

Steps to creating an Audience Development Plan



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Feedback

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FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

What are your overall audience development aims?

Consider early on what you are trying to do. Do you simply want more visitors? Do you want to attract more visitors during specific times such as quieter months or weekdays? Do you want to engage with visitors not currently visiting or target specific groups such as schools? Consult your team right from the start and get a clear objective in place.

At this stage also consider what is realistic for your organisation. How many more visitors can be safely and comfortably accommodated? Are there any 'pinch points' or honeypot areas? How long do visitors currently spend at your museum? What is your visitor return rate? Involve your Front of House team who will have a good idea of how visitors move through the space.

Having clear and realistic aims from the start will help to focus research and planning throughout. Making sure that the whole team is onboard and involved will help with delivery of the plan later.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Understand your existing audience

Start by looking at any information you already hold. Ideally you will want to know who visits (age, group types, gender), what they enjoyed, things they'd like to see and anything they didn't enjoy.

Once you have looked at data you already have you can plan to fill any gaps. A few techniques are suggested below:

Technique	Pros	Cons
Exit surveys	Cost effective, get instant feedback. Potential for high volume	Very few people take the time to fill them out
Online surveys	Cost effective. Some potential for high volume	Return rate is typically between 20% and 30%. Can exclude some people not comfortable online
Accompanied visits	High quality feedback	Time intensive. Staff and volunteers may need some training
Visitor interviews	High quality feedback	Visitors may not have time. Time intensive for staff and volunteers
Social media audience	High volume feedback	Needs very careful focussing to get quality responses. Will exclude some who don't use that particular platform
Postcode analysis	Can help you to understand where your visitors are coming from. Linking this to other publicly available data can help you to understand the broad characteristics of key areas	Quite a broad-brush approach. Full postcodes are considered personal data
Focus groups	High quality information	Can be hard to recruit a representative sample. Costly to run. Staff and volunteers may need training

You can find some suggestions for survey questions in the document [Example survey questions.](#)

Understanding your potential audience

Once you know the makeup of your current visitors you need to look at who is missing from your audience profile. Putting your organisation in its wider context will help you to identify who is in your community but not engaging with the museum.

There is a lot of available data which you can freely access

The Office for National Statistics

Geographic levels used by the Office for National Statistics

Electoral Wards/Divisions the spatial units used to elect local government councillors

Parishes the smallest type of administrative area in England is the civil parish

Output Areas (OA) the base unit for Census data releases

Local Authority District (LAD)

Name	Acronym	What is it?	Rough population size
Output Areas	OA	Base unit for census data releases	Minimum 100 residents or 40 households Recommended level 125 households
Lower Layer Super Output Area	LSOA	Small areas designed to be of similar population sizes	1500 residents or 650 households
Middle Layer Super Output Area	MSOA	Built from contiguous LSOA	Minimum population 5000 mean is 7200

The ONS has freely available data on

Who we are - information about the personal characteristics of people who usually live in an area, including

- Resident population
- Age
- Marital status
- Living arrangements
- Ethnic group
- National identity
- Country of birth
- Passports held
- Household language
- Religion
- Unpaid care

How we live - the characteristics of the household we live in, including

- Number of households and type of accommodation
- Owned or rented
- Number of rooms and central heating
- Number of cars
- Household composition
- Households with no adults in employment
- Lone parent households
- Communal establishments

What we do - this section covers work related topics, including

- Number of people in employment and unemployed
- Qualifications and students
- Hours worked
- Industries and occupations

[Census 2021](#) data is now available. You can access [Local Authority level data](#) or drill down to see [Ward or Parish data](#). The data at these smaller levels is currently based on the 2011 census so may be less useful if there have been changes in your area.

There is an interesting [new interactive tool](#) on the ONS website which makes it really easy to find the characteristics of the area your museum serves - you can add various options to build a profile at neighbourhood, ward or parish level.

Organisations using ONS data

[Open Audience](#) gives snapshots of the population within a range of postcodes or output areas.

Local councils use census data to provide insight services

[Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#)

[Bedfordshire](#)

[Essex](#)

[Hertfordshire](#)

[Norfolk](#)

[Suffolk](#)

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small areas. It is a combined measure of deprivation based on a total of 37 separate indicators that have been grouped into seven domains, each of which reflects a different aspect of deprivation experienced by individuals living in an area.

Every LSOA in England is given a score for each of the domains and a combined score for the overall index. This score is used to rank all the LSOAs in England from the most deprived to the least deprived, allowing users to identify how deprived areas are relative to others. The most recent [English indices of deprivation](#) were compiled in 2019.

Decile 1 represents the most deprived 10% (or decile) of LSOAs in England and Decile 10 represents the least deprived 10% (or decile).

To check the IMD decile of a particular area, you can use the online [IMD Postcode Lookup tool](#).

The results look complicated to start with, as there is a lot of information, but just focussing on the first few columns will give you an idea of the range of deprivation across an area.

Digital audiences

The most up to date information on [household digital access](#) from the Office for National Statistics was published in August 2020 and is a snapshot of the situation in January and February 2020.

From here you can download a dataset which links internet usage to a range of characteristics. Link these to the information from the ONS and you can get an idea of your potential digital audience.

You can check what proportion of your audience is likely to have good internet access using [Local broadband information](#).

Non visitor surveys

If surveying existing visitors is tricky then understanding why non-visitors aren't engaging with you can be even harder. If you look at the communities around you and realise that a particular demographic is strongly represented but you are not seeing them visit, then a starting point would be to find groups supporting, celebrating or working with that demographic. Youth groups, Children's Centres, charities supporting a range of people and relevant religious centres for example. Contact these and ask if you can have a conversation to understand why these groups aren't engaging. The key reasons for non-engagement tend to be lack of awareness, lack of interest and lack of confidence.

You also need to go out to where people are. Is there a shopping centre or supermarket where you can set up a stand and ask people there whether they have visited and if not, why not?

You can also look at online groups. Many areas have community Facebook groups and posting a couple of questions on these can be revealing.

What makes your museum unique?

To be able to attract audiences, it's important that you understand what your offer to them is. This might sound obvious but if you get a team of staff and volunteers together and ask them, you'll probably get a range of answers.

It's a good idea to take stock by adding a SWOT analysis to your Audience Development Plan and to create this with representatives from all parts of the museum team.

Consider all areas of your museum here including the café and shop, permanent and temporary exhibitions, and your collection. Also think about your location (can people find you, can they get to you easily, is there a lot of local competition?) and the spaces inside and outside (can everyone get around easily, is there a nice space for picnics and for children to play?).

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats



WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GET TO?

Audience segmentation

There are a lot of different ways to divide your audience into segments. Most look at a combination of demographics and motivation.

For example, the Audience Agency's [Audience Spectrum](#) has groups such as

- **Trips and treats: They enjoy mainstream arts and popular culture influenced by children, family and friends**
- **Home and heritage: Rural and small-town pensioners attracted to daytime activities and historical content**

The National Trust uses groups such as 'Curious Minds' and 'Explorer Families'.

The V&A subdivided family visitors further into 6 distinct types

- **Grandparents and grandchildren**
- **Mothers and children**
- **Mothers with other women friends and relatives with their children**
- **Fathers and children**
- **Couples with their children**
- **3 generation groups**

Using some audience segmentation tools attracts a fee and may be useful for larger organisations but smaller museums on tight budgets may find this prohibitive.

Spend some time when creating an Audience Development Plan to consider what audience segmentation is useful for your organisation. You might want to consider

- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Geography/location**
- **Interests**
- **Hard to reach**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Group types**

From this, consider which segments you plan to target as part of this plan. This doesn't mean that you will ignore the other groups but you will need to prioritise some to develop a realistic and achievable plan. Set goals for each segment so you are clear what you are trying to achieve.

Setting SMARTER goals

As this stage you will start to set some goals for your priority audience segments. It's important to make sure that these are SMARTER (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time, Evaluate, Review)

- S** Make your goal for each audience segment specific
- M** What increase are you looking for?
- A** Are your targets achievable?
- R** Does your Audience Development Plan align with wider museum aims?
- T** Over what time period?
- E** How will you evaluate the impact of your plan?
- R** Build in review points - do you need to tweak anything?

HOW WILL YOU GET THERE?

At this stage

- You have identified your current audiences and know who is underrepresented
- You know who you want your audience to be (your audience segments)
- You know your museum's strengths and what makes it a unique visitor experience
- You know what your overall aims are

Consider who will work on developing and delivering this plan. Which teams or individuals do you need to work on this with you? Will anyone need additional training or support?

Use the [Museum audience map template](#) to help you think about what each audience segment might want from a visit, what barriers they might face and what you can do to overcome those barriers.

You can create personas to help you visualise your audience segment. Personas are fictional profiles that represent groups of similar people within a target audience. For example, thinking about Steve, a recently retired 65-year-old visiting with his grandchildren Polly (aged 8, likes sport) and Jake (aged 6, likes insects and reading) might help you work out how to reach people on a more personal level, and deliver the right messages and opportunities at the right time. Add as much detail as you find helpful. Where do they live, what do they do, what are their responsibilities and how much free time do they have?

From there you can use the [Audience segment delivery plan example and template](#) to plan your actions.

Will you need internal advocacy for your target audiences? If you plan to attract more families with very young children or want to include more teenage visitors, are there staff, volunteers or trustees who might need some additional support to feel confident in welcoming these groups? If you aim to target an underrepresented ethnic group, then do you need some training on unconscious bias or cultural awareness? If you hope to welcome customers with a range of disabilities, then is everyone confident in how to make these visitors feel welcome?

[Kids in Museums](#) have a range of resources and offer training on working with children in museums.

Welcome to Excellence offer [training](#) across the hospitality industry focusing on giving a good welcome to all visitors including those with disabilities.

Building in evaluation

Think about how you will measure success at your planning stage. What will success look like for you and for your intended audience segments? Consider both quantitative and qualitative measures, for example

Family audiences - what will success look like and how will you measure it?

For your museum?		For your audiences?	
Quantitative	Qualitative	Quantitative	Qualitative
100 new family groups	Staff enjoy interaction with new groups	Visitors spend more than 1 hour at the museum	Visitors report feeling welcomed
Provide family tickets. Record family groups with tally marks on paper at entry. Ask if they have ever visited before	Staff survey	Observed time in and out	Exit survey. Social media review

Review points

It's a good idea to build review points into your plan to consider whether the plan is working as you had hoped and whether you need to change any parts of it. As a rule of thumb looking at your plan every three months to see whether you are likely to achieve your hoped-for results is a good idea. If things aren't going the way you'd hoped, then consider whether this is because of things you can't control, for example, a recruitment freeze stopping you from filling crucial posts, budget cuts, or a global pandemic. In these cases, you may need to change your plan.

If there are reasons you can control, then consider what you can do to reach the goals in your plan.

An Audience Development Plan is a living document, don't be afraid to modify in response to your ongoing evaluation and what is happening outside of the museum. If some of your goals now appear to be unrealistic, spend some time working out why and adapt them accordingly. If you have had more success than you anticipated with a particular audience, then consider adding more ambitious targets.

COMMUNICATING YOUR AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Effective audience development needs the buy in of everyone involved in your museum including boards and trustees. This may involve you in becoming an advocate for new audience types and being able to clearly articulate why your organisation should welcome a more diverse audience.

Ideally, everyone would agree that museums should be accessible to the widest possible audience, and work to attract under-represented groups would be accepted as standard. However, we are all wary of the unknown and some may feel nervous about welcoming new audiences. Before working out your approach to advocacy consider why you might meet resistance.

Some possible reasons are

- **Not knowing what behaviours to expect from a group.**
- **Fear of doing or saying the wrong thing and causing offence.**
- **Worry about alienating existing audiences.**
- **Not being comfortable with visitors who 'don't know the rules'.**

By encouraging people to be open with their concerns you can support them with dialogue and by finding reading and training for them.

Boards and Trustees should recognise that as charities or public institutions they have a responsibility to be accessible. You can also appeal to less altruistic motivation by pointing out that all major funders (and most others) will always look for audience development as part of any grant. The National Lottery Heritage Fund require applicants to take into account all four of their investment principles, one of which is

'Inclusion, access and participation: supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation in heritage'.

Fundamentally, if museums don't encourage wider audiences, they will eventually become less relevant and less likely to survive in a challenging economic climate.

RESOURCES



[Example survey questions](#)



[Museum audience map template](#)



[Audience segment delivery plan example](#)



[Audience segment delivery plan template](#)

STEPS TO CREATING AN AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

What are your overall audience development aims?

What can your site realistically accommodate?

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Understand your existing audience

Identify 'missing' audiences – who is in your community but not engaging with you?

Understand your local community

Strengths
Weaknesses
Opportunities
Threats

What makes your museum unique?

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GET TO?

What audience segmentation works for you?

Which segments will you target?

What goals will you set for each segment?

Check your goals are **SMARTER**

HOW WILL YOU GET THERE?

What do these audience segments want from a visit?

What barriers might your potential audience segments face?

What will be done to overcome these barriers?

What budget is needed?

What training is needed?

When will it be done?

Who will do what?

HOW WILL YOU KNOW YOU HAVE SUCCEEDED?

What will success look like for your museum?

Quantitative outputs

Qualitative outcomes

What will success look like for your audience?

Quantitative outputs

Qualitative outcomes

HOW AND WHEN WILL YOU REVIEW AND MAKE ANY CHANGES?

Build in a review timetable

Look at your measures of success

Are there unexpected outcomes?

Have external factors had an impact?

Be honest – do targets need to change?

Up – do you want to add a stretch target?

Down – were/are your initial targets too optimistic?

IS YOUR PLAN STILL FIT FOR PURPOSE?