or politicians for example.

How are you going to present your evidence?

The method you use is dictated by your audience but could include:

1. A Report or Presentation (e.g. for Trustees, Staff, Volunteers and/or Friends)
2. Case Study (e.g. for funders, MPs or councillors)
3. A Noticeboard in the Museum (e.g. for staff, volunteers and visitors)
4. Website (for a wide range of people including all of the above as well as non-visitors)
5. Press Release (for the media and through them, the general public, funders and politicians)

Lastly, some basic principles of using your Benchmarking data for advocacy:

- Know what message(s) you want to get across
- Concentrate on delivering these few key messages well
- Be clear about what Benchmarking data can and can't do - it can tell a story of 'outputs' (more quantifiable things such as visitor numbers or the total amount of funding secured), rather than 'outcomes' (more qualitative information such as the visitor experience).
- Be sure of your conclusions – have you analysed and interpreted your data correctly? Can you substantiate your claims with evidence of how you came up with your figures?

Please see over for guidance on how you might use Benchmarking data with three external audiences: the media, politicians and funders.