

Doing busy well

Peak practice

Whether you love to buzz or dread the stress, every National Trust place will have its own pattern of busy periods. This guide compiles learning from around the Trust to help us take these peaks in our stride.



Seven steps to doing busy well

1 - Understand the problem

What gets in the way of a great visitor experience on your busiest days? Go through your comments and grumbles – what’s really bothering your visitors?

2 - Create your challenge map

Using a map of your site, mark the difficulties you’ve identified. If you work as a team, you’ll get everyone’s support from the start.

3 - Prioritise your challenges

List the challenges in order of priority according to visitor feedback and your own instincts. Where do the greatest problems lie (for visitors and the team)?

4 - Create your action plan

Working from the top of the list, come up with short- and long-term actions. Challenge yourself to be creative, bring in consultancy support if needed.

5 - Make it happen

It might help to think of your ‘busy well’ plans as a project, with a project manager, timeline, budget if required, and a group of property and consultancy staff to support it.

6 - Use the resources on hand

The links in this document will direct you to tips, examples and people who can help you. Remember: focus on doing one thing well to get great results.

7 - Evaluate the experience

Don’t forget to evaluate how things are working. Let everyone know the results and how much their hard work is appreciated: great job everybody!

Resources in this handbook

Infrastructure

Car parks
Visitor reception
Gardens and parklands
Houses
Catering
Retail
Toilets
On-site closures

People

Marketing and communications
Recruitment and induction
Customer service
Staffing
Volunteers
Queues

Process

Hit the ground running
Programming
Managing visitor flow
Using insight
Case studies



Seven steps

Step 1: Understand the problem

How does 'busy well' feel at your place?

Before you start, get together with your team to think about what you'd like to achieve. Do you want your busy days to feel buzzy? Would you like create a festival atmosphere, with people feeding off each other's energy? Or do you want to establish a quiet, calm environment? Your spirit of place may guide you here.

What gets in the way of a great visitor experience on your busiest days?

Look at the feedback (visitor survey comments and grumbles, TripAdvisor posts, comment cards and any complaint letters) focussing on the key busy times of the year. Summarise comments in two columns: what's already going well, and what needs improving. Then talk to your teams: what's it like working on a busy day? What helps? What hinders? What do visitors say?

Who can help?

It may help to get a different view point. You could invite a consultant, a colleague from another property, or someone external to observe your operation on a busy day and share their thoughts. This is an opportunity to challenge any preconceptions: for example you might think that service is the challenge in your café, whilst what visitors are actually complaining about is the range of food.

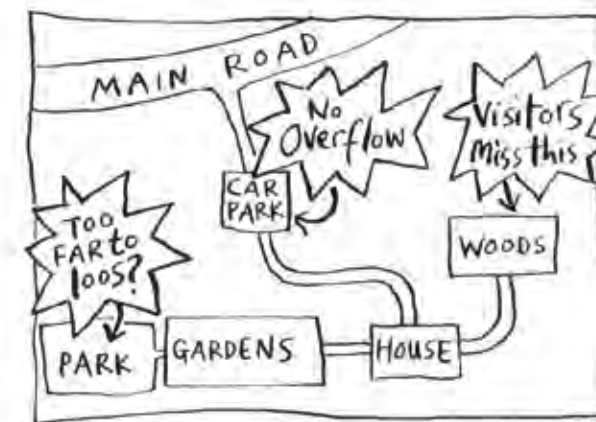
Step 2: Create your challenge map

Use stickers or post-its to highlight challenges

When you highlight the problem areas on a map, you can often suddenly see the links between the issues you've identified. Create a challenge map by:

- printing off a map of your property (your welcome map should do)
- marking the issues you've identified with post-it notes or stickers.

This is a great exercise to do with the team – either the whole team or in departments before bringing everything together. As you create the map, discuss what's already going well and why, as well as challenges.



Step 3: Prioritise

Where do the greatest problems lie?

List the challenges in order of priority according to visitor feedback and your own instincts. Where do the greatest problems lie?

Make this a team discussion too, covering the top visitor concerns as well as concerns expressed by the team – this is as much about making our lives easier as it is about improving the visitor experience! At this stage, don't worry about the potential difficulty or cost of solving the challenges.

Step 4: Create your action plan

Short term and long-term fixes

Create a list of short term, quick fixes. These are things you can try out during your next busy period and evaluate, before committing to a permanent solution.

You may also have longer-term, more expensive fixes on your wish list, such as building a new car park or more toilets. Don't dismiss these – seek advice from the relevant consultant or property teams who have faced similar challenges. They may be able help you come up with alternative solutions. Also think about whether you need to commission a feasibility study (the issues identified in step 1 gives the evidence you need for this).

Seven steps

Step 5: Make it happen

Do you need to set up a project team?

It might help to approach 'doing busy well' as a project, with a project manager, small project team of property and consultancy staff, timeline and budget if required.

Look at the actions identified in the plan and agree what you'll tackle first (it may not be what's top of the list) and who is responsible for each action and timings.

Do one thing...

Remember, there will be plenty of busy periods to try out new approaches. So focus on one or two challenges at your next peak, evaluate the impact of the actions you've taken, and once you're happy you've solved the issue, then move on to your next challenge.

Step 7: Evaluate the experience

Know what's working and celebrate success

Don't forget to evaluate how things are working. Let everyone know the results and how much their hard work is appreciated. As well as gathering indepth feedback, for instance at the end of a holiday period, why not run ten-minute feedback sessions at the end busy days. A 'little and often' approach can make continous improvement feel more manageable.

Step 6: Use the resources on hand

Infrastructure

- Car parks
- Visitor reception
- Gardens and parklands
- Houses
- Catering
- Retail
- Toilets
- On-site closures

People

- Marketing and communications
- Recruitment and induction
- Customer service
- Staffing
- Volunteers
- Queues

Process

- Hit the ground running
- Programming
- Managing visitor flow
- Using insight
- Case studies

Useful links

- Visitor Survey data
- Action Plan template – available from your Easter champion

Car parks: a hassle-free arrival

Planning ahead

Organise overflow car parking

- What's the process for activating your overflow car park? Do you have a written plan or a layout that's easy for new car park attendants to understand?
- Are there clear pedestrian routes in and out of the overflow parking site? If reception is a bit of a hike, do you have signs with estimated walk times?
- Are paths easy for buggies to traverse? If not, can you lay down extra matting to smooth the journey?

Overflow overflow

- Do you have a contingency plan if your overflow car park is full by 11am? For example, could you make an arrangement with nearby properties (NT or otherwise) with parking capacity?
- What message will you give when people turn up and all car parks are full? Can your car park attendants give this message confidently?

Signage

- Have you prepared the extra signs you will need for the car parks on busy days? You can make temporary signs up in advance using your region's sublimation machine (if your region has one). Avoid using laminates where possible.

Public roads

- Is there a risk that queues of arriving cars could build up on public roads? If there is, speak to your local police ahead of your busy period and on the day, if traffic does build up, let them know.

Your team

Car parkers

- Staffing levels: don't underestimate how many people it takes to manage a busy car park on a peak day. Many properties now pay for dedicated car park attendants when it's busy (either through Trust contract or agency staff).
- Start early: ask your car parking attendants to come in early to make sure the first arrivals park well and don't take up multiple spaces.
- Welcome people as they arrive: our Visitor Survey results show that the easiest way to overcome grumbles about car parking is to welcome people as soon as they drive in.

Team welfare

- Keep an eye on the team's welfare. Give someone the task of checking everyone is getting the right breaks (especially those stationed a distance from the main hubs) and that there's a good supply of teas, coffee, water and, with any luck, sun cream!

Property knowledge

- Start each day by briefing the team so that everyone knows what is happening at the property that day and whether any areas are closed.
- Put a system in place to communicate any changes during the course of a day.

Your visitors

- Make up some flyers or vouchers in advance of busy days, ready to hand out to people in case you need to turn people away because your car park is full. You could offer a free or discounted visit at a quieter time.

Great examples

- Belton and Fountains Abbey case studies (see Visitor Journey Framework handbook, pages 13 and 14).

Useful links

- Check the basics are in place, using the Visitor Journey Framework as a guide
- Car parks intranet page
- Supporter Intelligence (see the case studies about using insight to identify your busy times)

Who can help

- VE consultant



Visitor reception: making first impressions count

Planning ahead

What's on

- There isn't time or headspace to promote everything a visitor can do on their day out in the reception area. So think about where else you place these messages. For instance, a 'What's on' board beyond the reception area, regular information points, or roaming staff and volunteers who act as welcome hosts.

Signage

- If you think you may need additional signage, make these up in advance. For ideas on alternatives to laminates, see the Visitor Journey Framework.
- Make up flyers or vouchers in advance that offer a free or discounted visit at a quieter time, ready to hand out to people you need to turn away.
- Make sure you know where all your extra signs, ropes, stakes and so on, are stored. Agree who is responsible for packing it all away at the end of the day.

Check the basics

- Use the Visitor Journey Framework to make sure everything's in place

Members' fast track

- If you can, set up a separate, clearly signposted fast-track line for members. This can really speed up the queues. We want to give every member a warm welcome, but for some this will be their first visit and they may need more information. Think about the best place to position this help. It could be before the pay barrier or after the reception area.

Your team

People

- Whatever you do, make sure you've got enough staff to cover the reception area at peak time. Use the number of visitors in your budget to plan how many people you'll need in the reception team. As a rule of thumb, it takes two minutes to offer a tailored welcome to each visitor, and six minutes to offer and complete member sign up.

Team welfare

- Allocate someone to keep an eye on the welfare of your team during busy days, especially people stationed away from the main hubs. Make sure people are taking the right breaks, have plenty of drinks (tea, coffee, water), and on sunny days, are topping up their sun cream.

Today's offer

- Start each day by briefing the team so that everyone know's what is happening at the property that day and whether any areas are closed.
- Put a system in place to communicate any changes during the course of a day.

Your visitors

Membership

- On busy days, you've got a great opportunity to boost membership sales (for example, Easter is a time that many non-members visit for their first time). Staff up, using historical patterns of visitor numbers as your guide to resourcing levels.

Great examples

Attingham's briefing sheet.

Useful links

- Visitor Journey Framework
- Using your visitor reception area
- Supporter Intelligence (see the case studies about using insight to identify your busy times)

Who can help

- VE consultant
- Membership consultant



Gardens and parks: a sustainable approach

Managing busy gardens

We're seeing a steady rise in numbers of visitors to our gardens. It's a great situation to be in, but not without its challenges since our gardens were not designed for crowds. Here are some ideas to manage and protect your garden features:

Planning ahead

- Do you know what's sustainable? Use the Conservation for Access (C4A) toolkit to help you define how many visitors your garden or park can support. This will also help you work out the resources you need to manage this level of access.
- Where are the pinch points? Can you encourage visitors to go a different way or open up alternative, or temporary routes?
- Do any elements of your visitor programme take place outdoors, for example family trails? Think about where these are and how visitors get there. Does their location make the feature more difficult to access or take people through a fragile area?

Managing closures

If you need to close areas off, have you thought through how you will do this. For example:

- Have you got smart rope and stakes ready? Does everyone know where they're kept?
- Do you have a chalk board you can use to explain why the area's closed?

Assessing routes through the garden

During your planning process, look at the routes through each area of your garden or parkland and consider how well the surfaces will hold up to visitor numbers and likely weather conditions. If you've got concerns, look into:

- a) Improving or changing the surface. How could you make the existing surface more resilient? If you need to change the surface, what would be in keeping with the property?
- b) Creating alternative routes.
- c) Or, if the options above are not feasible, restricting access to protect fragile areas.

See the 'Managing visitor access in gardens' page on the intranet for more ideas.

Your team

- Start each day by briefing the team so that everyone know's what is happening at the property that day and whether any areas are closed.
- Put a system in place to communicate any changes during the course of a day.

Your suggestions please!

This page is a work in progress... If you've got any wise or practical advice to add, please send it through to: joanne.davenport@nationaltrust.org.uk.

Useful links

- Check the basics are in place (see the Visitor Journey Framework).
- Conservation for Access toolkit.
- Managing visitor access in gardens.

Who can help

- Gardens consultant
- Curator

Houses: welcoming in all weathers

Planning ahead

In the weeks running up to your busy period, think about the following:

- **Coats, bags and buggies:** is there enough space to store them at the entrance, and does everyone know where to put them?
- **Rainy weather plans:**
 - Have you got space to store things like buggies inside?
 - What will you do with wet umbrellas? Invite people to leave them in buckets? Or hand out plastic bags for visitors to put their soggy brollies in (so they can keep hold of them)?
 - How will you address the problem of muddy shoes? Will you hand out blue overshoes? Will you put out seats for people to perch on while they're putting on and taking off the overshoes? Who is responsible for handing out the overshoes and emptying the disposal bin during the day?
 - Will you need to put out extra matting at the entrances?
- **Trail sheets and other activities:** are there plenty of copies of any activities ready? Do you have enough clipboards, pencils and so on?
- **Guides:** do you have a full stock of guidebooks? Are your iPads fully charged? Is the virtual tour working?
- **Fragile objects or areas:** walk around the visitor route to see if there are any objects or areas that could be at risk when the volume of visitors is high. Do you need to move or protect anything?

Planning ahead – longer term

Use the Conservation for Access (C4A) toolkit to help you define the right level of visitor numbers for your property. It will help you:

- identify pinch points and vulnerable objects or fixtures
- assess dwell time by room
- work out how much resource you need to support your level of visitor access.

Your team

- **Volunteer rotas:** check these and make sure you've made any contingency plans. For instance, what will you do if you are short of staff/volunteers? If you need to close an area or room quickly, how will you do this?
- **Daily briefing:** begin each day by briefing your team so that everyone on site knows what's on offer that day and whether any areas of the property are closed.
- **Updates during the day:** make sure you have established a system for updating the team on any changes (for instance area closures).

Your suggestions please!

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Useful links

- Check the basics are in place (see the Visitor Journey Framework)
- Conservation for Access toolkit

Who can help

- Conservator
- Curator

Catering: a friendly and efficient service

Planning ahead

Inductions

- Give any new starters a full induction, explaining our service culture and the property's features as well as someone's specific role. Line up a more experienced member of staff to be their buddy during their first few shifts.

Signage

- Make sure the menus are visible before people get to the counter so they can be thinking about their menu choice in the queue.
- If there are alternative catering outlets on your property, prepare signs directing people to them that you can put up outside your main outlet if queues build up.

Programming

- When you're putting your programme together, think carefully about the timing of events, such as talks and tours. You can relieve pressure on your restaurant or cafe if plan for activities to finish well before, or well after the usual lunchtime rush.

Secondary outlets

- Catering pop up outlets and concessions can help relieve queues at main outlets during busy times. If you are going down this route you will need to:
 - make sure the quality is right and the offer is in keeping with our strategy
 - include any third party staff in your Service Leadership training.

Your team

Today's offer

- Remember to brief the team well before a busy shift – fire them up for the day! Make sure they know who is responsible for what.

Team welfare

- Lead from the front: manage and coordinate busy days, don't get distracted by 'doing' yourself.
- Play to people's strengths: if you've got a speedy barrista in the team, put them on the coffee machine during your busiest times.
- Move people around stations: a change of scene and duty can help people stay fresh and proactive.

Great service

- When you're serving visitors, treat them as individuals, not just as 'the queue'. Always thank people when they've had to wait.
- Think about how your team will deal with any complaints. Do they feel confident about listening and understanding? Do they know when they can replace someone's meal, or offer a free drink?
- Work with fellow Heads of Department to share responsibilities during busy times. Where possible, get all hands on deck. For example, could all staff do fifteen minutes of table clearing each day?

'Offer tasters to people waiting in queues – it's a proven way to boost sales!'

Your visitors

Queues

- If customers just want a drink or a takeaway, direct them to the right place for service. Point out any free tills. When queues build up, offer tasters to the people waiting. You can use products on sale in the shop – a proven way to boost shop sales!
- If all tables are full, could you encourage people to still buy food but sit elsewhere? Ensure all catering staff know how to direct people to pop up cafes, the best picnic spots and so on. You could even think about loaning (or selling!) a picnic rug so people can take their lunch into the garden and park. Why not make it an adventure?

Useful links

- Check the basics are in place (see the Visitor Journey Framework)
- Induction tools for Catering Managers.
- Family Friendly Checklist
- Christmas Catering Toolkit
- Pop up catering examples
- Service Vision

Who can help

- VE consultant
- Commercial support consultant

Retail: a personal touch

Planning ahead

Staffing

- Review visitor number forecasts and daily/weekly trading patterns to make sure you have planned for the right level of staffing.
- Plant sales: it's a good idea to have a volunteer outside the shop tending the plants. Is it clearly signposted? Consider a cash only purchase point. Check there's a plan for recording sales and keeping stock secure.

Layout

- Put a plan in place to move products around to fill any gaps caused by stock shortages.
- Run a bestseller/department report for the same period the previous year. This will remind you of which lines were popular and help you decide how to allocate space and work.
- Look again at your layout and aisle width: less is more when you are at peak visitor volume. In particular, check the position of products or fixtures that tend to cause people to linger (for instance card spinners). Move them if possible.
- At properties with a larger turnover, think about adding a till – a second or third till can make all the difference. If you do invest in more tills, make sure you've got the staff to cover it and think about how the queues will form (visualise how it's going to work in advance).

Your team

Today's offer

- Remember to brief the team well before a busy shift – fire them up for the day! Make sure they know who is responsible for what.
- Work with the property team to plan the best flow of visitors during peaks. It may seem logical to flow people through the shop as they leave, but how well does your shop layout cope with large volumes of people? You could see a drop in your conversion rate, if, when visitors are leaving, what they're really looking for is the toilet or café.

Team welfare

- Lead from the front – manage and coordinate busy days, don't get distracted by 'doing' yourself.
- Play to people's strengths – if someone's great at chatting to visitors, make sure they're on the shop floor at your busiest times.
- If you can, allocate someone to be on hand to orient people as they enter the shop, respond to queries, help manage the queue and generally keep things tidy.
- Adapt shift patterns and stagger lunch breaks over a longer period.

Inductions

- Give any new starters a full induction to our service culture and the property, as well as someone's specific role. Line up a more experienced member of staff to be their buddy during their first few shifts.

Your visitors

Tasters and up-selling

- Use tasting sessions wisely. They will make people dwell for longer, but also take up staff time. Think about the best time of day to make tasters available – when you want to attract people into the shop, or away from hotspots.
- Add-on sales at the till: clear out all the clutter around the till point and choose two products. Try to keep the price point under £5-7.
- Think volume! Our best sellers will still be random rugs and triple packs of biscuits, so make sure merchandise is displayed in bulk in key selling spots. Keep topping up stock and regularly monitor stock levels.

Useful links

- Check the basics are in place (see the Visitor Journey Framework).
- Christmas Microsite.
- Retail intranet page.

Who can help

- Retail consultant

Toilets: looking after the essentials

The basics

Follow the checklist below (from the Visitor Journey Framework) to make sure you've got the basics right:

Before the day

- Update your posters.
- Deep-clean, high and low, including ceilings, cobwebs, woodwork.
- Check contingency plans for issues like blockages are in place.
- Install poster frames for notices on backs of toilet doors (if you haven't already done so). If you have, make sure the 'What's on' notices are up to date.

On the day

- Put flowers from the garden in pots or jars.
- Make sure toilets are regularly checked and cleaned.
- Top up toilet paper and paper towels, check and empty bins as necessary.

Your team

Capacity

- Do you need extra toilets when you're at peak capacity? If yes, do you need to arrange temporary portaloos for your site? Do you know where they should be located? (Check your visitor comments for any suggestions.)

Maintenance

- If it's proving a challenge to keep the toilets clean and your site free of litter on busy days, then set up a contract with your cleaners to include peak weekends and bank holidays.

Timing

- What times of day do the toilets need attention? If you haven't already got one, set up a rota so people know when to check them.

Your visitors

Signage

- Make sure there's clear signage in place, especially if you're using temporary portaloos.

A captive audience

- Grab people's attention while you can! The back of the toilet door is a good spot to advertise future events. Just make sure the information is always up to date.

Useful links

- [Visitor Journey Framework](#)
- [Procurement intranet page](#)

Who can help

- [Procurement business partner](#) – they can help you find the best supplier for temporary toilets.
- [Building surveyor](#) – they can help you decide the best location for temporary toilets, or help solve issues with existing toilets.



On site closures: managing disruption

Planning ahead

When people arrive at a property to find an area has been closed off for building or conservation work, it can create disappointment and frustration. A sense of 'member entitlement' is on the rise, particularly in the outdoors.

So, if you know there is a closure or restricted access on the horizon, communicate. Make sure visitors get the message about closures before they arrive using your website pages and social media channels. That way, people should be aware of closures when they turn up and the task for your welcome teams to give the positive messages, directing people to areas of the property which are open and looking great – personal recommendations can go a long way.

Road works planned? If you know there is going to be disruption on the roads in your area, use your digital channels to warn visitors ahead of time.



On the day

Communications

- How will you communicate any closures when people arrive on site? Is there a story to tell about what's being done, why and why now? Is it appropriate to ask for contributions to your fundraising efforts?

Routes

- Consider rotating temporary route closures when it's busy, for instance those paths around the park, garden or building that need protecting from wear and tear.
- Have a plan in place for last minute closures, for instance, due to weather conditions. Does everyone know when you make these decisions, who makes them and what happens? Have you got the ropes, stakes and signs ready to go?

Your team

Today's offer

- Daily briefing: begin each day by briefing your team so that everyone on site knows what's on offer that day and whether any areas of the property are closed.
- Updates during the day: make sure you have established a system for updating the team on any changes (for instance area closures).

Communications

- Create a map of the property that shows any closures and alternative routes to help staff and volunteers explain changes to visitors.
- Be ready to update your website and social media channels with any changes; let neighbouring properties know too.

Useful links

- [Managing visitor access in gardens](#)
- [Everything Speaks *Conservation in action* handbook](#)

Who can help

- VE consultant
- Conservator
- Gardens consultant

Marketing and communications: informing all

Planning ahead

Marketing planning

- Work with your property and regional Marketing and Communications team to discuss how you want to position yourselves during the year: does your property marketing plan reflect when you've got capacity to attract more visitors?

Website content

- Create a content schedule for your website pages to support your marketing communications. Your pages should:
 - Manage your visitors' expectations. Describe what will appeal to different audiences, and make sure you have covered every major feature of a visit, for instance the house, garden and what's on offer for families. Where possible, promote seasonal activities and features.
 - When you are promoting family trails or activities, include information on age suitability, duration and considerations like mud!
 - Don't oversell the experience – you'll be setting people up for disappointment.
 - If you know in advance a day or weekend is going to be particularly busy (for example the Easter weekend) can you warn people about the likely crowds and suggest quieter days for those who would prefer more peace?

On the day

- Have you checked the content of your website pages and your automated phone system? Do you have emergency messages lined up if you need them? Is there someone on duty each day who knows how to update the content?
- Prepare wording for social media announcements (for example, closures, reaching full capacity, wet weather) so you can get these messages out quickly.
- If you do reach full capacity, what will you say to people you need to turn away? Can you direct them to neighbouring properties that do have capacity? Prepare 'Where next' announcements – on site, on the web and through social media.

Internal communications

- Start each busy day with a briefing for all staff, volunteers and any contract staff (for instance car parkers and caterers). Explain what's happening and who's responsible for what. If it's not possible to brief everyone, make sure department managers pass on the key information to everyone in their team.
- Prepare 'peak period briefs' for each holiday period. Include information that will be of interest to different audience segments and first-time visitors and distribute to all staff.
- Also, think about printing a portable FAQ that can be kept to hand in a lanyard for all staff. Keep it simple!

Your team

- At key times like Easter and Christmas, consider organising a staff and volunteer launch day. This will give you the platform to run through your plans, talk through learnings from previous years, celebrate successes, discuss rotas and generally solve problems together. It's a good idea to finish a session by giving everyone a tour of the visitor offer around the property.
- After the busy day or weekend, do a quick review of what went well and what you'd do differently next time.

Great examples

- A team briefing sheet from Attingham
- Lanyard example from Nostell priority

Useful links

- [Marketing and Communications plan guidance intranet page](#)

Who can help

- [Marketing and communications consultant](#)
- [VE consultant](#)

Recruitment and induction: building teams

Recruiting for attitude

One of the most important factors in creating a great visitor experience is our people. Encounters with National Trust staff and volunteers who are passionate and knowledgeable about the place they work really do make all the difference.

We describe the attitudes and behaviours we are looking for in front line staff in our Service Leadership vision and our Values and Behaviours, as well as individual role profiles. The qualities we are looking for will usually fall under one or more of the following categories:

- Customer service: we need an unswerving commitment to ‘delighting’ our visitors.
- Team work: so much of our success depends on joining up our efforts across departments.
- Promoting the Trust: every conversation with a visitor is an opportunity to tell our story and inspire people to be supporters.
- Willing to learn: we need people who can adapt, be flexible and take on new things.
- Experience: obviously we need evidence of a candidate’s relevant experience.
- Leadership: for those in supervisory roles, we are looking for leadership qualities, including the ability to inspire and communicate with teams.

Planning ahead

Recruitment

- Create a timeline for your recruitment process. In the run up to busy times like Easter or the summer holidays, make sure you’ve built in time for a full induction for new recruits. Introduce people to the Trust, their property and their department.
- Budget: remember to allow for induction and training time in your wage budget.

Inductions

- Plan inductions using the advice available (see links, right), and/or talking to your VE and commercial support consultants. Could you pool resources with neighbouring properties to cover some (non property specific) elements of the induction process?
- Make time for training at the start of the year as well as refreshers at key points throughout it.

Useful links

- Employee Journey
- Catering People Development
- Catering and Retail Inductions
- Service Vision

Who can help

- VE consultant
- Commercial support consultant
- People business partner



Customer service: focussing on improvements

Service culture

- We want to develop a culture of excellent customer, but being able to deliver 'exceptional service every time for everyone' is a real challenge when it's busy. We all need to invest time and energy into making customer service a priority for our all of our staff and volunteer teams.
- Great customer service is not just about individual commitment: it's about who the whole team works together to support the visitor experience.

Include the Service Vision in all staff and volunteer recruitment and induction processes.

Planning ahead

Focus your attention

- Use feedback from your visitor survey results, comment cards, TripAdvisor and so on, to understand current levels of service. Which departments are getting it right? Which need some help? Is performance better on busy days or quiet days, weekdays or weekends and holidays?
- Can you narrow down what and where the issues might be? Can you use examples of great practice to inspire the team?

Training

- Include the Service Vision in all staff and volunteer recruitment and induction processes. See the 'Recruitment and induction' page for more detail.
- Once you have identified areas to address, use materials in the Service Vision toolkit to help you plan and lead the improvements. Bring in your VE consultant to help you.

Useful links

- Service Vision

Who can help

- VE consultants
- People business partner
- Regional service champion



Staffing: flexible and responsive team work

Planning ahead

- **Duty Manager:** Is your duty manager (DM) role clearly defined? This role is key to the smooth running of a busy day. Do you need different duty managers to oversee different areas (for instance zones of a large property). Is everyone in the team clear about when to call in the duty manager for help?
- **Training:** Are people confident in dealing with complaints or difficult situations? You might want to run a refresher session before your busy period.
- **Weather:** Keep an eye on the five-day weather forecast and make any last minute adjustments to staffing accordingly.
- **Daily roster:** Do you have enough people in the key customer facing areas, for instance car parking, shuttle vehicles, rubbish collection, fast track ticket office and the membership recruitment area?
- **Shift patterns:** can you structure the day in two shifts, so that people who start early don't need to stay late as well? Have you thought about having separate teams working on the busy days versus the quiet days during a holiday period? It can be hard switching between the two.
- **The calm after the storm:** we have seen VE scores slip on the quieter days following a busy period because people need to catch up on days off. Make sure your rota allows people time off but doesn't leave you short.

Your team

- **Welfare:** allocate someone to keep an eye on the welfare of your team during busy days, especially people stationed away from the main hubs. Make sure people are taking the right breaks, have plenty of drinks (tea, coffee, water), and on sunny days, slapping on the sun cream.
- **Energy levels:** think how you can keep the team's energy going all day. If you can keep the enjoyment levels up, it will be infectious (people can create or destroy an atmosphere). Some teams love the buzz of busy; others may worry more and get a bit tense. The manager's role is to bring an air of calm so visitors are not affected by any behind-the-scenes issues.
- **Duty managers:** make sure you don't get stuck in one location or on one task. Keep walking the whole property, watch what's happening, make small interventions when necessary.
- **Radios:** make sure the right people have a radio. Use them to alert each other when areas get busy (or quiet) so everyone knows what is happening and can help fill in where needed.
- **First aiders:** know who your first aiders are and how to get hold of them quickly.
- **Phones:** can you arrange for someone to be in the office to answer the phones? Could this be a role for one of your volunteers?

Leading the way

- Pitch in to help clear tables, manage queues or sort the toilets out at peak times, but don't get stuck in one place for too long.
- Be ready to mobilise departments to help each other out when it's needed.
- Get as many of the team as possible 'on the floor' at peak times. Unless absolutely necessary, no one should be in the office, especially managers who should be out motivating staff and solving problems before they happen.
- At the end of the day evaluate how it went – you could try a ten-minute stand up meeting and ask 'What three things went well today?' and 'What three things could we improve for tomorrow?'

Useful links

- [Service Vision](#)
- [Dealing with difficult situations](#)
- [Supporter Intelligence](#) (see the case studies at the end of this document)

Who can help

- [VE consultant](#)
- [People business partner](#)

Volunteers: opportunities to get more involved

Planning ahead

How do volunteers support you on busy days at the moment? Could you involve them more? Opportunities include:

- Using (more) volunteers to support your visitor welcome team.
- Thinking differently about shift patterns. Do you have the support you need at the busiest times? Or do volunteers do the same set shifts every day of the week?
- Using volunteers to support different roles. Can you build flexibility into the role of some (or all) of your volunteers so they can move to areas where they're needed most on busy days?

Your team

- Visitor welcome hosts: have you considered asking your volunteers to play roving roles on the busiest days – to lend a hand (and give a smile) when queues build up? They can be invaluable in your visitor reception area and café in particular, as well as helping people find their way around.
- Are your volunteers confident in dealing with complaints or difficult situations? It may be worth running some refresher training before your busy period begins.
- Can you use a busy day as an opportunity to build a volunteer's skills? For example, a garden volunteer could play a more visitor facing role during Easter Egg trails (handing out maps and prizes for example).

Leading the way

- Your volunteer team can be integral to your busy day resources plan and at the same time, can add variety to your volunteering offer. Being more flexible in the way we structure volunteering opportunities doesn't necessarily require big changes.

Great examples

- Read the *mythbusters* page to see the range of roles and support our volunteers are providing.
- Tyntesfield case study (Word 20kb)
- Lacock case study (Word 61kb)
- Fountains Abbey case study (Word 200kb)

Useful links

- Service Vision
- Volunteering Journey

Who can help

- VCI consultant



Queues: happier waits

Planning ahead

- Queues on busy days are inevitable. But we can plan for them. Think about opening alternative routes, extra gates, running extra tours at short notice to relieve pressure points, and moving people around the site.

Waiting to enter

- See Visitor Reception page for suggestions on setting up a members' fast-track entrance.
- Can you make the queue part of the experience, or even fun? (Disney call it the 'Pre-show'). Think about creating volunteer 'Meet and greet' teams (if you don't already have them). You could help people plan their day while they're waiting, explaining which spots are likely to be busy, where you'd recommend going first. You can also talk to non-members about membership – saving time at the ticketing point.
- Think about children in the queue (fractious children equals stressed parents). How can you entertain them? Can you hand out maps, give them a riddle to solve, with some clues planted along the line?
- When people finally get their turn, give them a great welcome and apologise for the wait.

Waiting for food

- How about handing out samples of cake to visitors waiting in the queue? It's a friendly conversation starter and you can go on to explain how long the wait might be.
- Make menus visible long before people reach the counter so they know what they want when they get to the front.
- Prepare signs for any alternative catering outlets and put these in front of your main outlet if queues form.
- If you can, adjust the timing of your visitor programme to take the pressure off busy lunchtime periods.
- Direct those who just want a drink or a takeaway to the right point. Direct people to free tills if they've not seen them.
- If there's no space to sit down, could you encourage people to still buy food but sit elsewhere? Offer a picnic rug if the weather's good? Direct people to good picnic spots or pop up cafes?

'If you can, adjust the timing of your visitor programme to take the pressure off busy lunchtime periods.'

Waiting to buy

- If you can, place a roving member of staff on the shop floor to orientate people as they enter the shop, answer queries, help out at the till if it gets busy, restock shelves and generally keep things tidy.
- Use tasting sessions wisely – can you use them to attract people away from hotspots at pinchpoints in the day?

Who can help

- VE consultant
- Commercial support consultant
- Retail consultants



Hitting the ground running

Even though many properties are now open 363 days a year, March is the time things traditionally get really busy. How can we make sure we're firing from all cylinders at a time when the weather is still cold and new teams of seasonal staff are just settling in? Here are some ideas to help you meet the high expectations of someone's first visit in the year.

Spring

- Our visitors love spring flowers: let people know when yours are going to be looking their best by posting pictures on social media.
- Plan walking routes to give people the best views of the flowers in bloom. Will you need to rotate the use of paths to minimise wear and tear?
- Think about other ways to encourage visitors to enjoy or engage with the spring scenes. Can you ask people to share their pictures? Have you planned a tie-in retail offer?

Easter

- Don't do Easter on a shoestring. Invest in the offer you develop, making sure trails are really professional.
- Don't just confine your activities to the four-day Easter weekend – spread your events (and your risks) across the whole two weeks of the school holidays.
- Easter can mean more than chocolate! See the Nature programming examples for more ideas.

Mother's Day

- Our visitors will want this day to be special, especially the food! Think about how you can make the café look amazing. Can you add more flowers or pots of bulbs? Does the cake display look really tempting?
- Why not create a special offer, such as afternoon tea in the café.
- If you usually attract strong visitor numbers on Mother's Day, focus less on marketing and more on really exceeding expectations on the day.

Father's Day

- Design a day of activities to appeal to Father's Day visitors. Woodcraft or forest skills activities have proved popular on the programme, as has 'Beer and BBQ' pop up catering concessions.

Catering

- Be prepared to serve hot food for longer and make sure stock levels are topped up.
- Use secondary outlets if you can and direct people to them if queues build up.
- Where queues do build up, keep them happy (see page on Queues).
- Plan refresher training or inductions before Easter and the May Bank Holidays.

Garden closures

- First of all, try to make sure as much of the site will be open on busy weekends. If you do need to close areas, announce the closures on the website and through your social media channels.
- Give property staff daily briefings on any closures and make sure people are equipped with positive messages for visitors, including the best things to see that day.

Useful links

- [Easter visitor journey](#)
- [Cadbury Easter Egg Hunts 2017](#)
- [Nature programming examples](#)

Who can help

- [VE consultant](#)
- [Marketing and communications consultant](#)
- [Gardens consultant](#)
- [Commercial support consultant](#)
- [Regional Easter champions](#)



Managing visitor flow

As well as programming, there are a number of ways you can control how long people spend at your property, when they come, how they move around it and where they spend their time.

Bookable admissions

The new Booking and Events system gives you two options to control visitor numbers:

- 1) The Booking and Events system gives you the ability to offer pre-booked admission tickets through your website, allowing you to set a limit on visitor numbers each day, and to control arrival times. When using this function non-members pay for their admission at the time of booking, not on arrival at the property.
- 2) The system also enables you to offer pre booked timed admission to parts of the property, for example guided tours or timed tickets to see the house. These would be 'free' at the point of booking, but non-members would pay for their general admission on arrival at the property.



Managing busy houses and gardens

We're seeing a steady rise in numbers of visitors to our places. It's a great situation to be in, but not without its challenges since our houses and gardens were not designed for crowds. Here are some ideas to manage and protect them.

- **What's sustainable?** Define the number of visitors you can support in your house or garden using the Conservation for Access (C4A). This will also help you define the level of resources you'll need to support this level of access.
- **Using timed tickets.** Stagger the arrival time (and number) of visitors flowing through small or more sensitive areas of the site. If you choose to use timed tickets, make sure you manage visitor expectations by publicising the arrangements:
 - If timed tickets are regular practice, tell people in your Handbook entry and property leaflet as well as on your website pages.
 - If timed tickets are more ad hoc, use the website, social media and property answer phone message to keep people up to date.
- **Think about the ticket design.** Can you design your timed tickets in a way that tells part of your story? And/or, are you planning to recycle the tickets? How can you make sure they last?

Create a 'busy' map

Involve the whole property team in an exercise to work through the visitor journey, from arrival to departure. Using a big map of the property, mark on the areas that will get busy (with times), and agree together how you will manage the pinchpoints. This will produce a visual action plan for the day and help you see where and when you will need to move crowds.

It's a similar exercise to the 'challenge map' (see page x), but for this exercise, the focus is on visitor hot spots.

Useful links

- Booking and events system
- Conservation for Access in houses and gardens
- Visitor routes in gardens

Who can help

- VE consultant
- Marketing and communications consultant
- Membership and promotions consultant
- Conservator
- Curator
- Gardens consultant

Managing peaks through programming

The role of programming

How can you use your visitor programme to manage the flow of people? The timing of a tour, for instance, can ease pressure on the lunchtime rush. Or an exhibition can attract more people in the quieter 'shoulder' months.

A strong visitor programme combines your routine activities with attractions designed to appeal to your target audiences, inspiring people to return. A visitor programme can include events, activities, exhibitions, talks, tours, demonstrations, temporary interpretation and changes to your presentation. At its best, a visitor programme brings your property's spirit of place to life.

'The timing of a tour can ease pressure on the lunchtime rush.'



Getting started

There are lots of different ways to approach programming; what's most important is that you develop a 'rhythm' that's right for your property.

If you are just beginning to build a visitor programme, don't be daunted by the challenge. It's a long-term exercise, not a quick fix, and there is plenty of guidance and hands' on help to get you started (see right).

If your visitor programme is more established, you may just want to think about refinements to help you address any peaks or troughs in your visitor pattern.

The *Reasons to return* handbook will help you work through the following questions:

- What do you want your property programme to achieve?
- What's the current visitor pattern?
- What's the desired visitor pattern?
- How *could* you structure your property programme?

Useful links

- [Programming intranet page](#)
- [Reasons to return handbook](#)
- [Reasons to return intranet page](#)

Who can help

- [Marketing and communications consultant](#)
- [VE consultant](#)

Learning from insight

Supporter Intelligence

Identify your annual visitor pattern

Does your property conform to the typical tourism model (busy during the holidays), or does it show differences (for instance, strong year-round local and repeat visitors)? Use the reports available to understand your pattern and identify where you may have the capacity to grow visitor numbers.

- [Link to case study 1](#)

Identify your daily visitor pattern

Most properties follow a similar pattern, with the peak arrival time at around 11am. For smaller properties, where people are likely to have shorter visits, you will probably find there are two arrival peaks, one for the morning, one for the afternoon.

- [Link to case study 2](#)

Identify your peak days

Map out your peak days from year to year: it will show you the extent to which your peaks are increasing (or decreasing) in scale.

- [Link to case study 3](#)

Identify visitor growth

It's also useful to track any changes in your visitor profile: who is visiting and where they are coming from?

- [Link to case study 4](#)

Visitor Experience

Data from the Visitor Experience survey (accessed via the MI Dashboard) can add another layer of detail to your analysis.

Focus your programming

Using the 'Audience Trends' tab, you can see the mix of people visiting your property from our four main audience segments, and their respective VE scores by month. Where you see a high percentage of visitors from one segment, but low VE scores, there's an opportunity to adjust your programme to appeal to the segment in question. Using this approach, you can design a much more targeted, year-round programme.

A word of warning: if your sample sizes are low when you're looking at these results, they won't be representative, but the data will still give you a clue about where to focus.

Audience Insight

When you are designing experiences on busy days, begin by asking 'who am I doing this for?'

The Audience Insight model helps us understand our visitors' needs and expectations. It combines a view of:

- Life stage (young families have different expectations to retired friends, for example, and will have different practical commitments).
- Attitudes, specifically, what they like to do on a day out, their mind set and motivation.

Useful links

- [Supporter Intelligence](#)
- [MI Dashboard](#)
- [Audience Insight](#)

Who can help

- [VE consultant](#)
- [Marketing and communications consultants](#)
- [Central or regional insight teams and champion](#)

Case study 1: Your annual visitor pattern

What Supporter Intelligence shows

Using the reports available, you will be able to see whether your property follows the typical tourist pattern (busy during the holidays). Properties with a strong base of local, repeat visitors (such as Attingham and Belton) will have a flatter pattern of visitor numbers and are less reliant on seasonal events and holidays. Properties with a strong seasonal attractions in the garden will have a different pattern again, for example Anglesey Abbey and Sheffield Park.

What's the right pattern of visitors?

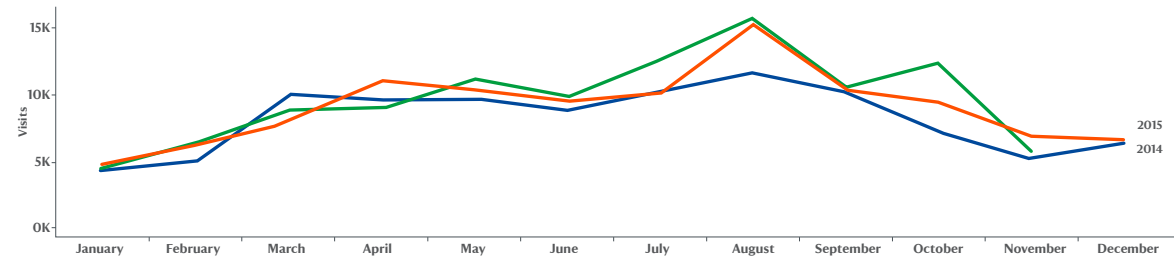
What's the ideal shape of your visitor numbers graph? Do you want to flatten the seasonal peaks by boosting visits during quieter times? Targeting local audiences during off peak months, or encouraging families to come back outside the holidays by providing a quality year round offer could help to flatten the pattern.

Does your programme drive growth at the right time?

On top of the member visits graph, draw a line showing the annual highlights of your programme. How does this compare with visitor numbers?

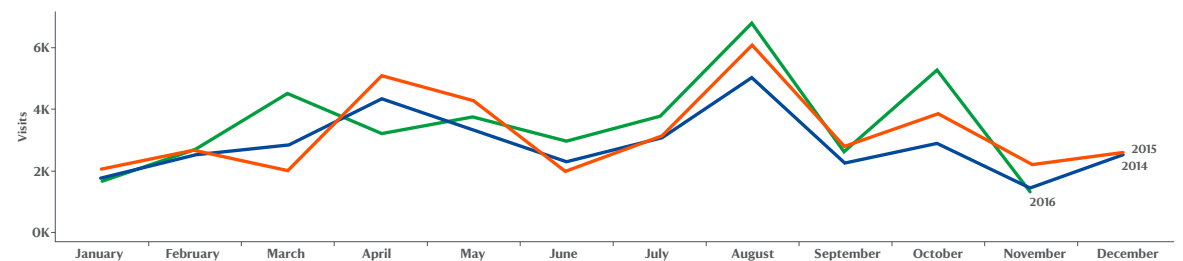
If it follows roughly the same shape, with most of your visitor programme taking place during your busiest months, consider whether that's the right approach. Would you be better off attracting more visitors in quieter times? Or if your programming is concentrated in the quieter months but you're not seeing a boost in numbers, are you attracting the right audiences? The programming training covers this in more detail.

When do our members visit? Adult memberships



Visitor numbers at Baddesley Clinton: this property has a strong local repeat audience, which is clear in the relatively flat line for 2014. In 2015 and 2016, the property has developed its holiday offer, particularly for families, and this can be seen in the more pronounced peaks in the family members around Easter, August and October half term.

When do our members visit? Family memberships



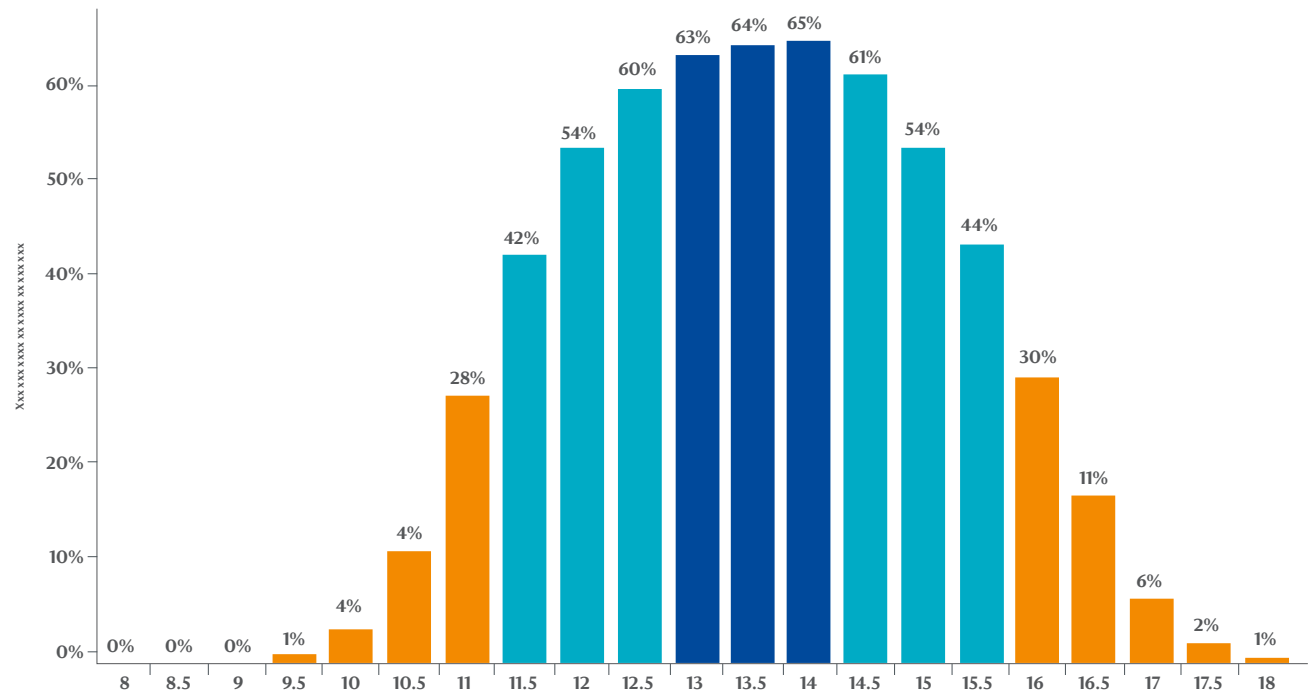
*Remember, Supporter Intelligence only shows scanned member visits. It doesn't include payers or those entering for free. If you have time, you could create your own graphs using your property PRS data to include all visitors.

Case study 2: identifying your daily visitor pattern

What's the busiest time of day?

Research into when people typically arrive and how long people typically stay gives us an indication of how many people are likely to be on site at any one time. In detail:

- At the majority of properties, especially the larger ones, there will be a 'bell curve' in the number of visitors on site during a day. The peak arrival time is around 11am, with majority of visitors on site during the middle of the day.
- This bell curve shape will generally apply; its height, width and the steepness of the curve will be influenced by the month, the day, the week, and the audience type (segment).
- A handful of properties (usually smaller ones) do not fit this pattern. Their visitors tend to come for a morning or for an afternoon. There may be a double peak, with high visitor traffic before and after lunch.
- At a typical medium-to-large property, peak footfall occurs between 2pm and 2.30pm, with 65% of the daily visitors on site at that time. So if you had 1000 visitors in a day, at your busiest you would have 650 people on site.



This graph shows the typical footfall bell curve. You may see this graph skew towards the morning in the winter months – people choose to visit earlier in the day to catch the light.

Rob Frecknall, source Visitor Survey data 2010-2014

Follow on action

Make sure you understand the typical peaks throughout a day, and use this information to plan staff and volunteer rotas – how many people you need, where you need them most (car park, reception, cafe, shop) and the best times to take breaks.

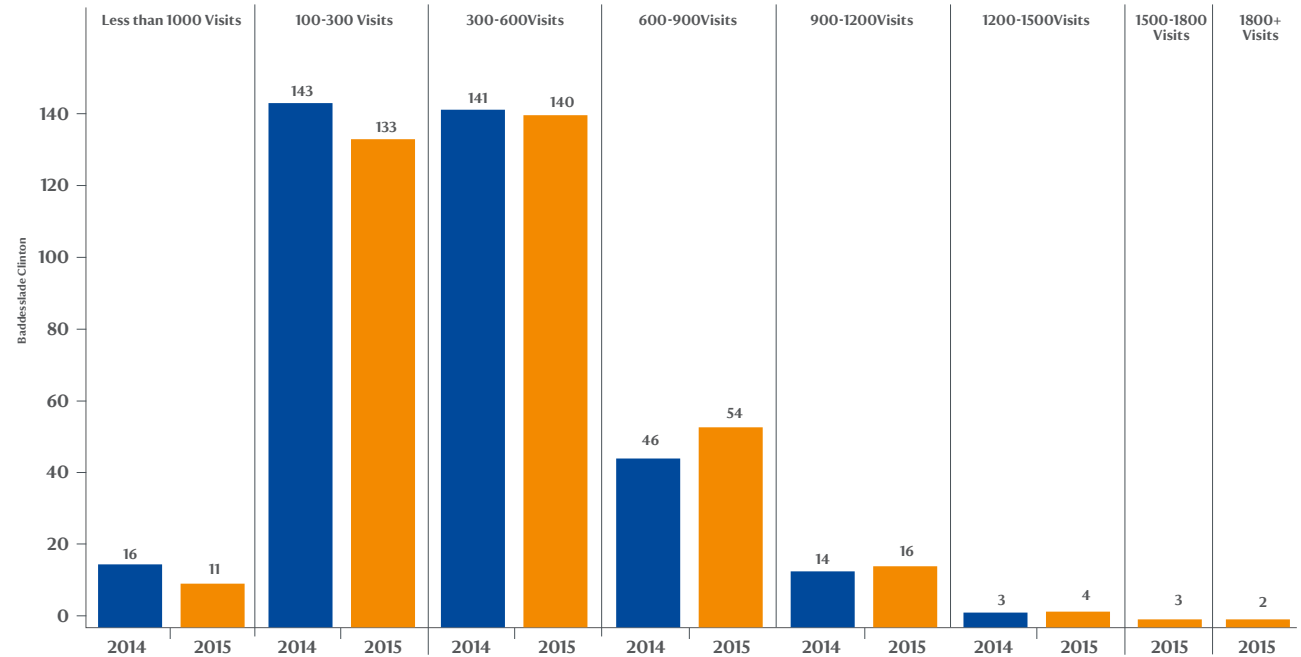
Case study 3: identifying peak days

Are you seeing more peaks?

This example compares peak days year on year. It shows a decrease in quieter days (up to 600 visitors) and an increase in busier days. In 2015 the property had nine days with over 1200 visitors compared to three in 2014.

Not surprisingly six of these days were around seasonal holidays (Easter, May Bank Holidays, the Christmas Fair weekend). The other three peak days were during the first week in August, a pattern that was not repeated in 2016. If you can work out the reason for a peak day (weather, programme), you can get better at predicting busy days in the future.

(Remember for this graph in particular that the data is for scanned members only – your peak days may well have more payers than average.)



Case study 4: identifying visitor growth

What's driving growth or decline in our visitor members?

Field – Supporter Group

This will show you where you have an increase in visits from particular audience groups. For instance, if you're attracting more people from a younger audience (Young Families and Young Independents, including couples with children under 5), you will see peaks in your visitor numbers around the holidays.

Field – Drive Time

If you are seeing an increase in visitors from within a 30-minute* drive of your property, you should see a flatter seasonal pattern in your visitor numbers.

Follow on action

If you are seeing a growth in a younger, more local audience, you may need to think about your seasonal programme so you can really make the most of their appetite for repeat visits.

* 'Local' could be up to a 60-minute drive away, depending on your location, for example if you're in a very rural area.



If you'd like this information in an alternative format, please email Sarah Kinnersley
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