

Helping to understand the science museum experience

October 1, 2016



In July, staff members at the Bradbury Science Museum began their participation in the Collaboration for Ongoing Visitor Experience Studies (COVES) system. The purpose of the system is to "...unite science centers across the country in launching an effort to systematically collect, analyze, and report on visitor experience data." The collaboration is led by individuals at Boston's Museum of Science and the Discovery Center Museum in Rockford, Illinois.

"A lot of museums collect information from their visitors but there really hasn't been any consistency in the information collected, so comparing satisfaction rates across science museums has been difficult," said Linda Deck, the Bradbury's director. "Through these efforts not only will we collect data that will help us as a museum provide a better experience for our visitors, we'll also be able to access data about how we're doing compared with other sites around the country."

For the second phase of its data collection, COVES trained the participating individuals about administrating the survey. The National Institutes of Health provided additional online training related to human subjects.

Each month, COVES advises Museum data collectors how many surveys visitors need to complete. Visitors complete the surveys on a desktop computer near the Museum's exit. All responses are anonymous, and filling out the survey is voluntary. The Museum hasn't received any raw data yet, but overall the visitors' comments about the Museum have been positive.

"I grew up in the "duck and cover" cold war so interesting to learn the background on why."

"This was an excellent experience. It is good that it is still free admission. We are new to the state, and will bring our guests here. Thank you."

"The current research section is the best for repeat visitors, and the public opinion corner is the most reliable entertainment."

"We enjoyed the museum!!"

Currently funded through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, COVES data collection will continue for roughly another year with a few more museums being added to help ensure that the questions being asked work as well as possible across all sites.

Stay tuned—we'll be happy to share some of the COVES results through this publication once the information is available.

For information on COVES, [visit its website](#).



Operated by Los Alamos National Security, LLC for the Department of Energy's NNSA

