



Pay as You Will/Free or Fee-Based Admission Policies



MuseOps Example: SWOT Analysis

2018



Contents

- Context
 - Current Situation
 - Objectives and Approach
- Data Review
- SWOT Analysis
- Paths Forward

Context

Current Situation

- The discussion about Pay As You Will/Free Admission versus Fee-Based Admission has increased over the past few years.
- Some museums, e.g. Children's Museum of Tacoma, have successfully introduced Pay As You Will/Free, while the Metropolitan Museum in New York is implementing Fee-Based Admissions.
- The specific circumstances of each institution obviously is a significant factor in their decisions. The arguments, pro or con, for each policy are more general.
- Summaries of the popular arguments for each policy will be useful for museum professionals.



Context

Objectives and Approach

- A SWOT Analysis captures and summarizes the key arguments in the debate over Pay As You Will/Free vs. Fee-Based Admission.
- Institutions can then engage in frank and productive discussion about each of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats presented by each policy.
- SWOTs are generated for specific positions, so two SWOTs have been created:
 - a SWOT evaluating the implementation of Pay As You Will/Free Admission
 - a SWOT evaluating the implementation of Fee-Based Admission



Data Review

- Documents

- Articles/blogs from museum professionals who have enacted both admission policies
- Data studies of the impact of both admission policies
- Industry ethical codes and best practices

- Interviews

- Museum professionals
- Community advocates
- Financial experts

SWOT: Pay as You Will/Free Admission Policy

Strength

- Reduces economic barriers to visitation
- Encourages repeat visits
- May increase attendance
- Supports the ideal that museums serve the public interest and should be accessible to everyone

Weakness

- Lose a percentage of earned income
- Need sponsorships or grants to replace lost admission fees
- Uncertainty about donation amount may confuse visitors
- Assumes that admission fee is a barrier to visitation

Opportunity

- May reach new or underserved audiences
- Develop or expand fee-based programs and exhibitions
- Begins a dialog about the value of educational institutions, art, and history

Threat

- Could have negative effect on perceived value of a museum visit
- May have little/no effect on audience outreach strategies
- Could negatively impact membership program.
- Could be perceived as serving sponsors rather than the community

SWOT: Fee-Based Admission Policy

Strength

- Reduces dependence on individual, corporate, or government funders
- Provides a relatively consistent, predictable revenue stream
- Establishes a monetary value for the experience, similar to other cultural and entertainment activities

Weakness

- Creates an economic barrier to visitation
- Contributes typically a relatively small amount of revenue to the overall museum budget

Opportunity

- Creates a dialog about the expenses involved with maintaining collections, mounting exhibits, and providing programs
- Have more control over finances

Threat

- Underscores the perception that museums are for the elite
- May undercut new or underserved audience outreach efforts



Paths Forward

- By examining both Pay As You Will/Free and Fee-Based Admission policies, we see a more complete picture of the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy.
- Each institution has a different situation and funding history that will impact its point of view of the situation.
- Institutions should:
 - establish and communicate their inclusion, diversity, and outreach strategies
 - address their financial viability
 - be honest about the impact of sponsors on exhibits and interpretation
 - explain the how and why of their admission policy to the public