



National Park Service
Department of the Interior

Social Science Program

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Programmatic Approval for NPS-Sponsored Public Surveys

Submission Date 1/14/2014

1. **Project Title:** An Assessment of Public Engagement at Fort McHenry, Boston, and Boston Harbor Islands National Park Sites

2. **Abstract:** The purpose of this request is to identify best practices related to visitor center design, onsite/virtual programming and audiovisual elements, and public engagement, illustrating how these elements interact to influence the visitor experience in four dimensions. Data collection will occur at three visitor facilities: Boston (BOST), Boston Harbor Islands (BOHA), and Fort McHenry (FOMC). We are requesting approval to conduct on-site visitor interviews followed by a 5-item questionnaire.

3. **Principal Investigator Contact Information**

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4. **Park or Program Liaison Contact Information**

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Project Information

5. **Park(s) For Which Research is to be Conducted:** Boston (BOST), Boston Harbor Islands (BOHA), and Fort McHenry (FOMC).

6. **Survey Dates:** June 1, 2014 TO December 15, 2014

7. **Type of Information Collection Instrument (Check ALL that Apply)**

Mail-Back Questionnaire Other (explain)	Onsite Questionnaire	X Face-to-Face Interview	Telephone Survey	Focus Groups
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8. **Survey Justification:** *Social science research in support of park planning and management is mandated in the NPS Management Policies 2006 (Section 8.11.1, "Social Science Studies"). The NPS pursues a policy that facilitates social science studies in support of the NPS mission to protect resources and enhance the enjoyment of present and future generations (National Park Service Act of 1916, 38 Stat 535, 16 USC 1, et seq.). NPS policy mandates that social science research will be used to provide an understanding of park visitors, the non-visiting public, gateway communities and regions, and human interactions with park resources. Such studies are needed to provide a scientific basis for park planning and development.*

Consistent with National Park Service (NPS) management policy, this study will use social science research to provide an understanding of park visitors by examining human interactions with park resources and providing a scientific basis for park planning and development. The NPS commissioned this study to examine the variety, depth, and quality of visitor information, orientation, interpretive services, and outcomes at three sites in the Northeast Region.

The purpose of this collection is to:

1. Explore how *key features and services* identified by site planners and managers related to visitor center design, information, and interpretation contribute to experiences and outcomes.
2. Examine interpretive outcomes in four learning dimensions: *experience* (meaning), *doing* (practice), *becoming* (identity), and *belonging* (community).

NPS Managers are interested in knowing how visitors seek out, interact with and benefit from services offered. This study will provide an understanding of audience interactions with site meanings and significance through information, orientation and interpretive services in the Northeast Region of the NPS.

9. **Survey Methodology:** (a) **Respondent Universe:**

The respondent universe will include all English speaking adults, ages 18 and older, visiting Boston (BOST), Boston Harbor Islands (BOHA), and Fort McHenry (FOMC) during the sampling period. An additional sample will

include 18 local residents identified by park staff as being highly engaged at the park.

(b) Sampling Plan/Procedures:

Researchers from Stephen F. Austin State University, University of Nevada – Las Vegas, and West Virginia University will complete a series of onsite interviews with park visitors. All researcher staff will complete one or more training sessions to familiarize themselves with the survey protocols. Training sessions will increase consistency in terms of data recording, procedure implementation, and rater reliability.

Onsite Interviews

Researchers will conduct a total of 30 onsite interviews per study site. We anticipate that at each site we will conduct at least 7 interviews per day over a 4-5 day period until 30 interviews have been completed.

Interviewers will conduct face-to face interviews using a semi-structured format with predetermined questions and will follow a purposive sampling approach. This approach will allow researchers to use key features and services in the park to select visitors who appear to have differing levels of engagement with those features and services. The following key features and services have been identified for each of the three sites:

- Visitor center patio
- Interactive kiosks and display panels
- Film viewing areas
- Information desk with or without a ranger present
- Visitor center programs
- Interpretive exhibits with high “attention holding capacity”
- Iconic resources or experiences (e.g., flag flying over Fort McHenry)
- Gift shops

Researchers will select interviewees based on the following two categories:

- 1) *Group 1* This group will include individuals who frequently visit and/or who demonstrate a high level of commitment to the site. A person in this category may also include someone who is a “seasoned” park visitor.

This group will also consist of 18 local residents identified by park staff who are known to frequently participate in onsite activities (e.g., long-term volunteers or docents).

- 2) *Group 2 (Occasional/Casual Visitors):* This group will include first-time visitors. Every *n*th visitor will be approached, across time-stratified data collection period until 22 completed at each site.

(c) Instrument Administration:

Researchers will use a structured interview process to guide the conversations. In some cases, questions may be enhanced to probe for further insight about how key features and services contribute to the individual visitor’s experiences. Questions and sequencing will generally follow the interview protocol however, as conversation threads emerge through dialogue, researchers may follow up on these threads as they relate to the study objectives.

As required by the Stephen F. Austin State University, University of Nevada – Las Vegas, and West Virginia University, researchers will provide respondents with an informed consent form to ensure that respondents understand the purpose of the research. Interviews will typically take about 30 minutes to complete. With the respondent’s permission, all interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

(d) Expected Response Rate/Confidence Levels:

We anticipate an overall response rate of 75% for this study. We will start by contact at least 40 people per site to produce a total of 30 interviews per site. If we do not achieve our initial anticipated 70% response rate, we will continue sampling until we reach our goal of 30 interviews per site. We will not attempt to generalize the findings beyond the respondents at each site.

	Number of Initial Contacts	Expected Response Rate	Expected Number of Responses
BOST			
Group 1	18	85%	15
Group 2	22	70%	15
BOHA			
Group 1	18	85%	15
Group 2	22	70%	15
FOMC			
Group 1	18	85%	15
Group 2	22	70%	15
TOTAL	120		90

(e) Strategies for dealing with potential non-response bias:

If a visitor declines to be interviewed we will ask them to tell us their reason for refusal. The researchers will complete a contact log to record basic information about all respondents and non-respondents. The contact log will list the date, time, gender, group composition (i.e., adult versus children), and reason for refusal. In addition to the observational information, every person approached will be asked to answer two questions:

1. Is this your first time visiting this site?
2. Where are you from (state)

This information will be used to compare the results of those who chose to complete the interview process to those that refused. Results of the non-response bias check will be reported and any implications for planning and

management will be discussed.

(f) Description of any pre-testing and peer review of the methods and/or instrument (recommended):

The instrument was reviewed and approved by the Agreement Technical Representative for this project, Dominic Cardea. Six managers and program support staff in the Northeast Region reviewed and approved the methodological approach, the interview protocol. Researchers received comments and review from professional colleagues. The study plan, procedures and instruments received IRB review and approval at Stephen F. Austin State University.

10 **Burden Estimates:** We plan to approach at least 120 individuals during the sampling period. With an average response rate of 75%, we expect to receive 90 total responses for this collection.

We expect that the initial contact time will be at least one minute per person (120 x 1 minute = 2.0 hours). We expect that 30 (25%) visitors will refuse to participate during the initial contact. The non-response survey will take less than 1 minute per respondent to complete.

For those who agree to participate, we expect that all 90 persons contacted will complete the interview process, requiring an additional 30 minutes to complete (90 respondents x 30 minutes = 45 hours). The total annual burden for this collection is estimated to be 47 hours.

Estimated Number of Contacts		Estimation of Time (min)		Estimation of Burden Hours	
Total Number of Initial Contacts	120	Initial Contact	1	Initial Contact	2
Estimated number of onsite refusals	30	Onsite Refusal/ nonresponse	1	Nonresponse	< 1
Total Number of Responses	90	To complete interviews	30	Interviews	45

Total Burden Hours 47

11. **Reporting Plan:** A summary of the study results will be provided in report format to NPS/Northeast Regional Office. Study results will be presented at various academic and professional conferences, e.g., the International Symposium for Society and Resource Management, the National Association for Interpretation, and/or the George Wright Society Forum. One or more students enrolled in the M.S. in Resource Interpretation program will complete a master's thesis in conjunction with this research effort. In addition, articles will be submitted for publication to one or more interpretation or communication research journals. A copy of any reports will be archived with the NPS Social Science Program for inclusion in the social science studies collection.