

## Section 2: Visitor Services

- ◆ **Based on the Zoo's semi-annual visitor surveys, the percentage of Zoo visitors who rate their overall satisfaction as "excellent" has been slightly below 40 percent or between 40 and 50 percent since August of 1996. Prior to that, from March 1994 through February 1996 visitors reporting an "excellent" rating averaged around 30 percent. While recent trends have shown improvement, the Zoo has far to go in providing an "excellent" experience for all of its visitors.**
- ◆ **In the May 1999 Zoo visitor survey, when asked what one thing they would like to see changed at the Zoo, the most frequently mentioned suggestions (by 29 percent of visitors) concerned providing improved habitats for certain animals or all of the Zoo's animals in general.**
- ◆ **The Zoo's admission fees appear to be reasonable compared to other zoos and facilities catering to families and children in the Bay Area. In the case of its resident child and senior admission prices, the Zoo was one of the lowest priced facilities of those surveyed. According to the May 1999 visitor survey, 82 percent of respondents rated value for admission price as "excellent" or "good."**
- ◆ **An inspection of the Zoo's food services by the City's Department of Public Health in June of 1999 found numerous minor, but no major, health violations. However, it was noted that the Zoo's concessions "...are falling into various stages of decrepitude."**
- ◆ **Although the Zoo has recently made efforts to improve its restroom facilities by painting stall doors and making other repairs, the poor condition of the restrooms is in large part due to aging structures and deferred maintenance that has resulted in unsightly and hazardous conditions. Even the cleanest of restrooms would obtain a poor public rating under these circumstances.**
- ◆ **Exhibit signage is in poor condition in various areas throughout the Zoo. Damaged, worn out, dirty, and/or missing signage reinforces to the visitor an image of a Zoo in a state of disrepair and neglect.**
- ◆ **Although aged and deteriorating facilities hamper efforts to keep the Zoo grounds and facilities attractive and clean, the Zoo must allocate greater resources to managing the attractiveness, cleanliness, and information (educational and directional signage) aspects of the Zoo. The Zoo should strengthen the maintenance, horticultural, and custodial staffs, and provide them with the tools they need to perform efficiently.**

As part of this management audit, we included in our review an assessment of overall satisfaction of Zoo visitors, admission prices, the quality and pricing of concessions, and the attractiveness and cleanliness of the grounds and facilities. In order to evaluate these areas, we:

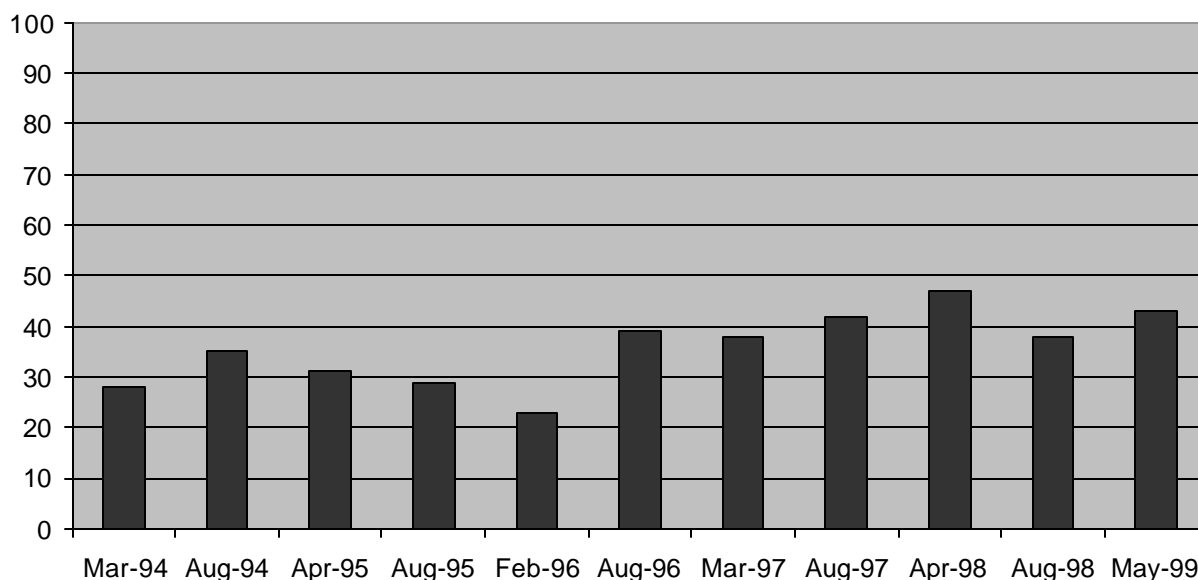
- Interviewed former and current Zoo personnel, including the Zoo's former Director of Visitor Services, the Director of Operations, and Graphic Design, Facilities Maintenance and Development staff;
- Surveyed 17 facilities catering to families and children in the Bay Area and other California zoos, as well as zoos in the United States which are roughly comparable to the San Francisco Zoo in areas such as annual operating budget and attendance, in order to compare admissions fees and policies;
- Reviewed the Zoo's Visitor Surveys from 1995 to 1999;
- Reviewed a survey of Animal Keepers which was conducted by the Budget Analyst as a component of this audit;
- Examined SFZS financial records in the areas of operations, rides, food and merchandise;
- Obtained the services of a team of custodial experts who assessed the quality of housekeeping of public areas of the Zoo and provided recommendations for improvement;
- Reviewed inspection reports by the Department of Public Health of the Zoo's food concession stands; and
- Obtained information on and/or observed operations and services of other zoos and facilities.

## **Overall Visitor Satisfaction**

The Zoo contracts with a private firm to conduct a semi-annual Visitor Survey. In order to assess the quality of Zoo visitors' experience in recent years we examined survey data from 1995 to the most recent survey, conducted in May of 1999. The surveys consist of approximately 40 questions, some of which differ slightly from year to year. Information gathered includes demographics, party size and characteristics, and the visitor's evaluation of exhibits, food and other services, suggestions for improvements, and their overall experience. Each survey was administered to between 200 to 350 visitors and surveys were conducted in the spring and summer of each year.

When asked to rate their overall satisfaction, 43 percent of visitors reported an “excellent” rating in the most recent survey administered in May of 1999. Those rating their experience as “good” was 50 percent, “fair” was 5 percent and “poor” was 2 percent. A comparison of the percentage of Zoo visitors who ranked their overall satisfaction as “excellent” from 1994 to 1999 is shown in the chart below:

**Percent of Zoo Visitors Ranking Overall Satisfaction as “Excellent”  
1994-1998**



*Source: San Francisco Zoo Visitor Survey Reports, March 1994 to May 1999.*

As shown in the chart above, the percentage of visitors rating their overall satisfaction as “excellent” has been slightly below or in excess of 40 percent since August of 1996. Prior to that, from March of 1994 to February of 1996, visitors reporting such a rating averaged around 30 percent. This improvement is notable; however, the Zoo has far to go in providing an “excellent” experience for all of its visitors.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the Zoo contains a mix of old and new exhibits which range from the outdated concrete bear grottos to attractive and recently renovated or constructed exhibits. In the March 1999 visitor survey, those exhibits which were given high marks (in order) were the Gorillas, Lions, Children’s Zoo, Monkeys, and Lorikeets. The exhibits cited most frequently by visitors when asked to describe the least enjoyable exhibit were the Elephants, Lions, Bears, and Aviary. The top reasons cited by visitors for the least enjoyable exhibits were

“couldn’t see” (21 percent), that the animals “looked sad” (21 percent), and “exhibit run down” (11 percent). When asked what one thing they would like to see changed at the Zoo, visitors gave a wide range of suggestions. The most frequently mentioned suggestions (29 percent) were directed toward providing improved habitats for certain animals or all of the Zoo’s animals in general.

The second most frequent suggestions for change, cited by 12 percent of visitors, concerned cleanliness at the Zoo. Tied as the third most frequently cited area which received suggestions for improvement, each stated by 9 percent of polled visitors, was the need to improve signage and parking at the Zoo.

## **Admission Fees**

The admission fees at the San Francisco Zoo were compared to 17 facilities catering to families and children in the Bay Area and other California zoos, as well as to zoos in the United States which are roughly comparable to the San Francisco Zoo in areas such as annual operating budget and attendance (an exception is the Bronx Zoo, which is included for informational purposes only since the Bronx Zoo has a budget and attendance significantly higher than the SF Zoo). The facilities and their admission prices by category are shown in Table 2.1 on the following page:

**Table 2.1  
Comparison of Admission Fees  
July 1999**

	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>Child</u>	<u>Senior</u>
<b>San Francisco Zoo</b> (non resident/resident)	<b>\$9.00/7.00</b>	<b>\$6.00/3.50</b>	<b>\$3.00/1.50</b>	<b>\$6.00/3.50</b>
<b>California/Local:</b>				
San Diego Zoo	\$ 16.00	\$ 16.00	\$ 7.00	\$ 16.00
Exploratorium	\$ 9.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 2.50	\$ 7.00
Academy of Sciences	\$ 8.50	\$ 5.50	\$ 2.00	\$ 5.50
Los Angeles Zoo	\$ 8.25	\$ 8.25	\$ 3.25	\$ 5.25
Bay Area Discovery Museum	\$ 7.00	\$ 7.00	\$ 6.00	\$ 7.00
Zeum	\$ 7.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 6.00
Lawrence Hall of Science	\$ 6.00	\$ 4.00	\$ 2.00	\$ 4.00
Sacramento Zoo (weekends)*	\$ 6.00	\$ 6.00	\$ 4.25	\$ 6.00
Oakland Zoo	\$ 5.50	\$ 5.50	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00
<b>Other Zoos:</b>				
Zoo Atlanta	\$ 10.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 6.00	\$ 8.00
Baltimore Zoo	\$ 9.00	\$ 9.00	\$ 5.50	\$ 5.50
Woodland Park Zoo (Seattle) (non resident/resident)	\$8.50/7.50	\$6.00/5.25	\$3.75/3.25	\$7.75/6.75
Louisville Zoo	\$ 7.95	\$ 7.95	\$ 4.95	\$ 5.95
Bronx Zoo	\$ 7.75	\$ 7.75	\$ 4.00	\$ 4.00
Pittsburgh Zoo	\$ 6.50	\$ 6.50	\$ 4.75	\$ 4.75
Dallas Zoo	\$ 6.00	\$ 6.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 4.00
Oregon Zoo (Portland)	\$ 5.50	\$ 5.50	\$ 3.50	\$ 4.00

\* The Sacramento Zoo offers a discounted weekday rate (\$5.50 adult admission).

Source: Individual zoo and other facility Web sites, July 1999.

As shown in the table, admissions fees for adults range from \$5.50 to \$16.00 for adults and \$2.00 to \$7.00 for children. The S.F. Zoo's non-resident adult admission fee of \$9.00 is in the upper third of fees charged by the surveyed facilities. The S.F. Zoo's resident adult admission fee of \$7.00 is in the mid-range. Fees charged for children's admission at the surveyed facilities range from \$1.50 to \$7.00. The S.F. Zoo's non-resident child admission fee of \$3.00 falls into the bottom third and its resident child admission fee of \$1.50 is lower than all of the surveyed facilities. The S.F. Zoo's senior admission fee of \$3.50 is also among the lowest.

The surveyed facilities provide a wide range of activities and experiences for visitors which may or may not be directly comparable to the S.F. Zoo. In addition, the quality of the exhibits and facilities varies widely. However, based on the 17 surveyed facilities, the Zoo's current admission fees appear to be reasonable compared to other facilities catering to families and children in the Bay Area and at

other comparable zoos. In the case of its resident child and senior admission prices, the S.F. Zoo is one of the lowest priced facilities. Finally, according to the latest visitor survey conducted by the Zoo in March of 1999, 82 percent of respondents rated value for admission price as “excellent” or “good” (excellent=34%, good=48%, fair=15%, poor=3%).

## **Food Services**

There are six food service stands at the Zoo, two of which provide a larger selection of food and seating areas, The Plaza Café and The Terrace Café. The Plaza Café is located near the Primate Discovery Center and is open year round. The Terrace Café is located near the bear grottos and is open during peak periods. Four other stands are open as needed, in the summer, or only on weekends and sell simple pre-packaged foods such as popcorn, hot dogs, cotton candy, and sodas.

An inspection of the Zoo’s food service stands by the City’s Department of Public Health in June of 1999 found that the Zoo’s food services facilities “...are falling into various stages of decrepitude.” Accordingly, DPH found a number of minor violations, the majority of which concerned needed repairs and areas requiring more thorough cleaning. Most of the cited violations were remedied immediately or within the allotted timeframe, the exception being those which required replacement parts which were not readily available. The Zoo has also moved to address a longstanding problem in The Plaza Café eating area where seagulls have proved to be aggressive nuisances. In early summer of 1999, the Zoo enclosed The Plaza Café’s eating area in netting which appears to be effectively deterring the seagulls.

In the May of 1999 visitor survey, 76 percent of respondents reported that food prices were excellent, good, or fair, with 24 percent stating prices were poor. In the same survey, 7 percent of respondents reported that food quality was excellent, down from 13 percent in August of 1998. Overall, 55 percent of respondents reported that food was excellent or good, 31 percent reported that it was fair, and 14 percent reported that it was poor.

Per capita food sales are slightly higher than average, ranging from \$1.99 to \$1.94 annually, compared to an average of \$1.73 for facilities with operating budgets of over \$5 million as reported by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association in its 1997 Management/Marketing Survey. However, net food services revenues declined by 60 percent (\$1.70 per capita) in FY 1997-98 in part due the introduction of new food products which did not meet sales expectations. A new Food Services manager was hired in March of 1999 after the Zoo was without a manager for a span of approximately eight months.

## **Housekeeping in Public Areas**

As a part of this audit, a team of custodial experts conducted a walk-through inspection of the Zoo and provide recommendations for any needed improvements.

The custodial team found that some public areas in the Zoo have been maintained in excellent condition. An example they cited is the Australian Walkabout exhibit area where the animal keeper has dedicated time to assisting the housekeeping and maintenance staff. However, in other public areas, the team observed conditions greatly in need of housekeeping.

Based on their observations and subsequent discussions with housekeeping staff at the San Diego Zoo, the custodial team concluded that the San Francisco Zoo's cleaning staff of nine full time equivalent positions is clearly understaffed. This problem is compounded by a lack of basic labor-saving custodial equipment compared to other public facilities. The custodial experts found that even under the most conservative estimates, another three to four custodians/maintainers should be added to the current custodial staff of nine to have minimal staffing. The team recommends that if the current level of staffing is maintained that management should consider the use of on-call custodians or maintainers who could fill in for personnel on vacation or leave without over-extending the remaining workers. In addition, the custodial team recommends that funds be set aside to purchase labor saving equipment to facilitate cleaning tasks.

### ***Restroom Facilities***

The most visible maintenance and housekeeping problem at the Zoo is the condition of the restroom facilities. There are six restroom facilities at the Zoo, with 4-5 stalls each. Four of these are wheelchair accessible. According to the custodial team, most publications and surveys in the housekeeping field refer to public restrooms as the area in which the public obtains their primary impression of any facility. This view is supported by the Zoo's visitor surveys. Between 1994 and 1999, the most frequent complaints voiced in the Zoo's visitor surveys concerned the restroom facilities. Visitors cited that there were not enough restrooms; the facilities were dirty; too dark, and hard to find; they lacked locks and diaper changing tables; and they were not accessible for strollers.

Although the Zoo has recently made efforts to improve the restroom facilities by painting stall doors and making other repairs, a large part of the poor conditions of the restrooms is due to aging structures and deferred maintenance, which has resulted in unsightly and hazardous conditions. The Zoo's restrooms were noted to contain rusted and jagged metal covers under hand basins, makeshift plywood stall doors, a large hole in one facility's floor, and ventilation consisting only of wide open window areas. The custodial team advise that even the cleanest of restrooms would

obtain a poor public rating under these circumstances. The team found that the restrooms were being serviced daily. However, it was also evident that daily periodic cleaning, either before or after public hours, had not been scheduled and completed.

Because the restroom facilities are such an area of high visibility to the visitor, proper cleaning of these areas should be made a high priority. We recommend that, in addition to the daily servicing of restrooms, they be thoroughly cleaned either after closing hours or before opening. Sign-in sheets posted on the walls would assure the public that restrooms have been serviced as well as aid the custodial supervisor.

### **Other Areas**

Several other areas in need of general housekeeping deserve note. At the onset of this audit, we noted that the cloth banners, food area table umbrellas, and food kiosk awnings throughout the Zoo were sorely in need of cleaning. Food service kiosk awnings throughout the Zoo and banners leading to the Feline Conservation Center were severely discolored from mold and dirt. When clean and in good condition, these items are festive and attractive additions to the Zoo. During the audit period, awnings and table umbrellas were steam cleaned which greatly improved appearances. However, Zoo staff report that steam cleaning is done on a sporadic basis and that there is no schedule for regular upkeep and cleaning. Regular cleaning and maintenance can help to slow deterioration and prolong the useful life of these items. Therefore we recommend that the Zoo establish a schedule for regular upkeep and cleaning of these items.

### **Exhibit Signage**

Signs marking exhibits are in poor condition in various areas throughout the Zoo. Damaged, worn out, dirty, and/or missing signage reinforces to the visitor an image of a Zoo in a state of disrepair and neglect. We observed dirty, peeling sign labels, worn to the point of being unreadable, exhibits without any signage, stands with the signs obviously broken off and missing, and presumably vacant exhibits which are unmarked. In particular, signs in poor condition were noted in the Magellanic Penguin, Feline Conservation Center, Walkabout, Patas Monkey, and Lemur exhibits.

First, we found that there is no clear line of responsibility for cleaning and simple repair of the exhibit signage at the Zoo. Such tasks were previously the responsibility of the Zoo's one-person Graphics Department. In the past, the Graphics Department was aided by a volunteer who regularly cleaned the Zoo's exhibit signs. However, those tasks are no longer being performed due to turnover



in volunteer staff and an increase in Graphics Department workload generated by the expansion of the Zoo's development activities.

Signs throughout the Zoo are made out of different materials and created using various printing processes. Each type of sign requires different cleaning and repair approaches so that the signs do not become damaged by applying harmful cleaning solutions. A manual containing photos and descriptions of the different type of signs and the associated cleaning procedures for each was created by the Graphics Department in an unsuccessful effort to shift responsibility for these tasks to the janitorial staff in the Operations Department. Therefore, at present, cleaning and minor repairs of the Zoo's signage are not taking place due to a lack of a clear line of responsibility and management oversight. We recommend that management assign responsibility for inventory, minor repairs, and cleaning of signs to one department, preferably to one or two persons who would then develop knowledge of the cleaning and maintenance requirements for each type of sign.

Second, it appears that the Zoo is installing signs of inferior quality as a cost saving measure. An example is those signs located in the Walkabout exhibit which have been designed to be colorful and interactive, some of the most attractive exhibit signage in the Zoo. However, only two years after many of the exhibit's signs were replaced, nearly all are faded and chipped, with interactive elements no longer functional, and in some cases the text is no longer readable. While salt air, pollen, dampness, and harsh conditions at the Zoo contribute to the rapid deterioration of signage, we found that signs are replaced on an ad hoc basis. We recommend that a regular inspection and replacement schedule be established for all signs and that signs that are currently of poor quality or damaged should be replaced as soon as possible. In addition, the Zoo should consider the costs and benefits of obtaining higher quality which is more durable and may result in lowered long term costs as well as enhancing visitor enjoyment and projecting a more positive image of the Zoo.

Third, long term empty exhibits with old signage or no signage also project an image of neglect and can be confusing to visitors. We recommend that simple temporary signs be installed that inform visitors that exhibits are "under construction" or with another appropriate explanation.

Finally, we found that the "For Your Information" signs posted throughout the Zoo are exceptionally informative and visitor friendly. These signs contain information which has been handwritten on inexpensive temporary signs by animal keepers concerning certain exhibits or items of interest. We noted that some of the posted signs were in need of re-lettering due to faded text or required updating. We recommend that the Zoo make more efforts to ensure that the information on the "For Your Information" signs is up to date and that the text is legible.

**Directional Signs**

The Zoo contains a myriad of primary and secondary pathways which can be disorienting to visitors. A major improvement was the installation of directional signs were placed throughout the Zoo which are highly visible and easy to read. However, "employee only" areas are marked only by small signs which are easily overlooked. Due to the nature of the pathway system in the Zoo, it can be difficult to tell if one is entering an employee area. We observed adults and children on multiple occasions wandering into off limits areas in the Zoo which could be hazardous to visitors and disruptive to staff. It is recommended that the Zoo install large red "STOP" signs or similar highly visible and easily understood signs at entrances to "employee only" areas.

**Phase II (New Zoo) Visitor Services Improvements**

A major emphasis in the Phase II renovation of the Zoo will include updating visitor service facilities at the Zoo. The Phase II plan includes a new Zoo Street which will be a central boulevard through the Zoo with linked loop trails into each major exhibit area. Plans for Zoo Street include new restrooms, gift shops, information kiosks, lockers, stroller and cart rentals, and food sales. The new Zoo Street will be a significant improvement over the current facilities when it is completed (currently scheduled for completion in 2002), however, the recommendations contained in this section concerning regularly scheduled upkeep and maintenance of the new facilities and of those located in areas of the Zoo which are not included in the Phase II renovations will remain of strong importance.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The percentage of visitors rating their overall satisfaction as "excellent" has been slightly below 40 percent or between 40 and 50 percent since August of 1996. Prior to that, from March of 1994 to February of 1996, visitors reporting such a rating hovered around 30 percent. This improvement is notable, however, the Zoo has far to go in providing an "excellent" experience for all of its visitors.

In the most recent Zoo visitor survey (May 1999), when asked what one thing they would like to see changed at the Zoo, the most frequently mentioned suggestions (by 28 percent of visitors) concerned providing improved habitats for certain animals or all of the Zoo's animals in general.

Based on 17 surveyed facilities, the Zoo's current admission fees appear to be reasonable compared to other facilities catering to families and children in the Bay Area and at other comparable zoos. In the case of its resident child and senior

admission prices, the S.F. Zoo is one of the lowest priced facilities. According to the latest Zoo visitor survey, 89 percent of respondents rated value for admission price as “excellent” or “good.”

An inspection of the Zoo’s food concessions by the City’s Department of Public Health in June of 1999 found numerous minor, but no major, health violations. However, it was noted that the Zoo’s concessions “...are falling into various stages of decrepitude.”

Although the Zoo has recently made efforts to improve its restroom facilities by painting stall doors and making other repairs, the poor condition of the restrooms is in large part due to aging structures and deferred maintenance that has resulted in unsightly and hazardous conditions. Even the cleanest of restrooms would obtain a poor public rating under these circumstances. However, upon inspection, it was also evident that daily periodic cleaning, either before or after public hours, had not been scheduled and completed by Zoo custodial staff.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Zoological Society should:

- 2.1 Consider the use of on-call custodians or maintainers who could fill in for personnel on vacation or leave. As resources become available, purchase labor saving equipment to facilitate cleaning tasks.
- 2.2 Ensure that restrooms are thoroughly cleaned either after closing hours or before opening, in addition to the daily servicing of restrooms. Sign-in sheets posted on the walls would assure the public that restrooms have been serviced as well as aid the custodial supervisor.
- 2.3 Review the detailed housekeeping report prepared by the custodial experts, which has been provided to the Zoo, and implement the recommendations contained in that report as resources become available.
- 2.4 Implement the following recommendations concerning signage in the Zoo:
  - Assign responsibility for inventory, minor repairs, and cleaning of signs to one department, preferably to one or two persons who would then develop knowledge of the cleaning and maintenance requirements for each type of sign.
  - Establish a regular inspection and replacement schedule for all signs and replace signs that are currently of poor quality or damaged as soon as possible. In addition, consider the costs and benefits of obtaining higher quality signage which is more durable and may result in lowered long

term costs in addition to enhancing visitor enjoyment and projecting a more positive image of the Zoo.

- Install temporary signs in empty exhibit areas that inform visitors that exhibits are “under construction” or with another appropriate explanation.
- Install “STOP” signs or similar highly visible and easy to understand signs at the pathway entrances to employee only areas in order to prevent visitors from mistakenly entering off limits areas in the Zoo which is disruptive to Zoo staff and potentially hazardous to visitors.
- Ensure that the text on the “For Your Information” signs is up to date and that the text is legible.

## **COSTS/BENEFITS**

Implementation of our recommendations would significantly improve the appearance of the Zoo and the quality of Zoo visitors’ experience. Costs to implement the recommendations range from no costs (regular servicing of restrooms and basic cleaning/maintenance of signage). Costs for purchasing labor saving equipment would depend upon the type and quantity of equipment. However, such costs may be offset by labor savings. Purchasing new signs will range from minimal amounts (for temporary signs) and between \$30 and \$500 per permanent exhibit sign.