

Private Events, Public Spaces:  
Why Guests Choose Museums as Hosting Sites  
*A Case Study at the Museum of Flight*

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to determine why guests choose museums as hosting sites for their private events. A brief survey of Seattle museum websites reveals that many area institutions offer private event rentals; however, each museum advertises its event program differently, some more effectively than others. The diversity of approaches to museums' special event programs exemplifies a lack of available resources and manuals specifically designed to address private events in non-profit settings.

In response to the dearth of scholarly work in this field, this study used a three-pronged approach to discover what determined guests' choices to hold special events in museums. Using a case study at the Museum of Flight, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of those interviews, this thesis examined a variety of motivating factors (i.e. Advertising, Customer Service, Donor Relationships, Educational Programming, Event Alignment with the Museum's Mission, Operational and Logistical Capabilities, Personal Alignment with Museum's Mission, Repeat Business, Underwriting, and Volunteer Relationships) through five event types (i.e. Birthday Parties, Meetings and Training Seminars, Nonprofit Fundraisers, Receptions and Dinners, and Weddings). This three-pronged methodology, case study, interviews, and analysis, found that the majority of participant's choices were determined by the given museum's operational and logistical capabilities, or by the level of customer service provided by the host institution, and their emotional connection to the institution.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis investigates clients' motivations for choosing the museums as hosting sites for special events, such as Birthday Parties, Meetings and Training Seminars, external Nonprofit Fundraisers, Receptions and Dinners, and Weddings. It explores a range of possibilities that might lead to clients' choices, such as Advertising, Customer Service, Donor Relationships, Educational Programming, Event Alignment with the Museum's Mission, Operational and Logistical Capabilities, Personal Alignment with Museum's Mission, Repeat Business, Underwriting, and Volunteer Relationships. This study seeks to begin the conversation that may lead to identifying the primary factors that govern specific event clients' choices. For example, it examines whether couples choose to hold their wedding at a museum because they are personally aligned with the museum's mission. This study explores if customers hold annual dinners in museums because they are repeats and are familiar with the institution. Further, it considers if nonprofit organizations choose to hold fundraisers in museums because of the venue's operational and logistical capabilities. By employing a three-pronged methodology, a case study at the Museum of Flight (MOF), semi-structured interviews, and detailed analysis of the interview transcripts, this study creates inroads into combining the fields of private event management and nonprofit fundraising.

In order to identify clients' chief motivations, a single case study was conducted at the MOF in Seattle, Washington. The MOF was chosen because it offers clients a dedicated resident event staff, an in-house caterer, and a large selection of educational programming options. In these respects, the MOF event program separates itself from other Seattle area private event

venues.<sup>1</sup> Many guides and manuals detail best practices in private sector event management. In addition, a wide body of literature concerns nonprofit fundraising events. However, no resources or studies were found, that combined these two fields to discuss private events as a revenue source in nonprofit settings. When the economy declined in 2008, museums began to look for innovative ways to generate revenue and attract new audiences.<sup>2</sup> However, the dearth of scholarly work focused on this subject has led to an inconsistent approach to museum private event rentals. If museum event coordinators better understood clients' motivations for choosing their venues, then they could design special event programs that match the vision and needs of their clients while simultaneously raising funds for the museum and awareness of their missions. With targeted research, aimed at specific clients, this study examines the key factors that drive the decision-making process that leads clients to choose museums as hosting sites for private events. In doing so, this initial study attempts to lay the groundwork for an emerging field of study that might combine private event planning and nonprofit fundraising in order to determine the primary motivating factors underlying customers' choices to hold their event in a museum setting, creating additional revenue streams as well as opportunities to further the institution's mission.

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<sup>1</sup> "Martha Stewart Weddings," *50 Ways to Wed in the United States, Washington, the Museum of Flight, Seattle*. <http://www.marthastewartweddings.com/231215/50-ways-wed-united-states/@center/272506/destination-weddings#/115053> (accessed May 22, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Robert W Preucel and Stephen A. Mrozowski, eds. "Media, Museums, and Publics," *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: the New Pragmatism*. 2nd ed. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2010) 554.

## Literature Review

There is a breadth of literature concerning best practices in event planning and management as well as a number of studies detailing effective strategies in nonprofit fundraising events. However, few publications combine these two subjects and consider how nonprofit institutions might generate revenue and attract new audiences through private events while furthering the institutional mission. By examining the literature from both private sector event management as well as nonprofit fundraising, this study explores both fields' applications. In the field of private event management, Donald Getz's *Event Management & Event Tourism* remains particularly helpful for defining terms and categories. Likewise, Judy Allen's *Event Planning* serves as a practical guide to event industry customer service. Jeff Goldblatt's *Special Events: Best Practices in Modern Event Management* furthers understanding of industry standards in event design. Morris Wilburn's *Managing the Customer Experience* summarizes customer loyalty development through effective brand marketing and communication. Alan Wendroff's *Special Events: Proven Strategies in Nonprofit Fundraising* explains how fundraising events can strengthen nonprofit organizations' image within their communities. Daniel Webber's study "Understanding Charity Fundraising Events" investigates guests' motivations for attending nonprofit special events. Together, this body of literature aims to explain customers' motivations for choosing museums as hosting sites for special events.

In the growing field of event planning and management, Donald Getz's *Event Management & Event Tourism* (1997) provides practitioners and scholars with a standardized guide.<sup>3</sup> According to Getz:

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<sup>3</sup> Getz, Donald, *Event Management & Event Tourism* (New York: Cognizant Communication Corporation, 1997), iii.

A special event is a one-time or infrequently occurring event outside the normal program or activities of the sponsoring organizing body. To the customer or guest, a special event is an opportunity for a leisure, social, or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experiences.<sup>4</sup>

To organize the diversity of special occasions, Getz creates an event typology. He classifies events into eight different groups: “Cultural Celebrations, Arts/Entertainment, Business/Trade, Sport Competitions, Educational and Scientific, Recreational, Political/State, and Private Events”.<sup>5</sup> Of these, Business/Trade, and Private Events are the most relevant for this study. For Getz, Business/Trade events are fairs, markets, sales, consumer and trade shows, expositions, meetings and conferences, publicity events, and fundraiser events. He defines Private Events as personal celebrations that include anniversaries, family holidays, rites of passage, or social events, such as parties/galas and reunions.<sup>6</sup> While Getz notes that fundraisers and private events may overlap, i.e. both take place within museums, they occupy separate categories.

Though museums traditionally host internal fundraiser events, Getz’s *Event Studies* (2007) highlights museums, historic houses, and zoos as recently-popular host sites for meetings and conventions. Further, Getz details that prior to this shift in the market, clients commonly turned to large, well-established event venues, such as hotels and banquet centers, as host sites for weddings with banquets, private parties (graduations, *bar and bat mitzvahs*), meetings and conventions, consumer and trade shows, entertainment events, and corporate functions like product launches.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>7</sup> Getz, Donald, *Event Studies* (Burlington: Elsevier, 2007), 147.

Both Getz and Judy Allen note changes in the event planning field from 2002-2007. Allen states in *Event Planning* (2009) that the field of event planning began to shift in 2002. According to her, clients began to employ newly-emerging event planners for their innovation, creativity, and flexibility rather than hiring large, well-established companies. Further, Allen argues that the range and complexity of events has grown because clients “are now looking for planners who [...] understand event design, strategic planning, logistics, timing and budget management [. . .].”<sup>8</sup> She details five principles of event vision, these are: “The Elements – All the Parts That Make Up the Event, The Essentials-Must-Haves, The Environment – Venue and Style, The Energy – Creating a Mood, and The Emotion – Feelings.”<sup>9</sup> According to Allen, successful event planning begins with creatively implementing the client’s event vision.

Joe Goldblatt, author of *Special Events: Best Practices in Modern Event Management* builds on Allen’s argument, claiming that a successful event manager achieves customer satisfaction by designing an event environment that appeals to the five senses: tactile, smell, taste, visual, and auditory. Goldblatt suggests that an event’s quality finds expression through the textures of linens, invitations, as well as the program materials. He also notes the strong connection between memory and scent. While this may be a valuable asset to creating an environment, he cautions that it is important to maintain natural aromas such as plants and flowers. He recommends that event planners should appeal to the guest’s sense of taste, as well as their age, culture, and lifestyle, in order to fully-engage them in the event. He advises that visual elements not only be used for decoration, but also as repetitive signs and logos that help to orient guests. Finally, Goldblatt underscores the vital importance of quality sound systems in event venues due to growing client demands for live bands and technological displays. Goldblatt

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<sup>8</sup> Allen, Judy, *Event Planning: the ultimate guide to successful meetings, corporate events, fund-raising galas, conferences, conventions, incentives and other special events* (Ontario: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), xiii-xviii.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 7-8.

argues that event planners must consider their audience when determining how to appeal to the five senses. He suggests that it is important to creatively compose sensory elements in order to achieve the correct atmosphere for each client.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the sensory elements of event design, Goldblatt proposes that event planners create an environment where guests can be active participants. Clients have the opportunity to watch television and movies on a daily basis. Given that events are one-time experiences that occur outside of the normal range of activity, guests want to engage with their surroundings. Goldblatt advises adding a participatory element into the event design that involves the guest sensuously, physically, and emotionally. He affirms that best practices in event design engage the guest's five senses and participation.<sup>11</sup> Together, these design elements produce events that maintain guest's satisfaction and engagement.

In addition to the sensory and participatory elements of an event, Getz suggests that planners should also consider the event operations and logistics, or the systems that must be in place in order to produce events.<sup>12</sup> In 1997, Getz developed an operations plan that includes the following headers: programming factors, experiential factors, management factors, site/venue factors, other constraints, venue settings, food and beverage, technical support, and service quality. Beneath each header, Getz lists considerations for each category. For example, availability, cost, access, capacity, suitability, flexibility, potential risks, adequacy for emergency, responses, and legal constraints all fall under the category of site/venue factors.<sup>13</sup> Getz notes that the categories may overlap and that each event may have unique operational and logistical concerns, therefore his list is not intended to be all-inclusive. However, he contends

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<sup>10</sup> Goldblatt, Joe, *Special Event: Best Practices in Modern Event Management*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 63-67.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 86-89.

<sup>12</sup> Getz, Donald, *Event Studies* (Burlington: Elsevier, 2007), 275.

<sup>13</sup> Getz, Donald, *Event Management & Event Tourism* (New York: Cognizant Communication Corporation, 1997), 88.

that planners ought to consider these factors in order to ensure customer satisfaction and repeat business.

Morris Wilburn further discusses the topic of client satisfaction in *Managing the Customer Experience* (2007). He explains that American businesses have shifted from acquiring as many customers as possible to trying to obtain as much business as possible from each customer. Wilburn reasons that businesses achieve this through brand loyalty:

a brand [...] gives the consumer a reason to buy one product instead of another. It does this by adding something intangible to the purchase, ownership, or the use of the product. That “something” may be perceptions about broad functional benefits of the product, such as overall quality, or it may be emotional benefits (for example, security, increased status, or meeting the need to nurture).<sup>14</sup>

Customers purchase brands for the experience associated with the products. Wilburn cites examples, such as consumers buying food with a healthy image because they have a desire to become healthier.<sup>15</sup>

Wilburn also holds that consumer’s decisions are not solely based on products; experiences with service personnel also impact purchases. In order to gain loyalty, businesses must meet three customer needs: security, self-esteem, and justice. Business should maintain regular communication with their clients in order to make them feel secure. Building self-esteem requires companies to use signage whenever possible and to be available to answer questions. Wilburn also cautions against using company jargon. Finally, he suggests that businesses can convey a feeling of justice by honoring return policies, prices, and maintaining a level of

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<sup>14</sup> (Wilburn, Morris, *Managing The Customer Experience: A Measurement –Based Approach*, (Milwaukee: ASQ Quality Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

transparency in regards to their manufacturing.<sup>16</sup> By meeting these three emotional needs, Wilburn claims that businesses can build loyalty. In addition, he advises that companies may employ marketing and communications strategies to remind customers that their needs are being met, thereby strengthening customer loyalty.<sup>17</sup>

In the nonprofit sector, special events are also a way to build brand loyalty among stakeholders as well as a marketing and communications strategy that raises money for the organization. Alan Wendroff states in *Special Events: Proven Strategies for Nonprofit Fundraising* (2004) that:

A nonprofit special event is a unique fundraising program that strengthens the nonprofit's image in the community and recruits and involves volunteers; it raises money as well as friends. Special events involve bringing together lay leaders, volunteers, and the nonprofits supporters in a social gathering that educates people regarding the work of the nonprofit in the community.<sup>18</sup>

Though Wendroff suggests that staff and board members may question special events' effectiveness at achieving monetary goals, he addresses these concerns by outlining seven goals for a successful nonprofit fundraising event: 1) raising money, 2) updating the mission statement to educate your constituency, 3) motivating board members and major givers, 4) recruiting volunteers and future board members, 5) expanding the organization's network, 6) marketing the organization, and 7) soliciting endorsements.<sup>19</sup> After establishing fundraising event goals, Wendroff states that an organization should determine which type of event best suits the institution's needs. He provides five special event models: "community-wide special events,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 5-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Wendroff, Alan *Special Events: Proven Strategies for Nonprofit Fundraising* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 2.

auctions, theatre and art gallery opening parties, sporting events, such as golf and tennis tournaments, and testimonial events: award or tribute dinners.” Wendroff advises that nonprofits use these five types to tailor events specifically to the organization.<sup>20</sup> He contends that a customized event, founded on his seven principles, will successfully maintain current stakeholders as well as cultivate new ones.

Daniel Webber published “Understanding Charity Fundraising Events” (2003), to identify guest’s motivation for attending fundraising events. According to Webber, attendee’s motivations can be broken into two categories. First, guests frequent special events to make donations. The second reason that guests attend fundraising events is for their personal benefit. Webber argues the private benefit can be further broken down into eight classifications: 1) Philanthropic, “the donor believes in the underlying charitable cause,”<sup>21</sup> 2) Purely private, the event is a unique, networking opportunity or celebrity appearance,<sup>22</sup> 3) Prestige, the person wishes to be seen at the event,<sup>23</sup> 4) Leadership, “to encourage others to give; show of generosity,”<sup>24</sup> 5) Relationship, “the donor has a direct personal experience of a relevant cause,”<sup>25</sup> 6) Warm glow, “the donor takes enjoyment from giving to charity,”<sup>26</sup> 7) Associated warm glow, “supporting friends or associates who are organizing the event,”<sup>27</sup> 8) Peer pressure, “friends and committee members encourage attendance.”<sup>28</sup> While Webber cites two possible reasons that guests may attend fundraising events, he believes that the primary motivation for appearing at

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>21</sup> Webber, Daniel, “Understanding Charity Fundraising Events,” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2004, 123,

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 124.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

special occurrences remains personal benefits.<sup>29</sup> Providing the donor with an experience in return for their gift sets fundraising events apart from other forms of contributions. Webber notes that fundraising events may not be the most efficient manner to maximize productivity. However, nonprofit special events are an effective means to attract donors that give for personal reasons rather than for purely philanthropic motives.<sup>30</sup>

According to Daniel Getz, Judy Allen, and Jeff Goldblatt, private sector event resources highlight market trends and focus on how to produce events that best match the vision and needs of clients. Alan Wendroff and Daniel Webber's work in the nonprofit sector, discusses how events can raise money and awareness for organizations.

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<sup>29</sup> 123-124.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 133-134.

## Methods

Using the MOF as a case study, a twelve-question instrument was designed to investigate client's motivations for choosing the museum as an event host site (see Fig.1, pg. 22). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants. The Special Event Manager selected these subjects from the MOF's client list. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed as documents. Each of the ten factors for which the study tested were assigned individual colors. As the transcriptions were read, the test factors were marked, counted, and ultimately, graphed. Together, these three methodologies—a case study at the MOF, semi-structured interviews, and document analyses—were employed to suggest why guests chose to host their special events at the MOF.

This study's instrument consisted of twelve questions drawn from Donald Getz's "operations plan"<sup>31</sup>, Judy Allen's "event vision"<sup>32</sup> and Daniel Webber's description of guests' motivations for attending nonprofit fundraisers.<sup>33</sup> The instrument explored what type of events guests held, ten possible motivations for choice: Advertisement, Repeat Business, Operations and Logistics, Personal Alignment to the Mission, Event Alignment to the Mission, Educational Programming, Underwriting through Private Events, Donor Relationships, Volunteer Relationships, Customer Service, along with validating the customer's choice to host an event at the MOF.

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<sup>31</sup> Getz, Donald, *Event Studies* (Burlington: Elsevier, 2007), 275.

<sup>32</sup> Allen, Judy, *Event Planning: the ultimate guide to successful meetings, corporate events, fund-raising galas, conferences, conventions, incentives and other special events* (Ontario: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), xiii-xviii.

<sup>33</sup> Webber, Daniel, "Understanding Charity Fundraising Events," *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2004, 123-124,

The first question determined the type of event held. The subsequent ten questions tested for possible motivations for choosing the museum. The final question sought to validate the customer's choice.

In order to determine the type of event that clients hosted, participants were first asked to describe their event. Following their event description, subjects were asked how they heard about the possibility of hosting an event at the MOF. This question was posed in order to explore if, for example, advertising or word of mouth suggestions were a motivating factor in the customer's choice to host an event at the museum. In order to test if repeat business was an indication for choice, clients were asked how many events they had hosted at the MOF. In order to examine the significance of the institution's operational and logistical capabilities, subjects were asked what drew them to the MOF. This question aimed to highlight the significance of venue elements such as cost, access, and capacity.

By asking them directly, this instrument sought to explore if customers chose to host events in museums because they considered themselves personally aligned with the institutional mission. When prompted by the participants, the Museum of Flight's mission statement was provided for their perusal. In addition, participants were directly asked if they considered the goals of their respective events closely aligned with the museum's mission. For example, do groups such as Women in Aviation choose to host fundraisers in an institution that shares their mission?

In order to test if educational programming was a motivation for choosing the MOF, participants were asked if they included an educational component or tour during their event. To explore if clients were underwriting the institution through private events, subjects were asked if knowing that their rental supported the museum's mission and educational programs impacted

their decision to host an event in the museum. To test if museum donors host special events in institutions to which they donate funds, subjects were asked if they had ever supported the museum financially. To ascertain if museum volunteers were more apt to host their special events in an institution in which they devoted time, clients were asked if they had ever volunteered at the MOF. In order to test the significance of customer service in their decision to host at the MOF, participants were asked to describe the level of customer service that they received while planning and hosting. Finally, each client was asked if they would ever host another event at the MOF in order to test for validation of their choice.

The twelve-question instrument explored what type of events guests held, ten possible motivations for choice: Advertisement, Repeat Business, Operations and Logistics, Personal Alignment to the Mission, Event Alignment to the Mission, Educational Programming, Underwriting through Private Events, Donor Relationships, Volunteer Relationships, Customer Service, along with validating the customer's choice to host an event at the MOF.

In order to implement the instrument, this study employed a semi-structured interview model. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber contends in *Feminist Research Practices*, that semi-structured interviews use a specific list of questions that the interview covers; however, the order in which they are asked is not important. Hesse-Biber notes that this format allows for follow-up questions and spontaneity throughout the interview.<sup>34</sup> Interviews were conducted with ten of the Museum of Flight's special event clients.<sup>35</sup>

In order for these interviews to represent a variety of event types, Private Events Manager Cindy Messey, selected two participants from each of the museum's five predetermined event

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<sup>34</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, *Feminist Research Practice: a Primer*: (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2007) 115-116.

<sup>35</sup> All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

categories: Birthday Parties, Meetings and Training Seminars, Nonprofit Fundraisers, Receptions and Dinners, and Weddings.<sup>36</sup> Due to the sample size, clients were chosen based on their existing relationship such as, pilots, engineers, scientists. These choices were made in order to ensure favorable results. Because this thesis explores whether or not customers are motivated by educational programs, clients who utilized educational programming—such as a docent tour or flight simulators—were asked to participate.<sup>37</sup> During the interviews, the same twelve questions were posed to each subject. Follow-up questions were based on answers that indicated a positive motivational response. For example, if a subject stated that they heard about the possibility of hosting an event at the MOF because their friend had held a birthday party there (aka, word-of-mouth advertising), the participant was then asked to provide some details about their friend’s experience. Motivational choices were then organized by event type.

All the interviews were transcribed and document analysis was performed. Each of the ten factors for which the study tested was assigned an individual color and coded throughout the document. For example, each time a participant mentioned the venues operational and logistical capabilities (e.g. capacity, cost, parking, location, catering), those responses were coded red. If the participant mentioned the MOF’s staff, then the responses were coded pink. In addition to the ten factors tested for by the instrument, two other factors arose during the interviews without prompting. Regardless of the questions that were posed, subjects often gave responses that reflected an emotional connection to the institution. For example, when asked what drew them to the MOF, one client said that they “loved”<sup>38</sup> the venue, suggesting their emotional connection to the museum as a motivating factor. In addition, guests often professed admiration for the

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<sup>36</sup> “The Museum of Flight,” *Private Events*, <http://www.museumofflight.org/private-events> (accessed April 29, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Kris Morrisey, Director, UW Museology Program, for her guidance and suggestion with this methodology that provided me with usable data.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with wedding client, May 16, 2012.

MOF's policy that extends free museum admission to all special event guests regardless of whether their event takes place during the day or evening. Those two topics, emotional response and free admission, were also assigned colors and noted during the analysis phase. The totals for each of the motivational factors for which the study tested (i.e. Advertising, Repeat Client, Operations and Logistics, Personal Alignment to the Mission, Event Alignment to the Mission, Educational Programing, Donor Relationship, Volunteer Relationship, and Customer Service) as well as emotional connection to the institution and free museum admission, were then organized by event type. Graphs were produced that divided the motivational factors into percentages.

## **Instrument**

The Museum of Flight exists to acquire, preserve, and exhibit historically significant air and space artifacts, which provide a foundation for scholarly research, and lifelong learning programs that inspire an interest in and understanding of science, technology, and the humanities.

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your event?
2. How did you hear about the possibility of hosting private events at the Museum of Flight?
3. How many events have you hosted at the museum?
4. What drew you to this particular space?
5. Would you consider yourself/company closely-aligned with the museum's mission?
6. Would you consider the goals of your event closely-aligned with the museum's mission?
7. Did your event include an educational component or activity such as a tour?
8. Did knowing that your rental would financially-support the museum's mission and educational programs impact your decision to host your event at the location?
9. Have you ever supported the institution financially in any other ways besides hosting events?
10. Have you ever volunteered for the Museum of Flight
11. Would you please describe the level of customer service that you received while both planning and hosting your event?
12. Would you host another event at the Museum of Flight?

Figure 1: Instrument used for semi-structured interviews with MOF special event clients

## Results and Discussion

When the test factors were graphed by event type, the three most prevalent responses given by the participants were noted as the primary motivations for choice. In addition, eight of the ten participants validated their choice by stating that, given the opportunity, they would host another event at the MOF. In all event categories, the top three options accounted for 71%-80% of the total responses. While many participants indicated similar responses, some variation occurred between event categories.

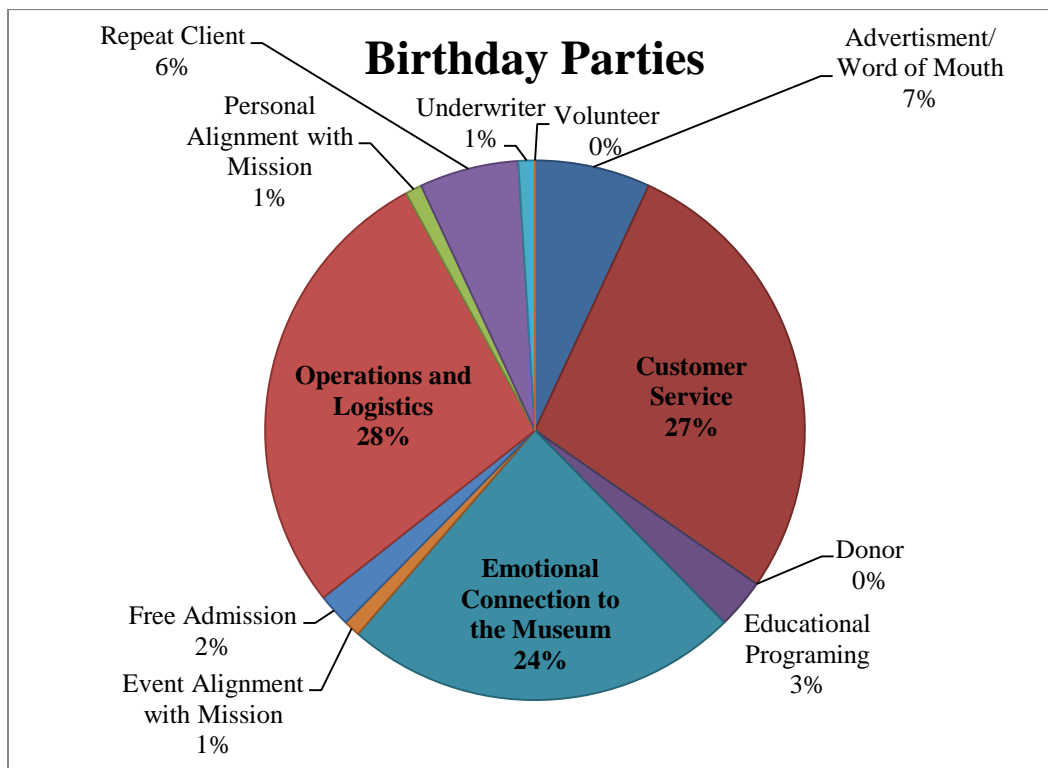


Figure 2: Combined responses to instrument by Birthday Party participants

Those clients who hosted Birthday Parties at the MOF indicated that the Operational and Logistical category accounted for 28% of their total replies (see Fig. 2 above). When asked what drew them to the venue, they gave responses such as, “ease of parking”<sup>39</sup> and “it’s available.”<sup>40</sup> Customer Service responses made up 27% of the client’s total number of answers. When asked

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Birthday #1, April 6, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

to describe the level of customer service that they received, participants stated, “I felt very taken care of”<sup>41</sup> and “[the] MOF personnel [are] sooo great.”<sup>42</sup> Subject’s emotional connection to the museum accounted for 24% of the total answers given and elicited responses such as “wow, it’s memorable”<sup>43</sup> and “dad would love this.”<sup>44</sup> Together, Operations and Logistics, Customer Service, and Emotional Connection to the Museum accounted for 79% of the total responses given by birthday party participants.

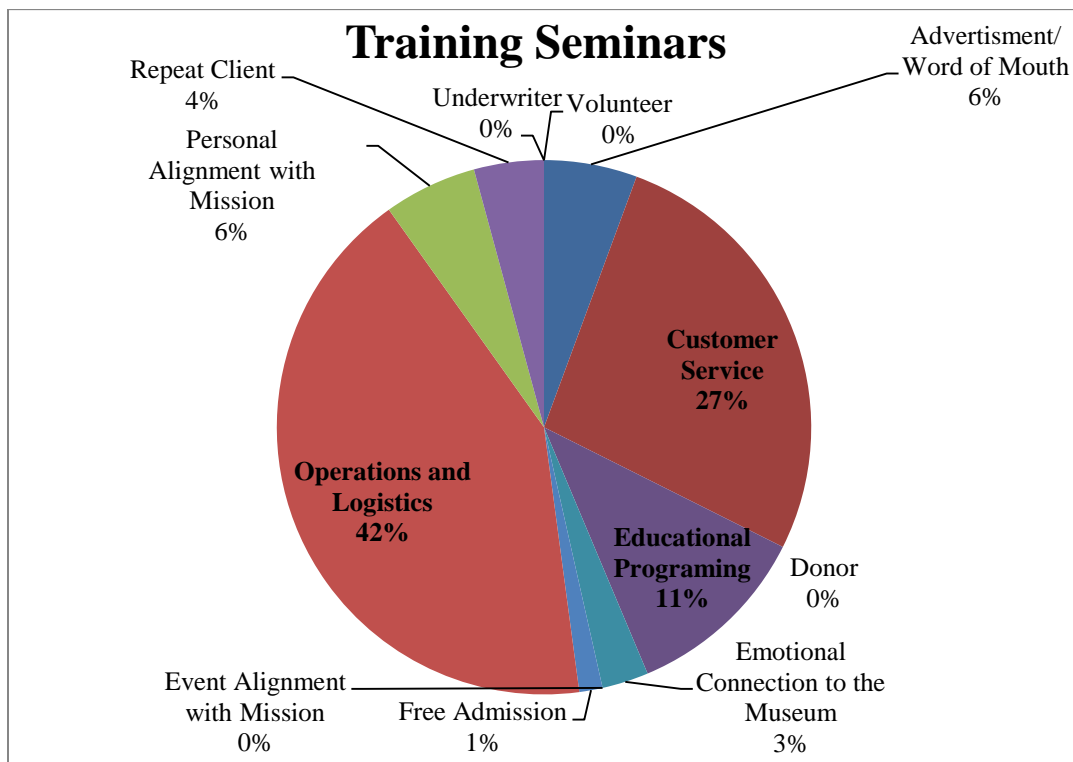


Figure 3: Combined responses to instrument by Meetings and Training Seminar participants

Those clients who hosted meetings and training seminars at the MOF indicated that Operations and Logistics, followed by Customer Service, and the Museum’s Educational

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Birthday #2, April 5, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

programming were their primary motivations when choosing a location for their events (see Fig. 3, pg. 24). Operations and Logistics accounted for 42% of the total responses given by subjects in this category. When asked what drew them to the site, clients noted the, “availability of the venue”<sup>45</sup>, and “[it being] a facility large enough to house us.”<sup>46</sup> Customer Service replies accounted for 27% of the total answers received. When discussing their interactions with the MOF staff, subjects cited examples such as, “they were accommodating”<sup>47</sup> and “they’re real easy to work with.”<sup>48</sup> The museum’s educational programs accounted for 11% of the total responses received by those clients who held a meetings and training seminars. When asked to describe these activities, subjects stated, “you get to do a tour,”<sup>49</sup> and “using the museum itself as a set of team building events,”<sup>50</sup> drew them to the MOF over other venues. Together, Operations and Logistics, Customer Service, and Educational Programming accounted for 80% of the participants responses.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Meetings and Training Seminars #1, April 6, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Meetings and Training Seminars #2, April 20, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Meetings and Training Seminars #1, April 6, 2012.

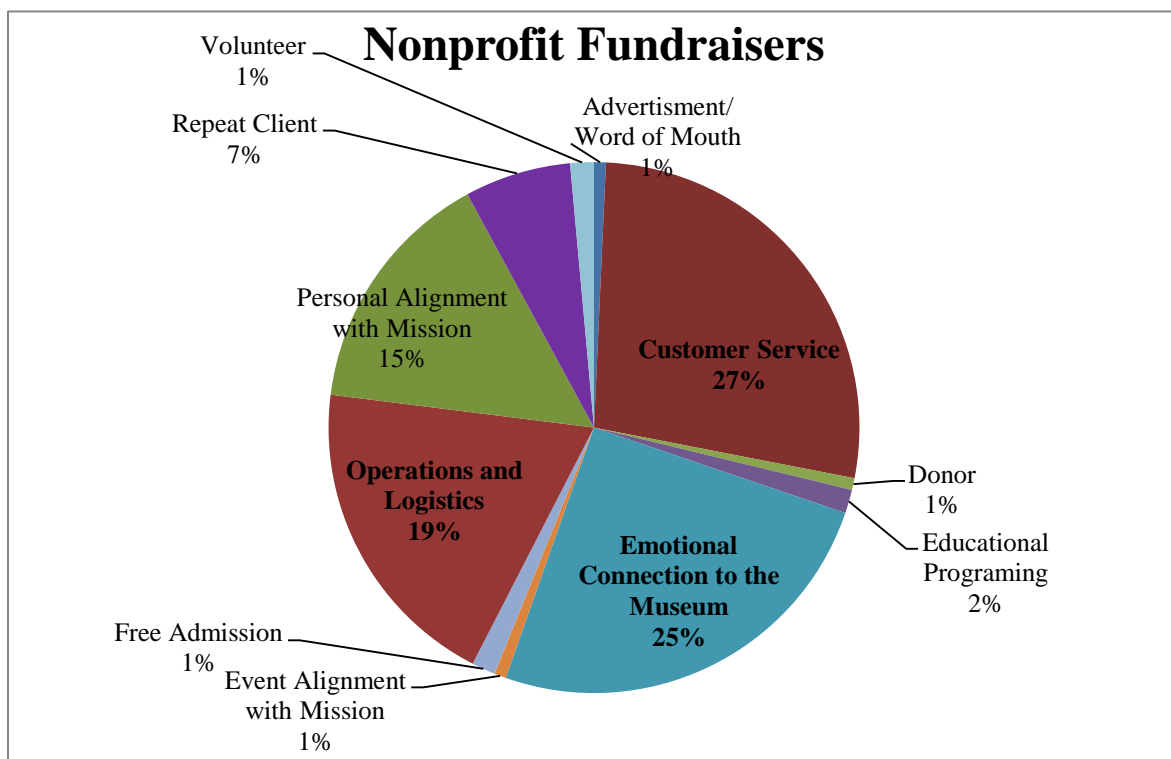


Figure 4: Combined responses to instrument by Nonprofit Fundraiser participants

Clients who hosted nonprofit fundraisers at the MOF indicated that Customer Service, Emotional Connection to the museum, and Operations and Logistics were the primary motivations for choosing the site (see Fig. 4above). Twenty-seven percent of the total responses received related to customer service. When describing the MOF staff, participants stated that, “they’ve been very very helpful,”<sup>51</sup> and “they make it really easy.”<sup>52</sup> In addition to customer service, 25% of the total responses given by clients who hosted nonprofit fundraisers reflected an emotional connection to the institution. For example, when describing their event, participants stated, “I’m proud to do the event [at the MOF]”<sup>53</sup> and “[guests] are very enamored with taking

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Nonprofit Fundraisers #1, May 18, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

that all in.”<sup>54</sup> Operations and Logistics responses accounted for 19% of the total replies. When asked what drew nonprofit clients to the space, clients said “the location right off the freeway [was important]”<sup>55</sup> and “[their] biggest driving factor was price.”<sup>56</sup> Together, Customer Service, Emotional Connection to the Museum, and Operations and Logistics accounted for 71% of the total number of responses indicating that these were the primary motivations for choice among nonprofit fundraiser clients.

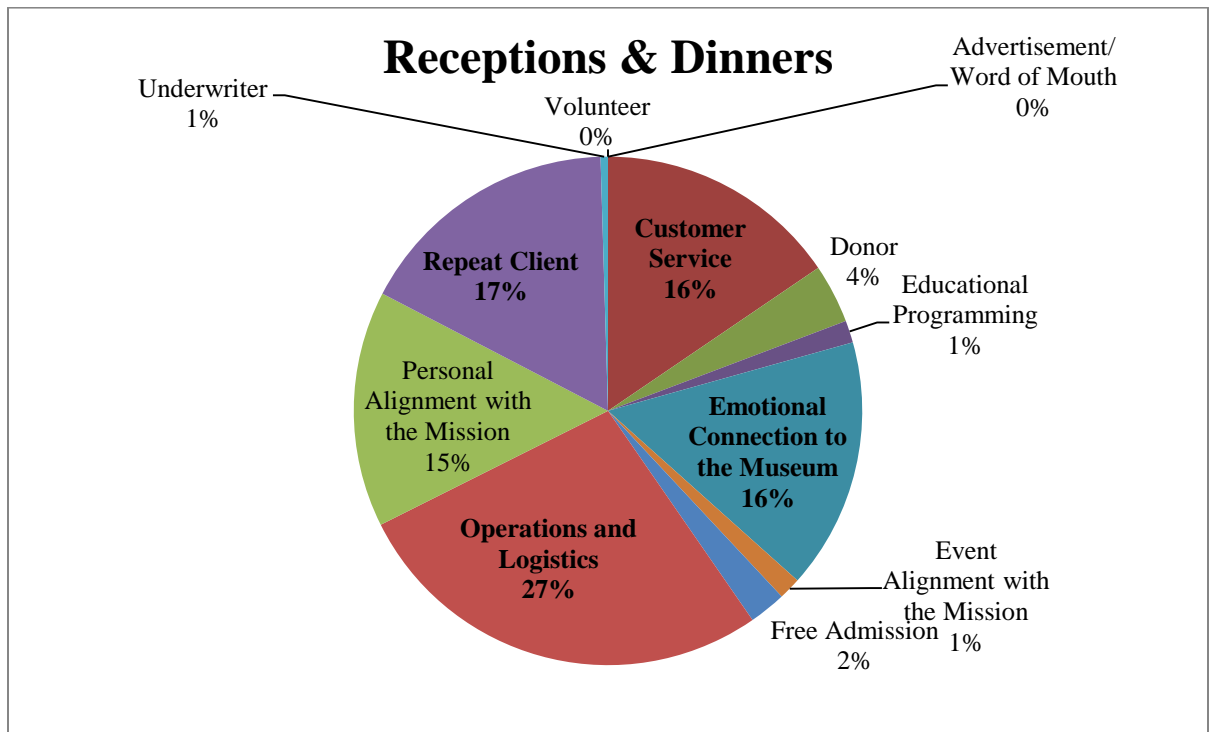


Figure 5: Combined responses to instrument by Receptions and Dinner participants

Those clients who held receptions and dinners at the MOF indicated that the museum’s Operational and Logistical capabilities, followed by their status as Repeat Clients and the MOF’s Customer Service, as well as Emotional Connection to the Museum, were the most important factors to them when choosing a venue (see fig. 5, pg. 27). Operations and Logistics accounted for 27% of the total answers received. Clients described these aspects of the museum by stating

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Nonprofit Fundraiser #2, April 6, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

that “handicap seating [was] available”<sup>57</sup> and “the billing is always clean and clear.”<sup>58</sup> Seventeen percent of the total responses related to their status as repeat clients. Participants noted this distinction by stating, “it’s been very easy to make it work every year”<sup>59</sup> and “having gotten to know them over the years it’s so helpful.”<sup>60</sup> Customer service and emotional connection to the museum received 16% of the total responses, respectively. When clients detailed the level of customer service they received they stated that “the staff are wonderful”<sup>61</sup> and “[they were] very accommodating.”<sup>62</sup> Participants reflected their emotional connection to the museum through phrases such as “they love them”<sup>63</sup> and “the people who love it so much”<sup>64</sup> to describe their event details. Collectively, Operations and Logistics, Repeat Client status, Customer Service and Emotional Connection to the museum account for 76% of the total responses given by receptions and dinners participants.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Receptions and Dinners #1, April 4, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Receptions and Dinners #2, March 30, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Receptions and Dinners #1, April 4, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Receptions and Dinners #2, March 30, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Receptions and Dinners #1, April 4, 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Receptions and Dinners #2, March 30, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

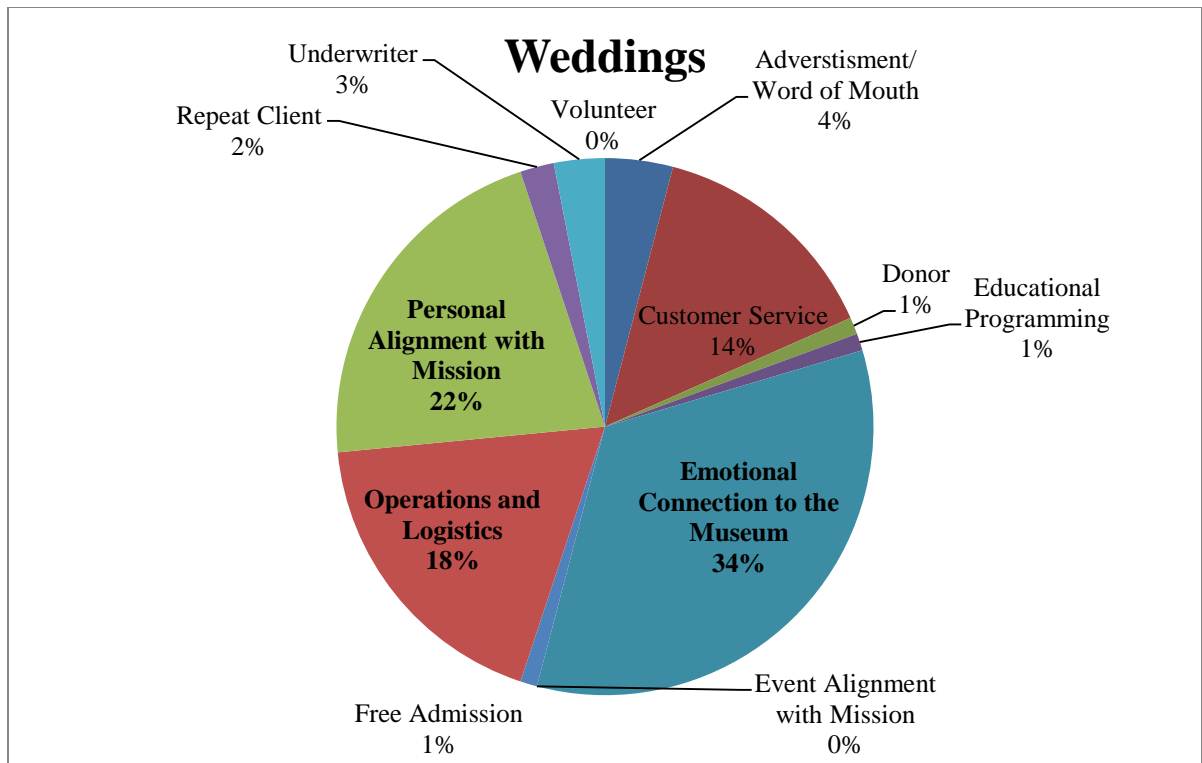


Figure 6: Combined responses to instrument by Weddings participants

Those clients who held weddings at the MOF indicated that their Emotional Connection to the museum, their Personal Alignment with the Mission, and the museum’s Operational and Logistical Capabilities were their primary motivations when choosing a venue. (See Fig. 6 above). Emotional connection to the museum accounted for 34% of the total number of responses given. Participants used phrases such as, “we just fell in love with it as soon as we went and saw it”<sup>65</sup> and “fascinating”<sup>66</sup> to describe the site. Twenty-two percent of clients’ replies indicated that they were personally aligned with the MOF’s mission. Subjects indicated this relationship with remarks such as, “the preservation of historic information and artifacts is going to be really important to me”<sup>67</sup> and “we’re both very much into science and technology as things

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Wedding #1, April 16, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Wedding #2, April 23, 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Wedding #1, April 16, 2012.

that are going to move our society forward.”<sup>68</sup> Operational and Logistical responses made up for 18% of the client’s total number of answers. Wedding clients used words such as “capacity”<sup>69</sup> and “price range”<sup>70</sup> when discussing the logistical aspects of the site. Collectively, Emotional Connection to the Museum, Personal Alignment with the Mission, and Operations and Logistics account for 74% of the wedding clients’ total responses.

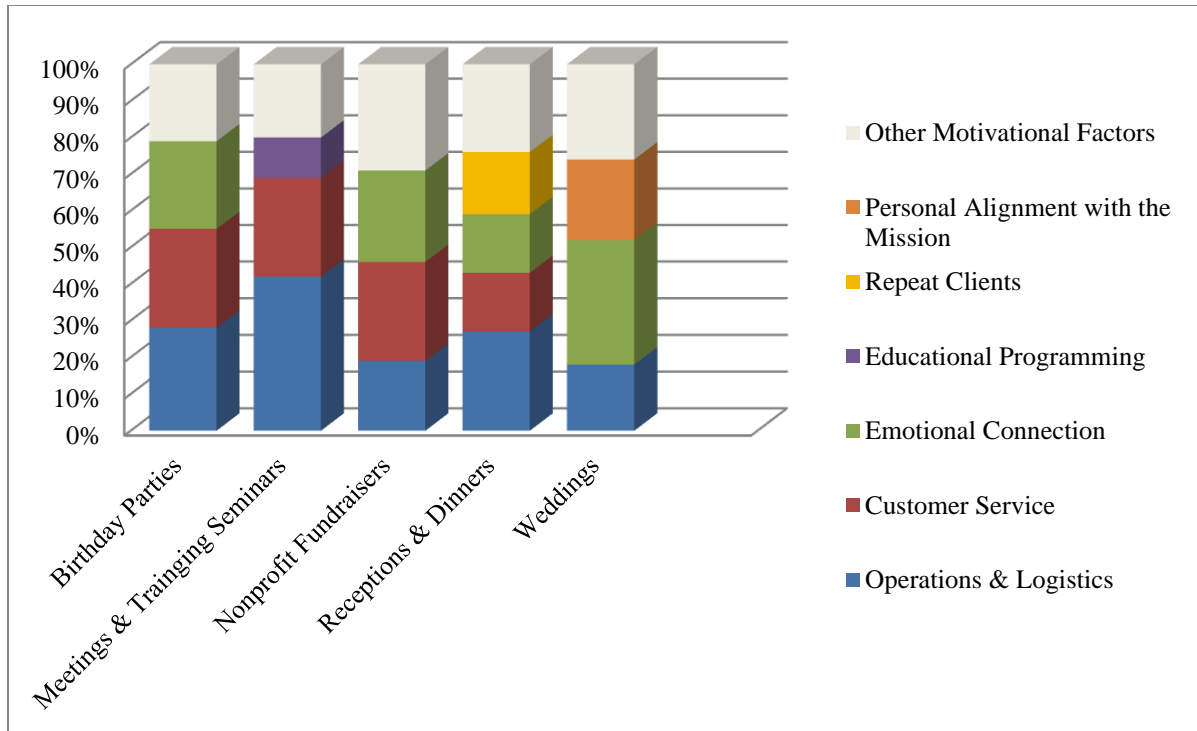


Figure 7: Special event clients’ top three motivational choices, arranged by event type

A comparison of the top three motivations for choice in each of the five event categories reveals numerous equivalencies (See Fig 7, above). The MOF’s operational and logistical capabilities appeared among the top three motivations for choice regardless of the type of event. In addition, participants in four-out-of-five of the event categories (birthday parties, meetings and training seminars, nonprofit fundraisers, and receptions and dinners) noted that customer

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Wedding #2, April 23, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

service was a primary motivation for choice. Further, clients in four-fifths of the event types, (nonprofit fundraisers, receptions and dinners and wedding) cited their emotional connection to the institution as a primary motivation for hosting their events at the MOF. However, Educational Programing, Repeat Clients, and Personal Alignment with Mission only appeared as primary motivations for choice in only one of the five event categories each.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The analysis of client's motivations for choosing the MOF as a special event venue indicates that the majority of decisions are made on the basis of Operational and Logistical Capabilities, Customer Service, and Emotional Connection to the Museum. Additionally, eight of the ten participants validated their choice, suggesting that given the chance, they would host another event at the MOF. Beyond the stated factors for which the study tested, many participants also noted an admiration for the museum's policy to extend free museum admission to all special event guests on the day of their event. Without prompting, seven of the ten subjects mentioned this benefit as a motivation for their choice.

This thesis represents a single case study at the MOF; as such, it is only an initial study of an aspect of the museological field that has received little attention. Though this study does not offer conclusive results, it does invite further examination into the interplay between private events and public museums. Subsequent studies are needed to further test if museums can generate additional revenue and attract new audiences through special events by advertising their operational and logistical capabilities, as well as by providing high levels of customer service, and by marketing to the client's emotions.

Though this study is not inclusive, museums may want to employ a five-pronged approach. The initial step in this approach appears to be advertising and marketing the institution's operational and logistical capabilities. Potential clients need to be able to easily access information such as price, capacity, location, as well as the types of events that they can host at the venue and whether or not the space can meet their needs. In addition to operations and logistics, institutions can provide high levels of customer service. This seems to be how the

institution maintains a positive relationship with their current clients. Furthermore, marketing might consider targeting potential clients' emotions. For example, advertisement taglines may include words like love, remember, and inspire. Museums can also follow-up with previous special event clients, as a possible source of revenue. This study suggested that customers are willing to host more than one event in a museum; therefore institutions might foster relationships with clients in hopes of developing additional business. As a means to attract new audiences, institutions may consider extending free museum admission to special event guests. Further research is needed to determine the full impact of these free admission event visitors. For example, do those guests who receive free admission generate additional revenue in the museum's gift shop and café? If so, does this additional revenue merely offset the cost of their admission, or can it be an additional revenue stream for the institution? Together, this five-pronged approach: advertising operational and logistical capabilities, providing high levels of customer service, marketing to emotions, following up with previous clients, and extending free museum admission to private event guests may raise additional funds for the museum while also attracting new visitors and supporting the institution's mission.

## **Limitations**

There were two primary limitations to this study. The first was the way in which the participants were selected. Given that the private event guests who had a known pre-existing relationship (e.g. pilots, engineers, and scientist) were asked to participate, the results may lean in favor of the test categories, personal alignment with mission and event alignment with mission. If subjects were chosen at random, then the results may have differed. The second limitation to this study was the lack of control over the participants who represented larger organizations. In other words, one person represented a decision that could have been made by several individuals. For example, a company's secretary or event planner may plan an event that reflects input from ten or more people. By only gathering data from one person, this study was limited in its ability to gain a full picture of institutional motivations for choice. If the participants had been selected at random and all individuals from large organizations been interviewed, then this study's results may have differed.

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