Splendor in the Gallery

What Visitors Said about the Newly Reopened National Portrait Gallery

Office of Policy and Analysis
Smithsonian Institution

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Image Credits

Front Cover: Opening ceremony for the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery in downtown Washington on July 1, 2006. Photograph by Robin Weiner, Smithsonian Institution

Back Cover: George Washington by Gilbert Stuart, as installed in “America’s Presidents,” National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. Photograph by Hugh Talman, Smithsonian Institution.
Preface

In July 2006, the Smithsonian Institution inaugurated the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture. The Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery, which occupy the Reynolds Center, show their inspirational art and portrait collections on three floors of one of the most innovative spaces in Washington, DC.

Shortly after the opening, Marc Pachter, the Director of the National Portrait Gallery, asked the Office of Policy and Analysis to conduct a study of visitors to document their reactions to the renovated galleries. Hopefully, this study meets his needs and further attunes the Gallery to audience interests and requirements.

Personally, I thank Marc Pachter for his understanding of the importance of a commitment to visitors. The Office of Policy and Analysis has benefited from his deep reservoir of experience, knowledge, and credibility, as well as his ability to implement change and achieve critical goals.

I also wish to thank four members of my staff. Kathleen Ernst, Whitney Watriss, and Ioana Munteanu, who carried out this study, and continually ensure timely, relevant and accurate work. Lance Costello once again very ably designed one of our reports.

Carole M.P. Neves

Director, Office of Policy and Analysis
Introduction

_This is a place where we as Americans can stand proudly and proclaim, “This is what a free people can do.”_

Remarks by Smithsonian Chancellor and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John G. Roberts, Jr. at the opening ceremony of the Donald W. Reynolds Center, June 21, 2006

In July 2006, the newly named Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture (DWRC) – home to the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery (NPG) and Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) – re-opened to the public in the renovated Patent Office Building (POB), the third oldest federal building in Washington, built circa 1830 to 1840. After six years of being closed, visitors could again view the collections of art and portraiture held by the two museums – but now in greatly improved vaulted galleries showing many of the original architectural features and illuminated with natural light from 550 windows (coated with art-protecting filters) and two reopened skylights a city block long. As visitors move through the building, they can see a myriad of restored features of the original building, such as the curving double staircase, porticoes, stained glass, and marble floors.

While in the past the POB was split in half, with NPG on the south side and SAAM on the north, and with each having separate entrances, the two currently share the F and G Street entrances. The galleries of the two museums now occupy alternate sides of the building on each floor.

During the six years it was closed to the public, NPG’s programming underwent a renovation of its own, the goal being to expand its telling of the story of America through portraiture. While its collections were once subject to a “dead ten years” collection policy, they now encompass portraits of living individuals, both famous and ordinary, who speak to the achievements and interests of our time. And NPG embraces contemporary artists who experiment with the many possibilities of portraiture in the 21st century – as exemplified by the exhibition of portraits produced by 51 finalists from among 4,000 entries in NPG’s first-ever national portrait competition. Many of these newer works – for example, one of a three dimensional child’s head hanging from the ceiling – are in marked contrast to the traditional realistic paintings of individuals sitting or standing in formal poses.
Soon after the re-opening, NPG Director Marc Pachter asked the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to conduct a survey of visitors to the new DWRC, with a focus on the experiences they had in the Portrait Gallery. How did visitors react to the reinvented space and newly configured presentations of NPG holdings? How attractive were the labels and other information, both in terms of content and legibility? To what extent were visitors interested in the latest trends in portraiture, or contemporary portraiture, which is more about the “art” and which depicts people who may not be famous Americans? What brought visitors to the Center, and once inside the exhibition spaces, were they aware whether they were in NPG or SAAM? What did they think of the public amenities in the Center as a whole? How satisfied were they with their overall visit and with specific experiences they might have had? And what were the demographic characteristics of the visitors?

**Methodology**

To assess the level of visitor satisfaction with the Gallery and selected experiences and amenities offered in the Center, and to answer specific questions raised by NPG’s director, the OP&A study team asked visitors to fill out a pre-tested one-page questionnaire. The team conducted the survey on December 9, 10, 13, and 14, 2006. Using variable interval sampling, the study team asked 558 eligible visitors exiting the Reynolds Center at both the F and G Street exits to complete the questionnaire. Almost four in five visitors (441) did so, for a completion rate of 79%. Most of those who declined to participate stated that they had insufficient time.¹

The survey consisted of multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions that asked visitors to state the highlights of their visit and what would have improved it. In analyzing the data, the study team looked both at how visitors overall responded to different questions and at the patterns of responses of visitors when broken out by age, local versus out-of-town residence, and repeat versus first-time visit. In looking at levels of satisfaction, the survey instrument used a five-point scale of poor-fair-good-excellent-superior. Although both excellent and superior can be considered indicators of satisfaction, in this study the OP&A team focused its analysis on the percentages of visitors marking superior, the highest possible rating. The frequency of other ratings, including excellent, for all visitors can be found in Appendix A.

Two cautionary points about the survey need to be noted. First, this survey posed an unusual challenge. Of necessity, it had to be administered at the exits of the Reynolds Center in order

¹ The results presented in this report are representative of the visitors exiting the Reynolds Center during the period of the survey and have a 95% probability of being within a margin of error of ± 5%.
to obtain information about people’s entire visit. However, because the Center houses two museums, the study team could not always be sure that visitors were in fact responding just about NPG, or whether at times they were unable to distinguish NPG from SAAM. Second, NPG management wanted to get a sense of how visitors to the Reynolds Center and the Gallery were responding to the newly reopened facility and asked for the study to be conducted in 2006. The study team did not conduct the survey until December of that year, to allow as much time as possible to elapse from the opening to minimize any bias in visitorship that good reviews and natural curiosity about the Reynolds Center might create. The study team cannot be certain to what extent the novelty factor of the Center and forthcoming holiday season might have affected the demographics of visitors. For example, did a desire to buy gifts for the holidays lead people to the Reynolds Center who might not usually have come? Was the novelty factor still in play – did people who would not normally visit NPG come to the Center to see the renovation?

**Organization of the Report**

This report consists of two main sections and several appendices. The next section presents the key findings from the survey, while the following one contains the study team’s observations about the survey results and some implications for NPG. Appendix A contains the survey instrument and response frequencies. Appendices B through E have lists of responses to “other” and open-ended questions.
Survey Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Surveyed Visitors

Knowing who your visitors are is the first step in understanding their needs and expectations and providing what they want. Below is the demographic profile of responding visitors.

Gender: Fifty-three percent of respondents were female, and 47% were male.

Age: The average age was 43. In terms of generational cohorts, Generation Y was the largest (Figure 1).

Education2: A very high percentage of visitors aged 25 and older (66%) said they possessed a graduate/professional degree, and another 26% said they had earned a bachelor’s degree. Of the remaining visitors aged 25 and older, 4% had completed one or more years of college, 2% had an associate degree, and 1% marked high school graduate or less.

Figure 1. Age Profile of Visitors to the Reynolds Center by Generation


2 The percentages do not always equal 100 because of rounding.
Race and ethnicity: The vast majority of surveyed visitors identified themselves as White (90%). The largest minority group was Asian (6%), followed by African American/Black (5%); for other groups, the figure was 1% or less. Five percent of all respondents said they were of Latino/Hispanic origin. On average, White visitors were more likely to be older than those in other visitor groups (44 vs. 33 years of age). While all generations were overwhelmingly White, Generation X and Y visitors included 23% and 14% minority visitors, respectively, vs. a range of 3-6% for the other generations.

Residence: About two fifths (38%) of responding visitors lived in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, 58% lived elsewhere in the United States, and 4% lived in other countries.

Visit Background

History with NPG: Surveyed visitors were asked if they had been to NPG before they were intercepted for this study. About half of the respondents (49%) said they were visiting for the first time (new visitors). Of the repeat visitors — those who said they had been to NPG before the day they were surveyed — 31% had already visited the gallery since it reopened in July 2006, and 30% said they had visited it before the building closed for renovation in 2002. Those who had visited NPG before it closed were older on average (54 vs. 38 years of age).

Reasons for visiting: Visitors could select a number of reasons for visiting the Reynolds Center from a list, or they could write in another reason. Their responses, in order of frequency, were:

- To see NPG — 68% (Table 1) (44% said they came only to visit NPG)
- To see SAAM — 40% (29% said they came only to visit SAAM)

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3 The percentages total more than 100 as visitors could check more than one answer.
4 Based on zip codes provided by visitors.
5 The percentages total more than 100 as visitors could check more than one answer.
• For other reasons (such as to see something in particular, for example, a special exhibition, or to visit the museum shop) – 17% (see also Appendix B)

• To see the renovated POB – 12%

It was not possible to determine from the data whether people who said they were coming to NPG did so to see the Gallery in general or to see or do something specific, such as to view a temporary exhibition.

Table 1. Profile of Visitors Who Came to See NPG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total visitors</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New visitors</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited NPG before it closed</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited NPG since it reopened</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information was useful</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just the right amount of information</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall experience was superior</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal enjoyment was superior</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit was better than expected</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to your own life/world was superior</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with famous Americans was superior</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Greater understanding of the American Experience” was superior</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of national pride was superior</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw Portraiture Now and/or The Portrait Competition</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of interest in contemporary portraiture</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resides in the DC metropolitan area</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited alone</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited with other adults</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Visit group composition:** Three in five survey respondents (58%) visited the Reynolds Center with one or more adults, 6% were adults accompanied by children and/or teenagers, and 2% were part of an organized group. One in three (33%) responding visitors came alone. By age group, Generation Y had the smallest number of visitors coming alone – 22% – in contrast to around 40% for other generations.

**On the Day of the Visit**

**Contemporary portraiture:** A question of special interest to NPG director Mark Pachter was the extent of visitors’ interest in “portraiture as an art form, e.g., our exhibits when the sitters are not famous Americans but [where] they can see the latest trends in portraiture.” At the time of the survey, NPG offered two exhibitions showing the latest trends in portraiture – *Portraiture Now* and *The Portrait Competition*.

Close to half (46%) of survey respondents said they had a high interest in contemporary portraiture; two in five (41%) rated it as so-so; less than one in ten (8%) said they were not interested; and 5% said they didn’t know. Generation Y had the highest percentage of highly interested visitors and Leading Edge Boomers the lowest percentage. More than half (54%) of the responding visitors said they saw *Portraiture Now* and/or *The Portrait Competition*; two fifths (37%) did not see either exhibition; and the remaining 9% said they did not know whether they had seen the exhibitions.

**Labels:** Another issue of interest to NPG leadership was the attractiveness of the labels in terms of content and legibility. To address this question, OP&A asked respondents to choose one or more of seven statements that best described their experience with the labels/information. Sixty-six percent of respondents agreed that “information was useful to me,” and 51% said it was “just the right information.” Less than 10% expressed negative comments about the labels (see Appendix C).

**High points of the visit:** Respondents were asked to answer the open-ended question “What were the high points of your visit today?” The high points relating to
Which visitors were most likely to have a high level of interest in contemporary portraiture?

- Those who rated the experience “connection to your own life/world” as superior
- Those who reported seeing *Portraiture Now* and/or *The Portrait Competition*
- Members of Generation Y and Matures
- DC metro area residents
- Those who rated their overall experience at NPG as superior
- Those who came to see NPG specifically
- Those who said their overall visit experience was better than expected

NPG* that were cited by more than 10% of the 202 people (46% of all respondents) who wrote in responses were (see also Appendix D for a full listing of the responses):

- Presidential portraits in *America’s Presidents*
- The temporary exhibition *Josephine Baker: Image and Icon*
- Some other NPG exhibition or particular period or genre of portraiture

**Awareness of museum space:** As noted, NPG and SAAM share the same building, occupying spaces on either the east or west side of the building depending on the floor. NPG leadership was curious to know, given this new configuration, to what extent visitors were aware whose spaces they were in.

Slightly over one third (35%) of responding visitors said they were always aware which museum they were in, 49% were sometimes aware, and 16% were never aware. The percentages were the same in the case of just those visitors who said they had visited NPG since it reopened. Men were slightly more likely than women to indicate that they were always aware

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* Respondents also listed high points that related to SAAM, such as the temporary exhibitions *An Impressionist Sensibility: The Halff Collection* and *Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination*. In addition, 24 people cited high points that referred to SAAM’s collections (artists or artworks), the open-storage Luce Center, and/or general genres or periods of American art.
which museum they were in (39% vs. 32%), and women were more likely to say they were never aware (21% vs. 10%).

Reynolds Center visitor amenities: A visitor’s experience with amenities such as signage and restrooms can influence his/her overall experience. The opinions of visitors about amenities such as directions to the exhibitions, places to sit and relax, the museum store, and the two restaurants were of special interest to NPG leadership.

Surveyed visitors gave “directions to find exhibitions, restrooms, etc.” and “places to sit and relax” relatively equal ratings (Figure 2). About two in ten (16%) rated “directions to find exhibitions, restrooms, etc.” as superior, and 19% rated “places to sit and relax” as superior. Only around three fifths (63%) and two fifths (37%) of respondents rated the museum store and the restaurants, respectively. Of those providing a rating, 11% marked the museum store as superior, while 4% gave that rating to the restaurants.

Figure 2. Ratings for Visitor Amenities
Surveyed visitors were asked to write down what improvements they would suggest (see also Appendix E). Of the 100 visitors who suggested improvements (some providing more than one suggestion), 18 (18%) mentioned issues with the restaurants, including their high cost and low quality. Fifteen (15%) referenced signage, including better directions to exhibitions or amenities, and eight (8%) called for more seating.

**Visitor Experiences**

*Overall visitor satisfaction:* OP&A looked at three things in assessing overall visitor satisfaction: (1) whether the visit was better or worse than expected, (2) rating for overall experience, and (3) rating for personal enjoyment.

*Meeting the expectations of visitors.* More than half of the surveyed visitors (56%) said their experience was *better than expected*, 44% said it was *about as expected*, and 1% said it was *worse than expected* (see the box below).7

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**Which visitors were more likely to say their experience in NPG was better than expected?**

- Those for whom the following experiences were *superior*:
  - “Feelings of national pride”
  - “Greater understanding of ‘the American Experience’”
  - “Overall experience”
  - “Identification with famous Americans”
  - “Personal enjoyment”
- Those who saw *Portraiture Now* and/or *The Portrait Competition*
- Those who found the label information useful
- Those who had a *high* interest in contemporary portraiture
- Men
- Repeat visitors
- Those who found “Places to sit and relax” and “Directions to exhibitions, restrooms, etc.” to be *superior*

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7 The percentages total more than 100 because of rounding.
**Personal enjoyment and overall experience.** The OP&A study team asked surveyed visitors to score their “personal enjoyment” and “overall experience” on a five-point scale ranging from poor to superior. Forty percent rated their “personal enjoyment” as superior, and 30% rated their “overall experience” as superior (Figure 3).

**Specific visitor experiences.** The study solicited visitor opinions about specific experiences of importance to NPG management. Survey respondents rated the following experiences as superior (Figure 3):

- “Identification with famous Americans” – 23%
- “Greater understanding of ‘the American Experience’” – 23%
- “Feelings of national pride” – 22%
- “Connection to your own life/world” – 20%

### Which visitors were more likely to give superior ratings to “overall experience” and “personal enjoyment”?

**“Overall experience”**
- Those who had visited the Reynolds Center since it reopened
- Those who lived in the DC metropolitan area
- Those who had a high interest in contemporary portraiture

**“Personal enjoyment”**
- Those who were accompanied by other adults
- Those who said the labels had “just the right information”

Both “Overall experience” and Personal enjoyment”
- Matures (Generation Xers were the lowest)
- Repeat visitors to NPG
- Those who had a better than expected experience
By age group, Generations X and Y were less likely than other generations to rate “Connections to your own life/world” as superior. Generation X was far less likely and Matures far more likely than other generations to rate “Greater understanding of ‘the American Experience’” as superior.

**Some Characteristics of Key Audiences**

Based on research at other Smithsonian museums, including art ones, it is useful to break total visitors into certain groupings and to compare their characteristics. That type of analysis can serve to guide programming and other decisions geared to serving specific audiences. Generally, museums are interested in three key audiences:

- New visitors, because museums want to get them back and have them become loyal repeat visitors
- Repeat visitors, because they are the core of a museum’s visitorship, and because retention of this group and more frequent visits are major goals
- Local visitors, because important year-round visitors tend to come from this group
Museums are also interested in two generations:

- Baby Boomers, because of their numbers, their high percentage of repeat visitors, and their forthcoming entry into retirement, with what those factors imply for leisure time and time with family, particularly grandchildren

- Generation Y, again because of their numbers and because they represent perhaps the most critical future audience

Profiles of these audiences are presented below in Tables 2-4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>New (%)</th>
<th>Repeat (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total visitors</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Came to see NPG specifically</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited NPG before it closed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visited NPG since it reopened</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information was useful</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just the right amount of information</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall experience was superior</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal enjoyment was superior</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit was better than expected</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to your own life/world was superior</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with famous Americans was superior</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Greater understanding of ‘the American Experience’” was superior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of national pride was superior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw Portraiture Now and/or The Portrait Competition</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>High level of interest in contemporary portraiture</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Resides in the DC metropolitan area</td>
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<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visited alone</td>
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<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visited with other adults</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>37 yrs</td>
<td>48 yrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generation Y</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
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### Table 3. Profile of Local Visitors to the Reynolds Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Local (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total visitors</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New visitors</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Came to see NPG specifically</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited NPG before it closed</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visited NPG since it reopened</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information was useful</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Just the right amount of information</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
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<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal enjoyment was superior</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>High level of interest in contemporary portraiture</td>
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<td>African American</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited alone</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited with other adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>43 yrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generation Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Gen Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total visitors</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Came to see NPG specifically</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visited NPG before it closed</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visited NPG since it reopened</td>
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<tr>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>Personal enjoyment was superior</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identification with famous Americans was superior</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Greater understanding of the American Experience” was superior</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw Portraiture Now and/or The Portrait Competition</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of interest in contemporary portrait</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resides in the DC metropolitan area</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited alone</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited with other adults</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observations**

Overall, people who responded to the survey were positive about their visits, based on their ratings for the three general measures of satisfaction – a better than expected visit and a superior rating for “overall experience” and “personal enjoyment.” This pattern held true across age groups, repeat and first-time visitors, and local and out-of-town visitors, although with some variations in the percentages of each group expressing the highest level of satisfaction.

NPG emerged as the strongest draw to the Center when looking at visitors as a whole and was attractive to new and Generation Y visitors. Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine if visitors were drawn to NPG as a whole or to see special temporary exhibitions, such as *Josephine Baker* and *The Portrait Competition*. It might be worth NPG investigating further what most motivates different groups of people to visit – for example, is it temporary exhibitions or the collections in general?

Based on survey responses, including the open-ended comments, what visitors most liked were aspects of NPG relating to content, such as:

- The collections in general and specific portraits
- Specific exhibitions such as the *Portrait Competition*, *President's Hall*, and *Josephine Baker*
- Contemporary portraiture – around half the visitors indicated a high level of interest, and those who saw the two exhibitions of contemporary portraiture tended to be slightly more satisfied with their overall experiences and to have had a better than expected experience. A further point about the visitors who had a high level of interest in contemporary portraiture is that they tended to be younger and local. The implication is that there is a significant and willing audience for this category of portraiture, and that a program of regular, changing exhibitions of contemporary portraits might serve to boost year-round and repeat visitation by these important categories of visitors.
- The information provided in the exhibitions.
When looking at the data on the survey respondents, the OP&A study team was struck by three things in addition to the strength of NPG as a draw to the Center: the existence of a loyal core of repeat visitors, the age distribution, and the composition of the visit group. The first two augur well for NPG, while the third may represent a missed opportunity:

- A third of visitors had been to NPG before it closed, and a significant number of visitors had come to the Center more than once in the six months since it opened. NPG has a solid base of interested and loyal patrons. The Gallery might want to learn more about the needs and expectations of this key group to ensure that they remain loyal and that their ranks grow.

- NPG attracted a large number of Generation Y-ers, an audience that museums in general try to attract. While the majority of visitors in this age group came from out of town, it is noteworthy that over two fifths were local. Again, knowing more about the interests and expectations of this audience would be useful in guiding programming. Research elsewhere suggests, for example, that the social experience in a museum is very important to this generation. This is borne out by the lower percentage of Generation Y-ers visiting alone (22%) compared to other generational cohorts (all around 40%). Research also suggests that effective marketing for this generation requires different approaches than museums typically use. Being able to tailor programming and marketing to this audience will increase the potential for creating another loyal core of repeat visitors.

- As noted, the percentage of visitors who came with children was low. Unfortunately, the survey was not directed toward understanding the reasons for this pattern. Generation X, the generation with elementary school age children, had the lowest number in attendance at 15%. Another possible explanation might be the time of the year at which the survey was conducted – right before Christmas. People may have been combining Christmas shopping with museum-going, in which case they might not have wanted children along. If NPG is interested in attracting visitors with children, here too it might want to investigate the reasons for the low attendance of adults with children and how to change that pattern.

Again, consistent with attendance data at Smithsonian museums (and museums elsewhere), there were not many minority visitors. There may be a missed opportunity here, as the DC
metropolitan area is home to large numbers of minorities, many of whom fit the profile of
museum-goers in terms of income and education. NPG and SAAM both have collections with
strong representations of minority artists and artwork depicting minorities. Unfortunately, the
survey was not designed to provide an answer to why there were not more minority visitors, and
this may be another fruitful area of study. For example, are minority groups more or less likely
to be attracted to artists or artwork dealing with their race or ethnicity? How aware are people
about the collections held at the Reynolds Center? Would cross-marketing with other museums
or organizations, such as the National Museum of African Art, boost visitorship by African
Americans?

Amidst the overall positive responses of visitors to NPG, two negatives stood out in the survey
results. From the open-ended comments (bearing in mind that these represent the opinions only
of those visitors who chose to respond), some visitors noted problems reading the labels because
of the size of the font and lack of adequate contrast between type and background. This may
be an issue in particular for the Baby Boomer and Mature generations, for whom small type
and lack of contrast can be a particular issue. As noted, a number of comments were critical
of the restaurants, citing high costs, low quality, and limited selection of the offerings, and the
lack of a place just to sit and have a reasonably priced cup of coffee. The study team was also
struck, considering the crowds at other Smithsonian eateries, by how many visitors marked
“not applicable” when it came to rating the restaurants. Is this an indication that relatively few
visitors are availing themselves of the restaurants, and if so, why is that? NPG and SAAM might
want to investigate whether the restaurants do or do not satisfy visitors. They are an important
visitor amenity, and they are an opportunity for a good social experience for visitors coming with
others. Eateries are also an important source of revenue, but for the Reynolds Center to realize
that potential in a neighborhood that offers a wide range of choices for food and coffee breaks, its
eateries must do a better job of meeting visitor interests.

It is unusual for two museums to occupy the same building, and over the years NPG and SAAM
have surveyed visitors to see if they know which museum they are in and if it matters. A fairly
high percentage of visitors were not aware which museum they were seeing, and this was not a
concern for them, based on their having rated their overall experience with the Gallery as high as
other visitors. The study team suspects that the percentage of visitors who did not know which
museum they were in may in fact be higher than the data indicate – even when people said
they knew, their answers to other questions tended to suggest otherwise. This pattern certainly
was evident when the team was pre-testing the questionnaire and interviewing respondents specifically on this question after they had completed the test questionnaire.

Many of the suggestions for improvements made by visitors related to amenities or subject matter for exhibitions. At the same time, many visitors did not distinguish between SAAM and NPG. These finding suggest that there is significant room for joint endeavors by the two. For example, NPG and SAAM share responsibility for most amenities, including restaurants. Both would benefit from more satisfied customers of the restaurants. Both presumably are interested in increasing and developing repeat visits by younger generations, particularly those living locally, and both have much to offer local minority residents. Joint programming and marketing, including promotion of the restaurants, would seem to offer the best potential for return on investment.
Appendix A. National Portrait Gallery Visitor Survey Questionnaire and Frequencies of Responses

National Portrait Gallery Visitor Survey, December 2006*

Why did you come to this building today?

12% To see the renovated old Patent Office Building
68% To see the National Portrait Gallery
40% To see the Smithsonian American Art Museum
17% Other [See Appendix B]

Have you visited the National Portrait Gallery before today?

49% No, this is my first visit
31% Yes, I visited since it reopened on July 1, 2006
30% Yes, I visited about _ times before it closed for renovation in 2002

As you viewed the artworks, were you aware if the space you were in was the Portrait Gallery or the American Art Museum?

35% Always
49% Sometimes
16% Never

Thinking about labels/information in the Portrait Gallery exhibitions, which apply to you?

1% Text was hard to understand
66% Information was useful to me
6% Visually, labels were difficult to read
2% Too much information
7% Too little information
51% Just the right information
5% Hard to find label about the object
5% Other [See Appendix C]

Please rate your experience in the Portrait Gallery today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Superior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your overall experience</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to your own life / world</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with famous Americans</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater understanding of “the American Experience”</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal enjoyment</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of national pride</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages may not always equal 100 because of rounding or because visitors could mark more than one answer.
Please rate these visitor services based on your visit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Superior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directions to find exhibitions, rest rooms, etc.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places to sit and relax</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum store</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Was your experience in the NPG better or worse than expected?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About as expected</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What were the high points of your visit today?

[See Appendix D]

Did you see the exhibits *Portraiture Now* and/or *The Portrait Competition*?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How interested are you in contemporary portraiture where the sitters are not famous Americans?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So-so</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What would improve your visit to the NPG today?

[See Appendix E]

What is your gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your age?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you of Latino/Hispanic origin?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What race do you consider yourself to be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native American</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the highest degree of school you completed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate or less</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more years of college</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors degree</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Profes. degree</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Where do you live?  96% United States (specify) Zip code ____________
4% Other country (specify) _________________

In this building today, with whom are you with?  
33% I am alone
2% I am with organized/school group
65% I am with others

If with others, how many people are you with?  
(Mark one or more, write number of people not ages)
(63% marked the option) Adults 18 and Over
(3% marked the option) Youth 12 to 17
(3% marked the option) Children under 12

Analytical variables

Where do you live?  (determined using zip codes)
38% Washington, DC metropolitan area
15% Southeast
13% Mid Atlantic
6% Midwest
3% New England
3% Mountain Plains
6% West
12% Other US
4% Country other than US

Social composition of visit group
33% Alone
2% Organized group
58% Adults only
6% Adult(s) with teenagers or children
Appendix B. Other Reasons Responding Visitors Gave for Visiting the Reynolds Center

Following are the responses of the 83 visitors who marked “Other” to the question about why they came to the Reynolds Center on the day they were intercepted (in descending order of frequency). Note that a visitor might have given more than one reason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibition/Collections-Related</th>
<th>Visitor Amenities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exhibition/Collections-Related</strong></td>
<td><strong>Visitor Amenities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination</em> exhibition (14 people)</td>
<td>Shop (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Josephine Baker: Image and Icon</em> exhibition (11)</td>
<td>Eat (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>An Impressionist Sensibility: The Halff Collection</em> exhibition (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special exhibitions, unspecified (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansel Adams display (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art on Demand (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War exhibit (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk Art exhibit (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for Black, Afro, etc. art (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luce Center (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam Jun Paik art (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait of Einstein (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait of Lincoln (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidency exhibit (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William H. Johnson exhibit (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article re: NPG Director [Marc Pachter] in [Washington Post] Express (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait AAA gallery (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check things missed before (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend recommended it (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist visit (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very interesting – have more text in other museums! (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C. Visitor Opinions About Labels/Information

Following are the written responses of the 19 visitors who marked “Other” when asked their opinion of the labels/information in NPG.

Content
American Experience
   Better labeling of American Experience
   Improve labels American Experience
Bias in the descriptions
Errors
   Ask a Mormon about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young
   Some facts wrong about Brigham Young and Joseph Smith
   One discussion/Cornell panel is incorrect
Label dates on photographs
Leave the sign as is but add another with information on the artist
Loved the Presidents’ bios
Loved history with portraits
More context
More context modern portraits
Not enough in special exhibit on artist’s personal life

Ease of reading
Placement
   Labels too low on wall (back problem)
   Placement too low
Placement coins + labels coins
Sometimes tough to read

Writing
Great quotes
I didn’t like the way sometimes the artist was on top and sometimes in the text
Very well written
Well-written and concise

General
Be more creative
I read some but not others depending on my interest
Wonderful
Appendix D. High Points of the Visit Mentioned by Survey Respondents

Following are the written responses of the 202 respondents who wrote in the high points of their visit to the Reynolds Center.

Exhibition or collections-related
America’s Presidents – 32 comments
  Presidential Gallery
  Presidents’ portraits
Josephine Baker exhibit – 22
  “A delightful surprise”
Halff Collection – Impressionists – 17
Joseph Cornell – 14
  “Especially the Cornell” and “Wonderland”
Portrait Competition – 13
Folk art – 10
Christenberry – 5
  “Christenberry section on the KKK”
Civil War exhibit – 4
  “Excellent”
  “Civil War collection”
Contemporary art – 4
  “Finding the contemporary section”
  “Contemporary art galleries”
Modern art – 4
  “Modern art was excellent but wish there was more, especially photography”
Variety – 4
  “Variety of art – paintings, pictures, sculptures, etc.”
  “Diversity of art and people, both subjects and artists represented”
Luce Center – 3
  “Luce Center collection of paintings”
Paintings – 3
President George Washington portrait – 3
African-American presence – 2
Americans 1960-2000 – 2
  “Contemporary American portraits”
Bravo! exhibit – 2
  “Bravo – film/movies of entertainers”
Busts – 2
Champions exhibit – 2
Edward Hopper paintings – 2
Indian portraits – 2
National Portrait Gallery – 2
Photography – 2
Portraits – 2
Portraits of 20th C Americans – 2
  “Portraits of modern Americans – excellent way to relive our history”
Special exhibits – 2
Spectacular works of art – 2
  “Superior works of art everywhere”
Video montage – 2
  “Video of late night montage fabulous”
Walt Whitman – 2
Ability to get two inches from John Sargent paintings
Alice Neel portraits
Aluminum Foil throne
American Experience – landscapes
American history portraits
Artwork
Bierstadt
Brady
Cartography
Catlin
Charlie Chaplin poster
Child’s head!!
Church
Cold War
Colonial era
Dawoud Bey
Discussion on Isaac Singer and American ethic of corporate paternity and grace
Early American works
Educational
Einstein portrait
Everything – the variety of exhibits is wonderful
Famous people
Gallery
Gold and silver exhibition
Graphic arts exhibition
Great works of art
Heads
Highlights tour great for first visit
Historical portraits prior to photography
Information about the American Presidents
Inventions
James Hampton piece
Just seeing history
(Justice)
Landscape artists
Late 19th Century
Learning about American history through American portraiture (3rd floor exhibit)
Lincoln Gallery
Lincoln portrait
Luce Center tour
Moran pictures
Nina Levy
1900–1930
1950–2000 American portraits
19th century works
Paul Manship sculpture only reason for my visit
Peale
Photographs of American Experience
Portraits on 1st floor
Portraits with comments good and moving
Rare portraits that I recognize from history books
Real thing here
“Many famous pieces I’d seen in reproduction”
Really enjoyed the social justice portraits
Restored portraits
Revolutionary portraits
Richness of content
Rossiter
Salon style 3rd floor
Sculptures
Self-portraits
Sherman portrait
Stories on the plaques
Stuart
Susan B. Anthony sculpture
Text explanations
Tour
TV
20th Century Americans
20th Century collections
When I saw all the World War history
William Wegman

Reynolds Center Building
Building renovation – 4 comments
“Great renovation”
“Enjoyed seeing renovated building”
“Old Patent Office Gallery”
The facility
Great Hall
LaFarge windows
Main gallery
Peace provided by good architecture
Renovation is beautiful
Spectacular spaces
Victorian hall

General
All great
All of it!
Beauty
Cleanliness, brightness
Each time I visit a different exhibit. Today I focused on Walt Whitman and pre-1776
Excellent
Exploring parts of the museum I have yet to visit
General vibe
Great layout
Inspiration

It’s all wonderful starting with the building, space, light, exhibitions, and wayfinding
Relaxing, revealing, revelatory
Not the 3rd floor modern stuff
Size of museum is good – not overwhelming
Very good

Visitor Amenities
Chairs
Closing at 7 pm – do this with more museums
Free coat check room with marble carvings/busts
Furniture
Gift shop
“Found item I was looking for in gift shop”
Good and knowledgeable sales people – what a surprise! Thanks!
Graciousness of desk staff
Polite personnel
Restaurants
“West Side Café – unique area”
“Had lunch at café which was delicious but pricey”
Well lit

Miscellaneous
All Smithsonian is wonderful
Claire (docent) was knowledgeable and enthused
Husband liked hooters
Mr. Fern
Santa Claus impersonation by my boyfriend
Taking this survey!
Time with wife
Appendix E. Improvements Suggested by Survey Respondents

Following are the written responses of the 100 visitors who wrote in suggested improvements.

**Exhibition, program-related**

**Art-related**
- A special overview on this African American contribution each decade
- Another excellent/superior docent overview
- Information about America’s presidents
- It was awfully quiet – maybe a few active tours/presentations

Jean Michael Basquiot
- Less emphasis on pop culture icons
- Less modern art that looks like a kid could do it

Make captions more truthful and less negatively biased

More Civil War
More diverse artists and subjects
More information about modern portraits
More little areas of historic objects with portraits – “Monitor Ship” example

More modern art
More photography
More women in “Champions”

Rearrange the coin display so that each coin can be viewed. Number and label each coin.

Remove Hillary’s picture’s prominent placement

Ryder exhibit

Take advantage of U.S. Army Center of Military History, ARTWORKS by WWI & II, Civil War to today by famous artists during those times. Renee Klish

202-761-5396

**Audio guides**

- Audio guide
- Audio tours
- Electronic guide (headphones with tape)
- Guide to each exhibit
- Really cool if you had earphones connected to portraits like London Portrait Gallery

**Children**

- Exhibits for kids under 18
- If you have an art area for children, parents love that.

**Other**

- Guides
- Information higher up on walls

**Visitor amenities**

**Atrium**

- Completion of the atrium
- Finished atrium roof
- Having the courtyard open
- Long walk around the perimeter to get back to entrance
- Nothing, except completion of unfinished area
- Open up atrium

**Hours**

- Open earlier
- The gallery should be open a lot earlier
Restaurants
A great cafeteria
Better access to café
Better catering at lower prices
Better food facilities – fast and easy
Better restaurant facilities
Cheap coffee
Cheaper cafeteria
Cheaper options in the café
Less expensive coffee in the café
Looking forward to the opening of the cafés
More food services
More seating
Much better fare
Much better layout in café
Much better seating
Open the café
Outdoor café too expensive
Starbucks

Seating
A couple more benches to view art
Better places to sit
More benches to sit on
More benches/chairs to sit
More places to sit in galleries
More seating areas to view paintings
More sitting places in each gallery
Places to sit/rest

Signage
Better signage (4)
Better signage at AAA gallery (good signage to space but nothing at space)

A sign at Metro exit telling which way to turn
Bad wayfinding
Better directions around the museum; signs giving the logic of the layout
Better directions for the bathroom
Better directions to specific special exhibits, i.e., Impressionists
Directions to elevators
It was hard to navigate the museum
Marked cross-walk to 8th St.
No signs to café
Signs to special exhibit
Specific directions at elevators/stairs to special exhibits – we wandered around the 2nd floor looking for Cornell only to find it was on 3rd

Store
Bookstore should sell a document with all famous people and the material on the walls
I wish the gift shop were more imaginative
More material on special exhibits in gift shop – post cards, gifts, etc.
Prices on items in gift shop are not shown on many items
Zach in the museum store needs some more personality

Other
A place to secure an umbrella
Correct information listed on websites – two separate ones listed
Temperature too warm
Web page should note café not open
**General**

**Time**
More time (12 people)
If I knew there were two museums, I would come here when I had more time. There was not enough to see it all.

**Other**
No changes needed (7)
A place to sit while filling out the survey
Closer connection between the two museums
Complimentary champagne!
Free foot massage
Free ice cream
Good to know there are lockers
Have some design
It used to be a hidden treasure
Make it cell phone free!
Saw a museum employee almost brush up against a painting – he walked in front of me. He was carrying cleaning solvents – should this be in the gallery?
Security staff rude