

**Visitor Center Initiative**  
**Army Corps of Engineers**  
**Visitor Center Survey, July 2001**



Prepared for the  
Army Corps of Engineers  
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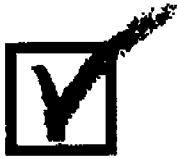
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## Introduction

The Army Corps of Engineers Visitor Center Initiative Committee drafted a survey for Visitor Center managers with the following goals in mind. In June of 2001, the Committee contracted with Wendy Meluch of Visitor Studies Services to refine the survey instrument, receive responses, and analyze and report on the results.

1. Assess current condition of Visitor Center facilities, programs and operations.
2. Assess relevancy of current interpretive themes, media and presentations found throughout the Corps Visitor Centers.
3. Determine level and extent of needed upgrades and remodeling at Corps Visitor Centers.
4. Determine institutional or other barriers to improvement of the Corps' Visitor Center Program.
5. Solicit field-level input on future management strategies for Corps Visitor Centers.

Members of the Visitor Center Initiative Committee identified approximately 135 individual Visitor Center managers to participate in this web-based survey. During June and July of 2001, 95 managers responded and have been included in the sample for this report. The total number of responses per question varies because of accepting multiple answers where appropriate and, in some cases, respondents' incomplete submissions. The nature of this study as a tool to collect and identify qualitative information requires minimal statistical analysis.

Due to technical difficulties with the web site hosted by staff, the survey's original questions 13, 19, 26, 27, and 34 are not included in this report. Instead, four text questions which were emailed to participants in August of 2001 are presented below. Fifty managers responded to the August email. In this report, those questions are referred to as Text Questions 1 through 4.

Please see Appendix A for copies of the web-based Survey and related e-mail communications, and Appendix B for the August e-mail Text Questions 1 - 4. For a discussion of Method and Sample, please see Appendix C.

## Executive Summary

Visitor Center managers were eager to participate in this survey. Many voiced or stated their appreciation of the effort. Overall, their responses reveal a thoughtful approach to their work and a desire to improve Corps Visitor Centers.

This survey effort did much to answer questions presented by the Committee's five goals as stated above.

### **1. Assess current condition of Visitor Center facilities, programs and operations.**

Apart from exhibits, almost all physical aspects of these Visitor Center facilities were judged by respondents to be "fair" or better. Among the most favorably rated were Staffed Welcome Station, Restrooms, Heating and Air Conditioning, and Condition of Building. Those features with significant negative ratings include office space, public meeting space, vending and sales/bookstore space.

Programs are addressed primarily in the context of Visitor Centers partnering with outside agencies. For those Visitor Centers who do have partners, several benefit from program input. Partner relationships may be helpful to those Visitor Center managers who mention wanting to have a larger role in their local communities. Impediments to partnering include limited resources, remote locations and outdated or cumbersome Corps policies and regulations.

Numerous responses throughout the survey touch on problems with operations. Concerns range from relatively simple issues of communication to annual budgeting procedures that make long term exhibit planning impossible to how the Corps perceives Visitor Centers. Please see comments on Goals 4 and 5 below.

## **2. Assess relevancy of current interpretive themes, media and presentations found throughout the Corps Visitor Centers.**

Both managers and visitors stress the importance of interpreting "Site-specific Project Purposes" and "Physical Orientation to the Site (way finding)." In addition, visitors are believed to want information on "Recreation." "The Corps' Missions" and "The History of the Corps" fall into a mid range of interest for managers and the lowest level of interest for visitors. Should the Committee pursue a Corps-focussed exhibit for installation in numerous Visitor Centers, care should be taken to allow customization of it so it can be integrated properly into existing exhibits on site.

Other interpretive interests that are valued by managers and visitors included issues germane to the local area and community including local history, community events, activities, environment and the like. Note that managers are reporting on visitor interests based primarily on informal input from visitors. A survey of visitors was not done as a part of this effort.

Very few Visitor Center managers report that their exhibits are built around a single, central theme. Many cite a list of subject areas addressed by exhibitry. Current exhibit development practice revolves around identifying and supporting a single "big idea."<sup>1</sup>

Less than half of respondents state that their facility has computer-based interactives among exhibits. Many comments throughout the survey reveal that managers have a need for improved computer-based exhibitry as well as expertise.

Exhibits geared for children are present in a majority of participating Visitor Centers, but less than half of those are felt by managers to be adequate.

As it plans for exhibit renovations throughout the Corps, the Visitor Center Initiative Committee should consider further visitor research studies. Front-end evaluations with visitors, for example, can guide exhibit development from the outset. Front-end and formative evaluation studies are instrumental in helping exhibit developers avoid costly mistakes while helping to ensure an effective exhibit.

## **3. Determine level and extent of needed upgrades and remodeling at Corps Visitor Centers.**

Managers report a need for vast amounts of exhibit renovations. Many of them feel that over 80%, even 100%, of exhibit areas need renovation. By far the two most common reasons for updating exhibits were "Broken/maintenance problem" and "Obsolete computer technology." Much more information about the type of updating or new exhibit creation, and the estimated square footage for same is needed to estimate costs.

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<sup>1</sup> Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels and Interpretive Approach* (Altamira Press 1996) [and many other works by Serrell]

Remodeling and upgrading of other aspects of Visitor Center buildings is needed, according to respondents, but to a somewhat lesser degree. Office space, vending space and public meeting space are lacking or very limited in several participating facilities. Many also commented on the dated look of the buildings and appointments.

**4. Determine institutional or other barriers to improvement of the Corps' Visitor Center Program.**

**&**

**5. Solicit field-level input on future management strategies for Corps Visitor Centers.**

The most frequently cited barrier to improving Visitor Centers is that of budgetary constraints. In addition to higher levels of funding and other resources, Visitor Centers would benefit from procurement and budgeting procedures that reflect the nature of Visitor Center management, i.e., planning for new exhibits which often requires a multi-year approach.

While nearly all managers report a lack of resources (time, staff, funding and space) a few blame this lack on the apparent low standing of Visitor Centers in the eyes of Corps management. Many respondents want upper management to recognize the value of Visitor Centers as the public face of the Corps. Responses cite unsupportive districts, lack of respect for the Visitor Center mission, and lack of awareness or acknowledgement of interpretive staff as professionals. Real support from the Corps in terms of communication, funding and other resources, programs and partnering will improve Visitor Center staffs' ability to function both by facilitating their efforts and boosting morale.

Increased communication among Visitor Centers, between upper management and Visitor Centers, and with the Visitor Center Initiative Committee figures into most scenarios for improved, future management. Managers would like to know what has succeeded at other Visitor Centers, especially in terms of exhibits and partnerships. A regularly scheduled Visitor Center conference was suggested.

A majority of managers feel that they would be more effective if they had training or access to expertise in areas of importance to them, especially exhibit media technology, exhibit evaluation and exhibit planning.

## **Recommendations**

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**1. The Visitor Center Initiative Committee should continue to assist Corps Visitor Centers meet interpretive goals of the Corps.**

Visitor Center managers have needs for and expectations of the Visitor Center Initiative Committee. It is clear that managers and Visitor Centers would benefit from the Committee as an ongoing source of support and information. Participating managers look to the Committee for help with logistics such as obtaining funding for exhibits and assisting with communications.

Beyond the relatively straightforward questions of logistics, however, the Committee represents to Visitor Center managers a possible change in the way Visitor Centers will be regarded by upper management. Responses throughout the survey reveal frustration and sometimes resentment on the part of many managers about how they feel Visitor Centers are perceived and treated in the Corps. Should the Committee dissolve, Corps upper management will lose credibility in the eyes of Visitor Center staff.

Continued...

Among the tasks that the Committee should consider are

- facilitating communication between Visitor Centers. This may be done, in part, by establishing a regularly scheduled conference of Visitor Center management.
- simplifying or streamlining budget procedures for Visitor Center interpretive and exhibit expenses.
- reviewing a wide range of management procedures around interpretive staff and Visitor Centers. Note that several respondents report that other agencies such as NPS are adept in these areas.
- reviewing upper management policies and regulations that may affect a Visitor Center's ability to partner.
- accessing exhibit-related expertise or training existing staff for same. To this end, the Committee may want to explore the possibility of convening a standing panel of experts.
- participating in and getting more from the American Association of Museums and the National Association of Interpretation.
- conducting a more detailed survey of Visitor Centers targeted at identifying and prioritizing exhibit renovations or replacements.

## **2. As Visitor Centers renovate or develop new exhibits they should include visitor research and evaluation studies.**

Exhibit development has grown to include a scientific approach over the past 10 to 15 years. Effective exhibits are created with scientifically based visitor research from the earliest planning phases. Front-end evaluation done by interviewing visitors about their perceptions of and familiarity with exhibit content helps exhibit developers avoid misleading or incomplete scripts. Formative evaluation, i.e., testing exhibit prototypes with visitors makes exhibit elements easiest to use and understand, and can save large amounts of money during exhibit fabrication. Summative evaluation examines the effectiveness of completed exhibits and points to necessary changes or improvements.

## **Summary of Findings**

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The initial web-based survey was difficult to access forcing many respondents to make numerous attempts to log on and, in some cases, contact Nancy Rogers at the San Francisco Bay Model Visitor Center for assistance. In spite of these difficulties, 70% of the managers solicited did participate. This response rate is considered "very good" and is more than adequate for analysis.<sup>2</sup> This **good response rate**, even in the face of great inconvenience, speaks to the enthusiasm of Visitor Center managers to participate. Their actions and written responses, as well as comments voiced to Nancy Rogers, reveal great interest on the part of managers in the success of the Committee's efforts and ensuing improvements to these Army Corps facilities.

Questions 1, 2 and 3 ask respondents to **rank interpretive subject areas** to be presented in visitor centers based on their own priorities and those of visitors. Responding managers emphasize "Site-specific Project Purposes;" and "Physical Orientation to the Site (way finding)" more than any other subject areas. For these respondents, "The Corps' Missions" and "The History of the Corps" fall into a midrange of interest. Managers' sense of what *visitors* prioritize include "Physical Orientation to the Site;" "Recreation;" and "Site-specific Project Purposes." Managers report that their visitors are not interested in "The Corps' Missions" or "The History of the Corps" ranking them among the bottom three subject areas for visitor interest.

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<sup>2</sup> Earl Babbie, Survey Research Methods Second Edition (Wadsworth Publishing Company 1990)

Subject areas suggested under "Other" responses were prioritized highly by many respondents for both managers and visitors. These included issues of the locality such as local community events and activities, history, environment and the like.

In responding to Questions 4, 5 and 6 managers report a need for **vast amounts of exhibit updates**. Sixty-four respondents feel that at least 50% of their exhibit facilities need to be updated. Twenty-eight state that at least 80% need updating. By far the two most common reasons for updating exhibits were "Broken/maintenance problem" and "Obsolete computer technology." Much more information about the type of updating or new exhibit creation, and the estimated square footage for same is needed to estimate costs.

Questions 7 and 8 focus on **exhibits for children**. Twenty-one of 95 respondents state that they have exhibits designed for children and that those are sufficient. Thirty-two who have child-centered exhibits felt that they were not sufficient.

Current methods of exhibit development identify a single theme or "big idea" which is in turn supported by every element and label.<sup>3</sup> Question 9 asks managers if their **facilities are designed around a "central theme."** Fourteen respondents indicated some degree of this. Most others list several topic ideas that their Visitor Centers address. Where Visitor Centers have been developed in various stages, a varied, even disjointed, set of themes can be a natural outcome.

Questions 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 address **broad issues of Visitor Center usability**. Over one third of responding managers felt that their location is not optimal. Most of their concerns focus on the Visitor Center being hard to find, hard to access or without a view of the project. Most responding Visitor Centers experience peak usage during the summer months: June, May and July. About two thirds of respondents feel that the size of their facility is adequate for their current level of visitation. Less than half can confirm that their hours are convenient for visitors, about one third report that visitors find Visitor Center hours of operation to be inconvenient, the rest report insufficient input from visitors to comment.

Issues of **accessibility per ADA** requirements are addressed in Questions 20, 21 and 22. Twenty-eight Visitor Centers have conducted an accessibility study. Seventeen have accessibility plans, 27 do not and 50 are not sure if they have one or not. Sixty-two responding Visitor Centers have wheel chair access facilities. Less than one third cite other types of accommodations.

In responding to Questions 16 and 17, survey participants most commonly identify "local residents," "tourists," and "school groups" as being among their visitors. These three groups are also most commonly identified as comprising one third or more of the **Centers' visitorship**.

Thirty-five out of these 95 responding managers indicate in Question 18 that they conduct controlled studies **to collect input from visitors**. A controlled study for data collection which relies on a probability-based sampling method can produce statistically reliable information that can be considered representative of the population being studied. The Visitor Center Initiative Committee should consider more effort in this regard as they plan for exhibit renovations throughout the Corps. Front-end evaluations with visitors, for example, can guide exhibit development from the outset. Front-end and formative evaluation studies are instrumental in helping exhibit developers avoid costly mistakes while helping to ensure an effective exhibit.

In responding to the August email survey Text Question 1, 33 of the 50 respondents described an active program of **reviewing and acting upon visitor input** gathered by all formal and informal means. Many of them state that changes or improvements are difficult or impossible to do because of limited funds and/or staff and time.

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<sup>3</sup> Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels and Interpretive Approach* (Altamira Press 1996) [and many other works by Serrell]



Question 23 asks respondents to **rate a list of features at their facility** as "Very Good" down to "Very Poor." Managers are most likely to be satisfied with their "Staffed Welcome Station." Most likely to be rated as "Very Poor" are "public meeting spaces," "vending," and "sales/bookstore space."

Questions 24, 25, and Text Questions 2 and 3 address **Visitor Centers partnering with other organizations**. Fifty out of 95 managers report that their Centers do partner with outside organizations, most commonly some sort of "Friends Group." Partner organizations cited by respondents typically assist the Visitor Center with bookstores, programs, staffing and direct funding. In return, Visitor Centers are most likely to provide partners with space and information dissemination. Managers that cite barriers to partnering for their Visitor Centers list a lack of interested partners; the remoteness of their site, a lack of upper management support for partnering, and a lack of other resources such as staff, funding and space.

The top three types of **training that respondents feel would benefit their ability to manage and plan for their Visitor Centers** are: 1) A/V Multi-media Technology; 2) Program and Exhibit Evaluation; 3) Exhibit Plans and RFP's. Other responses to Question 28 include Developmental Management Plans and Prospectus, Visitor Surveys and general management skills.

The most frequently cited **barrier to improving Visitor Centers** (Question 30) is that of budgetary constraints (76 respondents). In addition to limited funding, restrictions on the time-frame for spending fiscal dollars makes multi-year planning difficult as exhibit development and exhibit production firms require longer planning times. The next-most frequently cited barriers are "Small Staff," (40) and "Lack of Space to Expand" (34). Comments offered in response to this question also address management styles in the Corps, e.g., upper management needs to broaden its focus beyond engineering and recognize that Visitor Center staff meets and deals with the public daily; and Interpreters and Visitor Center Managers need to see themselves and be recognized by management as professionals.

Managers see the **role of Corps Visitor Centers in the future** as public educators regarding the Corps' Activities, project sites, water and environmental issues. They emphasize supporting local educational systems. Many respondents also see Corps Visitor Centers as vital local community-based facilities.

Text Question 4 asks respondents for any **other input for the Visitor Center Initiative Committee**. Those managers who responded to this question had much to write. Several responses are very lengthy. Many responses reveal frustration, even resentment, on the part of managers regarding upper management and budgetary issues. They also reveal commitment to the interpretive mission of Visitor Centers and the ability of their interpretive staff.

Among their concerns are issues of communication and training. There is a need for Visitor Centers to be able to communicate with each other about exhibit and program success and failures. The Visitor Initiative Committee is referred to here and in other questions as a potentially useful body for communications and exhibit development.

Managers are also concerned about renovating, maintaining and developing exhibits. They feel that more expertise and resources should be applied in this area.

## Survey Results

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### Question 1

From *your* perspective, what subject areas listed below do you think should be included in Corps Visitor Center exhibits? Rank in order of importance to you from 1 (highest priority) to 11 (lowest priority).

Of the ten Subject Areas listed, two lead as highest priorities for a majority of respondents by all measures. They are:

1. Site-specific Project Purposes

Mode (most frequent response)	1
Mean (average of all responses)	2.44
Number of respondents citing this among their top three priorities	74

2. Physical Orientation to the Site (way finding)

Mode (most frequent response)	2
Mean (average of all responses)	3.92
Number of respondents citing this among their top three priorities	63

The middle range of Subject Areas is listed below in order of the number of respondents to cite them in their top three priorities (33 to 21 respondents). The mode for each of these falls in a range of 1 to 10 and the mean from 4.68 to 6.29.

3. The Corps' Missions
4. Recreation
5. Visitor Safety
6. The History of the Corps
7. Natural Resources

Lowest in all measures were:

8. Cultural Resources (archeological, historical, etc.)
9. Cultural Resource Management Relative to the Project
10. Environmental Education

Subject Areas suggested under "Other" were cited as highest priority for 54 respondents. Many "Other" responses address local, community and/or site related issues such as local history, local facilities, history of the site/project, community events. For complete data on all Subject Areas and a full list of "Other" responses, please see Appendix D.

## Question 2

Based solely on input you have received from visitors during the previous 12 months, in which of the subject areas listed below have visitors shown the most interest? Rank in order of interest 1 (most interesting to visitors) to 11 (least interesting to visitors).

Nearly all respondents have based their answers to this question on informal and/or anecdotal evidence (see Question 3 below). Data so gathered can suggest useful trends, but cannot be considered statistically representative of the visitorship.

Of the ten Subject Areas listed, three are identified by respondents as most interesting to visitors.

1. Physical Orientation to the Site (way finding)

Mode (most frequent response)	1
Mean (average of all responses)	2.87
Number of respondents citing this among their top three priorities	66

2. Recreation

Mode (most frequent response)	2
Mean (average of all responses)	2.76
Number of respondents citing this among their top three priorities	68

3. Site-specific Project Purposes

Mode (most frequent response)	1
Mean (average of all responses)	3.16
Number of respondents citing this among their top three priorities	57

The middle range of Subject Areas is listed below in order of the number of respondents to cite them in their top three priorities (39 and 20 respondents). For each of these the mode are 3 and 7, and the mean 4.17 and 5.47.

4. Natural Resources
5. Environmental Education

Lowest in all measures were:

6. Cultural Resource Management Relative to the Project
7. Cultural Resources (archeological, historical, etc.)
8. The Corps' Missions
9. Visitor Safety
10. The History of the Corps

Subject Areas suggested under "Other" were cited as highest priority for 62 respondents. Many "Other" responses address local and/or site related issues about recreational opportunities and/or how to proceed with their visit (maps, passes, camping, restrooms). A few cite interest in the local Corps project and related environmental issues. For complete data on all Subject Areas and a full list of "Other" responses, please see Appendix E.

### Question 3

**On what sort of visitor input have you based your response to Question 2 above?  
Please check all that apply.**

A total of six respondents indicated that their answers to Question 2 were based on a controlled study of visitors. The other 87 respondents relied upon anecdotal information, i.e., casual conversation or observation of visitors, questions from visitors during programs and the like; or input from self selected samples e.g., visitor comment cards or guest books. For a complete data table, please see Appendix F.

While a formal and controlled study of visitors provides statistically reliable data, more casual input as is reflected in most answers to Question 2 can reveal real and useful trends as are seen above. For more information please see Question 18 below.

**Question 4**

**Approximately how many square feet of exhibit space does your visitor center include? Please enter your numerical response on the line below:**

A majority of responding visitor centers (54) are 1,500 square feet or less.

<b>Approximate Square Feet</b>	<b>Number of Visitor Centers</b>	<b>% of 87 responses</b>
6 - 100	6	7 %
101 - 500	18	21 %
501 - 1000	16	18 %
1001 - 1500	14	16 %
1501 - 2000	7	8 %
2001 - 2500	5	6 %
2501 - 3000	3	3 %
3001 - 3500	2	<3 %
3501 - 4000	1	<3 %
4001 - 4500	2	<3 %
4501 - 5000	4	5 %
5001 - 5500	0	n/a
5501 - 6000	4	5 %
6001 - 6500	0	n/a
7000	1	<3 %
8,000	1	<3 %
8500	1	<3 %
25,000	1	<3 %
<b>total valid responses:</b>	<b>87 total</b>	

**Question 5**

**About what percentage of your exhibits do you think need to be updated? Please enter your numerical response on the line below:**

A large majority of respondents (64) felt that at least 50% of their exhibits needed to be updated. Thirty-eight felt that at least 80% needed updating.

<b>Approximately ____ % of our exhibits need to be updated.</b>	<b>Number of Visitor Centers</b>	<b>% of 86 Valid Responses</b>
0 % (or n/a)	4	5 %
10 - 19 %	5	6 %
20 - 29 %	9	10 %
30 - 39 %	5	6 %
40 - 49 %	3	3 %
50 - 59 %	14	16 %
60 - 69 %	4	5 %
70 - 79 %	8	9 %
80 - 89 %	10	12 %
90 - 99 %	9	10 %
100 %	19	22 %
<b>total valid responses:</b>	<b>86</b>	

## Question 6

**Why do you think those exhibits need to be changed? Please rank the following list beginning with 1 for the biggest or main problem for exhibits at your facility. Enter numerical digits on the lines preceding each item leaving blank those that do not apply.**

Of the nine reasons offered for needing exhibit changes, two stand out as the most prevalent. They are:

1. Broken/maintenance problem

Mode (most frequent response)	2
Mean (average of all responses)	3.19
Number of respondents citing this among their top three priorities	46

2. Obsolete computer technology

Mode (most frequent response)	1
Mean (average of all responses)	3.49
Number of respondents citing this among their top three priorities	34

The middle range of needs for exhibit changes is listed below in order of the number of respondents to cite them in their top three priorities (23 to 16 respondents). For each of these the mode falls in a range of 1 to 4 and the mean from 3.82 to 4.74.

3. Not suitable for current visitor population, e.g., more children vs. retirees now
4. Increased or decreased volume of visitation
5. Do not accomplish the written objectives of the exhibit
6. Inaccurate information

Lowest in all measures were:

7. Inaccessible per ADA requirements
8. Site project mission has changed
9. Increased need for multiple languages

Most "Other" comments described the exhibits' style and content as being old and/or out of date and, in some cases, unappealing or boring. Several "Other" comments specified a need for interactive displays to help engage visitors. Concern for accommodating repeat visitors was also expressed. For complete data on needs for change and a complete list of "Other" comments, please see Appendix G.

## Questions 7 & 8

### Do you have exhibits that were designed for children?

If you have exhibitry that was designed for children, does it seem to be enough to serve your current visitor population?

Response	Frequency of Resp.	% of 95 Participants
Yes, we have exhibits for children.	53	56 %
Yes, these exhibits seem to be adequate for our visitors	21	22 %
No, these exhibits are not sufficient for our visitors.	32	34 %

General comments on exhibits for children were also solicited with this question. Most comments address a need for more child-oriented, hands-on and interactive exhibitry. One respondent suggests, and museum visitor research agrees, that adults as well as children need to be engaged by tactile and visually attractive exhibits. For a complete list of responses to Question 8, please see Appendix H.

## Question 9

### Is there a central theme to your visitor center exhibits? If so, what is it?

This question also specified: "A theme is the central or key idea of any exhibit or presentation. Themes should be stated as short, simple, complete sentences, contain only one idea and reveal the overall purpose of the exhibit."

Fifty-three participants responded to this question. Fourteen (15% of 95) appear to get at the idea of themes as described above, though not all are written as complete sentences.

- Power and Play is just a short distance away on the Pend Oreille.
- The role of water in the life cycle of the San Francisco Bay region, state of California
- Preserving the Salmon of the Pacific Northwest.
- The Honolulu Engineer District's regional visitor center is dedicated to Civil Works Water Resource Development. The theme of the presentation is "People, Islands and Water."
- The Living Lake
- The Missouri River; A River through time and change in northeastern Montana.
- The Corps' Missions are varied and serve the world.
- Inland waterway transportation benefits the country and you.
- Lake Lanier Works ( for you )
- Maritime history and the Corps of Engineers role in development of Duluth-Superior Harbor, Lake Superior, and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System.
- Meeting the challenge of Change on the Missouri River
- Oahe, Foundation of Fun.
- Paleontological and cultural resources of the project area were important components of pre-construction planning.
- Water as a Multiple Use Resource
- Thurmond Project/Lake offers an abundance of resources.

Continued...

Most of the other 39 responses to this question listed one or more topics addressed by their visitor center. Of those, 15 specified the Corps' local and/or broader missions. Topic areas range from local flora/fauna, to details of the local water project, to "the environment."

For a complete list of all responses to this question please see Appendix I.

## Question 10

**What is your mix of media? Check all that apply.**

Media:	No. of Resp.	% of 95 Respondents
Photos	82	86 %
Pamphlets or printed handouts	81	85 %
Videos	50	53 %
Other	42	44 %
Other interactives	37	39 %
Computer-based interactives	36	38 %
Slide shows	29	31 %
Audio tours	17	18 %
Film	10	11 %

"Other" responses include a wide array of models, dioramas, aquaria, maps, animal mounts, etc. "Other Interactives" responses describe a variety of hands-on items and games including mounted animal specimens to touch, question-and-answer doors, touch table, buttons to activate lights or recordings, puzzles, etc.

Highlights of "Computer-based Interactives" responses are listed below. For a complete list of responses to Question 10, please see Appendix J.

- Computer touch screen informative display
- Control the Flow - making decisions on water releases
- Flood Control Game
- information kiosk, Corps history
- Interactive computer program that is part of an regional multi-agency interactive program
- Fish identification game.
- large menu of project history, construction/.engineering of project, Corps missions and history, Project recreation facilities, maps, safety videos, safety messages.
- Locking Through Simulation
- Recreation information where people can select an area and get a print-out with site specific information. We also have a salmon issues interactive computer program where people answer questions about salmon, and are shown the effect of their answers.
- shows photos of all parks, in a comp. slide show with music; contains Corps mission, lake history, videos of trail, wildlife, wildflowers, photos of shelters to assist w reservations; interactive games for kids, ranger profiles of shoreline management rangers...
- water safety computer games
- video disk player
- web site
- World Wide Web connection to Corps on the Internet



### Question 11

**Do you think your visitor center is in the best possible location in your project area? Consider factors such as visibility, accessibility, views of the site, etc.**

Thirty-four, or just over one third of respondents, felt that their location was not optimal. The most common problem cited had to do with accessibility of the visitor center (9). This includes concerns about the visitor center being hard to find from main roads, far from the lake/project or any other attraction, on a hill making it look hard to approach, etc. Lack of a view of the project or lake was a problem for seven respondents.

For a complete list of responses to Question 11, please see Appendix K

### Question 12

**Based only on input you've received from visitors, are the hours of operation at your visitor center convenient for visitors?**

Response	Frequency of Resp.	% of 95
Yes	40	42 %
No	29	31 %
Received little or no input from visitors on this issue	26	27 %
Total:	95	100 %

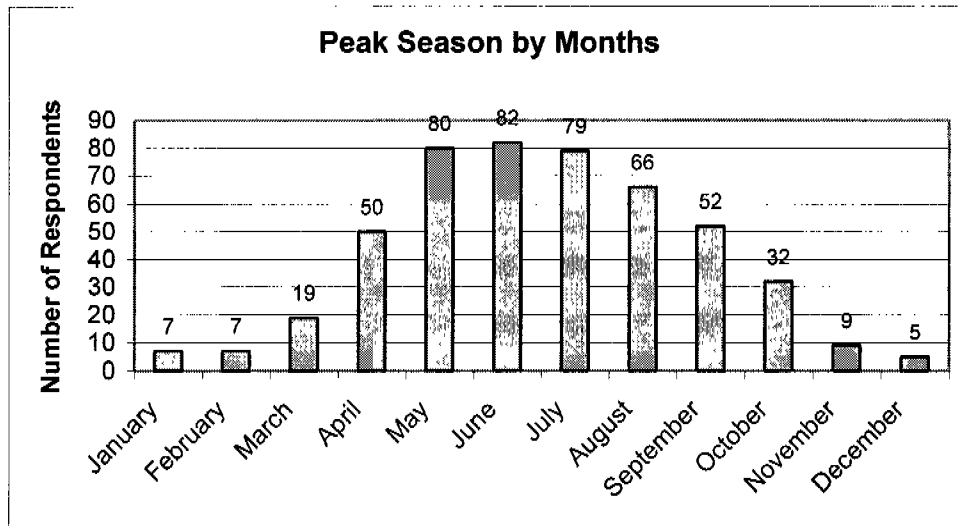
### Question 13

**If visitor feedback suggests that hours are not convenient, how could they be improved?**

This question has been eliminated from the survey because of technical difficulties referred to above.

**Question 14**

Please identify your peak season months. Check all that apply.



**Question 15**

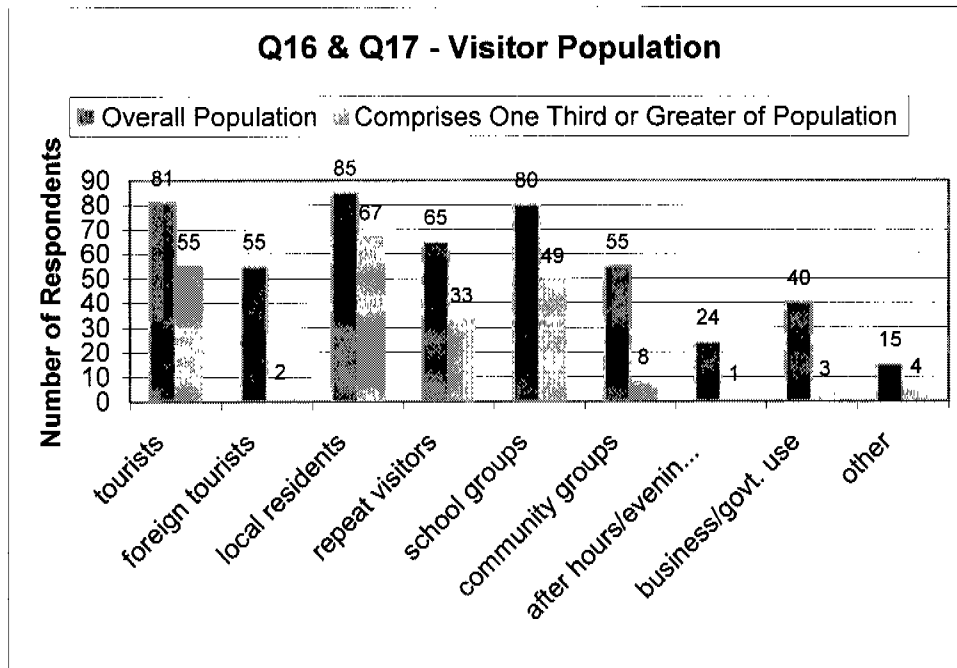
Is the capacity (size) of your facility adequate to accommodate your current level of visitation?

Response	Frequency of Resp.	%
Yes	64	68 %
No	24	26 %
I'm not sure	6	6 %
Total:	94	100 %

## Questions 16 & 17

Describe your visitor population. Check all that apply.

Please indicate which, if any, of these visitor types comprise one third or more of your visitorship. Please check up to three.



“Other” visitor populations cited for Question 16, General Population:

- Cruise ship passengers from 4 different cruise lines, dozens of different tour bus companies, 400-500 school groups annually
- Large Fishing Tournaments
- Large scheduled groups & bus tours
- large qty. of 3rd grade school kids & college level students.
- elder hostels
- Upward Bound, Lewis and Clark enthusiasts
- visitors following the Lewis and Clark Trail
- Media--focal point for dam breaching controversy
- Musical Groups performing for visitors to adjacent campground
- training
- Hunters and Bird watchers
- Special events
- boat class students
- district office personnel and guests
- fishermen
- people from campgrounds
- senior citizen group tours
- Paleontology enthusiast

“Other” visitor populations cited for Question 17, One third or greater of visitorship:

- Hunters and Bird watchers
- people from campgrounds
- special events
- Large scheduled groups, tournament attendees and busses as indicated above

## Question 18

### How do you obtain input from your visitors? Check all that apply.

A total of 35 respondents indicated that they practice some sort of formal study of visitors, i.e., observational study of visitors, focus groups, and public scoping sessions. When done with a probability-based sample data generated by these, and other, types of studies can be relied upon as statistically representative of the visitor population.

Informal studies of visitors in which a sample is not drawn systematically produce data that may be skewed. Casual conversation, guest book comments and correspondence from visitors share the same weakness of working with a self-selected sample of the population. The data will reflect the population of people who like to chat with rangers write in guest books and send letters, but not the visitor population as a whole. Casual observations suffer similarly from non-systematic sampling and data gathering techniques. Questionnaires and comment cards can be used effectively when administered with a probability-based sampling system.

Thirty-five respondents to question 28 indicated that they would benefit from training regarding visitor surveys. Fifty-nine indicated that they would benefit from training regarding program and exhibit evaluation techniques.

No. Resp.	% of 95	Means of Obtaining Visitor Input	Frequency	No. Resp.
82	86 %	Casual observation of visitors	At least once a year Less than once/year Never	69 0 0
53	56 %	Guest book with comments		
48	51 %	Questionnaire or Comment Cards	At least once a year Less than once/year Never	33 10 0
32	34 %	Email or other correspondence from visitors		
31	33 %	Participant evaluations of Educational Programs	Each program At least once a year Less than once/year Never	12 13 3 1
26	27 %	Observational study of visitors	At least once a year Less than once/year Never	23 2 0
13	14 %	Focus Groups	At least once a year Less than once/year Never	5 7 1
13	14 %	Public Scoping Sessions	At least once a year Less than once/year Never	7 5 0
16	17 %	Other	At least once a year Less than once/year Never	13 3 0

## Question 19

### What do you do with survey results?

This Question was replaced by the following Text Question 1 in the August email.

### Text Question 1

**In the original survey you were asked to indicate how you obtain input from visitors. Some examples are participant evaluations of programs, formal observational studies, focus groups, casual observational studies, public scoping sessions, comment cards, guest books, etc. How do you use the results of these efforts?**

Forty of the 50 managers to respond to the August email describe an active program of reviewing and acting upon visitor input gathered by all formal and informal means. Some make a practice of periodic reviews of visitor input with staff, some look to the input when they are ready to make changes. Many of them state that changes or improvements are difficult or impossible to do because of limited funds and/or staff time.

For a complete list of responses to Text Question 1 please see Appendix L.

## Question 20 & 21

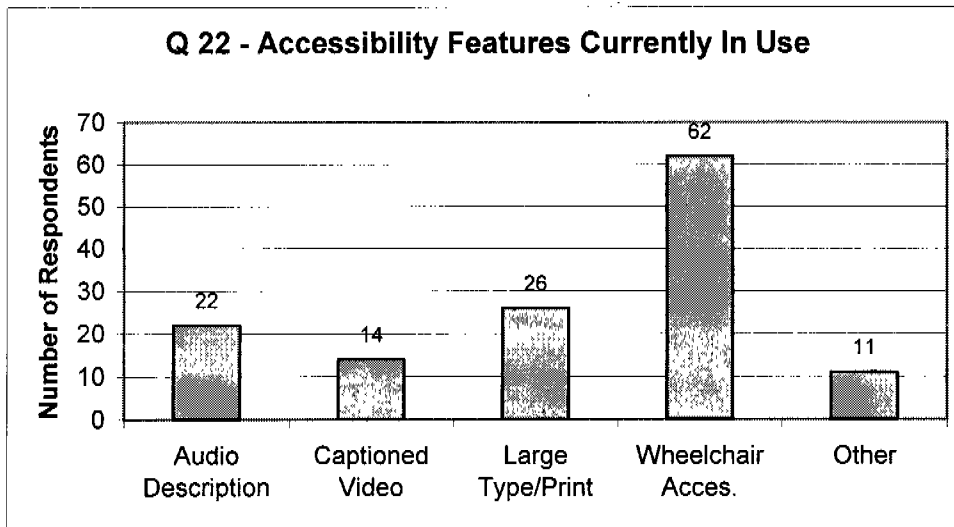
### Have you conducted a formal accessibility survey?

**If you have conducted a formal accessibility survey, do you have an accessibility plan?**

Response	Frequency of Resp.	% of 93 Responses
No, we have not conducted an accessibility study.	65	70 %
Yes, we have conducted an accessibility study.	28	30 %
Yes we have an accessibility plan.	17	18 %
No, we do not have an accessibility plan.	27	29 %
I'm not sure if we have an accessibility plan.	50	54 %

## Question 22

What features are incorporated into your exhibits to increase visitor accessibility?  
Check all that apply.



“Other” features and comments cited:

- Accessibility standards by professional exhibit vendors must be met in all exhibit contracts and RFPs
- Braille and large print guide to accessible nature trail located near the Center.
- Hearing Impaired brochure for all exhibits
- Phonic ear for blind population
- Spanish language audio and captions.
- Wheelchair, Ramp, Water Fountain, Accessibility conforms to the 1982 standards.
- All parts of VC are accessible but the deck. It has a short step to access it.
- curb cut-outs at drop-off zone in front of the visitor center
- height of desk and exhibits, door weight and ease of operation
- modifications to entry and restroom doors
- photos of view from deck
- Plan completed recently; features to be incorporated in visitor center rehabilitation.
- would like to be able to do it all

## Question 23

**Please rate the following features of your visitor center. Rate each item on a scale of 1 (very good) to 5 (very poor). Skip any items that are not applicable.**

Of the 21 features that respondents were asked to rate, 19 were judged to be "Fair" or better, based on the mode response (most frequent response). Below are listed the 21 features grouped by mode response. Please see Appendix M for complete data on each feature.

Mode Response (most frequent response): 1 "Very Good"

- Staffed "Welcome Station"
- Theater (only one respondent in total)

Mode Response (most frequent response): 2 "Good"

- Restrooms
- Heating and air conditioning
- Electrical
- Lighting
- Condition of building
- Landscaping
- Handicapped accessibility - Interior
- Handicapped accessibility - Exterior
- Interior design/decor
- Furnishings
- Office space

Mode Response (most frequent response): 3 "Fair"

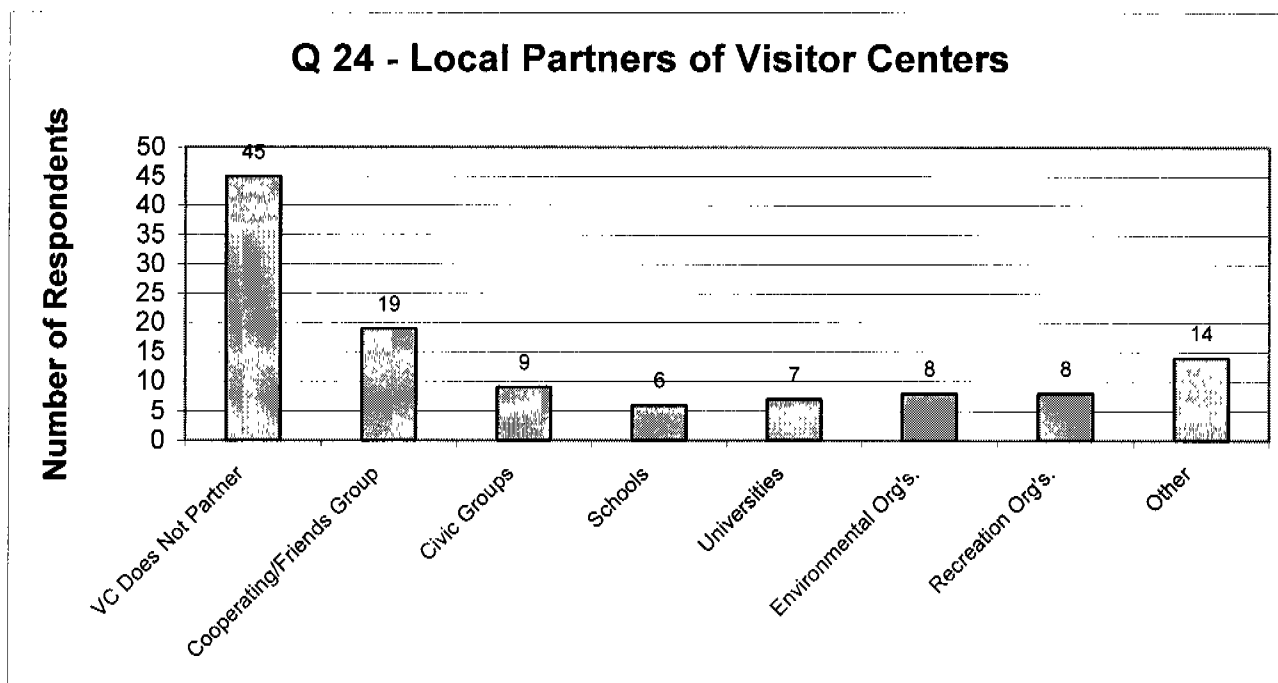
- Parking (very high response rate of "1," "2" and "3")
- Traffic flow
- Exhibit space (high response rate of "1," "2" and "3")
- Effectiveness of directional signs
- Appropriate languages on signage

Mode Response (most frequent response): 5 "Very Poor"

- Public meeting space
- Vending
- Sales/bookstore space

## Question 24

Do you currently partner with a local group? Check all that apply.



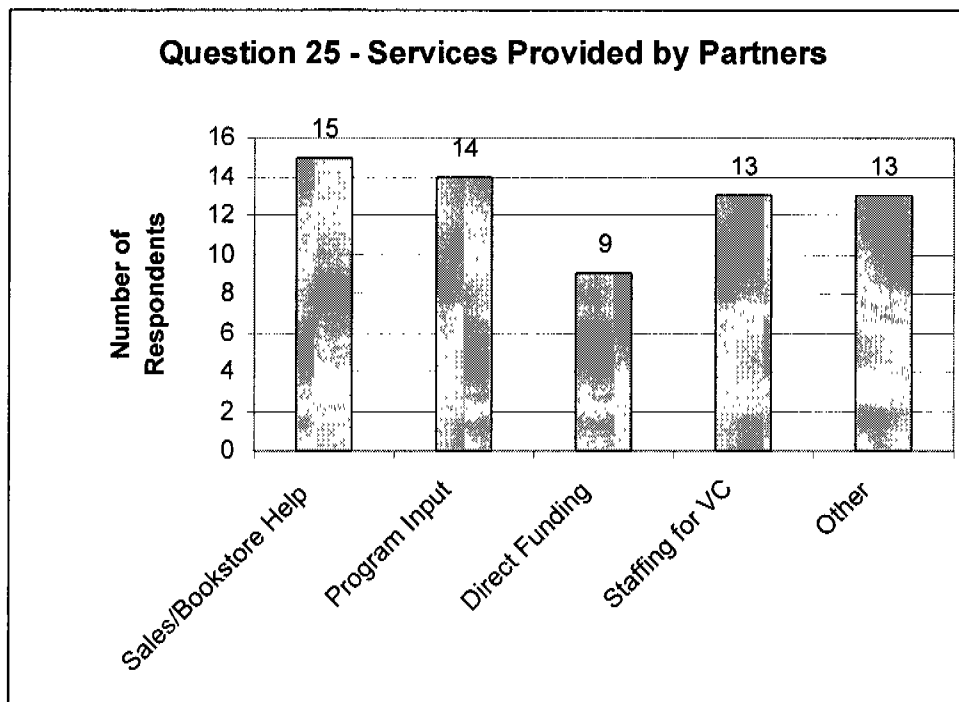
A few responses to "Other" evidence a varied understanding of what "Partnering" is. "Other" responses follow:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Cooperating Agreement with Eastern National County & State
- County Parks Department
- Eastern National - Bookstore
- Eastern National Monument Association
- Green Thumb Inc.
- Kansas Historical Society
- National Park Service
- National Park Service personnel assist in operation of VC
- RSVP- retired senior volunteer program
- U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and other Federal Agencies.
- EE programs & events only
- Paleontology Field Station
- VC is basically run with volunteers
- We had a volunteer prepare many of the exhibits
- We use paid staff and seasonal volunteers.
- Contracted visitor services (is that considered a partner in the sense you are asking this question?)



## Question 25

If you are partnering, what types of services do your partners provide? Check all that apply.



“Other” services from partners cited:

- Cooperative Association only
- Could provide one staff member representing their government agency, and perhaps a volunteer from each group.
- Display describing "Shawnee Hills of the Ohio" provided by the Shawnee National Forest Service
- EE & interpretive programs, events
- Interpretive Materials and goods - Bookstore
- Loan of Archeological artifacts
- Organizes and funds an annual Heritage festival; has provided some interpretive infrastructure
- Program development
- They also develop, fund and present a series of their own programming that enhances our overall interpretive mission. Programs that we could not fund or have staffing to develop.
- brochures, etc
- provision of sales items and related administration - no staffing
- some volunteer staffing
- special event assistance

## Question 26

### What does your visitor center provide to the partner organization(s)?

This Question was replaced by the following Text Question 2 in the August email.

## Text Question 2

### If your Visitor Center partners with community groups, what does your Visitor Center provide to the partnering organization?

Nineteen of the 50 responding Visitor Centers describe their partner relationships. What Visitor Centers provide to their partners fall into several categories: access to space, access to visitors for dissemination of information, access to revenue via bookstore sales activities. Some Visitor Centers also support their partners with staff hours. One Visitor Center gives their partner access to Center planning as well. For a complete list of responses to Text Question 2 please see Appendix N.

## Question 27

### What barriers to partnering do you see at your visitor center?

This Question was replaced by the following Text Question 3 in the August email.

## Text Question 3

### What barriers do you see to partnering with community organizations?

Lack of resources such as time, funding, staff and space, top the list of barriers to partnering arrangements (15 responses). Concern or difficulty about conflicting missions and/or priorities is problematic for 7 respondents. Lack of possible or willing partners is cited by another 8 managers. Poor or remote physical location, low visitorship or limited season present barriers for 7 respondents. Difficulty with getting potential partners to understand the role of the Corps Visitor Center as a partner is touched on by three respondents. In the context of describing barriers, two respondents mention the value of partnering to enhance public appreciation of the Corps.

Three responses highlight Corps policies and regulations that hinder partnering arrangements, two of them in great detail. Below are several key points that these two managers make regarding policy. For a complete list of responses to Text Question 3, please see Appendix O.

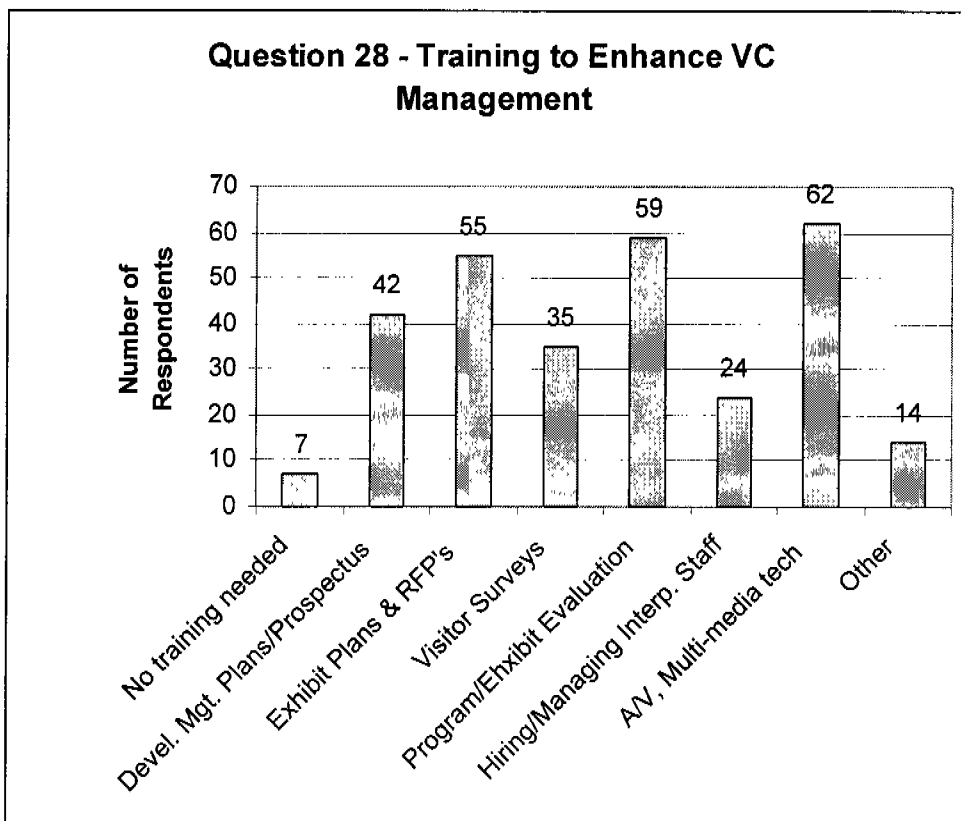
- The authorizing law and regulations, do not allow for the government to do work and be reimbursed by the partner.
- The regulations do not provide for the government to contribute funds to an effort being implemented by the partner.
- They discourage work done by contract under the partner's direction. The regs provide for contributions, but ethics rules discourage proper recognition of the partner.

Continued...

- Out of date, out of step, archaic regulations that worked fine in the 50's and 60's, but not the 21st century! We are WAY behind the curve compared to NPS, FS and BLM in how we approach partnering.
- Still a great deal of distrust from the Corps legal staff from District to Division to HQ on what we are allowed to do...
- The Corps expects the partners to commit to funds, but then turns around and says, " we'll help if Congress appropriates or we have the funds, but no guarantee" – that will kill a partnership faster than anything.
- There has to be a way to commit funds and hold them in an "escrow" or other account, over multi-years to facilitate long-term partnering. It has been done elsewhere and can be done in the Corps.
- Other agencies have HQ staff that do nothing, but help the field with partnering- that has been a driving force in other agencies.

## Question 28

**What type of training do you feel you could benefit from with regard to managing/planning for a Visitor Center? Check all that apply.**



"Other" helpful training cited echoed a need for training and/or expertise in exhibit design and production including staffing and funding issues for same. Several respondents indicated a need for general management skills. Several others offered Corps-specific comments about management and use of skilled personnel.

For a complete list of "Other" comments for Question 28 please see Appendix P.

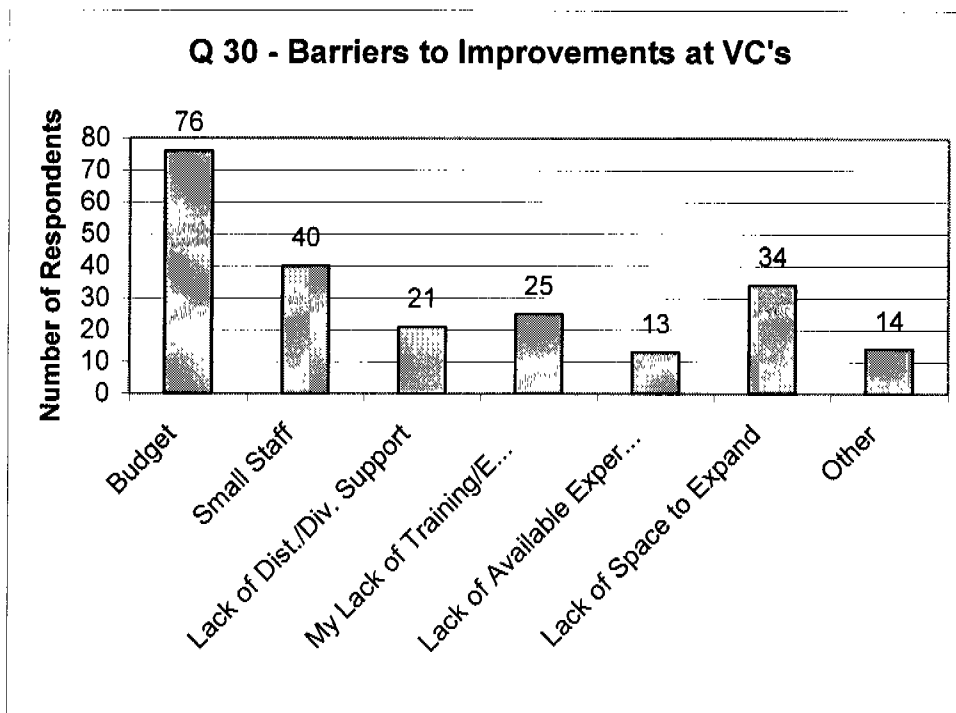
**Question 29**

**Are your Visitor Center needs integrated into your project Operation Management Plan?**

Response	Frequency of Response	% of 81
Yes	52	64 %
No or no answer	29	36 %
Total:	81	100 %

**Question 30**

**What do you think are the barriers to making improvements to your Visitor Center? Check all that apply.**



“Other” barriers to improvement cited here include several specific comments about management, budget and staffing issues peculiar to the Corps.

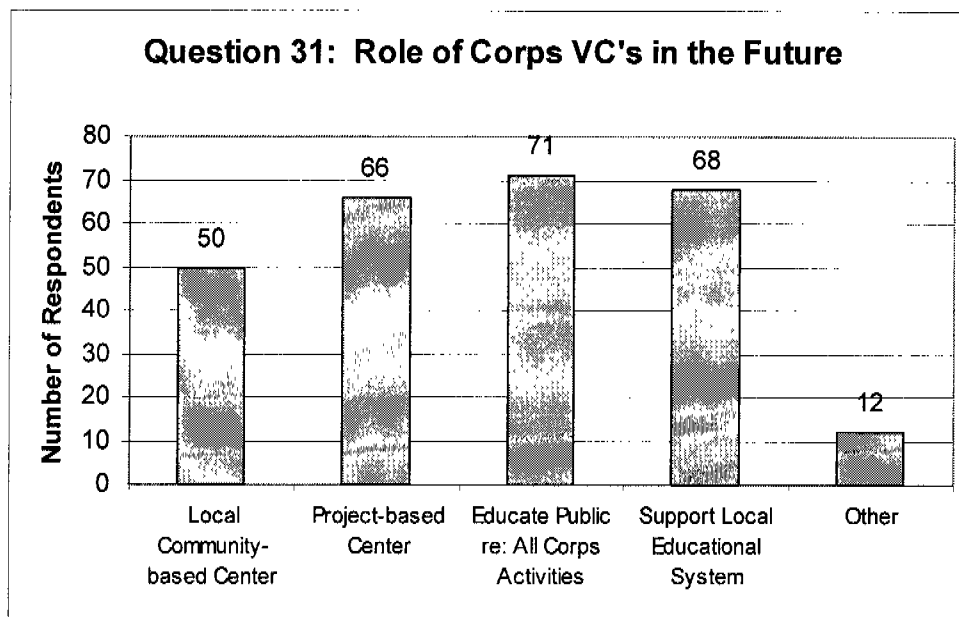
- The Corps needs to think of itself as real professionals like the National Park Service. Upper management wants to think of engineering only, but we meet and deal with everyday people.
- The Visitor Center and Interpretive Manager is not recognized as a manager/professional specialist, in some projects, districts, divisions as part of NRM programs. Yet we are 12-15 years ahead of at least two other agencies with our Interpretive Management
- Restrictions on the timeframe for spending fiscal year dollars- most exhibit/VC planning efforts are multi-year and the funding requirements say you have to have full expenditure (not just obligation) in one year- exhibit firms don't operate that way.
- prohibition to lobby for new facility
- Current laws that prohibit us from being a 1 recreation facility.

Continued...

Several other respondents blame a severe lack of funding and other resources including time and staff. Visitor center improvements are a low priority for some respondent facilities. Physical limitations of the existing center or site impede improvements as well. Finally, three respondents felt that current levels of visitation could not justify visitor center improvements at their facility. For a complete list of "Other" responses to Question 30 please see Appendix Q.

### Question 31

What role do you think Visitor Centers managed by the Corps should play in the future? Check all that apply.



Three respondents underscore the importance of community service.

*"Corps visitor centers need to be more integrated into the local/regional community to remain relevant and effective. Otherwise, they run the risk of missing critical constituency."*

One respondent wants to see visitor centers become the, "Center piece of the Project." Two more comments address how the Corps might approach visitor centers:

*"We need to be pro-active with full support of upper management. This includes funding, and staffing."*

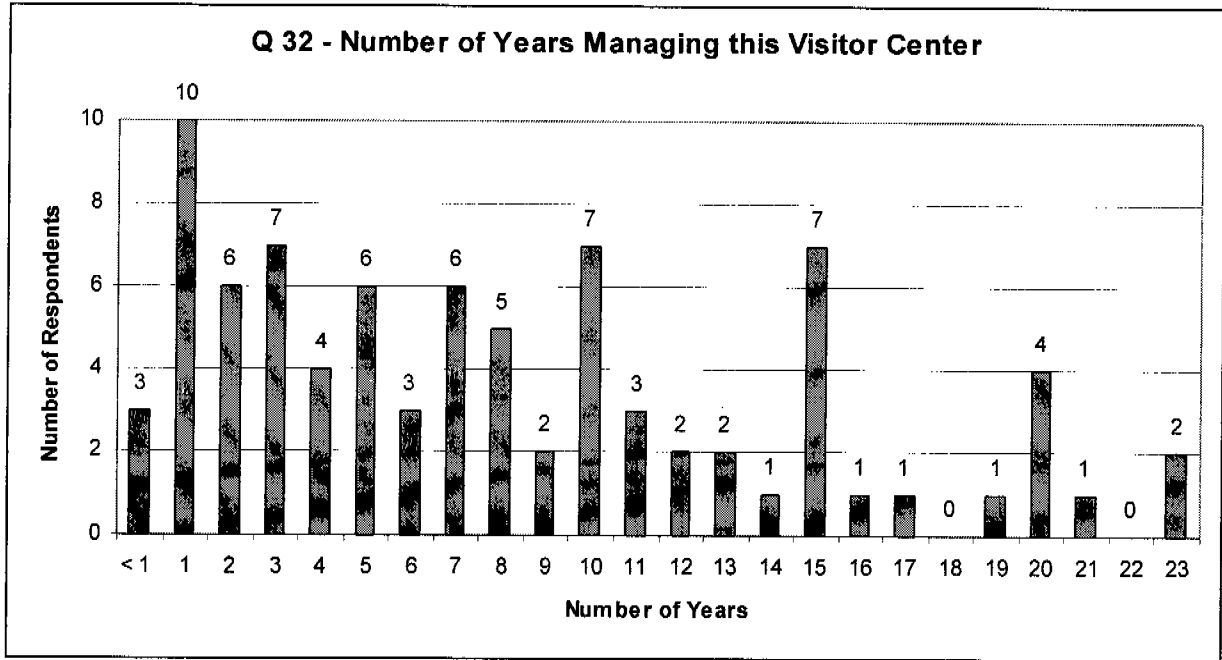
*"Customer Care and Professional Service through Visitor Center and Interpretive Programming and Management."*

The remaining "Other" comments promote educational goals for visitor centers about the Corps, the project, water and environmental issues. Several of these stress relating this information to the lives of visitors.

For a complete list of "Other" responses to Question 31 please see Appendix R.

**Question 32**

How long have you been managing this visitor center? Please enter the number of years in numerical form on the line below. Partial years may be indicated with a decimal point.



**Question 33**

What class is your visitor center?

Class A	15
Class B	37
Class C	32

**Question 34**

Do you have any other input for the Visitor Center Initiative Committee?

This Question was replaced by the following Text Question 4 in the August email.

## Text Question 4

**The original survey asked you about the many facets of managing your Visitor Center including the physical condition of the facility, the nature and timeliness of your exhibits, what training or expertise you think would assist you, and so on. Do you have any other input for the Visitor Center Initiative Committee? If so, please elaborate below.**

Thirty-three out of 50 managers took this opportunity to share their concerns and ideas. Several responses are quite lengthy. Many responses reveal frustration, even resentment, on the part of managers regarding upper management and budgetary issues. They also reveal commitment to the interpretive mission of Visitor Centers and the ability of their interpretive staff. Please see Appendix S for complete responses to this Question.

At least eight responses to this questions hit on issues of communications and/or training. Comments include general statements about needing more communication and expertise, wanting to know what other Visitor Centers have done as well as suggesting a regularly scheduled Visitor Center conference. More than one respondent recognizes the Visitor Center Initiative Committee as a potentially effective aid to communications as well as exhibit development.

Should the Committee develop an exhibit about the Corps story for use in a variety of Visitor Centers, two managers recommend that it be created with flexibility and options such that it can be customized per site.

Exhibit-related issues appear in at least eight responses. Concerns around exhibits include the lack of a systematic approach to updating and maintaining them, funding for them and expertise for developing them. Two managers point out that visitors spend very little time with exhibits and they are best used as tools or supports for interaction between visitors and interpretive staff.

Several lengthy responses to this question address aspects of how Visitor Centers operate as a part of the Corps and/or Corp management. Some comments reveal frustration on the part of Visitor Center managers regarding their perceived low standing in the eyes and actions of Corps management. Some see low funding for Visitor Centers as symptomatic of their being held in low regard. Several writers hope that upper management will recognize Visitor Centers as critical and useful to the Corps. They feel that interpretive staff expertise and ability is overlooked and not used to full advantage. One points out that they are kept busy by less relevant tasks such as CEFMS, OMBIL, FEMS and NRRS.

Concerns around funding and budget issues include frustration that great amounts of money seem to flow through Corps projects, but rarely to Visitor Centers and exhibits. OMB is cited more than once as being burdensome to the point of preventing even small projects or expenditures.

## Appendix A

### Original Web-based Survey & Related Email Communications for Participants

#### First E-mail Announcement

Visitor Center Managers:

The Visitor Center Initiative Committee has been convened to assess current conditions of Corps Visitor Centers. In the next few days, you will be receiving an email message with a link to an on-line survey form. With your input the Committee will be able to identify and recommend improvements to the Corps regarding visitor center buildings, exhibits, interpretive themes and policy.

Your participation in this study is very important as only 135 Type A, B and C centers are being contacted. You and the other Managers we are contacting have been identified as the individuals who are closest to the day-to-day management of your visitor center facility.

Please take the time to complete the survey form completely and honestly when you receive it. Your responses will be sent directly to our Visitor Studies contractor for tabulation and summary and will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at the number below.

Thank you.

-Nancy Rogers  
Manager, San Francisco Bay Model Visitor Center, (415) 332-3871  
Visitor Center Initiative Committee

#### E-Mail Message With Link To Survey Form...

Visitor Center Managers:

You recently received a message from the Visitor Center Initiative Committee about a survey that we are asking you to complete. Please use the link below to access the survey form and submit it electronically. Instructions for completing and submitting the survey are included on the form. Thank you for providing your input by July 15, 2001.

To support and improve Corps visitor centers, the Committee needs to hear from you about the condition of visitor center buildings, exhibits and interpretive themes managed by the Corps of Engineers. Results of this survey will provide critical input from the field to identify needed reforms, upgrades and policy changes to make visitor centers responsive to future roles, missions and innovative approaches to management.

All Type A (Regional), Type B (Project) and selected Type C Centers, for a total of about 135, are being invited to participate the survey. You and the other Managers we are contacting have been identified as the individuals who are closest to the day-to-day management of your Visitor Center.



Please take the time to respond completely and honestly. Your responses will be sent directly to our Visitor Studies contractor for tabulation and summary and will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at the number below.

Thank you for your time and quick response.

-Nancy Rogers  
Manager, San Francisco Bay Model Visitor Center, (415)332-3871  
Visitor Center Initiative Committee

### **Reminder Email Message With Link To Survey Form...**

Visitor Center Managers:

You recently received a message from the Visitor Center Initiative Committee about a survey that we are asking you to complete. If you have already done so, thank you very much. If you have not, please take the time to do so today. To be included in the study, your responses must be submitted no later than July 15.

Please use the link below to access the survey form and submit it electronically. Instructions for completing and submitting the survey are included on the form.

This survey was developed to gather information about the condition of visitor center buildings, exhibits and interpretive themes managed by the Corps of Engineers. Results of this survey will provide critical input from the field to identify needed reforms, upgrades and policy changes to make visitor centers responsive to future roles, missions and innovative approaches to management.

All Type A (Regional), Type B (Project) and selected Type C Centers, for a total of about 135, are being invited to participate the survey. You and the other Managers we are contacting have been identified as the individuals who are closest to the day-to-day management of your Visitor Center.

Please take the time to respond completely and honestly. Your responses will be sent directly to our Visitor Studies contractor for tabulation and summary and will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at the number below.

Thank you for your time and quick response.

-Nancy Rogers  
Manager, San Francisco Bay Model Visitor Center, (415)332-3871  
Visitor Center Initiative Committee

## Web-based Survey Form

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey form. With your input, the Committee will be able to identify and recommend reforms to benefit Corps visitor center facilities.

Please enter your responses only in the spaces indicated. Numeric responses should be entered in numeric form. When checking boxes, please enter "x" in the box(es) you select. When you have completed the form please **XXXX**. Your input will be submitted directly to our visitor studies contractor and will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at the number below.

Thank you for your time and quick response.

-Nancy Rogers

Manager, San Francisco Bay Model Visitor Center, (415)332-3871  
Visitor Center Initiative Committee

**1. From *your* perspective, what subject areas listed below do you think should be included in Corps Visitor Center exhibits? Rank in order of importance to you from 1 (highest priority) to 11 (lowest priority). Enter numerical digits on the lines preceding each subject area.**

- \_\_\_ Site-specific Project Purposes
- \_\_\_ The History of the Corps
- \_\_\_ The Corps' Missions
- \_\_\_ Physical Orientation to the Site (way finding)
- \_\_\_ Cultural Resources (archeological, historical, etc.)
- \_\_\_ Cultural Resource Management Relative to the Project
- \_\_\_ Natural Resources
- \_\_\_ Visitor Safety
- \_\_\_ Recreation
- \_\_\_ Environmental Education
- \_\_\_ Other; please specify:

**2. Based solely on input you have received from visitors during the previous 12 months, in which of the subject areas listed below have visitors shown the most interest? Rank in order of interest 1 (most interesting to visitors) to 11 (least interesting to visitors). Enter numerical digits on the lines preceding each subject area.**

- \_\_\_ Site-specific Project Purposes
- \_\_\_ The History of the Corps
- \_\_\_ The Corps' Missions
- \_\_\_ Physical Orientation to the Site (way finding)
- \_\_\_ Cultural Resources (archeological, historical, etc.)
- \_\_\_ Cultural Resource Management Relative to the Project
- \_\_\_ Natural Resources
- \_\_\_ Visitor Safety
- \_\_\_ Recreation
- \_\_\_ Environmental Education
- \_\_\_ Other; please specify:

**3. On what sort of visitor input have you based your response to Question 2 above? Please check all that apply.**

- casual observation of visitors
- casual conversation with visitors
- visitor input on comment cards
- visitor input in guest book
- controlled survey of visitors
- other; please specify:

**4. Approximately how many square feet of exhibit space does your visitor center include? Please enter your numerical response on the line below:**

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ square feet of exhibit space.

**5. About what percentage of your exhibits do you think need to be updated? Please enter your numerical response on the line below:**

Approximately \_\_\_\_\_ % of our exhibits need to be updated.

**6. Why do you think those exhibits need to be changed? Please rank the following list beginning with 1 for the biggest or main problem for exhibits at your facility. Enter numerical digits on the lines preceding each item leaving blank those that do not apply.**

- \_\_\_ Do not accomplish the written objectives of the exhibit
- \_\_\_ Site project mission has changed
- \_\_\_ Inaccurate information
- \_\_\_ Broken/maintenance problem
- \_\_\_ Obsolete computer technology
- \_\_\_ Increased or decreased volume of visitation
- \_\_\_ Not suitable for current visitor population, e.g., more children vs. retirees now
- \_\_\_ Increased need for multiple languages
- \_\_\_ Inaccessible per ADA requirements
- \_\_\_ Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Do you have exhibits that were designed for children?**

- Yes
- No

**8. If you have exhibitry that was designed for children, does it seem to be enough to serve your current visitor population?**

- Yes
- No

Comments:

**9. Is there a central theme to your visitor center exhibits? If so, what is it? (A theme is the central or key idea of any exhibit or presentation. Themes should be stated as short, simple, complete sentences, contain only one idea and reveal the overall purpose of the exhibit.)**

- Yes. Please write it here: \_\_\_\_\_
- No

**10. What is your mix of media? Check all that apply.**

- Photos
- Audio tours
- Slide shows
- Videos
- Film
- Pamphlets or printed handouts
- Computer-based interactives; describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other interactives; describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Do you think your visitor center is in the best possible location in your project area? Consider factors such as visibility, accessibility, views of the site, etc.**

- Yes
- No. Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Based only on input you've received from visitors, are the hours of operation at your visitor center convenient for visitors?**

- Yes
- No
- Received little or no input from visitors on this issue

**13. If visitor feedback suggests that hours are not convenient, how could they be improved? \_\_\_\_\_**

**14. Please identify your peak season months. Check all that apply.**

- January
- February
- March
- April
- May
- June
- July
- August
- September
- October
- November
- December

**15. Is the capacity (size) of your facility adequate to accommodate your current level of visitation?**

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

**16. Describe your visitor population. Check all that apply.**

- tourists (residing more than 100 miles from your site)
- tourists from outside the US
- local residents
- repeat visitors
- school groups
- community groups
- After hours/ evening use
- Business/government (use of meeting space)
- Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Please indicate which, if any, of these visitor types comprise one third or more of your visitorship. Please check up to three.**

- tourists (residing more than 100 miles from your site)
- tourists from outside the US
- local residents
- repeat visitors
- school groups
- community groups
- After hours/ evening use
- Business/government (use of meeting space)
- Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**18. How do you obtain input from your visitors? Check all that apply.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Participant evaluations of Educational Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Each program <input type="checkbox"/> At least once a year <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once/year (last done in year: ____) <input type="checkbox"/> Never
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups	<input type="checkbox"/> At least once a year <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once/year (last done in year: ____) <input type="checkbox"/> Never
<input type="checkbox"/> Public Scoping Sessions	<input type="checkbox"/> At least once a year <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once/year (last done in year: ____) <input type="checkbox"/> Never



**23. Please rate the following features of your visitor center. Rate each item on a scale of 1 (very good) to 5 (very poor). Skip any items that are not applicable.**

Very Good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very Poor	
1	2	3	4	5	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Effectiveness of directional signs
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staffed "Welcome Station"
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Handicapped accessibility - Exterior
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Handicapped accessibility - Interior
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Appropriate languages on signage
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Heating and air conditioning
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrical
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lighting
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Restrooms
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Condition of building
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Furnishings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interior design/decor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Landscaping
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vending
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Traffic flow
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parking
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Office space
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Exhibit space
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Public meeting space
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sales/bookstore space
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Theater

**24. Do you currently partner with a local group? Check all that apply.**

- This visitor center does not partner with local groups
- Cooperating or Friends Association
- Civic groups
- Schools
- Universities
- Environmental organizations
- Recreation organizations
- Other; please specify:

**25. If you are partnering, what types of services to your partners provide? Check all that apply.**

- Sales/bookstore help
- Programming input/direction
- Direct funding for programs, equipment, materials
- Staffing for visitor center
- Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_

**26. What does your visitor center provide to the partner organization(s)?**

**27. What barriers to partnering do you see at your visitor center?**

**28. What type of training do you feel you could benefit from with regard to managing/planning for a Visitor Center? Check all that apply.**

- No training needed
- Developing Management Plans/Prospectus
- Exhibit Plans (how to write/administer an RFP for exhibits)
- Visitor Surveys
- Program/Exhibit Evaluation Techniques
- Hiring/managing interpretive staff
- A/V, multi-media technology
- Other; please specify:

**29. Are your Visitor Center needs integrated into your project Operation Management Plan?**

- Yes
- No

**30. What do you think are the barriers to making improvements to your Visitor Center? Check all that apply.**

- Budget
- Insufficient number of visitor center employees
- Lack of District/Division support
- Your own lack of training, expertise
- Lack of available expertise
- Lack of space for expansion
- Other; please specify:



**31. What role do you think Visitor Centers managed by the Corps should play in the future? Check all that apply.**

- Local community based center
- Project-based center
- Educate public concerning all Corps activities
- Support local educational systems
- Other; please specify:

**32. How long have you been managing this visitor center? Please enter the number of years in numerical form on the line below. Partial years may be indicated with a decimal point.**

\_\_\_\_\_ years managing this visitor center.

**33. What class is your visitor center?**

- Class A
- Class B
- Class C

**30. Do you have any other input for the Visitor Center Initiative Committee?**

Thank you.

## Appendix B

### August E-mail Questions 1 – 4

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All,

We experienced an unfortunate incident during the collection of the data you submitted for the recent Visitor Center survey in which you participated. We lost the data for several of the questions which requested text-input answers. Acknowledging that your time is very valuable, we ask not that you complete the survey again from the beginning -- but that you respond once again only to the four questions below. We can allow a maximum of two weeks to respond. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause, and thank you in advance for your cooperation!

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Using your email systems' Reply capability -- click Reply. Answer the questions below in the space provided after each question. When complete, click send. The responses will be returned to the person who sent you this message. They will collect the responses and provide them to the data analysis agency.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. In the original survey you were asked to indicate how you obtain input from visitors. Some examples are participant evaluations of programs, formal observational studies, focus groups, casual observational studies, public scoping sessions, comment cards, guest books, etc. How do you use the results of these efforts?
2. If your Visitor Center partners with community groups, what does your Visitor Center provide to the partnering organization?
3. What barriers do you see to partnering with community organizations?
4. The original survey asked you about the many facets of managing your Visitor Center including the physical condition of the facility, the nature and timeliness of your exhibits, what training or expertise you think would assist you, and so on. Do you have any other input for the Visitor Center Initiative Committee? If so, please elaborate below.

Once again, thank you very much for taking the time to complete this portion of the survey once again. Your responses will allow the Visitor Center Committee to identify and recommend reforms to benefit Corps Visitor Center facilities.

Gordon Gough,  
CESAM-IM-IS

## Appendix C

### Method & Sample

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Members of the Visitor Center Initiative Committee identified approximately 135 individual Visitor Center managers to participate in this web-based survey. Each manager was emailed a message in advance of the study to inform them of the project and invite them to participate. A few days later they received an email message with a link to the web site for the survey form.

During June and July of 2001, 95 managers responded and have been included in the sample for this report. The total number of responses per question varies because of accepting multiple answers where appropriate and, in some cases, respondents' incomplete submissions.

Due to technical difficulties with the web site hosted by staff, the survey's original questions 13, 19, 26, 27, and 34 cannot be included in this report. Instead, four text questions which were emailed to participants in August of 2001 are presented in the body of this report. Fifty managers responded to the August email. In this document, those questions are referred to as Text Question 1 through 4.

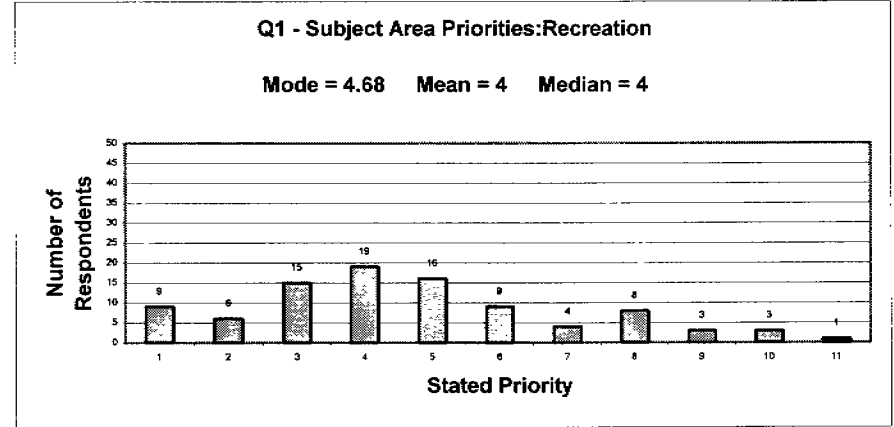
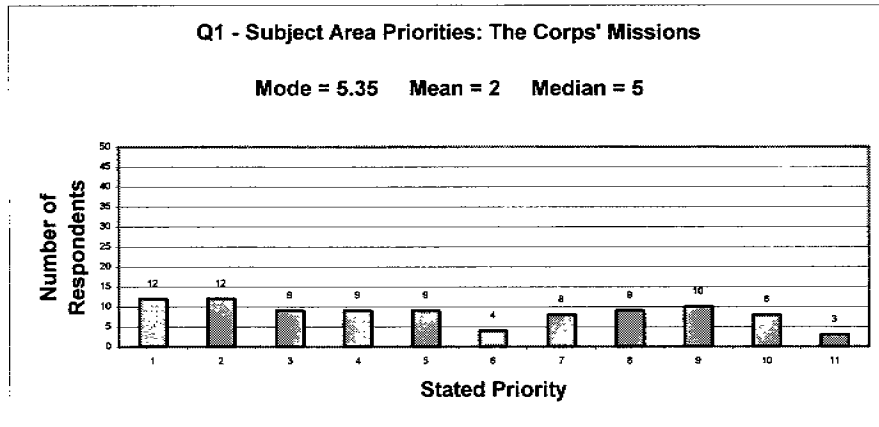
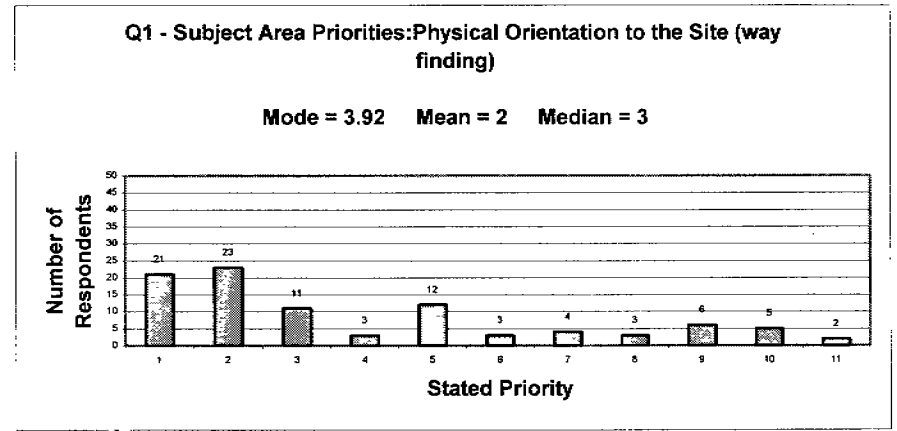
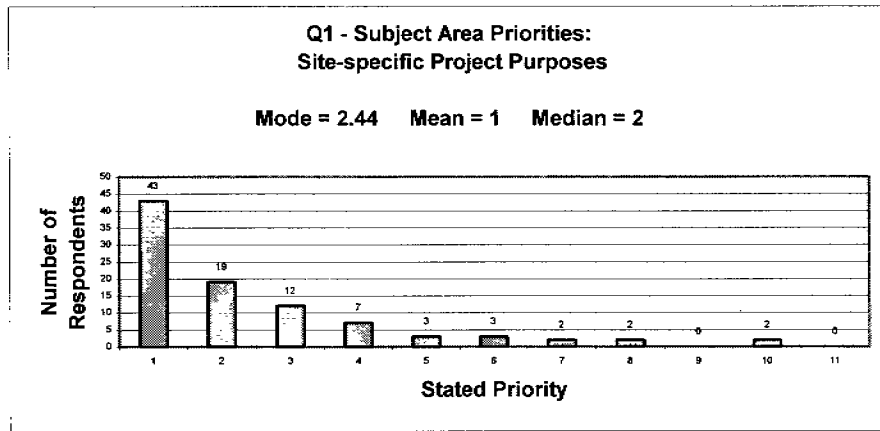
This sample can be considered a very knowledgeable and experienced group. Of the 95 respondents to the initial, web-based survey, 54 state that they have been in their current Visitor Center management position for five years or more. Seventeen of those have been on the job for 15 to 23 years.

Responding managers represent 15 Class A Visitor Centers, 37 Class B Visitor Centers and 32 Class C Visitor Centers.

Question 1

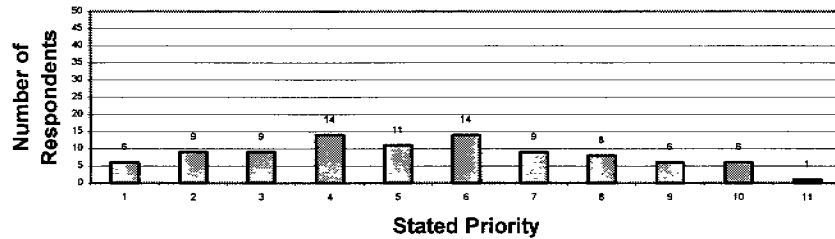
From *your* perspective, what subject areas listed below do you think should be included in Corps Visitor Center exhibits? Rank in order of importance to you from 1 (highest priority) to 11 (lowest priority).

Mode = most frequent response; Mean = average; Median = half of all responses are above and half are below this point.



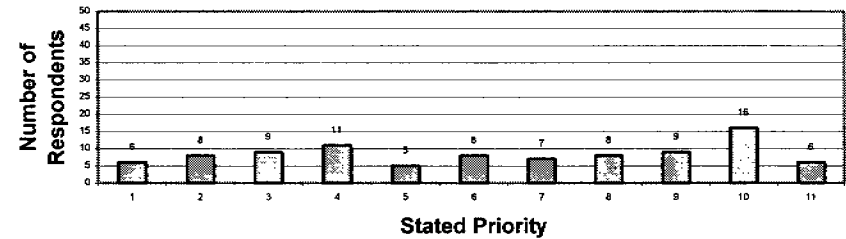
**Q1 - Subject Area Priorities:  
Visitor Safety**

**Mode = 5.34 Mean = 6 Median = 5**



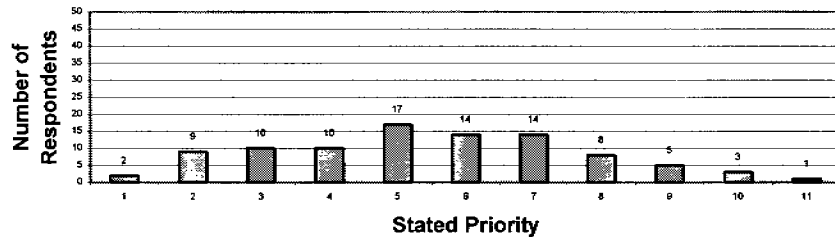
**Q1 - Subject Area Priorities:  
The History of the Corps**

**Mode = 6.29 Mean = 10 Median = 6**



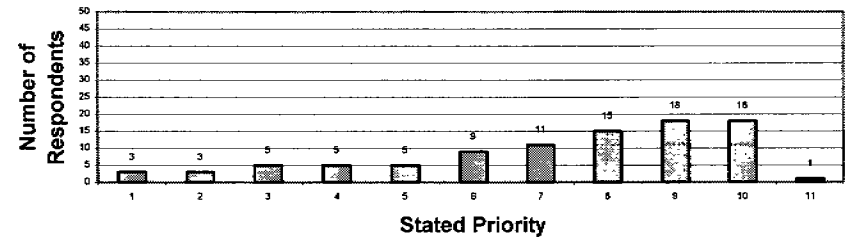
**Q1 - Subject Area Priorities:  
Natural Resources**

**Mode = 5.44 Mean = 5 Median = 5**



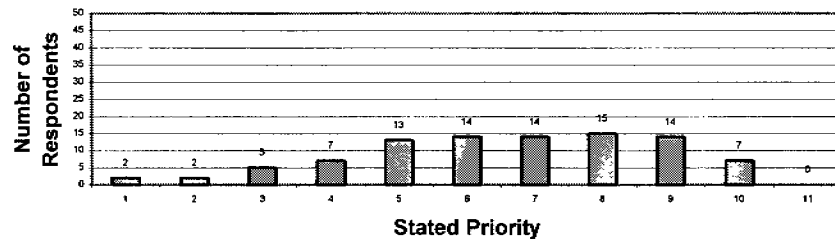
**Q1 - Subject Area Priorities:  
Cultural Resources (archeological, historical, etc.)**

**Mode = 7.23 Mean = 10 Median = 8**



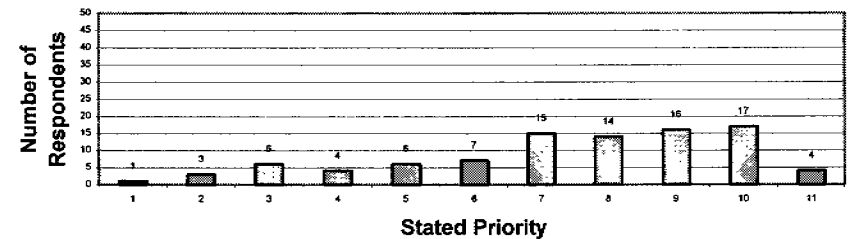
**Q1 - Subject Area Priorities:  
Environmental Education**

**Mode = 6.57 Mean = 8 Median = 7**



**Q1 - Subject Area Priorities: Cultural Resource Management  
Relative to the Project**

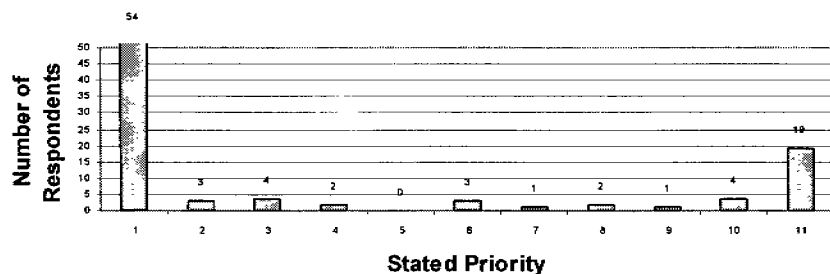
**Mode = 7.39 Mean = 10 Median = 8**



**Q1 - Subject Area Priorities:**

**Other**

**Mode = 3.49 Mean = 0 Median = 0**



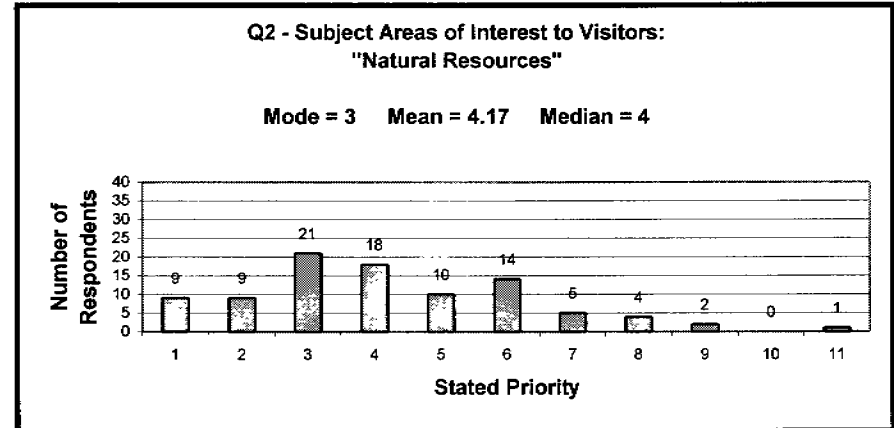
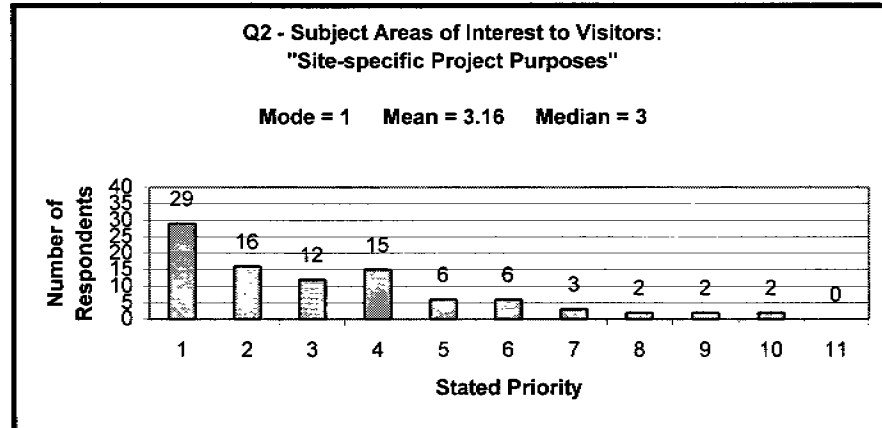
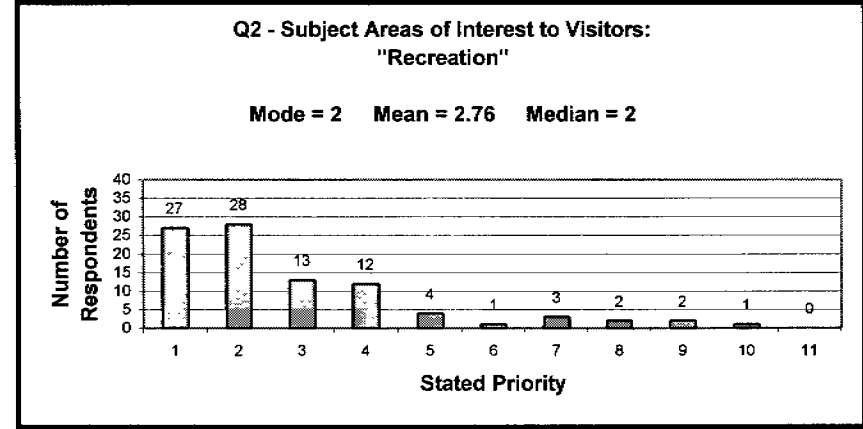
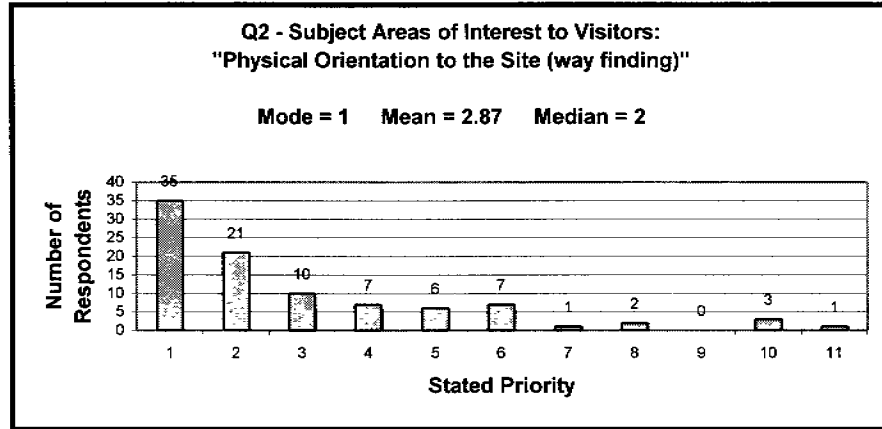
“Other” responses:

- Annual Special Events
- California Water Issues, infrastructure and history
- Community Attractions & Events
- Community Benefits
- Community Relations
- Corps Environmental Efforts- Region or Nation
- Engineering/Construction
- Cooperative agency description,
- History of Corps District
- How does this site relate to lives of most people.
- Importance of the Engineering Profession to the Region
- Interpretation programming
- Listing and missions of all Corps Visitor Centers
- Local History
- Local History and Resources
- Local points of interest
- No ranking, need combination of all of these.
- Page of hyper links to all other agencies that have similar missions.
- Relationships to Cultural and Natural resources of the region
- Site Specific Unusual and or Endangered Species of the Area.
- Site specific project history
- Site specific species, unique sites,
- Some Local Interests
- Water Quality
- Water management, site history
- if Building Named for a person some info on that
- other opportunities
- rare plants, ORV problems, cedar glades
- volunteer opportunities

**Question 2**

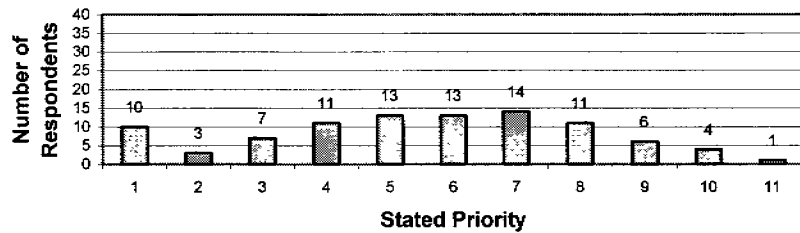
Based solely on input you have received from visitors during the previous 12 months, in which of the subject areas listed below have visitors shown the most interest? Rank in order of interest 1 (most interesting to visitors) to 11 (least interesting to visitors).

Mode = most frequent response; Mean = average; Median = half of all responses are above and half are below this point.



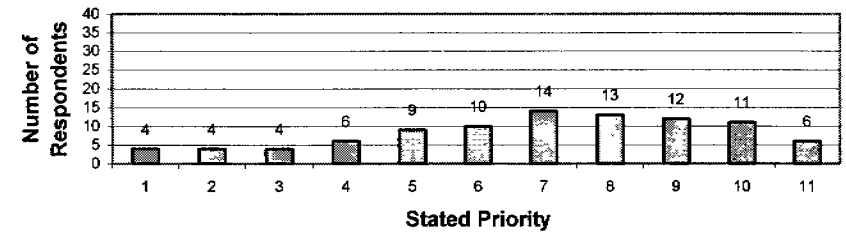
**Q2 - Subject Areas of Interest to Visitors:  
"Environmental Education"**

**Mode = 7 Mean = 5.47 Median = 6**



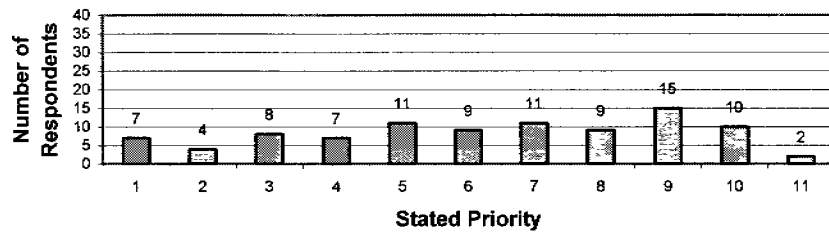
**Q2 - Subject Areas of Interest to Visitors:  
"Cultural Resource Management Relative to the Project"**

**Mode = 7 Mean = 6.83 Median = 7**



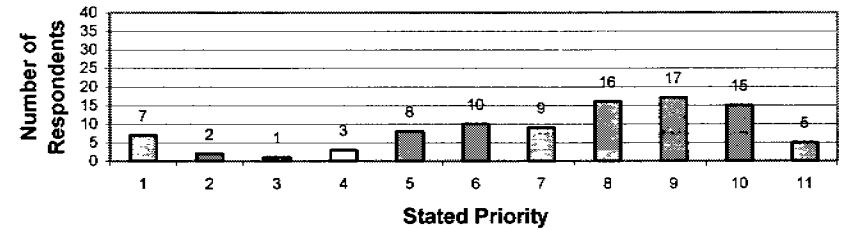
**Q2 - Subject Areas of Interest to Visitors:  
"Cultural Resources (archeological, historical, etc.)"**

**Mode = 9 Mean = 6.20 Median = 7**



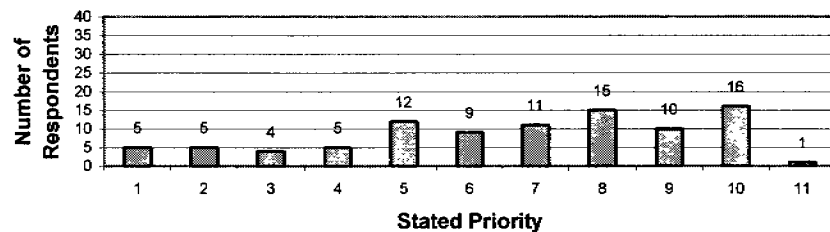
**Q2 - Subject Areas of Interest to Visitors:  
"The Corps' Missions"**

**Mode = 9 Mean = 7.19 Median = 8**



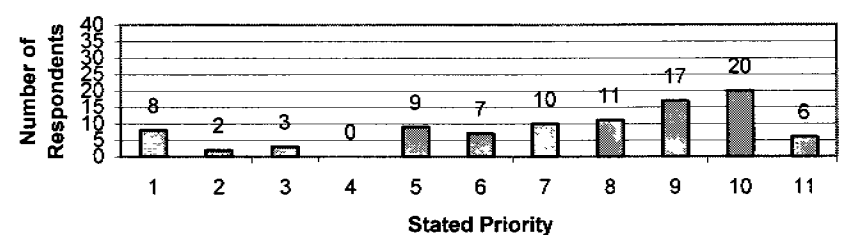
**Q2 - Subject Areas of Interest to Visitors:  
"Visitor Safety"**

**Mode = 10 Mean = 6.60 Median = 7**

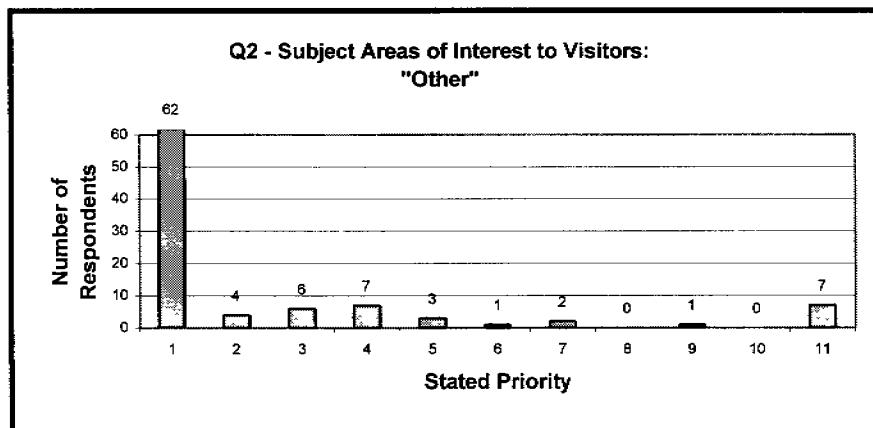


**Q2 - Subject Areas of Interest to Visitors:  
"The History of the Corps"**

**Mode = 10 Mean = 7.31 Median = 8**







"Other" Subject Areas mentioned:

- Annual Passes, Golden Age Cards etc
- Annual Special Events
- Annual pass purchase and pavilion reservations
- California Water Issues: Water for irrigation vs. recreation vs. wildlife
- Community Attractions & Events
- Directions to facilities and to buy Golden Age cards, etc.
- Great Lakes commerce, Shipping, Connecting Channels, Dredging, and Soo Locks
- How does this site relate to their lives
- Interpretive Exhibits and programming
- Local Interests
- Local environmental issues as they relate to Bay development and use. i.e.: dredging and use of dredged materials, airport expansion, water quality issues, oil spill prevention, etc.
- Local points of interest
- Requests for Local and Surrounding Area Recreation Opportunities
- Restrooms
- Shoreline Management
- Shoreline Management Program
- What can I do or see here at the lake
- camping & shelter reservations, hunting & fishing
- dam construction
- fishing report
- local history
- maps of other regions
- monitv set to monitor a bluebird box.
- multilingual materials

**Question 3**

On what sort of visitor input have you based your response to Question 2 above? Please check all that apply.

<b>Means of Visitor Input:</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
casual conversation with visitors	87
casual observation of visitors	75
visitor input in guest book	37
visitor input on comment cards	31
other; please specify	20
controlled survey of visitors	6

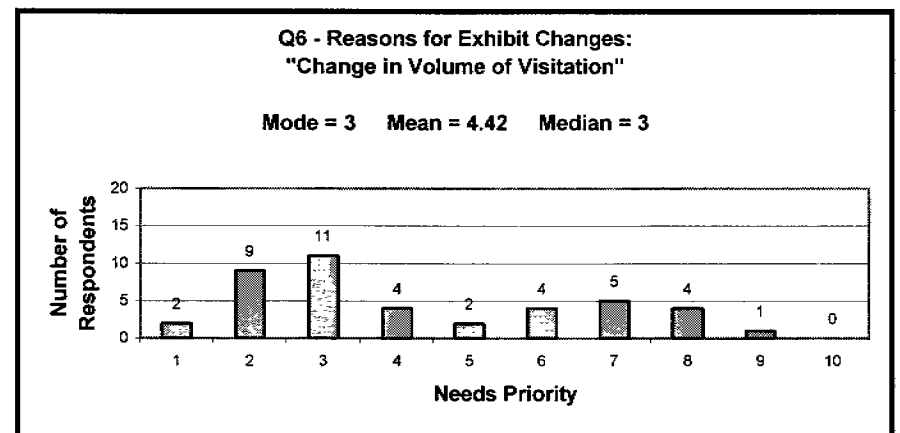
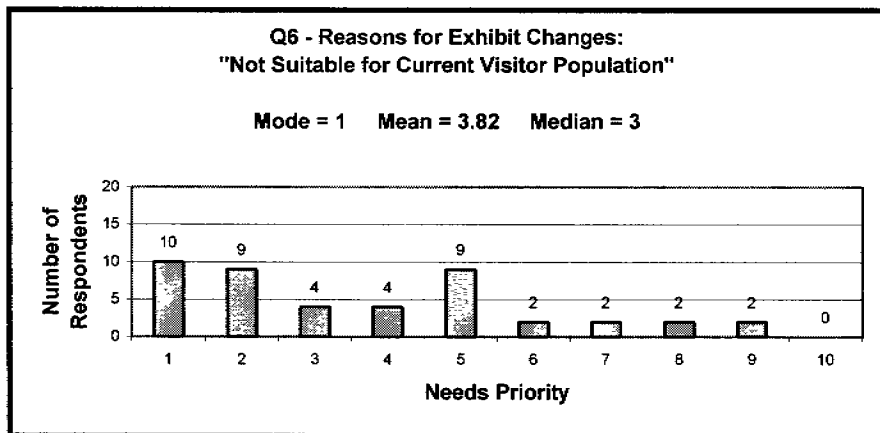
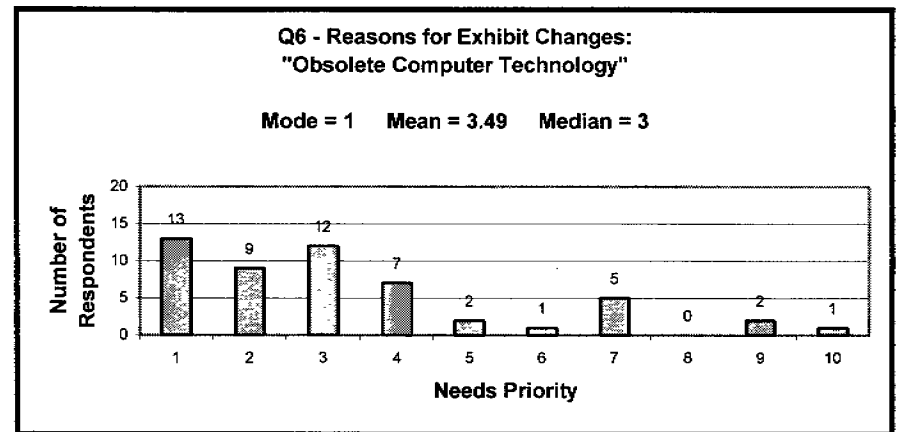
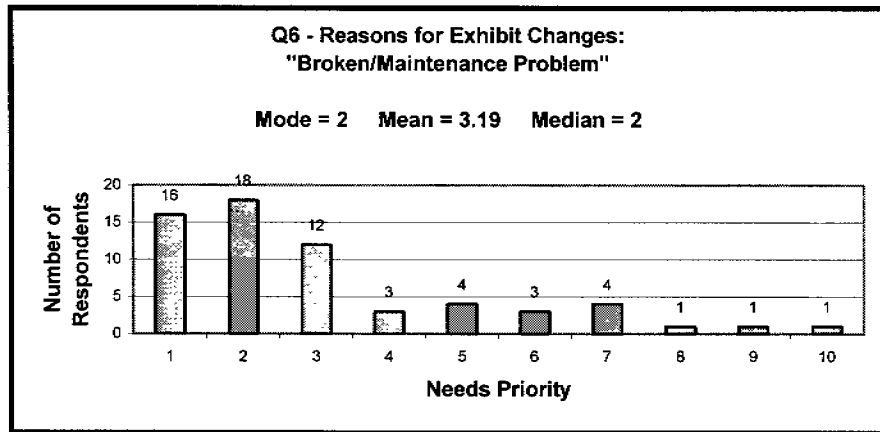
“Other” means cited:

- Annual Special Events
- direct conservation with our customer
- direct contact
- Direct on-site park ranger and volunteer visitor center host contacts
- Evaluations and follow-ups for interpretive exhibits and programming
- inquiries by visitors, requests for info
- Interpretive Review
- phone calls to District Office
- program presentations
- Programs with Civic and Educational Groups and Local Media Surveys
- Questions
- questions asked
- Questions asked by Visitors
- Questions that visitor ask.
- responding to inquiries, letters, phone and web site questions.
- review of presentation
- Sales of Golden Age cards, Access and other directions to visitors
- Solicitation of questions during formal interpretive programs and informal contacts
- Staff input
- Stakeholders meetings
- telephone calls/e-mail seeking information

Question 6

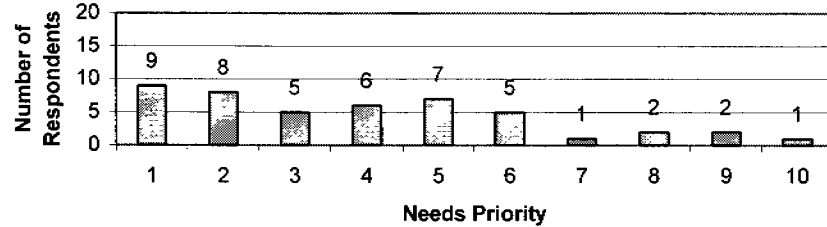
Why do you think those exhibits need to be changed? Please rank the following list beginning with 1 for the biggest or main problem for exhibits at your facility. Enter numerical digits on the lines preceding each item leaving blank those that do not apply.

Mode = most frequent response; Mean = average; Median = half of all responses are above and half are below this point.



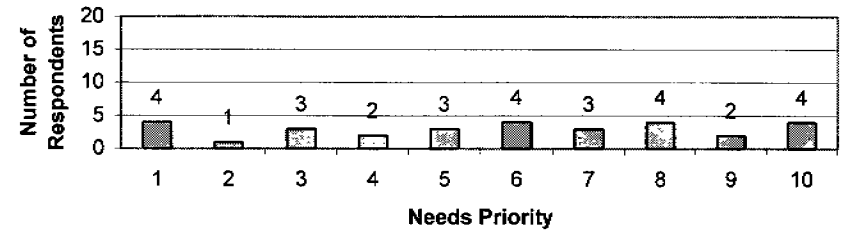
**Q6 - Reasons for Exhibit Changes:  
"Not Accomplish Written Objectives"**

Mode = 1 Mean = 3.91 Median = 4



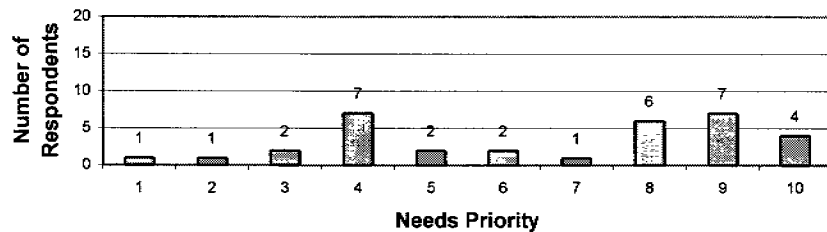
**Q6 - Reasons for Exhibit Changes:  
"Site Project Mission Has Changed"**

Mode = 1 Mean = 6.09 Median = 6



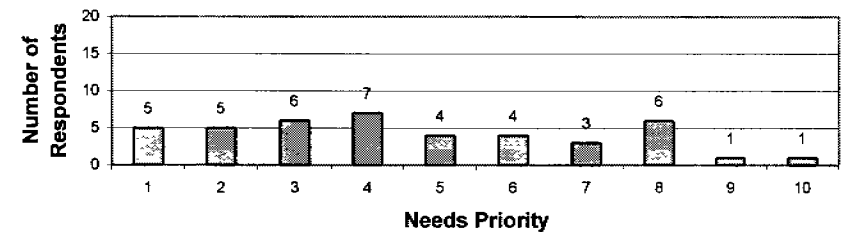
**Q6 - Reasons for Exhibit Changes:  
"Increased Need for Multiple Languages"**

Mode = 9 Mean = 6.83 Median = 8



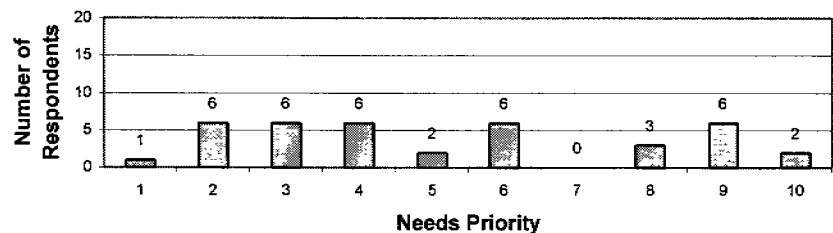
**Q6 - Reasons for Exhibit Changes:  
"Inaccurate Information"**

Mode = 4 Mean = 4.74 Median = 4



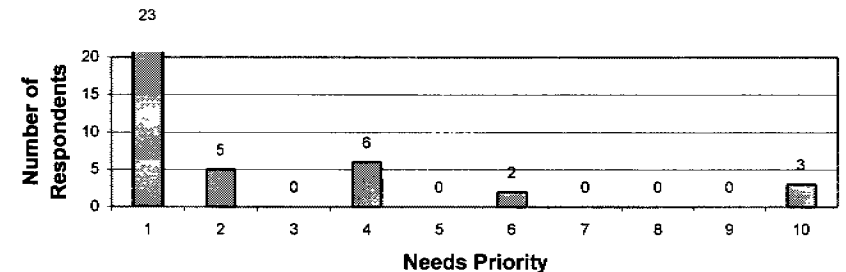
**Q6 - Reasons for Exhibit Changes:  
"Inaccessible Per ADA Requirements"**

Mode = 9 Mean = 5.38 Median = 5



**Q6 - Reasons for Exhibit Changes:  
"Other"**

Mode = 1 Mean = 2.75 Median = 1



"Other" responses to Question 6:

- Age/fading
- Exhibits are .20 years old
- Old
- Just plain "dated"
- Other than a project video, pictures, a lock and dam model, a few static displays and handouts we have no exhibits that entice or draw people to the visitor center
- Outdated styles/coloring, too much print
- Outdated, look old, can be more modern and appealing
- Stagnated Exhibits
- boring, ugly, not what people wanted
- Outdated media program (Circa 1980s) Maintenance Problems with Exhibits
- outdated
- outdated and no theme
- poor outdated exhibits
- presentation is outdated
- Central theme is outdated and needs to be changed to tell more of Corps story - locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Dated exhibits, many visitors are local who won't come back if new exhibits aren't presented from time to time. In addition, 1/2 of our VC is dedicated to the late Congressman Jerry Litton. Now, 2 generations have come and gone and no one knows who he is.
- Messages are out of date by 10 - 20 years
- Not thematic or very interactive or engaging. Does not pass the "So What?" test. Exhibits still largely date from original installation in the late 1970's.
- Displays need to be changed to just provide change to repeat customers. Lewis and Clark celebration coming up and we should concentrate on providing L&C displays.
- Low interest level
- Accommodate Lewis & Clark visitors
- Too inactive to maintain interest, especially among younger (<25) visitors.
- displays are passive
- lack of interactivity
- static , aged exhibitory that is not interactive
- Exhibits need to be inter-active. Not entertaining but get the visitor involved to learn about who we are and what we do and why we do it.
- Existing displays are static displays and very unimaginative. Need more interactive displays
- Static, need more interactive
- Most people do not want to come here and see the same thing over and over again!
- New exhibits for repeat visitors.
- Variety
- Need to increase technology/update
- Most exhibits have been updated. One needs updated due to maintenance problems.
- It is a point of sale and information station, not a history lesson place
- Money
- Museum is old and is in powerhouse, new visitor center under multi partners is scheduled for construction this summer through 2003 with exhibits 2004
- New exhibits 8/01 without computer interactives
- Not interesting
- Only 50% completed and they were done at minimal cost with volunteers and in-house labor
- This includes Power plant exhibits
- area has been de-emphasized due to space requirements
- lack of ranger personnel

**Questions 7 & 8**

**Do you have exhibits that were designed for children?**

**If you have exhibitry that was designed for children, does it seem to be enough to serve your current visitor population?**

Yes, we have exhibits for children.	Yes, these exhibits seem to be adequate for our visitors	No, these exhibits are not sufficient for our visitors.
53	21	32

Comments:

- Very basic, does not hold interest
- Exhibits were not designed with children in mind. Exhibits look good, but require extensive reading of text! Limited interaction! Nothing computer operated!
- It's not just children that want more "challenging" and fast paced information. There is a whole generation of people who have grown up in the "Nintendo" age. We are not meeting their demands at all!
- We are getting more and more children visitors every year and most of our exhibits are designed for adults.
- We have mostly School groups on field trips and need more exhibits for Natural Resources and environmental education.
- We need a broader variety of exhibits for children. Due to lack of budget we've been unable to keep up with the need for children's exhibits.
- outdated and boring
- we would like to develop more hands-on exhibits for our visitor's experience and target our presentation on the jr high sch. aged visitor
- We need more exhibit space devoted to very young children as our facility is difficult for them to understand. In addition, we need to increase overall interactivity of exhibits, better labeling for children.
- No enough hands on exhibits
- More exhibits, computers, etc. are needed
- Computer Kiosk has games children like to play.
- It is not interactive, children are bored by the exhibits.
- Need interactive Exhibits
- Needs more low maintenance interactivity built in, both low tech and hi tech. Needs to be stimulating and memorable.
- Needs to be more challenging/interactive
- Not interactive
- old, poor interactivity
- Exhibits will be new as of 8/01 - data not yet available
- New exhibits will have a children /family discovery zone and exhibit area
- No specific exhibits for children
- Very limited live experience with our VC,s. My job at the District involves updating the NRMS database and providing data to data calls or directing requests for information to the VC managers.
- no exhibits
- We have a video presentation that outlines the history of the Corps and it is played until the parents get through with their business.

## Question 9

---

**Is there a central theme to your visitor center exhibits? If so, what is it? (A theme is the central or key idea of any exhibit or presentation. Themes should be stated as short, simple, complete sentences, contain only one idea and reveal the overall purpose of the exhibit.)**

- Thurmond Project/Lake offers an abundance of resources.
- The role of water in the life cycle of the San Francisco Bay region, state of California
- Inland waterway transportation benefits the country and you.
- Lake Lanier Works ( for you )
- Maritime history and the Corps of Engineers role in development of Duluth-Superior Harbor, Lake Superior, and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System.
- Meeting the challenge of Change on the Missouri River
- Oahe, Foundation of Fun.
- Paleontological and cultural resources of the project area were important components of pre-construction planning.
- Water as a Multiple Use Resource
- The Corps' Missions are varied and serve the world
- Power and Play is just a short distance away on the Pend Oreille.
- Preserving the Salmon of the Pacific Northwest.
- The Honolulu Engineer District's regional visitor center is dedicated to Civil Works Water Resource Development. The theme of the presentation is "People, Islands and Water."
- The Living Lake
- The Missouri River; A River through time and change in northeastern Montana.
- Project and local area history
- Project construction history, and cultural and historic resources
- Project purpose and benefits
- Resource Office-Recreation/Resources; Powerplant Ctr-power production
- Site Specific Corps Missions; Water Supply, Flood Control, Recreation, Cultural Resources, Natural Resources.
- The History of St. Anthony Falls and how The Corps fits in
- The central theme is the history of the Soo Locks
- from origination to present.
- The nine foot channel on the Upper Mississippi River and it's uses
- The role of Federal Agencies in the Economic Development of Northeast Mississippi
- The theme is history of the Corps. But it is not viewed
- in that context. Most business is the selling of
- golden ages cards and directions to the facilities.
- Occasional questions on fishing and hunting programs.
- To demonstrate the Corps role in the management of the watershed, natural resources and recreational opportunities
- Why the dam was built
- Wicker Dams and History of the Project area prior to making it a lake.
- corps mission
- To show prior use of area, cultural and archeological history. To show current project purposes; flood control, hydropower, NRM, Recreation.
- Archeological, mounted mammals
- Commercial navigation on the Great Lakes since one VC is at a major port and the other is located at the locks.
- Cultural and Natural Resources and a Theme of Recreational Opportunities (Water Related)
- Different Class B VC each have a different theme - Navigation, Shoreline Management, Recreation, Wildlife Management, etc.

- Directed by Congress, the Corps of Engineers at Bonneville Lock and Dam provides people with hydropower, navigation, recreation and fish and wildlife management... now and for the future.
- Introduction and orientation to Lake Okeechobee and the Okeechobee Waterway
- Kinzua Dam & Allegheny Reservoir
- Largely based on area historical information. Other information relates to Corps history and missions, and District missions.
- Litton exhibits, Building a Dam, Resource Mgt, Cultural Resources, Water Safety, Past Present and Future (history of the area)
- Man and Nature in the Ozarks
- Native Americans, Regional History, Flood Control, Water Quality, Recreation, Wildlife
- Our theme is to explain the history of the Greers Ferry Lake area and the role the Corps of Engineers has played in that history.
- Pomo Native American Culture

- Representation of naturally occurring wildlife species located around Keystone Lake w/ a special emphasis on snakes; representative anti-drug display w/ variety of illegal items confiscated over the years from visitors.
- River History
- Settling the Ohio River
- The Environment
- This facility is known regionally for Crappie fishing. The theme of the visitor center revolves around Crappie fishing (Wall mounts including a world record catch, wall mounted location maps, brochures, and other fishing information). Other indigenous w
- Three distinctive themes exist in the VC, history, natural resources and the Corps.
- To convey the size and quality of project land and water.
- Tombigbee River Region from 1850 to now
- We only have a Class 'C' visitor center. It consists of replicas of the types of fish in the lake.



## Question 10

What is your mix of media? Check all that apply.

Media:	No. of Resp.	Details
Photos	82	
Pamphlets or printed handouts	81	
Videos	50	
Other Media	42	see below
Other interactives	37	see below
Computer-based interactives	36	see below
Slide shows	29	
Audio tours	17	
Film	10	

"Other" media cited:

- 3-D map of the SF estuary, models of ships
- archeological displays
- All of the above will be incorporated into the exhibit mix for the new multi-partnered Interpretive Center scheduled for completion between 2001 through 2004. Currently none of these exist in old museum format in powerhouse.
- All slide shows are broken and the exhibit is on the Corps Mission which most of the visitors aren't interested in.
- all videos are cd laser disk players
- artifacts (2)
- audio back-lit wall mural
- Cabinet with drawers containing various objects such as antlers, skulls, jaw bones, feathers and skins for kids to touch and play with. A discovery box with various animal puppets for kids.
- Coop Association Activities
- descriptive signs
- Dioramas, static displays, visual displays (7)
- Fish ladder viewing room
- fish replicas
- fish tank (3)
- Hands On Displays
- Kid's Corner
- lighted button map, diaramas, wildlife mounts
- LIVE FISH AND SNAKES AND MOUNDED ANIMALS
- Manipulatives in telescopes
- maps, drawings and text
- mechanized models of lock, hydropower generator, "theater" with sliding scenes
- Model of Fort Site
- Mounted animals (3)
- Multi sensory experiences.
- Operational lock model
- outdated mechanical demonstration & static display
- Park Ranger Tours
- Push button that illuminates a picture
- Push-button devices and games
- spare hydro parts used as exhibit items until needed
- Static displays of control tower
- water safety photo opportunity boat

"Other Interactives" cited:

- A historical photo on sliding blocks that can be assembled.
- Audio Tape and Interactive Light Activated Exhibit
- Digital Audio, spinning wheel
- Displays about how hydropower is generated. Some "push button" and "lift the flap" interactives about a variety of subjects..
- Electronic animal match game. Electronic pond life display.
- Handcranked generator, generator/pumpback model.
- Hands on for kids
- LED, Fiber Optics, flip boxes (not really interactive), fish spinner, fish marble maze, operational lock model, other buttons, bells and whistles
- Lock demonstration and hydropower demonstration
- Puzzles on the wall supporting the management of the projects Natural Resources.
- Small Scale Dam Model
- Stuffed animals that the visitor can touch.
- Stuffed local wildlife
- Terrarium
- Touch Table (2)
- aging recreational activity facts, what fish eat, rainfall vs. lake levels
- feely box
- flip boxes ; flip-lid Q & A (5)
- life-jacket game
- hand crank electricity generator
- hand crank generator and touch table
- lighted demo. of working dam and powerplant (outdated)
- manually interactive exhibits about fish, water level management, wildlife, project information, water safety
- match question with answers
- mounted mammals
- push a button and light come on!
- rolling panels on local wildlife, fibreoptic game showing tidal changes , tide wheel showing the 4 tidal phases of the SF Bay, push button videos vignettes on various topics of the Bay regions, Corps History game
- school age group presentations
- telephones with recorded messages
- touch table
- wildlife "match" games

"Computer-based Interactives" cited:

- Computer touch screen informative display
- Control the Flow - making decisions on water releases
- Educational environmental games
- Flood Control Game
- games (2)
- information kiosk, Corps history
- information/entertainment kiosk
- Interactive computer program that is part of an regional multi-agency interactive program
- kiosk, Fish game identification game.
- large menu of project history, construction/.engineering of project, Corps missions and history, Project recreation facilities, maps, safety videos, safety messages.
- Locking Through Simulation
- web site
- Recreation information where people can select an area and get a print-out with site specific information. We also have a salmon issues interactive computer program where people answer questions about salmon, and are shown the effect of their answers.
- shows photos of all parks, in a comp. slide show with music; contains Corps mission, lake history, videos of trail, wildlife, wildflowers, photos of shelters to assist w reservations; interactive games for kids, ranger profiles of shoreline mgt rangers..
- Touch Screen ( 15 )
- nat. res. mgt, rec. uses, navigation
- water safety computer games
- video disk player
- WWW connection Corps on the Internet

**Question 11**

**Do you think your visitor center is in the best possible location in your project area?  
Consider factors such as visibility, accessibility, views of the site, etc.**

Yes	61
No	34

Problems with locations:

- Not at Project, in town
- Too far from lake
- On a hill: looks hard to approach
- Our VC was built in the mid 70's and traffic/use patterns have changed in the past 25 years. Our VC is very hard for the public to find off any major thoroughfare.
- Placed in Rural area, low population, no major highway. Placed here due to location of Congressional District. Should have been placed on Corps land South of current location on I-59.
- The center would receive a lot more visitation if it were not so remotely located.
- We are very difficult to find in the local community, not located on a city street and poorly signed- we are off the beaten path.
- accessibility difficult
- good for the view of the dam but access from a main route is 1.5 miles away through a state park to the project which adds to confusing the visitor who is who should have better access and more space
- Admin Building was built too close taking up all the VC parking
- It should be located next to the project office so that it could be staffed.
- Project Office at dam site
- Resource Office has only an entry way. Current building is a modified old house. It does not come close to providing the needs of a visitor center. The power plant visitor center has a nice area for use but is not accessible nor open.
- The current site is not an end destination for recreation users; as such it is virtually unknown.
- few visitors come to office
- Can not view the lake
- Can't see the dam, lake or river from the Center. Could have been sited a short distance away and been better.
- Should have been closer to the lake with a lake view and view of the dam.
- does not have good view
- Something less isolated and overlooking the lake.
- Limited size, Limited Visibility, Non-Existing Aesthetic Setting
- The visitor center should be located in the proximity of the fish ladder viewing windows. All visitors go to the fish viewing windows, but many pass right by the visitor center.

## Appendix L

### Text Question 1

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In the original survey you were asked to indicate how you obtain input from visitors. Some examples are participant evaluations of programs, formal observational studies, focus groups, casual observational studies, public scoping sessions, comment cards, guest books, etc. How do you use the results of these efforts?

#### Systems of Collection and Use of Visitor Input

- I have used focus groups and public scoping sessions to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of existing exhibits and suggestions for new exhibits. Nominal group technique was used to organize and assign values to observations. The values were used to create consensus group recommendations.
- We use comment cards, guest book, direct contact with customers and casual observation. Our district also has a customer survey accessible via the internet. We use results to determine and help prioritize customer needs. As a result we usually find we are under-funded to do most of what the public expects.
- The input we gather has less to do with operation of the VC than it does with other aspects of project operations. A recent example is the review of our shoreline management plan. This turned out to be a contentious issue that is currently ongoing. As far as VC operation goes, customer comment cards have been the most valuable tool. Although the comments we get are not earth-shaking, there are good things we've done because of them. Sometimes the little things mean a lot to folks.
- The hard data is gathered, but as far as I know nothing is actually done with it due to the usual lack of money or any real guidance and direction from my resource manager. I can suggest and suggest, beg and moan but my comments, concerns and recommendations typical fall on deaf ears.
- We refine or develop new programs based on interests, provide additional exhibit elements to address particular interests or alleviate confusion. Provides input into condition of facilities and lets us know what the public expects of us. We have adjusted our hours of operation and provided additional training to staff to address certain interests.
- Occasionally, I will sit down and discuss with VC Ranger staff observations and comments made by public and look at if there are practical ways to improve operations and displays. Have tried to expand or change book store items that the public requests if available from Eastern National.
- As the Senior Park Ranger, I review all comments and even call the person making comments if I need more clarification. Comments/recommendations are discussed with the interpretive rangers and myself to see if we can accomplish or accommodate the request.
- Casual observation of visitors, as we see a need to add or change something we do so, money permitting. The recent budget crunch has not allowed for changes here at our center.
- Complaints are responded to immediately. Constructive criticism is taken into consideration and may result in policy changes, etc.. Suggestions are also considered, but are seldom feasible.

- These results are compiled, and the numbers become part of our FY report. We also review the comments for help in developing customer driven programming/improvements on the facility and display.
- When it becomes time to revise/replace the exhibits, programs, etc., we'll use this information. Also, the information is very useful in other interpretive planning efforts.
- We use a comment book, in the Visitor Center, to get visitor's feedback on services. We use the information to see if there are additional services that we could provide and to see if the services we are providing are lacking in any way.
- We try to incorporate this type of data into our management and operations but it is often pretty informal & I believe we do not get the full value of the info. This is usually a result of the "press of business" not allowing us to focus.
- The comments received on the comment cards and the computerized survey are summarized and studied by the Park Managers, Area Managers and the District to see what if anything can be incorporated into future plans for the parks.
- We use the results of these efforts to improve Visitor Center and Interpretive Programming, training, and improve customer service in all areas of the program, from accessibility to accountability.
- We have relocated exhibits and placed a new info desk, added ideas to our proposed new prospectus. If possible, we have implemented program changes.
- Look at the feasibility of implementation, cost vs. benefit, and then if can be used we modify them as necessary for implementation.
- As budget conditions allow, we continue to upgrade the center based on comments and observations.
- Results are used to evaluate the effectiveness of our displays and programs, to plan for changes or improvements and to improve customer service.
- We have made some changes in the visitor center due to customer feedback - mostly minor ones with little to no costs.
- Comment Cards and guest book. It is only used to give us an idea of what the visitor is looking for. No formal activity takes place.
- Comments are read by my manager and myself and if warranted a change is made as soon as budget and or manpower allow.
- We use it to prepare and provide the information (i.e. brochures, pamphlets, etc.) that our customer is looking for.
- We use the results to measure the job we are doing. We use it to determine recreation trends and if possible to ascertain needs.
- We use the results of these to make immediate improvements and long-term plans to improve facilities, products and services.
- We use the input to correct problems, better services for the visitors and in future budgeting and planning efforts.
- Comment cards are referred to the program manager to address in planning.
- Make adjustments to programming and exhibits as budgets allow.
- Upgrade exhibits, displays, programs and add or delete information as necessary.
- assistance in conceptual plan development, safety improvements, staffing requirements
- We try and incorporate info into future planning/improvement efforts.
- To determine budget items, program development, and facility enhancements
- Used for planning improved facilities and programs.
- Revisions of displays, modify hours of operations.

- to make improvements to the V.C.
- As a planning tool for making improvements in either service or facilities.
- Results are used to tailor exhibits and presentations to desires of visitors.
- Comment Cards, Guest Book, Casual Observation
- We use these results to make decisions.
- To improve VIC operations, displays and exhibits

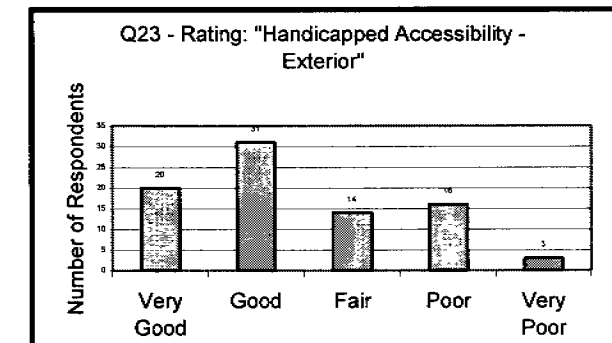
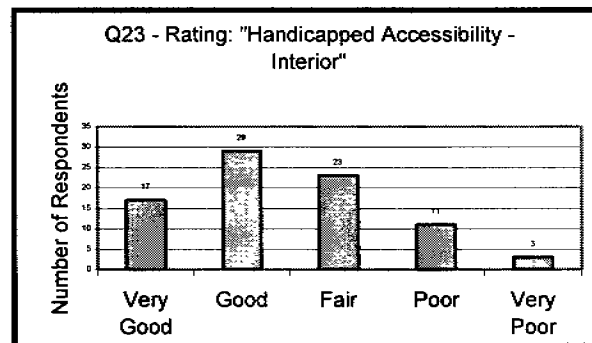
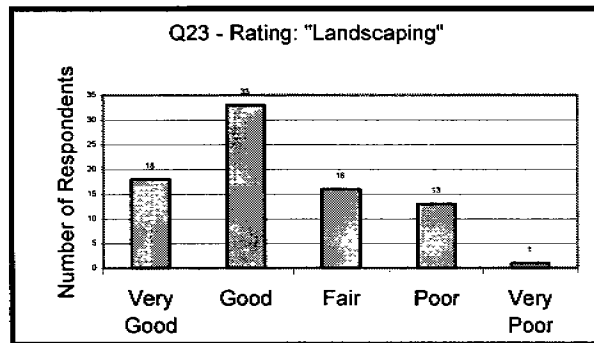
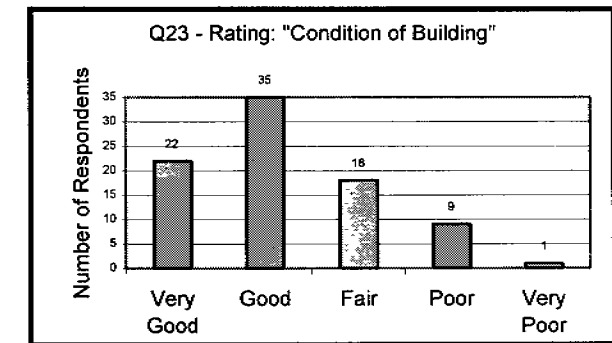
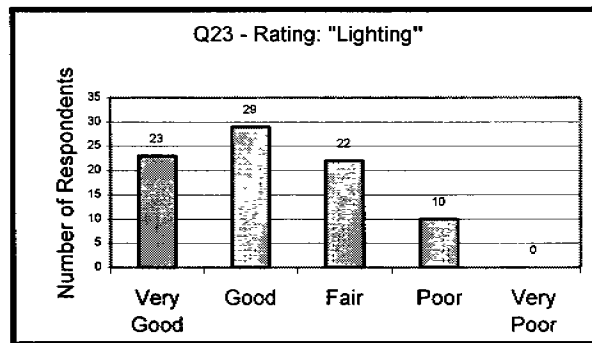
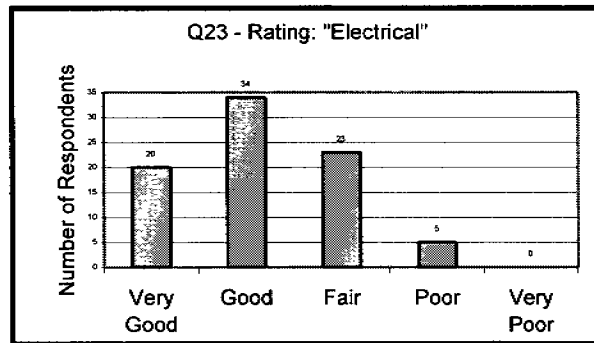
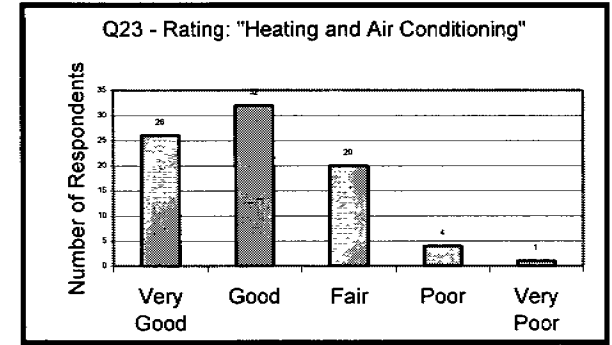
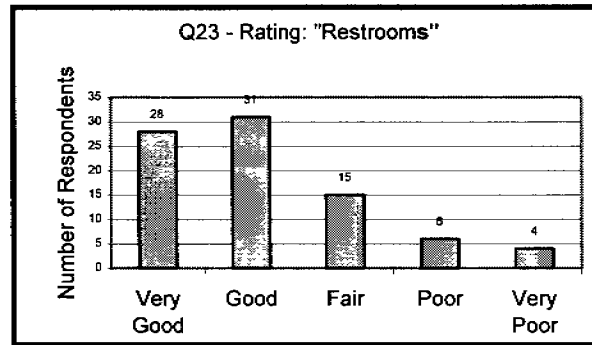
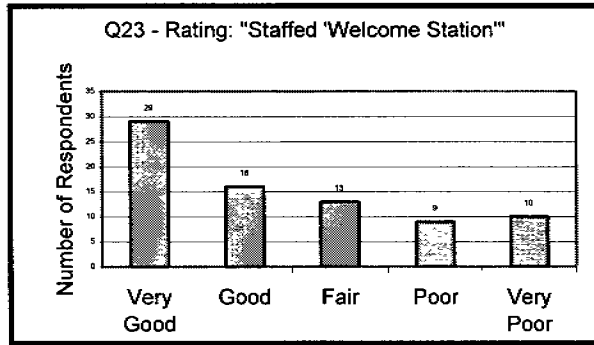
### **Methods of Data Collection**

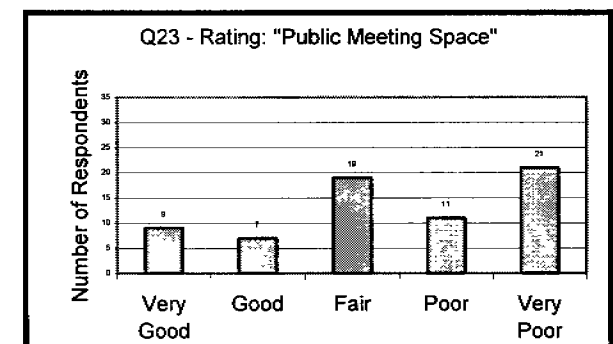
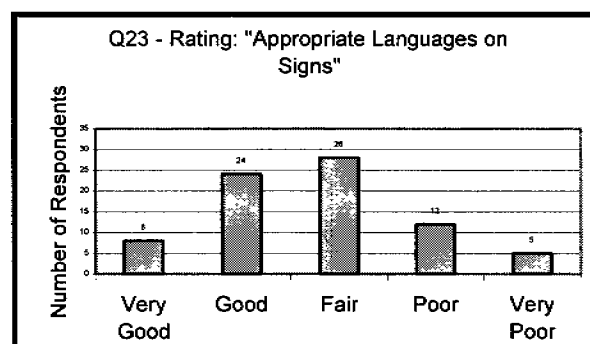
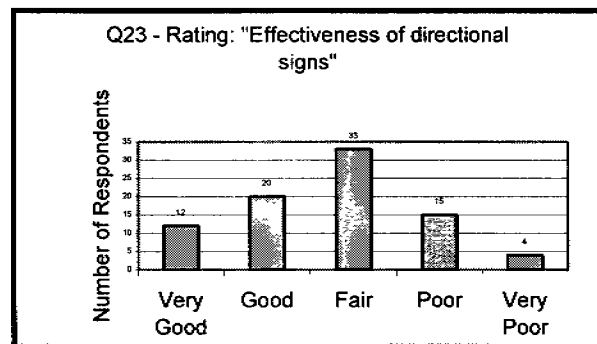
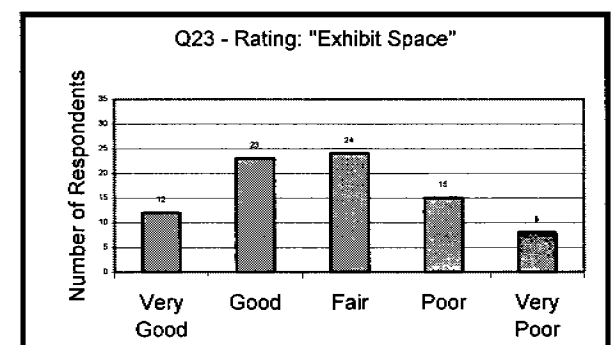
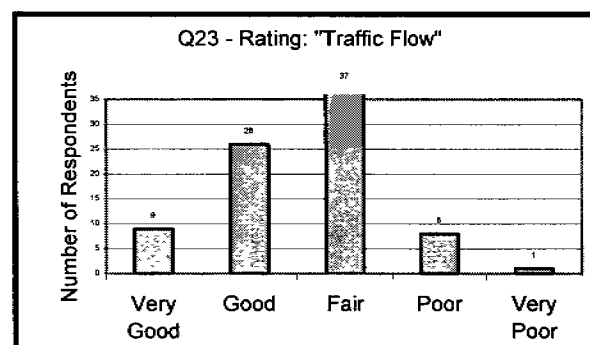
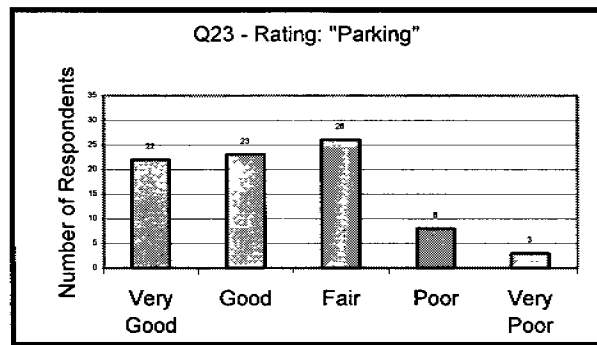
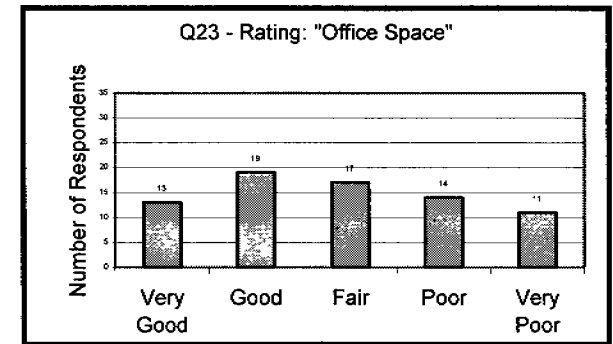
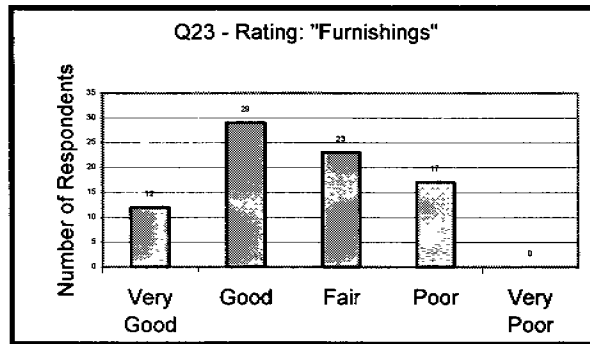
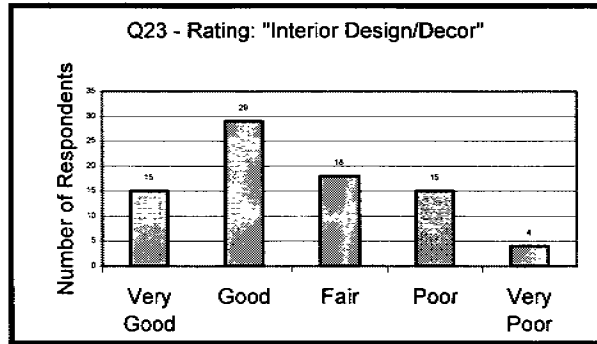
- Primarily Informal observations. Also do comment cards and comments written in register book.
- Formal observation and comment cards.
- Customer comments are all informal and very few offer suggestions on how to improve the Center.
- Comment cards, observation, guest books
- Casual observation of visitors. casual conversation with visitors, visitor input on comment cards, visitor books.
- Our input comes from conversations with visitors and most are compliments concerning the visitor center or indications that one of the displays are not working properly.
- We obtain input from visitors via comment/questionnaire sheets which covers facility, exhibits, programs, and personnel.
- Informally at the Project Office.

# Appendix M

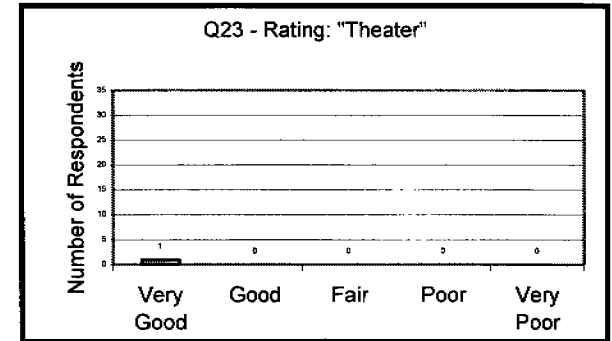
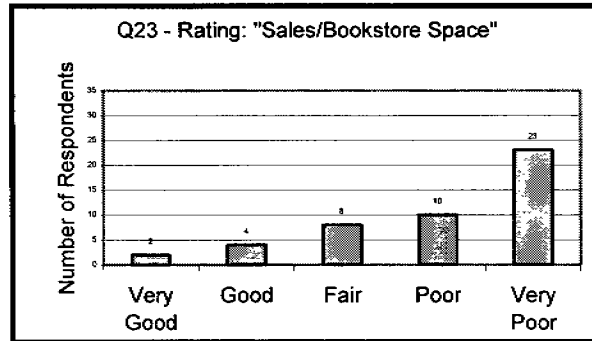
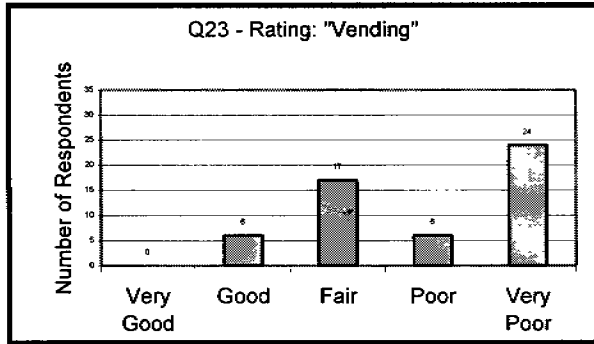
## Question 23

Please rate the following features of your visitor center. Skip any items that are not applicable.









## Appendix N

### Text Question 2

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**If your Visitor Center partners with community groups, what does your Visitor Center provide to the partnering organization?**

#### **Provided to Partners...**

- We will allow public groups to use the Visitor Center for meetings and other use of the theater. Most use is by the WV Division of Natural Resources for Hunter Education Programs; Div. of Forestry for Firefighting Training; and Healthnet for Helicopter Landing Zone Safety Training. Other than these, we do little with other groups (Audubon Society Chapter, Scout Groups, etc.).
- They are included in all aspects of the decision making process and have space to operate, access to meetings, reports and information that targets multi-partner groups and agencies, we provide resources and volunteer training and share in scheduling special events and working as a team to accomplish the same goals. In our particular situation one of the partners will be responsible for the gift store operation in the center and others will be the catalogers and care-takers of the fossil cleaning station. Buildings have been outgranted, to them by the Corps. The other partner, that is a federal agency, will house one full-time employee in the center, representing the national wildlife refuge.
- We provide office space for our Cooperating Association, space for bookstore, meeting space and pay overtime of staff to accommodate mutually beneficial programs sponsored by the partner. We waive special use fees as necessary to accommodate some groups. We provide staff time to sit on committees, boards and other community efforts that we share an interest. All staff are expected to provide outreach support in their program areas. Partners implies a shared effort and we take it very seriously.
- Currently, we do not have a partnership with a community group. In the past, we had a partnership with the local AARP. They provided over 50 VC Hosts that took turns working in the VC 7 days/wk and we in-turn under the Volunteer Program provided meals, recognition, etc. Unfortunately, this group dissolved due to age, poor health and no new members. Also, for 3 years we partnered with the Aliceville Chamber of Commerce and the Pickens County Historical Society in sponsoring and hosting the annual "Southern Heritage Festival" held in and on the park grounds of the VC.
- Our visitor center has been made available to non-political community groups for public meetings at no cost (after hours or on days when the visitor center is closed during the off-season).
- Free use of a meeting room, tour of dam.
- Infrastructure and site services for special community events
- Office space.
- Mainly staff hours, meeting spaces and ideas.
- The visitor center provides a focal point for activities and special events. The visitor center attracts a diverse audience which in many cases has an interest in the activities and missions of the partner.
- The only partnering is with The Shawnee National Forest Service. We provide a location in our visitor center for their display.

- We partner with 2 local chambers of commerce and 2 visitor associations. We help spread the word about one another mostly by brochure distribution.
- Opportunity and access to visitors.
- An outlet for their information.
- High visibility and an opportunity to "advertise" their participation via posters near the work area.
- profits from the gift shop.
- The only partnering we have is with the Coop Assn. We provide sales location for their merchandise.
- We have a cooperative agreement to operate our VC with a local county recreation department. We provide some operating expenses and salary.
- We have a formal agreement with the Wapapello Lions Club to sell interpretive and educational materials at the visitor center. We provide them the space and assistance in selling these items.

### **Other Comments**

- At the present time we are not partnering with any groups. We will be trying to partner with some groups on our next Lake Map revision/update to see if we can split some of the costs with other organizations.
- At this time we are not partnering with any organization, we solicit for volunteers and provide them with a campsite.
- We have just started our partnership and do not have details worked out yet.
- We have no formal partnering agreements. In the case of Upper St. Anthony Falls, we are in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (NPS) and work with all the other agencies to coordinate and share information.

### **Not Partnering or Not Applicable**

- "Not Applicable" (9)
- We are not partnering at this time (13)

## Appendix O

### Text Question 3

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#### What barriers do you see to partnering with community organizations?

##### Corps Policies and Regulations

- The authorizing law and regulations, do not allow for the government to do work and be reimbursed by the partner. The regulations also do not provide for the government to contribute funds to an effort being implemented by the partner. They also discourage work done by contract under the partner's direction. The regs provide for contributions, but ethics rules discourage proper recognition of the partner.
- From the community side- lack of understanding of what we can or can't do according to our mission, regulations, staffing restrictions. We are sometimes thought of a "community center" where anything goes and we have to say "no" at times depending on the nature of the request. Our mission and focus drive our decisions and that has been very helpful in explaining our position- From the Corps side- Out of date, out of step, archaic regulations that worked fine in the 50's and 60's, but not the 21st century! We are WAY behind the curve compared to NPS, FS and BLM in how we approach partnering. Still a great deal of distrust from the Corps legal staff from District to Division to HQ on what we are allowed to do... their position is usually "no" and then they expend great effort to find regulations to support their decision. We lose out time and time again... Also- the way funding is handled with shared costs...the Corps expects the partners to commit to funds, but then turns around and says, "we'll help if Congress appropriates or we have the funds, but no guarantee" – that will kill a partnership faster than anything. There has to be a way to commit funds and hold them in an "escrow" or other account, over multi-years to facilitate long-term partnering. It has been done elsewhere and can be done in the Corps. The Corps has to figure out that partnering is a two-way street- you don't get something for nothing, you have to give too. Also- other agencies have HQ staff that do nothing, but help the field with partnering- that has been a driving force in other agencies.
- Policy issues and prohibitions

##### Limited Resources (funding, time, staff, space) (15)

- Can be very VC ranger time and energy consuming. Especially if your VC lies in a very rural area. Often the local community groups are small and have little resources. Therefore, it takes a dedicated ranger to spend a lot of time taking the group by the hand and leading them into action, etc.
- Little, other than requiring that one Corps NRM employee must work the hours that the visitor center is made available. We do much within the community, but often the costs of going to meetings (many are lunches, breakfasts or dinners that the individuals must pay the way) is often too much, because of the number of community organizations in the local area.
- Many organizations hold meetings outside our normal Visitor Center hours of operation. We will adjust work schedules to accommodate such groups if time permits but usually do not receive such requests. Most are "repeat customers" listed above. A shortage of manpower prohibits us from soliciting community organizations although this would promote a more positive image of the Corps.
- Lack of time and personnel to do what we want.

- Limited space within the VC
- Funding issues, both theirs and ours.
- Time, space, staffing, budget
- Lack of space.
- Mostly just time on our part.
- Most of the local groups do not have the funding necessary to embark on such a mission.
- Budget, Insufficient number of VC Employees
- Space and staffing levels (not enough of either).
- Time on our part to make and grow these relationships.
- As with any organization there are only a few people that do the work - limited resources. Also in our case the group is not a 5013c.
- Have not partnered yet, but a big concern is always - will we be able to provide enough time/manpower to work with the partner.

### **Lack of Willing Partners (8)**

- There appears to be a general lack of interest on the part of the community with regards to what is going on at McNary Dam. I tried several years in a row to launch a volunteer program and could find no one willing to spend a few hours with us. I need to take it upon myself to find new approaches to creating community interest in McNary Dam.
- current lack of willing partner,
- lack of partner groups in our area.
- No interested partners
- From speaking with various groups they have shown no interest in partnering in the center.
- lack of organizations in our area
- Again, we have no community group partners.
- Intangible barrier is the apparent lack of interest within the community to develop and execute a partnership for VIC operations

### **Differing Priorities or Missions (7)**

- They usually do not have the same goals in mind. Our other problem is that we have to operate using goals and objectives, they often just want to do something without the pre-planning that we do.
- Different motivation's or missions.
- possible conflicts of interest, possible competition
- There's always the chance of conflicting goals and missions between the Corps project and the community organization.
- other priorities.
- Finding mutual, common goals . . . and management that "doesn't think it would be a good partnership."
- Loss of close control. Partner tends to put their spin on our product.

### **Remote Location (7)**

- Our Visitor Center is located approximately 8 miles from the nearest community (Warren, PA). This doesn't seem like that far to travel, but we've had past experiences with primarily high school students and seniors whose transportation "challenges" have impacted their availability to work.
- Physical location is not good
- Remote location
- Remote location low visitor traffic.
- Short recreation season and low visitation.

- Lack of volume of visitors and remoteness to site.
- The size of our center is not very large and would not be conducive to a partnering organization.

### **Other Barriers (6)**

- I do not think we have any barriers, that can not be overcome. When you have a group of enthusiastic community volunteers, it takes time and energy to educate and keep everyone on task and schedule. For example they may not understand the professional' role representing a multi-million dollar interpretive center and the exhibit planning and expertise that is essential to get an outstanding and professional vendor quality product for an exhibit, vs. an old piece of Family Farm Equipment. Sometimes it is very challenging to keep everyone on the same page and focused on the objectives and goals. The one area that we have struggled, is a state agency has a hard transferring money to a Federal Agency. This is one area we could use some standardized procedures as multi-agency (not just Federal, become part of these partnering teams).
- The most frequent and difficult part of partnering is making the locals understand that just because we are the Federal government we do not have unlimited resources and that they need to do their part.
- difficulty in establishing any partnerships
- Locating and keeping the partner active in the center.
- everybody thinks they are an expert in managing the V.C.
- Knowledge training and reliability.

### **Recommendation**

- Would recommend that the COE pursue a nation wide partnership if possible. This would significantly help VC personnel with establishing this!

### **None & Not Applicable**

- We see no barriers partnering with community organizations because that was one of the selling points on getting the approval for having the visitor center established. Working with local/community organizations help improve public relations between the Corps of Engineers and the residents of the community which in turn establishes mutual respect and appreciation for the public services that each provides.
- I don't see any barriers, more of a lack of opportunities.
- None - wide open opportunity
- None (2)
- n/a (2)
- Unknown

## Appendix P

### Question 28

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**What type of training do you feel you could benefit from with regard to managing/planning for a Visitor Center? Check all that apply.**

"Other" helpful training cited:

- Exhibit Designs
- Exhibit and print media design and layout
- Display Development and Design
- Public Outreach Techniques
- methods to acquire grants and outside funding--political support
- Recruiting a partner/cooperating association for alternate funding for exhibit construction
- getting funding for this area
- Time Management & Effective Delegation
- Volunteer/docent visitor center staffing programs
- Contract Representative (COR Training), because of all the contracts that will need to be initiated for the Visitor Center, Exhibits, Equipment etc.
- We need more Management training for accounts, funding, budgets and human resource training.
- This is a small center and is designed for self interpretation and should remain like that as we do not have the visitation to justify expanding the Center.
- Corps employee (trained in Interpretive Services) should manage the Visitor Center vs Contract personnel.
- Have a supervisor who has experience in the Corps NRMS Program/not an Engineer

## Appendix Q

### Question 30

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**What do you think are the barriers to making improvements to your Visitor Center? Check all that apply.**

- The Corps needs to think of itself as real professionals like the National Park Service. Upper management wants to think of engineering only, but we meet and deal with everyday people.
- The Visitor Center and Interpretive Manager is not recognized as a manager/professional specialist, in some projects, districts, divisions as part of NRM programs. Yet we are 12-15 years ahead of at least two other agencies with our Interpretive Management
- prohibition to lobby for new facility
- Current laws that prohibit us from being a 1 recreation facility.
- Cannot overstate the importance of adequate funding.
- Restrictions on the timeframe for spending FY dollars- most exhibit/VC planning efforts are multi-year and the funding requirements say you have to have full expenditure (not just obligation) in one year- exhibit firms don't operate that way.
- Number of visitors
- Lack of demonstrable need by project visitors and local community
- Lack of visitor volume.
- Low priority compared to other budget items such as hydropower, fish bypass work, navigation lock work, etc. The original design of the visitor center buildings was flawed to begin with. We need to design visitor facilities with interpreters input.
- not a priority in the project
- Division level resource personnel available nationally, not out of Washington HQ
- The inability to keep quality people at the visitor center because of low grade levels
- Contracted visitor services...
- Physical location
- Power plant exhibits will be limited due to accessibility issues at the site
- Resources Available
- lack of time; time and manpower
- The facility is totally inadequate



## Appendix R

### Question 31

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**What role do you think Visitor Centers managed by the Corps should play in the future?  
Check all that apply.**

"Other" responses:

Approach:

- Center piece of the Project
- We need to be pro-active with full support of upper management. This includes funding, and staffing.
- Customer Care and Professional Service through Visitor Center and Interpretive Programming and Management.

Community Service:

- Corps visitor centers need to be more integrated into the local/regional community to remain relevant and effective. Otherwise, they run the risk of missing critical constituency.
- Goal: Be considered a resource of value to the local community.
- Increase outreach programming.

Educational Goals:

- Educate public about project resources.
- Educate public concerning Corps activities that relate to our mission.
- Educate the public concerning environmental consequences of certain actions.
- Support broad understanding of water resources and man's interaction with each in the region.
- Provide information to public about the nature of the project.
- Provide brochures and information.
- Recreation Safety, agency awareness: local Corps activities, insight to Corps environmental stewardship.
- Tell the Corps story and relate it to lives of visitors.

## Appendix S

### Text Question 4

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The original survey asked you about the many facets of managing your Visitor Center including the physical condition of the facility, the nature and timeliness of your exhibits, what training or expertise you think would assist you, and so on. Do you have any other input for the Visitor Center Initiative Committee? If so, please elaborate below.

#### Combined Issues of Training, Communications, Exhibits, Management, Budget

- I would like to see more training for Visitor Center and Interpretive Managers, for staffing opportunities, trainings etc. for our Visitor Center employees (volunteers, temporaries, seasonals), since very few of us have full staffs at our Visitor Centers. These could all be accomplished through Video and activity hand books, with demonstrations etc. Presentation workshops on video, conflict resolution training etc. I would also like to see more of the professional level manager classes, for developing MOU's with large museum foundations and working with a schedule of traveling national Museum Quality exhibits scheduled at our facilities, in support of our sites theme. I think as Interpreters we have many opportunities through our individual and agency memberships with The National Association of Interpretation and the Association of American Museums, but we need to get the management and headquarters to recognize the support and networking and training that we acquire at these workshops, and try to work to hurdle the obstacles in our procedure language, which keeps us from being recognized as a major contributor and sponsor for these organizations. The other Federal Agencies have no problem contributing \$1000.00 to \$10,000.00 per year to these Associations and recognized as a major sponsor, but the Corps can not or chooses not to. We need headquarters to pursue this with a dedication and support of our many field rangers, historians and interpreters and Visitor Center Managers, that contribute and care for the customers that visit our sites, projects and Visitor Centers. Sometimes I feel like I have to interpret what we do at visitor center facilities to our own agency's employees. This area of management should be recognized and appreciated as professional employees; a tremendous workforce with high energy on the front line of public relations and customer service. I would like to see a COR at each district office that is only responsible for Interpretive, Exhibit and Visitor Center Contracts. We need representatives in this area, that understand Interpretive Vocabulary, Exhibit Vendors, have the expertise to process professionally and timely the needs of the Visitor Center Manager's RFP's, Task Orders and Contracts that are over the \$25,000.00 amount. We need that support and expertise greatly, to continue to upgrade and purchase interpretive equipment, products and exhibits, and work effectively with interpretive and exhibit and audio visual professional private vendors to support our visitor centers, and our Interpretive and Visitor Center Managers. I would also like to see us Visitor Center managers have a visa card for interpretive programming purchases. As an interpreter we need to purchase educational materials, training videos, natural history books, campfire stories, wildlife puppets etc. However, because we still rely on District Libraries for purchase requests of books and videos etc. It is another hoop we have to go through, which usually delays product delivery by weeks or months. If we as Visitor Center Managers could purchase, for example: up to \$2,500.00 each year for Interpretive, education and outreach programming products, It would simplify the process considerably. It would allow us to purchase products while attending interpretive workshops, trade shows etc. We could order over the internet, at an interpretive vendor or even a local vendor, if we needed an item within days. The Park Service and other Agencies have been authorizing this process for 5-7 years, for their Interpretive and Visitor Center Managers. This would also allow us as mangers to write a visa check for an employee's registration, to attend an interpretive workshop or conference. We need to recognize that Interpretive and Visitor Center Managers are no different in responsibilities and capabilities, as any of our other Corps managers. Thank you, for allowing me to resubmit these answers to the above four questions.

## Issues of Communications & Training

- Issues related to computer programs, public internet access, Web-based visitor information with the dual purpose of providing on-site info and remote info for anyone on-line, and NRRS reservation access in the visitor center - There is a need for guidance
- We need to share information better than we do. (I think that's a valid statement for our whole NRM program and am hoping that the Gateway will address it.)
- It would be nice to have a V.C. conference held every couple of years that would have some speakers/educators in the fields of V.C. design.
- Learning about what other visitor centers have, types of exhibits, AV equipment, etc - especially ones that are new or have been renovated recently.
- Employees VC management training is needed for displays and exhibits, and various interpretive work such as programs, brochures, etc.
- If you are asking these kind of dippy questions you are beyond the likelihood of accepting advice.
- Training in exhibit and print media design and layout

## Issues of Exhibits

- Our center is 25 years old and has had one major exhibit rehab. It is done on a hit and miss basis when funds become available. There is no district oversight or assistance (for that matter talent). A nationwide network of VC staff would be very helpful to help us know what problems others have experienced and overcome. Guidance and direction (and monetary) help from USACE would be grateful. There should be a network especially for Class A centers so that we all tell the same Corps history & mission stories.
- I believe this committee has potential to make the necessary changes in Corps visitor centers that will help assist the visitors in the recognition of our agency. It is my thinking that you would also be the task force to develop exhibits that all visitor centers should have ("Command Brief" on Corps missions and the Army, Lewis and Clark, etc.)...I hope you make that one of your items to address and soon.
- Our visitor center is presently in the first year of a multi-year rehabilitation effort. In that respect, we are probably different than most other centers, because many of our most pressing needs are being met, or will be met. Our only concern is that funding is made available in the out-years to complete the work and produce a completed product. Continued emphasis at the HQ level to modernize and update visitor centers, especially the Class A centers, is much appreciated and should continue.
- Concentrate on the sharing of expertise, create a team of consultants, elevate the status of visitor centers as a communication tool for the Corps. Exhibits are viewed by audiences with a high return rate and need to be changed periodically. Exhibits are only one of the interpretive media at the projects disposal and may not be the best media for all messages. They shouldn't be expected to comprise the entire interpretive program and communicate all the needed stories to visitor. Why? Because the average visitor views them for about 15 minutes max. They do however provide a focal point for interaction and communication with the visitor and need to be done well. Visitor Centers that have been ignored and are outdated and ineffective can be an embarrassment to the agency and should improved or closed.

- Some of our exhibits are outdated and we would like to "tell the story" with equipment (displays) that are not so old.
- We realize that interactive displays are what people want but you also have to have the expertise and \$ to keep them operating; Both are in short supply. Visitor Centers are competing with other recreation functions for \$\$\$\$. Money is short all around.
- When you develop this Corps Story for us be sure to include real options on how we can use it and integrate it into our facilities. Act as a clearinghouse for other good ideas. If someone has a particularly good product they are using buy 50 of them and distribute them to selected facilities. Examples would be our lock simulator or a flood control simulator game.

### **Visitor Centers as a Part of the Corps & Corps Management Issues**

- Get the time robbing activities of our back - i.e. CEFMS, OMBIL, FEMS, NRRS. Everybody's pushing their responsibilities off to lower levels. We are the lower level and it's affecting our ability to do the jobs we were hired, trained and educated to do. Being an expert interpreter or VC Manager is a dead end. It's tough to get promoted or get higher-grade levels or to be taken seriously when you're perceived as being into birds and bunnies. We need pre-approved GS-05 through GS-11 PD's in the PD Library, COREDOC and/or FASSCLASS for our folks to use when classification reviews or opportunities for promotions do exist. Everybody's afraid to ask for new space - most Corps VC's are grossly undersized when compared to what other agencies and the private sector facilities call a class "A". We should down grade just about every facility we call a class "A" to class "B", most of our "B's" to "C's" and admit our "C's" are nothing more than glorified lobbies. The Corps needs to get serious about bringing our facilities in line with what the standard is. Why don't you do a survey of the Chief's of Operations and the District Commanders and find out what they think? This will give you a better idea of who supports and who doesn't support the program. Since they're the ones who are making most of the budgeting decisions wouldn't it be smart to include them? You have a bunch of professional people who want to do a good job but the leadership (HQ and the green suiters) i.e. perceived as the biggest barrier. They need to put their money where their mouth is.
- For the most part, visitor centers have been viewed in the Corps more as architectural and design achievements rather than a people/learning focused facility where the Corps meets it's public. There is a general feeling that you build this center, fill it with exhibits (once) and than say, "that's it, we're done..." Then they don't staff it, let the exhibits age into oblivion and eternity and tell ranger staff to develop programming along with 50 other staff duties. The Corps spends a great deal of money building them, the Corps needs to nurture that investment and think of visitor centers as a program area with dedicated staff and duties. Visitor centers ARE the face of the Corps to the public and staff can multiply that good effort many fold if its allowed to develop. Visitor centers have to be thought of as essential rather than expendable- The agency gives great lip service to "telling our story", "outreach", etc, who else to do it but visitor centers? Time to put the money their mouth is... As a visitor center manager, I am distracted daily by issues other than running a visitor center- I wear too many hats and am required to complete work for which I'm not trained- mainly engineering/maintenance/facility/property management. It takes about 40-50% of my time. Supervision of staff takes another 20% at least (which is really not enough) and about 30% for being a VC manager...
- VC's are, apparently, low priority in the Corps because of the apparent absence of funding for us. We are as much Corps as is flood control, navigation, recreation (camping), and everything else, I would like to be treated that way. Money is available to hire new

engineers, remodel district facilities, purchase electronic toys, etc., but not to update display or provide appropriate office/staff areas. My facility has an 8X10 office area, one desk top, one notebook computer, and 5' high walls in a corner of the VC for up to 6 staff. There is no area for me to do personal reviews with staff or for anyone to work undisturbed. Now they want to remodel, from what I hear, we all have a similar display and appearance without meeting other needs first???? Give me a break, every project is different, we have different stories and different needs! Provide funding and let the project, within existing guidelines, do the work. We do know what we can and can't do. Our visitors praise this facility, it's staff, and (outdated) displays for telling the story with excellence. If we have to insert material unrelated to the project in our limited space it will risk damaging our good reviews. We tell the Corps story (for this project) at this location, give the Corps a positive face in a time when that is very badly needed. We need support for the work being done by project, district, and regional management. Don't impose, enable.

- I would point out that VC's are one of those nice things to have. Although I'm very proud of ours, when services have to be cut due to stagnant or decreasing budgets, VC services will be the first to go.
- Procurement procedures has been a major obstacle - it is getting better as more contractors are getting on GSA listings. It is much easier to use GSA contractors.
- District stonewalling on improvements is a problem

### **Issues of Funding and Budget Management**

- The Visitor Center is approximately 15 years old and in need of major exhibit updates. In addition the building itself needs a new roof and concrete sidewalk. We have found it difficult to come up with the money for these major repair update items with our current shrinking budget.
- We have some serious infrastructure problems because the O&M budget is woefully insufficient. It will literally take millions to get this facility repaired and up-to-date. Problems include leaky buildings, old heating/air conditioning systems, elevator and escalator maintenance needed, access for disabled, out-of-date displays, and short staff.
- Over the past 3 years, I've requested \$160,000 to replace existing exhibits, our district has had more than \$1,000,000 each year in excess money to spend. I know that not all of this money has even been expended, yet no one see the need to waste money on replacing exhibits! As long as we have this type of mind set within our district, we will never update any VC exhibits.
- Be great if funding was made available to handicapped access, expansion of areas instead of having to dip into annual O&M budgets. Could get much more accomplished.
- Get us products we can use and the funds to develop our own. We are told that significant dollars for improvements aren't available or not a priority. Well if we can spend millions on products like OMBIL, FEMS, NRRS, etc then why cant we get the financial support of our agency and it's leadership to meet this important mission.
- From an exhibit comment above: Our only concern is that funding is made available in the out-years to complete the work and produce a completed product.

## Issues of Partnering

- We are looking at partnering with Illinois Department of Natural Resources for a visitor center. Where possible, partnerships should be encouraged with local, state or other federal entities.
- Provide information on how other visitor centers have established partnerships. This should also include information on our regulations on partnering and cooperating associations.

## Misc. comments

- It would be beneficial to be able to keep the Visitor Center open on weekends, particularly during the recreation season. We are currently looking into constructing a few volunteer campsites to allow us to solicit volunteer help for this (we do not have a campground). The Visitor Center is in very good condition but most exhibits should be updated to reflect the Corps Mission. Our Visitor Center utilizes active and passive solar heat and some exhibits pertain to solar energy. There seems to be little interest in solar energy.
- None at this time. On 24 July 2001 the our district Visitor Center Evaluation Review Team visited our project and made an assessment of the facility, exhibits, grounds and personnel. The final results of the evaluation will be made known in September or October.
- As stated before our center is small and the main part of customer interaction is answering questions about the lake and surrounding public land.
- We would welcome your committee to visit our visitor center to provide input/suggestions for improvement.