Living Laboratory®
Developed at the Museum of Science, Boston

Study Approval Guide for Researchers

Introduction

Once you have identified your museum collaborator, you will be asked to submit your studies for approval for "museum appropriateness". Although your study will no doubt be approved by your university/hospital Institutional Review Board (IRB) for subject safety, your collaborating museum may have additional parameters for studies that will ensure that the topics and methods are appropriate for a museum environment, and that all visitors who interact with a researcher will have a positive educational experience. Each museum's mission is different so the parameters each museum will follow to accept or reject studies may vary slightly.

Approving Living Lab studies to maximize the Visitor Experience

Museums are collaborating with your lab and integrating research studies in their institution to enhance the visitor experience. While you are the experts in designing studies to address your research question, museum professionals are the experts in creating an optimal educational experience for visitors. Museum staff also consider visitors' safety and satisfaction with all exhibit offerings. In order to review studies for museum appropriateness, museums may bring together a group of museum educators, internal evaluation professionals and/or other stakeholders to determine whether each proposed study abides by the museum's educational goals and established study criteria.

Museums may consider the following large-scale questions when reviewing research studies:

- ☐ How much time should visitors devote to participating in a study? Some studies are over an hour long which may be too long to ensure that they have a positive visitor experience.
- ☐ What additional safety parameters will researchers need to follow? (e.g., parents need to stay within a designated area during the study, camera/computer cords need to be managed appropriately, etc.).
- ☐ What additional educational elements will researchers be asked to implement that will increase the visitor experience? (e.g., study specific handouts, activity suggestions related to the topic of the study, etc.)
- ☐ How will visitors who are not eligible to participate in a researcher's study be able to learn about it? Many museums require that all visitors be given a chance to see and learn about the study, although a researcher may not be able to collect or use the data.
- ☐ What additional information will museums need from the researchers in order to provide an optimal educational experience for visitors? (e.g., summaries of the study to create accessible handouts for staff/visitors)
- ☐ What types of gifts are appropriate for researchers to give to participants? Museums may require that you provide these gifts to all visitors who want one (even "non-participants"). Some museums may have concerns about gifts that may end up damaging exhibits (e.g., stickers, pens).
- ☐ Are there study topics/domains that the museum is not comfortable integrating in its programming? (e.g., race, religion, etc.)

Study Approval Checklist

Below is a list of study-related documents that the museum may request in order to be able to approve your study:

- ☐ *IRB Documents*
    - A copy of current IRB approval from the university or hospital
    - A copy of the original IRB application with full study explanation
    - A copy of IRB amendments listing the museum as a testing site, detailing any changes made to the protocol for the museum environment, and providing a museum-specific consent form
- ☐ Consent Form
    - Is it museum specific (e.g., is it clearly stated that the research is happening at the museum)?
    - Is it short? (no more than 1 page front and back)
    - Does the consent form clearly state safety protocols specific to the museum? *(e.g.,* reflects that parents need to be present at all times during the study)
    - Does it include collaborative information? (e.g., states “the research is occurring through the Living Laboratory at [host museum].)”
    - Does the header include the university/hospital logo?
    - Is the museum approved study duration clearly stated? (e.g. states “studies are no more than 15 minutes long”)
    - Are questionnaires of a reasonable length? (no more than one page - front only)
- ☐ Museum Specific IRB Info Document that highlights museum specific details as to what is actually going to take place:
    - Which populations will you be researching?
    - How many participants will be run?
    - How will they be selected?
    - Will there be videotaping or audiotaping?
- ☐ Brochure/Insert template, including:
    - *Research Question*
    - *Introduction/Previous Work*
    - *Explanation of Study*
    - *Conclusion/Predictions*
    - *Stimuli Picture*
    - *Researcher Contact Info*

Other Study Considerations

- ☐ Research stimuli and instructions/questions are not disruptive to the visitor experience (e.g. loud stimuli, large stimuli, etc.) or upsetting to children, parents, museum staff/volunteers, or other non-participant visitors at the museum.

- ☐ Parents/caregivers must be able to observe the entire study taking place

- ☐ How will you ensure equity among participants and non-participants? (e.g. Researchers may offer only paper-based gifts (*e.g.,* stickers, certificates) to participants as thanks for completing the study.)

- ☐ Visitors who cannot give informed consent (ie, are not with a legal guardian) or who are outside of the target age range or group must still be allowed to learn about the study, but researchers should not collect any information about visitors who have not provided informed consent.