



Visitor Studies Association

## Call for Session Proposals

31st Annual Visitor Studies Association Conference

Chicago, IL • July 19-21, 2018

### Fostering Transparency, Strengthening Public Trust

The informal learning field has long grappled with questions like “how do we remain relevant to our communities?” and “what is our value to society?” However, the geopolitical, social, and environmental events of the last several years have made these questions particularly urgent ones, and we are beginning to see more and more institutions actively reckoning with the need to respond. As many organizations turn inward and seek to protect their interests, we are reminded that places of informal learning are perceived as offering more trustworthy information than most other entities, particularly in a climate of uncertainty and polarization.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, our institutions are also well-positioned to offer experiences that not only engage people intellectually, but also promote empathy and understanding to help bridge the widening divides between us. Right now, there is a greater opportunity and need for informal learning institutions to strengthen our position of public trust.<sup>2</sup> We can do this by finding ways to maintain transparency, foster dialogue with the communities we serve, and ensure that we respond to those communities authentically and responsibly. At the same time, our organizations must also interrogate the ways in which and the extent to which their choices about collection, interpretation, collaboration, and governance have earned--or jeopardized--the trust of many diverse publics.

For this year’s conference, AMM and VSA invite our respective memberships to work together to answer critical questions about how, across a range of accountabilities and circumstances, we can fulfill our institutional missions with renewed perspective, rigor, and courage:

- How are informal learning institutions uniquely positioned to leverage public trust, and what responsibilities come with that role?
- How do the missions and visions of informal learning institutions support -- or not support -- public trust? In what ways are institutions accountable to various publics?
- What are successful models for building public trust in terms of strategic directions, institutional decision-making, and planning for sustainability?
- How does public trust in informal learning institutions affect audiences’ expectations for and takeaways from interpretation?
- How are museums and other informal learning institutions using their resources and collections to help their communities make meaning of locally important issues?

---

<sup>1</sup><http://colleendilen.com/2017/04/26/people-trust-museums-more-than-newspapers-here-is-why-that-matters-right-now-data/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.aam-us.org/about-museums/museum-facts>

- When and how should informal learning institutions take a stand on polarizing or controversial issues? What effect might this have on public trust?
- What do we need to know about our target audiences to communicate with them in ways that are understood as trustworthy, responsible, and appropriately thorough?
- What strategies can informal learning institutions use to respond to community - and even nationwide - concerns?
- What steps can informal learning institutions take to better position themselves as visible, trusted resources for authentic collaboration with community members?
- How can informal learning institutions more effectively build partnership and trust with audiences who have traditionally been excluded from informal learning spaces?

## Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be rated on the following criteria:

- The proposal provides a clear picture of what to expect during the session, including how the audience will participate.
- The proposed learning objectives are realistic and achievable.
- Multiple presenters should ideally represent diverse perspectives. All presenters should be confirmed by date of submission.
- The proposal demonstrates presenters' knowledge of and experience with the topic, including relevant methodologies, sources of evidence, and/or literature.
- The proposal provides conclusions and/or discussion of relevance to the visitor studies/informal learning field. Feedback from our annual conference survey suggests that attendees appreciate presentations highlighting findings.
- The proposal identifies relevant discussion questions to elicit audience dialogue about project relevance and implications.

## Timeline

**December 8, 2017; 11:59 pm PST:** Deadline for Submission

**January 2017:** Sessions undergo peer review

**February 2017:** Program Committee finalizes decisions and arranges program schedule

**Early March 2017:** Notifications sent to applicants

Questions? If you have questions or require additional information, please e-mail the VSA management team at [visitorstudies@visitorstudies.org](mailto:visitorstudies@visitorstudies.org).

## Session Proposal Guidelines:

We encourage the inclusion of substantial audience discussion within sessions. Although we expect that many presentations will fit well within traditional formats (e.g., paper session, panel, or roundtable), please feel free to propose alternative ways to communicate your work. We are especially looking for ways to involve participants through thought-provoking, reflective conversations related to key ideas and issues raised during your session.

This year, we are using an online submission form. Read through the guidelines below; then go to <https://visa.memberclicks.net/2018-vsa-call-for-conference-session-proposals> to submit your proposal. Please note that special formatting, such as bullets, is not transferred in the online form.

**All proposals must include the following:**

**1. Session Chair:** The session chair is the principal contact person for communications between VSA and presenters and is responsible for sharing logistical information with co-presenters. Please be sure to list the individual who will serve in this organizing role in the “Session Chair” field.

**2. Confirmed Presenters:** Up to 3 additional presenters. Presenters should represent diverse backgrounds and perspectives and come both from the museum world and outside it. Proposals with confirmed presenters will be rated more highly. **Please note: In order to encourage diverse perspectives, VSA has instituted a participation limit for individual presenters. Individuals may only appear on 2 session proposals total. If an individual is listed as a session chair or presenter on more than 2 proposals, none of the proposals will be considered until that individual has withdrawn his/her name from the appropriate number of proposals.** Posters, pre- and post-conference workshops, and dining discussions do not count toward the two session limit.

**3. Title of your session:** 10 word maximum.

**4. Program description:** Please provide a high level description of your session for inclusion in the Preliminary and Final Programs (50 word maximum). This description may be edited by the Program Chairs for clarity.

**5. Session format:** Your session should acknowledge and build upon the participants’ own knowledge and experiences. They should be able to clearly connect with your material and apply it to their own situations. Most conference sessions should be designed so that participants are actively engaged rather than passively receiving information. You must indicate one preferred format from the list below for your proposal. Program Chairs reserve the right to request changes to session format if deemed appropriate.

i) Individual Paper presentation: An individual presenter will have approximately 15 minutes to present on a single topic, project, or study. Program Chairs will group and assign individual papers into full sessions. Each individual presenter will be grouped with two other individual presenters on similar themes or topics within a 75-minute session. Presenters will be responsible for coordinating to moderate the session and facilitate audience discussion. Presenters do not need to complete the “Session Plan” portion of the proposal.

ii) Panel presentation: Panel presentations are conceived as a complete session on a single theme. These sessions include multiple presenters examining an issue, specific problem, topic, or theme from a variety of perspectives. While this may include traditional presentations, we encourage presenters to consider alternative techniques that incorporate greater audience engagement, discussion, and interaction on the topic. Sessions will be 75 minutes in length, with presenters reserving sufficient time for audience discussion and Q&A within the session. Presenters should describe the format in the “Session Plan” section.

iii) Roundtable discussion: An individual presenter facilitates an informal group discussion around a key topic or area of interest in the field. In this format, the presenter briefly frames the topic and then devotes most of the time to discussion. Multiple presenters may be leading these discussions in the same room during a 75-minute session. Attendees will be allowed but not required to rotate between conversations. No AV setup is available for this format. Presenters should describe how they will frame the topic and facilitate discussion in the “Session Plan” section.

iv) Working Group: An individual or group of presenters facilitates action-focused discussion to generate ideas or plans to move towards white papers, publications, and/or policies. These sessions are highly collaborative and intended to result in new directions or products. Presenters should describe the format in the “Session Plan” section. Sessions will be 75 minutes in length.

v) Hands-on Workshop: Best suited for demonstrations or applied practice where participants experience or take part in active learning. Presenters should describe the format in the “Session Plan” section. Sessions will be 75 minutes in length.

**Note:** Half and full day registered pre-conference workshops are being invited through a separate, concurrent solicitation.

**Note:** Poster presentations will be invited through a separate solicitation in early March.

**6. Intended Audience:** Indicate via checkboxes which audience(s) will benefit most from this session. Consider level of material, job focus, etc. You may make up to three selections.

- Experienced evaluators and researchers
- Novice evaluators and researchers
- Emerging museum professionals
- Visitor-facing practitioners (e.g., educators, visitor experience staff, etc.)
- Experience designers (e.g., exhibit designers, program developers, etc.)
- Museum administrators
- Another audience (please describe)

**7. Learning Outcomes:** What will participants know or be able to do as a result of your session? You should have no more than three learning outcomes, each a separate thought. At least one should relate to VSA’s learning competencies, as described here: <http://www.visitorstudies.org/competency-list>

**8. Proposal Narrative:** Provide a summary of the content of your presentation.

Word Limit: Proposals should not exceed (excluding references) 300 words for an Individual Project/Paper, or Roundtable Presentation. They should not exceed 750 words for Panel Presentation or other group format session. Please observe these word limits out of respect to our volunteer reviewers.

**9. Session Plan (for Panel Presentations, Working Group, Roundtable, and Hands-on Workshop Formats):** Describe what will happen during your session. Be sure to include your strategies for audience involvement and interaction, as well as a breakdown of how you intend to use the time allotted. For Panel Presentations, please be sure to note any participation mechanisms that might be affected by room setup. (200 words maximum)

**Audio Visual Guidelines (not applicable to roundtable sessions):**

All session and workshop rooms are equipped with the following audio visual equipment:

- 1 LCD projector (VSA does not provide VGA-DVI adaptors which Apple laptops and some PCs require)
- 1 Screen

Presenters planning to use LCD projection for PowerPoint, video, or other visual displays are required to bring a laptop. VSA **cannot** provide computers for use with LCD projectors.

Internet access is **not** guaranteed; please make arrangements to download your presentation ahead of time.

**Room Set:**

A session room will be assigned to you and will be set with a head table and chairs for up to four speakers. The remainder of the room will be set up with either chairs and round tables or theater-style chairs depending on session format, room capacity, and scheduling.

**Submission Agreement:**

**Please read and agree to the following five statements.**

1) I understand that as the session chair, it is my responsibility to secure session presenters and to disseminate all logistical and other information to session presenters.

2) I agree that neither I nor my participating session presenters will use the session as a platform to promote products or services of any kind.

3) I understand that presenters do not receive complimentary registrations, honoraria, or paid expenses to speak at the VSA Conference.

4) I understand it is my responsibility to register myself for the conference and to inform all presenters that they too are solely responsible for registering themselves for the conference by the Early Bird Registration deadline.

5) I agree that all presenters for this session will be fully informed that they must be available to present any day of the general conference programming (July 19-21, 2018) and that they will not be permitted to participate in more than two presentations.

I confirm that I have read and agree with the five statements listed and that I am responsible for sharing this information with all presenters for this session.

**Proposal Submission Process:**

- Prepare your proposal using the above as a guide
- Go to the following link to submit proposal(s): <https://visa.memberclicks.net/2018-vsa-call-for-conference-session-proposals>
- Submission deadline: **December 8 @ 11:59pm PST.**
- Address questions to the VSA management team via email: [visitorstudies@visitorstudies.org](mailto:visitorstudies@visitorstudies.org).

**Proposal Review Process:**

- Program Chairs may return or reject proposals without review if the proposals do not address all required information, include presenters listed on more than two proposals, or exceed the word limits specified above;
- Peer-review of proposals will not include presenter identification;
- Reviewers will evaluate each proposal they receive according to the criteria listed above.

**For more information about VSA, including updates related to the 2018 conference, please visit our website:** <http://www.visitorstudies.org/>