

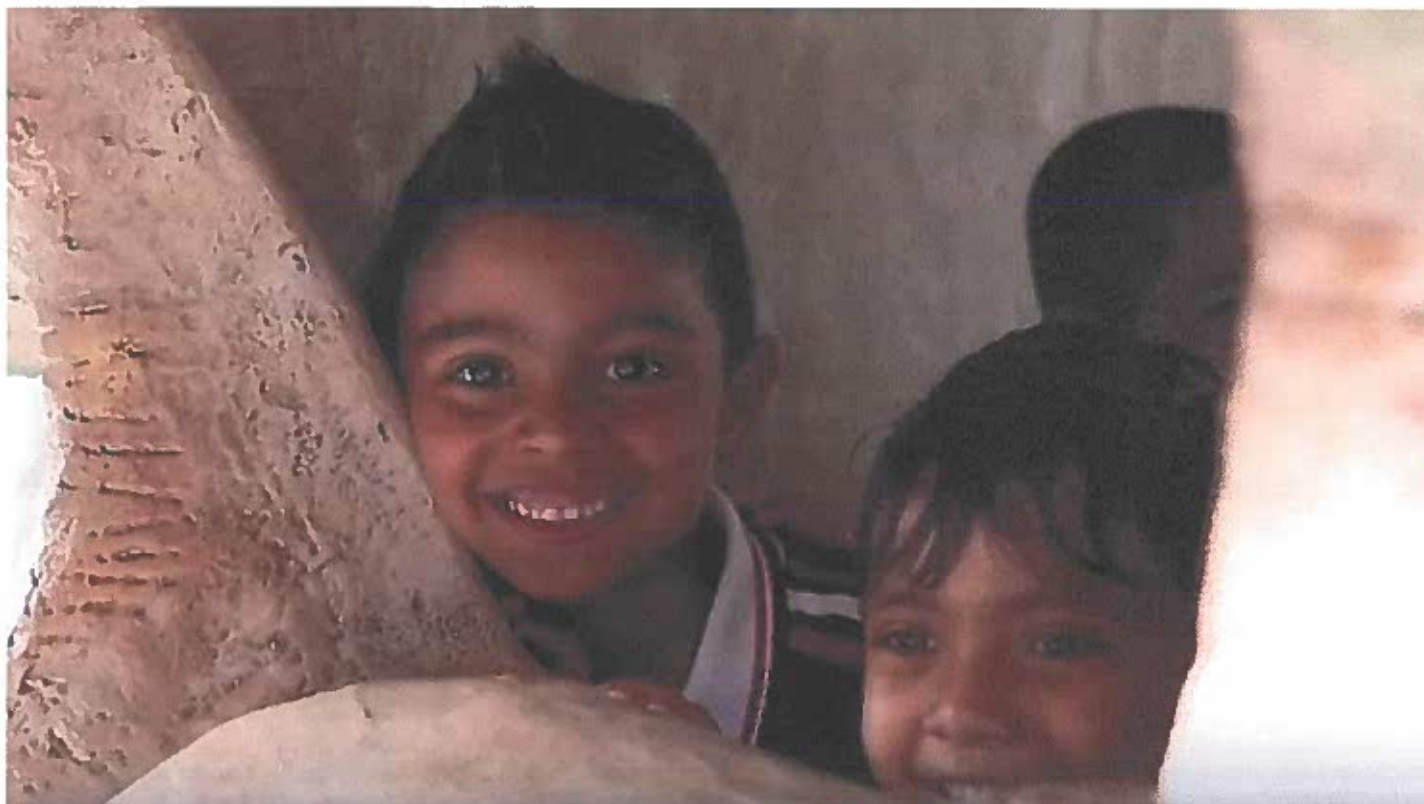
About Museums

BROWSE SECTION:



Museum Facts & Data

Watch: [The World is Better Because of Museums](#)



Museums and the COVID-19 Pandemic

- The pandemic has inflicted profound damage on US museums, the vast majority of which are 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organizations. While the museum field is making strides in its recovery efforts, it will take years to fully rebound to pre-pandemic levels of staffing, revenue, and attendance.^[1]
- [Survey data](#) shows two-thirds of museums continue to experience reduced attendance; institutions average 71% of their pre-pandemic attendance.^[2]

- Financial recovery from the damage of the pandemic has been inconsistent, with 30% of museums seeing decreases in net operating performance, 39% experiencing increases, and 31% seeing no change compared to 2019.[3]
- 26% of responding museums have not recovered to their pre-pandemic staffing levels. Of museums recruiting for job openings, 60% report trouble filling open positions, primarily among front-line roles. Many museums are changing staff compensation packages and working conditions, including half of respondents who have shrunk the gap between their institution's highest and lowest salaries and 50% implementing new initiatives to enhance staff wellness.[4]

Museums Are Economic Engines (Pre-Pandemic data)

- Museums support over 726,000 American jobs.[5]
- Museums contribute \$50 billion to the U.S. economy each year.[6]
- Seventy-six percent of all U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural or heritage activities such as visiting museums. These travelers spend 60 percent more money on average than other leisure travelers.[7]
- The economic activity of museums generates over \$12 billion in tax revenue, one-third of it going to state and local governments. Each job created by the museum sector results in \$16,495 in additional tax revenue.[8]
- Every direct job at a museum supports an additional job in the economy. This is a higher rate than many other industries.[9]
- Museums and other nonprofit cultural organizations return more than \$5 in tax revenue for every \$1 they receive in funding from all levels of government.[10]

Museums Are Community Anchors

- In determining America's Best Cities, *Bloomberg* placed the greatest weight on "leisure amenities [including density of museums], followed by educational metrics and economic metrics...then crime and air quality." [11]
- *Money's* annual 'Best Places to Live' survey incorporates the concentration of accredited museums.[12]

Museums Serve the Whole Public

- More people visit art museums, science centers, historic houses or sites, zoos, or aquariums than attend professional sporting events.[13]
- Museum websites serve a diverse online community, including millions of teachers, parents, and students (including those students who are home-schooled).
- Museum volunteers contribute a million hours of service every week.[14]

- Support for museums is robust regardless of political persuasion. 96% of Americans would approve of lawmakers who acted to support museums. The number is consistently high for respondents who consider themselves politically liberal (97%), moderate (95%), or conservative (93%).[\[15\]](#)
- Many museums offer programs tailored to veterans and military families. In 2019 over 2,000 museums in all 50 states participated in the 10th year of the Blue Star Museums program, offering free summer admission to all active-duty and reserve personnel and their families.[\[16\]](#) In the past five years more than 4 million active duty members and their families have participated in the Blue Star Museums program, which is, on average, more than 800,000 visitors per year, and many other museums offer military discounts or free admission throughout the year. While impacted by the pandemic, the program returned for summer 2021.
- Museums also provide many social services, including programs for children on the autism spectrum, English as a Second Language classes, and programs for adults with Alzheimer's or other cognitive impairments.[\[17\]](#)
- Museums are committed to ensuring that people of all backgrounds have access to high quality experiences in their institutions. In 2012, 37% of museums were free at all times or had suggested admission fees only; nearly all the rest offered discounts or free admission days.[\[18\]](#)
- Since 2014, more than 1,200 museums located in all 50 US states, the District of Columbia, and the US Virgin Islands have facilitated more than 8 million museum visits for low-income Americans through the Museums for All program.[\[19\]](#)
- About 26% of museums are located in rural areas[\[20\]](#); other museums reach these communities with traveling vans, portable exhibits, and robust online resources.

Museums Partner with Schools

- Museums spend over \$2 billion each year on education activities; the typical museum devotes three-quarters of its education budget to K-12 students.[\[21\]](#)
- Museums receive approximately 55 million visits each year from students in school groups.[\[22\]](#)
- Museums help teach the state and local curricula, tailoring their programs in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies.[\[23\]](#)
- Children who visited a museum during kindergarten had higher achievement scores in reading, mathematics, and science in third grade than children who did not. Children who are most at risk for deficits and delays in achievement also see this benefit.[\[24\]](#)

Museums Are Trusted

- The American public regards museums as highly trustworthy—ranking second only to friends and family, and significantly more trustworthy than researchers and scientists, NGOs generally, various news organizations, the government, corporations and business, and social media.[25]
- Museums preserve and protect more than a billion objects.[26]
- The American public considers museums a more reliable source of historical information than books, teachers, or even personal accounts by relatives.[27]

Museums and Public Opinion

- 97% of Americans believe that museums are educational assets for their communities.
- 89% believe that museums contribute important economic benefits to their community.
- 96% would think positively of their elected officials for taking legislative action to support museums.
- 96% want to maintain or increase federal funding for museums.[28]
- Three-quarters of the public think museums are an important part of our civil society, and that museums have a role in supporting civic knowledge and participation.[29]
- 92% of US adults think museums are non-partisan providers of educational content.[30]

Museums Save Species

- In 2022, accredited zoos and aquariums (museums with living collections) spent over \$252 million on field conservation projects in 119 countries.[31]
- Museums are involved with conservation breeding, habitat preservation, public education, field conservation, and supportive research to ensure survival for many of the planet's threatened or endangered species. Museums also conduct or facilitate research to advance the scientific knowledge of the animals in human care and to enhance the conservation of wild populations.

Museums Improve Public Health

- Living in a community with cultural resources confers a five year advantage in cognitive age: museums and similar cultural organizations provide the biggest boost to cognitive health.[32]

[1] [2023 Annual National Snapshot of United States Museums](#), AAM and Wilkening Consulting

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

- [4] Ibid.
- [5] [Museums as Economic Engines](#), AAM and Oxford Economics, 2017
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] [The 2013 Cultural and Heritage Traveler Report](#), Mandala Research
- [8] [Museums as Economic Engines](#), AAM and Oxford Economics, 2017
- [9] Ibid.
- [10] [Arts & Economic Prosperity 5](#), 2017, Americans for the Arts
- [11] [America's 50 Best Cities](#), Bloomberg, 2012
- [12] [How Money Chose the Best Places to Live in 2021](#)
- [13] Broader population sampling conducted on behalf of AAM by [Wilkening Consulting](#), 2018 and 2023
- [14] [Museum Financial Information 2009](#), AAM
- [15] [Museums and Public Opinion](#), AAM and Wilkening Consulting, 2018
- [16] [National Endowment for the Arts, Initiatives, Blue Star Museums](#)
- [17] [Museums on Call](#), AAM, 2013
- [18] *Annual Condition of Museums and the Economy*, AAM, 2013
- [19] [Museums for All](#): An Initiative of the Institute of Museum and Library Services
- [20] [Museum Data Files](#), IMLS, 2014
- [21] [Museum Financial Information 2009](#), AAM
- [22] Ibid.
- [23] [Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystem](#), AAM, 2013
- [24] [The Effect of Informal Learning Environments on Academic Achievement during Elementary School, presented to the American Educational Research Association](#), Swan, 2014
- [25] [Museums and Trust 2021](#), AAM
- [26] [Heritage Health Index](#), Heritage Preservation and the Institute for Museum and Library Services, 2004

[27] [The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life](#), Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, 2000

[28] [Museums and Public Opinion](#), AAM and Wilkening Consulting, 2018

[29] Broader population sampling, 2023, conducted on behalf of AAM by [Wilkening Consulting](#); and 2017 – 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, conducted on behalf of AAM by [Wilkening Consulting](#)

[30] Broader population sampling, 2024, conducted on behalf of AAM by [Wilkening Consulting](#); and 2017 – 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, conducted on behalf of AAM by [Wilkening Consulting](#)

[31] [2022 Annual Report on Conservation and Science](#), Association of Zoos and Aquariums

[32] [Neighborhood cognitive amenities? A mixed-methods study of intellectually-stimulating places and cognitive function among older Americans](#), Finlay et al, Wellbeing, Space and Society, Volume 2, 2021

The American Alliance of Museums' mission is to champion equitable and impactful museums by connecting people, fostering learning and community, and nurturing museum excellence.



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RESEARCH AND REPORTS

2024 Annual National Snapshot of United States Museums

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ANNUAL

National Snapshot of United States Museums



American Alliance of Museums

About the Report

The 2024 Annual National Snapshot of United States Museums survey, conducted by AAM and Wilkening Consulting, was fielded in August 2024. It tracked key metrics the Alliance began to collect in June 2020 to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on museums and, more recently, gauging new opportunities and challenges for the sector.

This is the sixth “snapshot” report of the museum field that the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) has produced since 2020. In that time, the purpose of these reports has shifted from monitoring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on museums to helping us track recovery from

those impacts, and more recently to gauging new opportunities and challenges for our sector. The data collected for these reports has become critical to national advocacy efforts, especially when advocating for funding for US museums.

Over 400 museum directors responded to the survey on their organizations' behalf, representing a broad cross-section of the field in geography, size, and discipline. This year, thanks to more robust participation, the data has been disaggregated by geographic region, museum discipline, operating expenses, and governance type.

[Read the full report.](#)

Key Findings

This year's report offers a window into the state of the museum field in 2024, with information on attendance, employment, finances, disruptions, DEI backlash, cybersecurity, and exhibitions. The data shows positive trends in employment and individual giving, but illuminates challenges in recruitment and growing concern around shifts in philanthropy. Four years after the pandemic closed museums across the United States, the field's recovery is trending upwards, though it is still incomplete.

In the face of these and other challenges, it continues to be critical to advocate for funding and policies that support the museum sector. During the height of the pandemic, AAM's advocacy work helped secure billions of dollars of federal relief funding. As we recover from this global catastrophe, our collective efforts will be required to help our sector thrive for years to come.

The findings show encouraging improvement over the statistics reported in the 2023 Snapshot report. Still, recovery remains uneven, and many museums have not yet returned to their pre-pandemic attendance or financial health:

- Four years after the pandemic's start, only half of museums (51 percent) have recovered to 100 percent or more of their pre-pandemic attendance levels. This is an improvement from 2023 when only one-third of museums had fully recovered to their pre-pandemic attendance levels.
- Museums support a broad range of American jobs in their communities, from security and administrative positions to educators and exhibition designers. 89% of museums have maintained consistent staff sizes or grown their staff over the past year.
- Financial recovery from the damage of the pandemic has been inconsistent, with 19% of museums seeing decreases in net operating performance as compared to 2019, 57% experiencing increases, and 24% seeing no change.

- Looking forward, 46% of respondents project their bottom line will increase this year compared to 2023, 17% expect decreases in their bottom line, and 37% expect no change.
- While charitable donations are up, 61% of museums report that the number of individual donors to the museum has stayed the same or decreased in the last five years. This indicates a sustainability challenge that comports with the broader nonprofit sector and demonstrates the need to provide the charitable deduction for the vast majority of taxpayers who do not itemize.
- When asked what they anticipate to be the most significant disruptions to their business strategies in 2025, almost half of respondents identified shifts in philanthropy (48%) and financial/market instability (46%), followed by a reduction or elimination of government funding (33%).

This research makes clear that disruptions to philanthropy, market instability, and threats of reduction or elimination in government funding have the potential to radically impact an already fragile sector. While the museum field's recovery from the pandemic is improving, significant support is still needed to secure this vital sector.

[Read the full report.](#)



American Alliance of Museums

Upcoming Events