Museum of Natural History & Science

Cincinnati Museum Center

The Family Nano: Engaging Family Audiences through Festivals and Evening Events

Museum of Natural History & Science presents five science festivals a year. The festivals include NanoDays the first weekend in April, BugFest the first Saturday in June, National Fossil Day and National Chemistry Weekend in October, and Batfest- the last Saturday of October.

Large festivals have several goals:

* Form lasting partnerships with Cincinnati Museum Center and local organizations to promote science education
* Establish Museum of Natural History & Science, Cincinnati Museum Center as an educational resource for families, teachers, homeschool groups, and other local organizations in the tri-state area
* Grow revenue generating programs and increase family memberships to Cincinnati Museum Center
* Create engaging, captivating and accurate science programs that encourage exploration, investigation and application of science information after a museum visit.

**Cincinnati Museum Center inspires people of all ages to learn more about our world through science; regional history; and educational, engaging and meaningful experiences**

The most successful of the science festivals is BugFest, a day-long event where visitors immerse themselves in the world of arthropods! In 2012, BugFest increased its attendance by 90% and received requests to participate from organizations outside of Ohio. The increase in attendance is attributed to hands-on programming, staff training, and working closely with our Marketing and Communication team, Graphics department, and Social Media staff members to promote festival participants and science activities. Participating organizations are strongly encouraged to present hands-on activities for a family oriented audience.

For a list of BugFest 2012 activities and participants, please go to <http://www.cincymuseum.org/bugfest>

The most popular BugFest activity is insect tasting in the Gnatty Café. For 2 to 3 hours, visitors explore the practice of entomophagy with tasty dishes such as Ants on a Log, scorpions dipped in chocolate, Mopani worm stew, and buffalo cricket dip. The “food” activity is so successful, that food activities have been incorporated into all science festival events except for National Fossil Day.

Borrowing from BatFest’s success, program activities and media promotion practices were applied to the NanoDays event. NanoDays 2012 attendance numbers almost doubled compared to NanoDays 2011 attendance numbers. Festival events include hands-on activities presented by local universities and colleges, business partners, Museum Center’s outreach department, curators and a nano food demonstration featuring, “Exploring Fabrication-Gummy Capsules” an activity from the NanoDays kit. Staff used sodium alginate to encapsulate fruit juices in order to provide our visitors with an edible experience of the nano world.

**Staff, Adult Volunteers and Youth Volunteer Training:**

* All staff are required to select and train each other on NanoDays kit activities
* Staff train Adult Volunteer and Youth Volunteers how to use and present Nano Kit activities
* Nano Kit activities are presented in LITE Lab (Learning, Innovation, Technology, and Education lab) a hands-on STEM lab where visitors can engage in nanoscience 363 days a year.
* Partnerships with local university and college staff and graduate students, American Chemical Society members, local business partners facilitate additional training for staff and adult volunteers as needed**.**

**Challenges:**

* Create program base
* Festival budget
* Introducing new science topic
* Scheduling training sessions
* Selecting festival date
* Identifying business partners and local organizations to support and participate in festival
* Staffing festival
* Meeting visitor expectations
* Communication across museum departments for festival support
* **Be patient and flexible!!!**

**Possible Solutions**

* Start small! Incorporate existing nanoscience programs with nanoscience kit.
* Contact universities, colleges and local American Chemical Society members for program ideas and training. NISEnet.com
* Festival budget: Provide festival space and audience (visitors); presenters present activities for free. Form relationship with business partners for sponsorship. Grants.
* Demonstrate why and how nanoscience is fun, exciting, and relevant to staff and visitor way of life now and in the future. Excite young visitors with nanoscience kit activities and information.
* Incorporate nano kit activities into daily floor programs. The more visitors engage in nanoscience the more comfortable they become with the concept.
* Make kit activities your own. Don’t be afraid to try different ways to present activities.
* Contact NISEnet partners for suggestions
* Be patient and flexible!

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