

March 20, 2017 | By Melinda Battenberg

UC San Diego Rady School's Research A Platform for Innovative Approach to Museum Ticket Sales



Ayelet Gneezy

Faced with a downturn in visitors, the San Diego History Center (SDHC) decided to take an innovative approach to boosting museum attendance – let visitors determine how much they wanted to pay for their visit. The museum's "Give Forward" admissions program launched in October 2016 and, to date, has given it a significant boost in attendance. This fundamental shift in admissions was inspired by the research of Ayelet Gneezy and Uri Gneezy, faculty at the Rady School of Management at UC San Diego, and experts in charitable giving. Working with the Rady School professors, the museum determined the best way to increase admissions was to allow visitors to

contribute based on their experience in the museum, instead of paying a set admissions fee. In addition, the museum highlights to visitors that admissions donations help pay for other people to visit in the future.



Uri Gneezy

Since the change in admissions policy, the number of daily visitors to the San Diego History Center has been steady, and in many cases stronger than attendance during the most popular exhibit "Ingenious!

The World of Dr. Seuss" (which ran from November 2014 to January 2016). For example, the daily average of visitors between November 2016, (after Give Forward began) and November 2015 (during Seuss) is up 76% on average. Prior to launching Give Forward, the center hosted an average of 67 visitors per day. Attendance since the launch has averaged 216 daily visitors (up 225%). January 2017 historically was one of the strongest daily attendance

periods in the institution's history – now averaging 280 visitors per day.

"The Give Forward program has been transformative, for our museums, our staff and our members," said SDHC Executive Director Bill Lawrence. "When the number of visitors is down, the energy that drives our purpose and passion is down. With the increased attendance from the Give Forward program, the energy has transformed and the community is taking notice. This program has dramatically increased our outreach to underserved communities, as visitors from underserved communities is up 44%!"

“As researchers, it is extremely gratifying to see what we have discovered in research applied successfully in practice,” said Ayelet Gneezy. “Working with the San Diego History Center and helping them implement their new Give Forward pricing structure has been rewarding and is an excellent example for other museums to consider when thinking about admissions structure.”

The Give Forward program is not a short-term trial, rather a permanent change to build long-term relationships that will ensure the future success of the institution.

“Continued viability for the San Diego History Center starts with enhanced exposure in the community and developing new relationships,” Lawrence said. “Increasing visitors who are learning to appreciate our region’s rich history and experiencing the stories of San Diego’s shared past, is an investment in our future.”

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