



**CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
MUSEUM BOARD AGENDA
556 W MAPLE
Thursday, November 7, 2024
5:00 PM**

Mission Statement: *The Birmingham Museum will explore meaningful connections with our past, in order to enrich our community and enhance its character and sustainability. Our mission is to promote understanding of Birmingham's historical and cultural legacy through preservation and interpretation of its ongoing story.*

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

3. Approval of the Minutes

Minutes of September 5, 2024

4. New Business

A. Museum Board Meeting Schedule for 2025

B. Exhibit walkthrough (lobby): Indigenous contributions to Birmingham's story

5. Unfinished Business

A. Strategic Plan--Review and discuss:

- Process and Timeline for Strategic Planning, revised
- (new addition) *Museum Board Leadership* (Museum, Sept-Oct 2024)
- *Post-pandemic workplace*
- *Digital (R)evolution*
- *Livable communities for our elders*
- *Reframing History*
- *2022 Trendswatch*
- *2024 Trendswatch*
- *The Museum Plus AI Network*
- City of Birmingham Generative AI Guidelines

6. Communication and Reports

A. Director Report

B. Member comments

C. Public comments

7. Next Meeting: December 5, 2024

8. Adjournment

NOTICE: Individuals with disabilities requiring accommodations for effective participation in this meeting should contact the city clerk's office at (248) 530-1880 (voice), or (248) 644-3405 (TDD) at least one day in advance to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance. *APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MUSEUM BOARD MEETINGS ARE AVAILABLE IN THE CITY CLERK'S OFFICE AND ON THE CITY WEBSITE AT www.bhamgov.org.* City of Birmingham, 151 Martin, Birmingham, MI 48009; 248.530.1800. Persons with

disabilities that may require assistance for effective participation in this public meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at the number (248) 530-1880, or (248) 644-5115 (for the hearing impaired) at least one day before the meeting to request help in mobility, visual, hearing, or other assistance.

Las personas con incapacidad que requieren algún tipo de ayuda para la participación en esta sesión pública deben ponerse en contacto con la oficina del escribano de la ciudad en el número (248) 530-1800 o al (248) 644-5115 (para las personas con incapacidad auditiva) por lo menos un día antes de la reunión para solicitar ayuda a la movilidad, visual, auditiva, o de otras asistencias. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).



**CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
MUSEUM BOARD MEETING
556 W. Maple
Thursday, September 5, 2024
5:00 PM**

Members Present: Mike Abelson, Kristy Barrett (Alternate), Alexandra Harris,
Eva Kirkman, Marty Logue, Pat Hughes, Judith Keefer
Members Absent: Bev Erickson
Administration: Museum Director Leslie Pielack

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM by Chairperson Logue.

**Approval of the Minutes
Minutes of July 11, 2024**

MOTION: by Logue, seconded by Hughes:

To approve the minutes of July 11, 2024.

VOTE: Yeas, 7
Nays, 0

New Business

In addressing the board's strategic planning task, members were in agreement about the following process, which could take approximately a year:

- 1) Continuing to review general concepts in the next one or two meetings
- 2) Examining our current plan and retaining, eliminating, or modifying our overall goals
- 3) Developing objectives from those goals
- 4) Communicating these goals and objectives and seeking input from the public at large, our patrons, and from focus groups
- 5) Incorporating feedback into a document and
- 6) Presenting the final strategic plan to the city commission for their acceptance.

The board discussed some of the concepts raised by the readings provided by Director Pielack. The intent of the readings is to help orient the board to what is going on in the museum field in general, and the idea is to stimulate discussion as well as help differentiate and define our museum's identity and purpose. Regarding ethics, Director Pielack clarified that there are two sets of ethical rules and standards for Museum Board members; the City of Birmingham's Ethics Ordinance is primary, but there also are museum-related ethical standards (e.g., based on the idea of holding the museum's collection and archives in the public trust) that apply to what we do as a museum. Regarding changes in the museum field since 2008, a number of predictions made about the increasing role of digital content and importance of museums as a way to meet social needs have held true, especially regarding helping people connect and find meaning. Regarding the matter of values, members discussed the importance of being a museum

for the whole community, the concept of being responsible to our history, and the phrase 'humanizing history' was affirmed as a way of characterizing museum priorities. Members also indicated they preferred language such as 'inclusion' and 'belonging' as we move forward toward restating our strategic goals. Members suggested that it would be helpful to review metrics and data as part of the process, which Director Pielack indicated would be most useful as we review goals and objectives specifically. The timeframe for the strategic plan and specific objectives, tasks, and methodologies will be best determined when the board finalizes its goals, as our community's needs may change rapidly and may require a shorter time span or more flexibility in implementing the plan. Ms. Kirkman has some materials she would like to share with the board relating to the upcoming discussion.

Communication and Reports

Director Pielack gave a verbal report regarding upcoming (planned) replacement of two of the Allen House HVAC units with more efficient units, awaiting final review of the engineering issues relating to the Pond Zone design (Phases 3 and 4) to develop a RFP, hopefully this fall, and several special tours of the museum. The exhibit has been delayed by a combination of unavoidable issues, but progress is being made. The museum will be starting its regular monthly lecture series at the library beginning September 12 on themes relating to various aspects of the transportation exhibit.

Member Comments

Ms. Logue announced that the Friends will be holding their annual cemetery tour on September 19. The Friends conduct two cemetery tours annually, and the fall tour is the Pioneers-focused tour, and a part of their fundraising efforts.

Public Comments

None.

The next Regular Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 3, 2024, at 5:00 PM.

Ms. Logue adjourned the meeting at 6:23 PM.



MUSEUM BOARD

556 WEST MAPLE, BIRMINGHAM, MI
248.530.1928

MEETING SCHEDULE 2025

**All Meetings Scheduled for 5:00 PM, first Thursday of the month,
unless otherwise noted.**

MONTH	DAY	MEETING	LOCATION
January	2	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
February	6	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
March	6	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
April	3	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
May	1	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
June	5	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
July	10	Regular Meeting-ALTERNATE DAY DUE TO INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY	Birmingham Museum
August	7	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
September	4	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
October	9	Regular Meeting-ALTERNATE DAY DUE TO OBSERVED RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY	
November	6	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum
December	4	Regular Meeting	Birmingham Museum

Proposed Strategic Plan Revision Process, 2024/25 for 2025-2028 Plan

July 2024-September 2025 **Revised 11/5/2024**

I. Review and Assess Museum's Status, Role, and Goals

Months 1 to 3 (**Sept-Oct-Nov**): Background and Orientation for Museum Board Members

1. Review information on current and future trends in the museum field
 - a. National trends and reports; American Alliance of Museums, American Association for State and Local History
 - b. Leslie's input from History Leadership Institute
2. Develop 2 or 3 general directions for next ten years derived from national trends
3. **Look at some recent strategic plans from other museums**

Months 4 and 5 (**Dec-Jan**): Assess status of Birmingham Museum in context

1. Review and discuss mission and vision as well as ordinance definitions
2. Review Birmingham Museum's accomplishments, past ten years (since 2013)
 - a. Objectives met
 - b. Objectives revised
 - c. Objectives unmet but still applicable
 - d. Objectives abandoned
 - e. **Review data on museum audience, activity, and reach**

Months 6 and 7 (**Feb-Mar**) Develop draft plan goals

1. Establish current and future audiences
2. Identify Birmingham Museum current strengths and needs in light of vision, mission, and **three to** ten year goals
3. Review possible new objectives
4. **Review Birmingham's Sustainability Plan to coordinated objectives**
5. Identify opportunities, partners, and capacity-building possibilities, and challenges

Months **8 and 9** (**Apr-May**): Develop assessment tool/s and process for community input on draft plan goals and objectives

1. Identify most important areas of feedback
2. Identify audience segments and means to engage with each segment
3. Develop process and tools for seeking input

II. Analyze and Develop Plan

Months 10-12 (**Jun-Jul**): Community Feedback and Analysis

1. Gather and analyze data
2. Review ways/methods of incorporating data into a **three to** ten-year plan

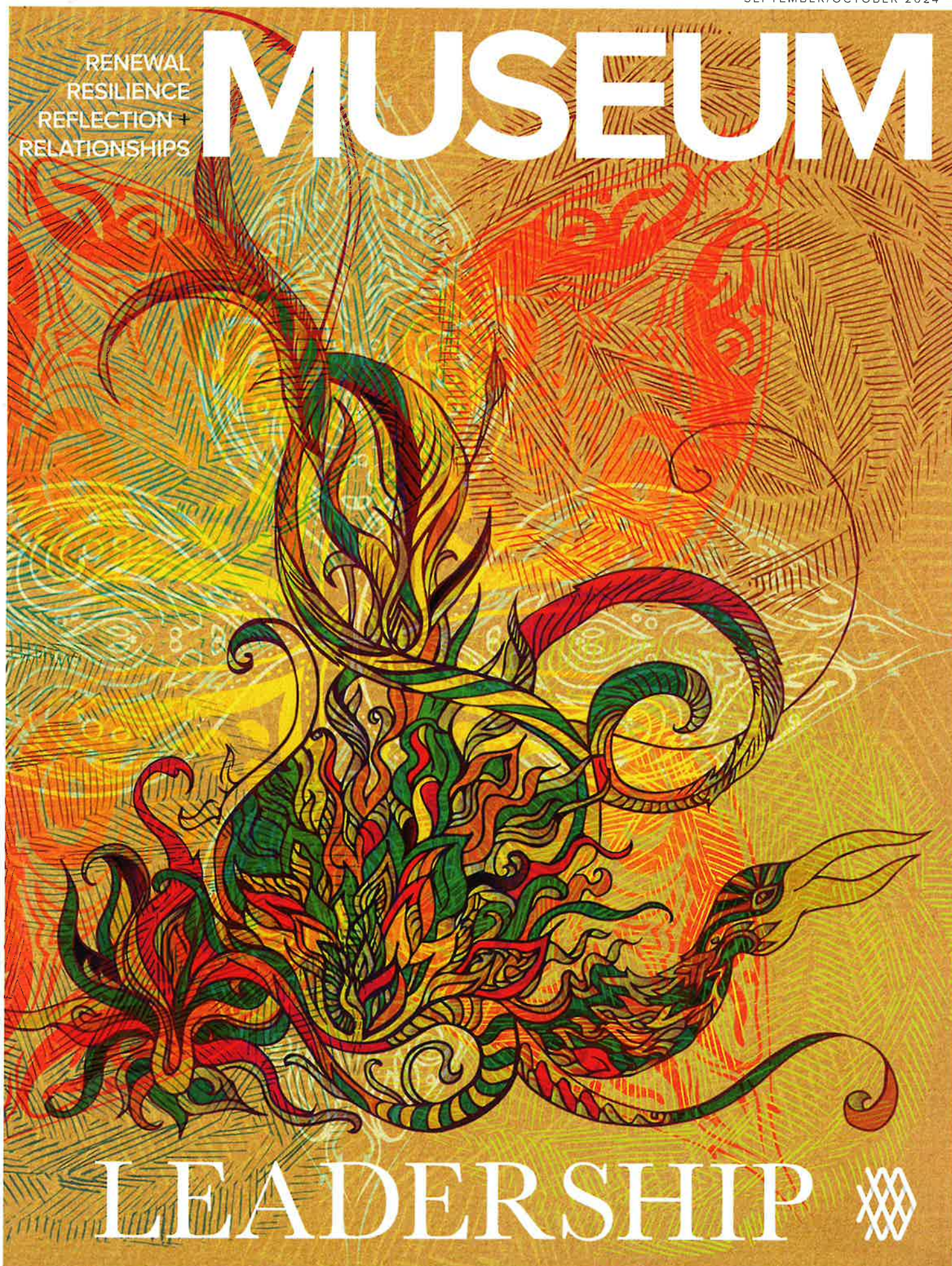
Months 13-15 (**Aug-Sep**): Develop final plan and present to City Commission

1. Review/finalize proposed document
2. Send Museum Board approved plan to City Commission

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024

RENEWAL
RESILIENCE
REFLECTION +
RELATIONSHIPS

MUSEUM



LEADERSHIP



Museum Board Leadership

By Carys Kunze, AAM Research & Data Specialist

Museums boards are critical to museums' missions and their ability to serve their communities. They set the tone for the entire institution and are defined by the individuals who comprise them. Who is serving on museum boards, how do they work, and what is the financial state of the museums they serve?

To answer these questions and more, the American Alliance of Museums is proud to share *Museum Board Leadership 2024: A National Report*. This research highlights the critical strides

museum boards have taken regarding diversity and inclusion in recent years, as well as the many challenges and opportunities to further equity in the highest ranks of museum leadership and improve overall efficacy.

This research was generously sponsored by Northern Trust, and we are grateful for their support of this important study.

The People

What is the state of museum board diversity? Boards have made meaningful progress in diversifying their

ranks, and still have significant room for improvement. In 2017, we found that a staggering half (46 percent) of museum directors reported that their boards were entirely white (i.e., no people of color). The 2017 museum board leadership report revealed that though the majority of directors and board chairs agreed on the importance of diversifying their ranks, nearly half of boards lacked even a single person of color, and only 10 percent had developed a plan of action to become more inclusive. This data helped to spark AAM's landmark initiative *Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity & Inclusion*, designed to support them in this challenge.

In *Museum Board Leadership 2024*, 27 percent of directors report their boards are entirely white. While this is a meaningful difference from the 2017 data, 71 percent of directors report that three-quarters or more of their board members are white, indicating that many board members of color may be one of only a few people of color, or the only person of color, in the room.

When looking at gender, we found relative parity in representation between men and women on boards. While the majority of

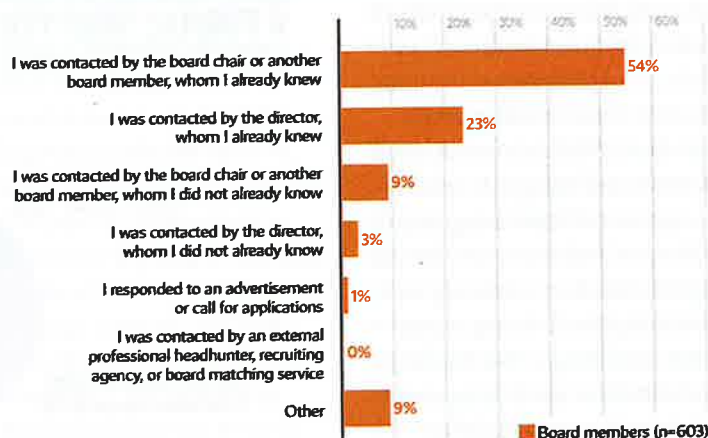


museum directors overall are women, women are much more likely to direct smaller museums than men. About three-quarters of museums with revenues under \$1 million are led by women directors, while approximately half of museums with revenues of \$1 million and above are led by women directors. (Read the full report for additional demographic information on boards and directors including age, disability, and identifying as LGBTQ+.)

The homogeneity that persists in many boardrooms may be, in part, attributed to recruitment tactics. The majority of board survey respondents were recruited through personal networks, and three-quarters of board members (77 percent) were recruited by someone they already knew. Primary use of this recruitment method, in many cases, can serve as a barrier to increasing diversity among the board. Expanding the use of other recruiting methods can help organizations and boards reach potential members whom they might not have otherwise considered and who can bring skills, perspectives, and talents that the organization might otherwise lack.

There is wide agreement that board diversity and inclusivity are important for board effectiveness, and this sentiment has grown since the 2017 study. The majority of directors and board members agree that board diversity and inclusivity are important for advancing the organization's mission, enhancing the organization's standing with the public, understanding the populations that the organization serves, and other important goals.

HOW WERE YOU RECRUITED TO JOIN THIS BOARD?



Directors report that two-thirds of boards (66 percent) have agreed that it is important to incorporate diversity and inclusion into their organization's core values, but many museums have not followed up on these discussions with concrete actions. Directors have taken actions such as modifying recruitment efforts to reach people from diverse backgrounds (39 percent), conducting DEAI training (37 percent, a notable increase from 14 percent in 2017), modifying policies and procedures to be more inclusive and equitable (33 percent), or developing a detailed plan for the board to become more inclusive (12 percent). Only one-third of directors indicate their organization has a written DEAI action plan that provides a clear next step for progressing their DEAI work.

Widely held views regarding board diversity and inclusion can provide a strong foundation for addressing this gap. *Museum Board Leadership 2024*, in addition to AAM's *Excellence in DEAI Report*

issued in 2022, provides a number of resources and tools to help museum leadership turn DEAI values into actionable and measurable strategies.

The Work

Boards perform a wide variety of critical functions to ensure their museums are thriving. What does board culture look like, how are meetings run, and what areas are in greatest need of improvement?

Most board members and directors express that their board has a positive impact on their organization's performance. Board members are particularly effective at financial oversight and understanding their organizations' missions. However, board members and directors widely agree that boards can improve their performance regarding fundraising, outreach, advocacy, and government relations.

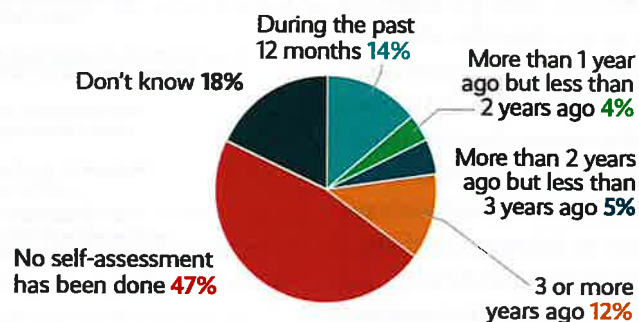
Directors in particular cited fundraising as a key area for improvement by a wide margin. This is at odds with the way directors

report their board's priorities when selecting future members (only 28 percent of directors reported that their board prioritizes fundraising abilities when recruiting new members). While almost all board members are engaged in some component of fundraising, only 67 percent of board members felt that expectations for fundraising were clearly explained during recruitment, indicating a need for clarity and consistent reinforcement of this important responsibility.

In addition to fundraising, many boards can improve their understanding of government relations and advocacy work. Changes in government policy can have a tremendous impact on an organization's operations. The report found that many boards (43 percent) do not monitor the impact of government policy on their organization's mission and resources despite that, on average, nearly a quarter (24 percent) of museums' budgets come from local, state, or federal government. One-quarter of boards (24 percent) do not have relationships with their elected officials, and many boards (38 percent) do not educate policymakers on behalf of their organization, its mission, or the nonprofit sector. One important way that boards can champion their museums is to become engaged in advocacy efforts that support their museum's best interests. As citizen leaders, board members play a unique role in representing the community benefits that museums provide to the public they serve.

Fundraising, government relations, and advocacy are areas that

HOW RECENTLY HAS YOUR BOARD CONDUCTED A FORMAL WRITTEN SELF-ASSESSMENT TO EVALUATE ITS OWN PERFORMANCE?



Directors (n=423)

board members and directors agree there is need for improvement. Conversely, we saw a significant gap between board members and directors on accountability—23 percent of directors cited “holding themselves more accountable” as a key area for board improvement, while only 9 percent of board members cited the same. Board self-assessments can ensure that evolving best practices are being followed, policies are appropriate and effective, and the board is adapting to external changes. Only one-quarter (23 percent) of boards have conducted a self-assessment within the past three years. Directors and boards might consider BoardSource’s recommendation to conduct a self-assessment every two to three years as a way to promote greater accountability.

Directors and board members can celebrate that board members widely agree that meetings are well run and well planned. Routine reporting takes up almost half (45 percent) of board meeting time.

Strategic, future-focused, and generative work is the focus of almost one-third (30 percent) of meeting time, with fiduciary issues taking up the remaining quarter of meeting time. Directors who state their board has a very positive impact on the effectiveness of their organization’s performance are also more likely to report that their board spends comparatively more time on future-focused, strategic, or generative work, compared to directors who say their boards have a neutral or negative impact on their organization’s performance.

One of the brightest spots in the report is that people take real joy in leading their museums—most directors (75 percent), and almost all board members (92 percent), find their roles moderately or extremely satisfying. Most board members and directors expressed that their board has a positive impact on their organization’s performance, and 89 percent of board members also report that they feel their perspective is valued.



Andre LuJan



Chris Morehead



Amber Angeloni

BOLDLY CHARTING NEW FRONTIERS



Stephen White



Roberto Chavez



KT Todd

**The 2024
recipients of
the Nancy
Hanks Memorial
Award for Rising
Stars discuss
the future
of museum
leadership.**



Miguel Ordeñana

As the museum field changes, so too does its leadership ranks. We recently asked the recipients of the 2024 Nancy Hanks Memorial Award for Rising Stars—museum professionals with 10 years or less of experience who are making an impact in their institutions, communities, and the museum field—about their experiences in the profession so far. Award winners who contributed to this article are **Amber Angeloni**, Manager of Visitor Experience, Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens; **Roberto Chavez**, Educator for Children and Family Learning, American Museum of Natural History; **Andre LuJan**, Director, Texas through Time; **Chris Morehead**, Director of Experience and Operations, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields; **Miguel Ordeñana**, Senior Manager, Community Science, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County; **KT Todd**, Director of Learning & Research, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh; and **Stephen White**, Chief Strategy Officer, Center of Science and Industry. Their responses have been condensed and edited for clarity and brevity.

From your perspective, what are the most pressing challenges facing museums today?

Andre LuJan: I believe space is one of the biggest challenges facing museums today. Large institutions in major metropolitan areas have reached their limits in expanding collections and exhibits. This exacerbates a second major issue: rural areas are growing faster and lack museums to represent local history and culture. The solution is a new wave of small museums in rural communities, preserving history and culture by keeping these resources at or near their discovery.

Stephen White: I have witnessed three key challenges for our industry: public funding, serving the most vulnerable in our neighborhoods, and navigating the innovation revolution led by AI and other digital advancements. Museums often rely on a mix of public and private funding, which can be threatened by economic downturns, changes in government policy, and shifting philanthropic priorities. We must reestablish museums as a “necessary” partner for our community in the eyes of public officials to ensure long-term sustainability. Community-based programs outside the museum are critical. Engaging

underserved youth through innovative technology, such as AI, can create immersive experiences necessary to attract and retain visitors, particularly those from marginalized communities.

KT Todd: Changes in attendance patterns, workers' expectations, and cultural polarization are significant. Many museums have not seen attendance numbers return to pre-COVID levels, forcing them to rethink their business models and find new revenue sources. As the population diversifies, many museums find pervasive whiteness in their leadership and histories perpetuating racial inequities in attendance, staffing, and societal outcomes. Worker expectations are also shifting, with increasing unionization and demands for cost-of-living adjustments that museums struggle to meet. Additionally, cultural polarization around issues central to museum missions poses a challenge, as museums strive to uphold their values without alienating significant portions of the population.

Chris Morehead: Institutions find it increasingly difficult to balance reckoning with problematic histories and evolve in more dynamic and diverse ways. Social media amplifies community frustrations

with perceived and legitimate lack of progress. Staying abreast of digital trends and incorporating technologies like AR and VR to enhance visitor experiences is essential. Appealing to broad and diverse audiences, including younger generations from various backgrounds, is key. Ensuring proper representation and inclusivity in collections and exhibitions is critical. Maintaining and preserving collections with limited space and resources while implementing environmentally sustainable practices is a balance many institutions face.

Miguel Ordeñana: The biggest challenges for museums include addressing their colonial roots and outdated policies as they strive to become more inclusive to diverse visitors, partners, and staff. Museum leadership faces multiple priorities, which can make equity and justice work uncomfortable, risky, or costly. Museums must act with humility and courage to dismantle institutional barriers, which will enhance their competitiveness for funding, inspire equitable partnerships, and better support and retain staff and visitors reflective of the communities they serve.

What types of support have been crucial to your professional and/or career development?

Amber Angeloni: The most important kind of support for me is feeling trusted by leadership. I am grateful for the times I have been given room to fulfill my vision for my department.

White: I am blessed to have had great mentors who have helped me on my servant leadership journey, enabling my work to serve the community through a “people-first” ethos. I have been fortunate to have colleagues with vast expertise who collectively serve the public. As a first-generation college student who grew up in poverty, I am thankful for mentors who inspired me toward “service-minded” leadership.

Roberto Chavez: Mentorship, continued communication, and collaboration have been crucial to my professional development, especially

as an LGBTQ+ professional and a museum educator of color. The museum field—especially museum education—can feel small and thankless, making mentorship vital for guidance and support. Staying in touch with former colleagues can be uplifting, as leaving a long-term museum job can feel isolating. Too often, museum professionals feel siloed in their roles, making collaboration essential for retention and maintaining institutional knowledge. Documenting institutional knowledge is crucial, as memory is fallible, and people leave. The pandemic highlighted how quickly the museum field can lose talented people, underscoring the necessity of continued communication and collaboration to maintain these networks.

Ordeñana: Leadership and professional development opportunities that allow collaboration with internal staff and external colleagues have been crucial for my career. Building trust and authentic partnerships has been vital. Support for my growth as a leader and the flexibility to bring my whole self to work have been invaluable.

What have been your proudest accomplishments in your work, and why?

LuJan: Founding my own nonprofit museum of paleontology and building it from the ground up tops my list. Discovering new genus and species of dinosaurs, some soon to be named after me, is also one of my proudest accomplishments.

Angeloni: My biggest accomplishment has been the rollout of the Gallery Host program at the Cummer Museum. Building the team, improving onboarding and ongoing training, and watching my initial hires grow into team leads has been rewarding.

White: I am proud of my work to support low-income youth and families, particularly through the “Learning Lunchbox Model of Engagement,” which delivers STEAM content to underserved youth. This program has expanded to various settings, distributing over 350,000 kits across multiple states and countries. I am also proud of my advocacy work

during the pandemic, supporting the inclusion of museums in the “Shuttered Venue Operators” grant program and testifying to the Ohio legislature on strategies to aid the museum industry.

Todd: My proudest accomplishment is building a team where marginalized people feel safe and can challenge the status quo. Creating an environment that centers care and wellness while committing to high-quality work has been an ongoing effort. Most of all, I am proud of nurturing a predominantly Black and Brown, disabled, and queer team.

Morehead: I am extremely proud of the work I have done over the past decade to launch Newfields’ Community Engagement Program. This program, built with more than 50 community partners, has facilitated the participation of over 100,000 members of the Indianapolis community. The record annual access program visitation is a testament to the power of working hand in hand with the community.

Ordeñana: A significant accomplishment was building relationships with local Indigenous communities through work involving a culturally significant animal. This opportunity led to numerous equitable partnerships and collaborations with tribes, advocating for their interests within traditional scientific and museum audiences.

What advice would you give to others seeking fulfillment in their museum careers?

LuJan: Be bold, think outside the box, and don’t be afraid to make mistakes. This career path is a marathon, not a sprint, so making slow progress is not a bad thing. Lasting changes must be built on solid foundations, which may take years or even decades to accomplish.

Angeloni: Relationships and empathy are everything. Most of us are here because of our love of objects, but caring for people is just as important. Remember, the preservation and care of objects is a gift for future generations.

White: Consider the concept of servant leadership and “servant learning” in your work. Servant learning involves applying principles like empathy, healing, growing people, and inspiring action to advance learning systems in your community. Leverage partnerships to achieve your vision and mission. Also, deliver programs that impact the community beyond the museum’s walls, reaching community centers, churches, food banks, and homeless centers where the most vulnerable live and learn.

Todd: Take time for joy. Experience your museum as a visitor, not just as staff. Play, explore, learn, and engage; it will enrich your work. Spend extra time on tasks you enjoy, even if they’re not top priorities. Also, build community with other museum workers. Support one another, share your celebrations and sorrows, and remember that knowledge from outside the field is valuable too.

Chavez: Remind yourself what brought you into the field, the joy you experienced, what you are grateful for, and the collaborations you are proud of. Document these moments for yourself and posterity—not just for grants, performance reviews, and self-advocacy.

Ordeñana: Aim to open doors not only for yourself but for the next generation. Museums’ colonial pasts won’t vanish overnight, but lean into growth opportunities even when they are uncomfortable. People respect those who are humble, relatable, and transparent about their values. Use your platform and privilege to advocate for those with less voice, even if it involves discomfort and risk.

How do you foresee the evolution of museums in the future, and what steps are necessary to prepare for these changes?

LuJan: I envision numerous smaller satellite museums partnering with anchor institutions, creating jobs and opportunities to present our shared cultural and natural history.

White: Museums will increasingly extend beyond their physical walls through partnerships with schools, community organizations, nonprofits, and businesses. They will offer mobile programs, educational workshops, and cultural events addressing local needs. Investing in workforce development programs and digital platforms for online learning will be crucial. Training team members in partnership building and cultural competency will better serve diverse populations, preparing a diverse future workforce and promoting workforce skills in emerging fields.

Todd: Museums need to adapt to changing audiences and polarized political climates. They must be willing to do the internal work to create inclusive workplaces. Museums should become places that disrupt societal divisions and foster community building.

Morehead: Building a foundation for a more inclusive tomorrow, integrating evolving technologies, and applying diversity, equity, access, and inclusion lenses will be essential. Museums must transform from places to learn about culture into active contributors to the cultural landscape, ensuring all audiences feel connected and fostering a sense of belonging.

Chavez: To evolve and prepare for change, museums must first look within. To retain the talent of emerging professionals, we must pay living wages. Full stop. Otherwise, we lose talented people and cannot grow. The phrase “This is how things have always been done” can stifle new ideas. Make room for emerging professionals’ contributions and trust them to uphold your museum’s values.

Ordeñana: Museums need to reckon with their colonial past and address existing institutional barriers. Playing it safe and avoiding risks will render institutions irrelevant. Pathway programs and outreach initiatives are essential, but museums must also create safe and nurturing environments for diverse communities.

In what ways do you believe museums contribute to making the world a better place?

Angeloni: Museums provide a haven for those who want to be surrounded by beauty and connect with other cultures and experiences. When done right, they create a love of diversity and a method for connecting with other human beings.

White: Museums make the world better through service, uplifting communities, supporting workforce development, and championing advocacy on critical issues. They provide spaces for public dialogue, cultural events, and educational programs, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting cultural understanding. Museums also support educational equity, particularly for underserved populations, and offer insights into career pathways.

Todd: Museums convene people, building community and a sense of belonging. They celebrate culture and sustain marginalized cultures, broadening our understanding and building empathy. Museums make us feel alive through joy, awe, sadness, and excitement. They have the power to create structural change and make the world a better place.

Ordeñana: Museums inspire wonder and curiosity. Museums make knowledge accessible, regardless of background, through stunning exhibitions that cater to visual and experiential learners. Their collections can serve diverse communities, fostering connections to the past and ongoing learning.

Morehead: Museums center, educate, and open new worlds to explore. They challenge our understanding of the past, present, and future, pushing the boundaries of possibility. Museums have the ability to connect deeply with their communities, unifying us through shared history and aspirations, fostering curiosity and hope for a better tomorrow.

The Post-pandemic Workplace

CATEGORY: [MUSEUM MAGAZINE](#)

Posted on [Jan 13, 2023](#)

This article originally appeared in Museum magazine's January/February 2023 issue, a benefit of AAM [membership](#).

How can museums build the workforce they need while creating better, more equitable labor practices?

This is not complicated. If you can't afford to pay your employees a living wage, you do not have a viable business model.

—Robert Reich

As the world shut down in 2020, unemployment soared to its highest rate since the government started keeping records in 1948. Labor participation crashed to a 50-year low as people left the workforce to care for family and protect themselves and their loved ones. Many of those still working were stressed, fearful, angry, and feeling burnt out.

By summer 2022, worker disengagement and discontent were at an all-time high: 60 percent of employees reported they were emotionally detached at work, and nearly one-fifth were outright miserable. Economist Anthony Klotz coined the term “The Great Resignation” to describe the record number of workers leaving their jobs in this time of trauma—4.3 million in August 2021 alone. Long term, this labor shortage may be exacerbated by the massive effects of long COVID, which potentially affects 31 million working-age Americans.

Given all of this, how can museums attract and retain the workforce they need while building better, more equitable labor practices?

The Challenge

The stress and instability of recent years is causing some people to question ingrained attitudes about the primacy of work. In China and South Korea, this gave rise to the “lying flat” movement in which young people took to social media to extol the virtues of a frugal lifestyle (supported by minimal income). In Atlanta, artist and theologian Tricia Hersey founded The Nap Ministry, a reaction to burnout culture centered in Black liberation. In fall 2022, the media began writing about “quiet quitting,” which, confusingly, sometimes refers to “checking out”—doing the bare minimum required by a job—and sometimes to a healthy practice of drawing firm boundaries around work rather than striving to overachieve.

While the pandemic may have brought growing dissatisfaction about work to a head, reactions such as lying flat, “napping,” or quietly enforcing work-life boundaries reflect long-standing tensions. One might argue they are the inevitable result of increased wealth inequality, social stratification, and a drop in socioeconomic mobility. What is the point of going “over and above” at work when your salary doesn’t cover basic living expenses, much less enable you to pay down student debt? The pandemic also forced us to confront the fact that unless we provide better protection, compensation, and respect, undervalued but essential work (teaching, nursing, providing childcare) may go undone.



In 2021, Anti-Racist Design Teams guided improvements to working conditions and compensation practices at the Oakland Museum of California. Courtesy of the Oakland Museum of California

Growing resistance to the many deficiencies of the workplace and the rise in the power of labor mean that employers must compete in a tight labor market. This has led to significant changes in how businesses recruit and retain staff. To expand the pool of potential hires, some are rethinking position prerequisites, dropping degree requirements, and explicitly valuing life experience in addition to formal education. (In response to this trend, LinkedIn, a major global platform for recruitment, has introduced a “career breaks” feature to make it easier for candidates to highlight skills and experience they have acquired outside the workplace.) Other companies are looking

outside the traditional workforce for skilled workers, including the pool of 72 million people reaching retirement age, many of whom want to continue to work part-time. Entire sectors, notably technology, are capitalizing on the preference for remote work, freeing employees to live where they like.

The competition for labor has pushed up wages—by 4.6 percent in the private sector in 2021—but employers are expanding other incentives as well. In response to data that the top reason for workers quitting was lack of career development, some companies are prioritizing training and establishing mentorship programs. Some companies are helping workers repay student debt, while others are covering tuition for continuing education. In the wake of the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision, some are even offering to cover travel costs for employees who need to go out of state to seek abortions.

We are only beginning to assess significant long-term changes in work prompted by pandemic disruptions. Legislative efforts in California are seeking to cap a full (non-overtime) workweek at 32 hours (perhaps piloting future changes to the national Fair Labor Standards Act). Some companies are experimenting with the end of the five-day workweek, whether that takes the form of a three-day office week within a longer workweek or four days of work (80 percent of the traditional workweek) at 100 percent salary. These efforts may be supported by research showing that parents, based on pandemic educational experiments, overwhelmingly prefer a four-day school week as well.

There is significant consensus that one massive change driven by the pandemic—the rise of remote and hybrid work—is here to stay. Remote work tripled between 2019 and 2021—to nearly 18 percent of all workers in the US. Research suggests that in coming years from 20 percent to nearly 40 percent of jobs may be fully remote, while 15 percent may be hybrid—with a quarter of work time spent in home offices. There will doubtless be some rebound from the pandemic peak, but some sectors, notably technology, are making remote work a fundamental part of their business model, both as a way to court scarce workers and to save on the costs of expensive real estate.

The untethering of work from geography is reshaping cities across the US. Major urban cores, including New York, Boston, San Francisco, Miami, and Washington, DC, are hollowing out as companies close offices and workers relocate to areas with lower costs of living and higher qualities of life. Many formerly thriving cities are struggling to rebuild their tax base and redevelop downtowns as attractive places to live, shop, and hang out. Some small cities, including Ruston, Louisiana, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, are courting remote workers with financial incentives to relocate. One interesting side effect

of this migration might be increased political diversity in the heartland, potentially blurring the boundaries between red and blue America.

What This Means for Museums

The pandemic labor exodus struck the nonprofit sector particularly hard, and as the world reopened for business, this shortage only got worse. In the 2022 Nonprofit Industry Pulse Survey, 69 percent of nonprofits cited staffing challenges, which left social service nonprofits unable to meet acute needs created or exacerbated by the pandemic. In AAM's 2021 *National Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on US Museums*, directors anticipated that one of the biggest disruptions in 2022 would be labor and skills shortages.



The Mychal's/ESMoA Education Internship Program introduces students with developmental disabilities to careers in arts and cultural organizations. El Segundo Museum of Art (ESMoA)

This labor shortage stems in part from the terrible toll the pandemic has taken on staff. In the past three years museum workers experienced stress and burnout paralleling that of their nonprofit and for-profit colleagues. Over 40 percent lost income, and nearly half experienced increased workload—with the heaviest burden falling on BIPOC staff and women. Stress, and burnout, may have been exacerbated by the pressure museums felt to innovate their way out of the pandemic. Research from Glassdoor shows that high levels of innovation are a good predictor of employee resignations. This is ironic, in the saddest way, as innovation is what enabled many museums to remain solvent and retain staff. The stress of working in pandemic conditions and the worker empowerment created by the tight labor market may be significant drivers of museum unionization.

Workers have formed collective bargaining units at more than two dozen museums in the past three years.

These pressures are leading many museums to think about how to create better, more supportive, and more equitable workplaces. Some practical steps build on lessons learned from diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) initiatives: committing to paid internships for a broad range of positions (thereby reducing economic barriers to entering the field) and including salaries in position descriptions (which has been shown to raise women's pay). Some museums are taking steps to significantly raise salaries, provide flexible work hours, and navigate the technical, legal, organizational, and financial complexities of supporting a widely distributed remote workforce. During the pandemic, more than 80 percent of museums allowed at least some staff to telework, and while this figure continues to drop as the world opens up, 16 percent of directors expect to increase the use of telework going forward.

Museums are also responding to a growing body of research documenting the important role of workplace culture—how workers are managed, coached, and treated—in employee engagement and satisfaction. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; ensuring workers feel respected; and transparent, ethical practices can have a huge impact on satisfaction and retention. Many of these changes have been pragmatic responses to immediate needs—sustaining them in the long term will require a values-based commitment to these reforms.

As museums recover financially and rebuild their staff, some may take this opportunity to reshape their workforce. The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) notes that many museums have used open positions to increase the diversity of their staff and what they were hired to do. For example, AAMD research documented a drop in museum educators in the four-year period between 2018 and 2022. Will these shifts prove to be transitory or enduring?

Museums across the country are also being affected by the demographic shifts transforming their communities. Those in cities being drained by the migration fueled by remote work face the potential loss of visitors, members, donors, staff, and financial support of cash-strapped states and municipalities. Museums in cities competing to attract remote workers can play a role in courting new residents and then welcome them into the museum's family of friends and supporters.

The pandemic inflicted terrible damage, but it also drew attention to ways that the workplace could be different and, in many ways, better—more flexible and compassionate, more skillful in the use of digital tools to support the work of staff. The lessons museums learned in the past three years may help them become more desirable

places to work for decades to come. If remote work continues to grow, as many believe it will, communities may place an even higher value on museums as cultural amenities that help them woo workers who can choose where they want to live. These are seeds of hope museums can tend as they help to build the post-pandemic world.

Museum Examples



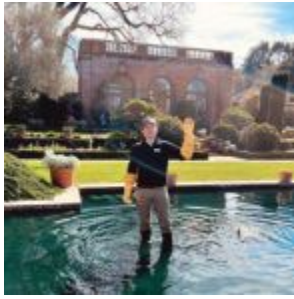
Courtesy of the Philbrook Museum of Art

The **Philbrook Museum of Art** is partnering with Tulsa Remote, a recruitment initiative that provides a wide variety of incentives for telecommuters living outside Oklahoma to relocate to Tulsa. Through private events and invitations to ongoing programs, the museum introduces these new residents to the diverse and engaging cultural activities at the museum. Many Tulsa Remote families have become members and regular visitors, and some have gone on to become higher-level members, patrons, and volunteers.



Courtesy of the S. Woodloe for Delaware Art Museum

Facing workforce challenges during the pandemic, the **Delaware Art Museum** broadened its pool of applicants by removing unnecessary requirements from job descriptions and recruiting from outside the museum sector. At the same time, the museum strove to create a “people-centered work culture” that raised morale and increased retention. This included creating policies and practices that ensure strategy and finances are clear and transparent, instituting paid family leave, raising the minimum wage, creating codes of conduct that outline the expectation of respectful behavior in detail, and building new pipelines for advancement.



Bryan Garza, courtesy of Filoli

In 2019, the rising cost of living in the San Francisco Bay Area and competition for labor caused annual staff turnover at the historic house and garden **Filoli** to soar to 50 percent. This stress, combined with the museum's goal to "attract and retain a talented team" impelled the organization to make a living wage—now nearly \$31 an hour in the Bay Area—the base pay for all positions. Supporting these higher salaries required adding an additional \$750,000 to the approximately \$9 million operating budget, paid for by increasing revenue from rental events, admissions, membership, and a new group tour program. As of 2022, Filoli's turnover rate had gone down eightfold to 8 percent.

Museums Might ...

- Evaluate how they can improve pay and benefits. Pay not only determines who can afford to work in museums, it sends a clear signal about a museum's values and priorities. Thoughtful salary benchmarking might include examining compensation data from comparable local and national museums and non-museum jobs that compete for museum labor. While benchmarking is important, decisions about compensation should also be grounded in principles of equity and fairness.
- Consider how compensation practices reflect an organization's values, particularly regarding equity, fairness, and transparency, which are core elements of workplace culture. While building the overall budget, a museum might evaluate the balance between funds allocated to producing stuff (exhibits, programs, services) and to paying the people who make that stuff. Fair wages may require less stuff, or fewer staff. A growing number of museums are explicitly setting a cap on the pay ratio between the highest and lowest paid positions. This is both more equitable and a strategy for allocating salary dollars to support the museum's needs.
- Follow the lead of organizations in the nonprofit sector that are offering flexible and hybrid work schedules or full-time remote work, prioritizing employee needs,

improving DEAI, and even cutting work hours. Such actions can help compensate for museums' competitive disadvantage in pay relative to the for-profit sector.

- Improve workplace culture—communications, mechanisms for meaningful input, sharing responsibility and power, and reducing unfair treatment at work (which is one of the biggest contributors to burnout).
- Create pathways to advancement and provide leadership training in order to keep people in the field. This is especially important in light of potential turnover in the field, accelerated by the pandemic. In a 2021 AAM survey, over half of paid staff said it was somewhat to highly unlikely they would still be working in the museum sector in three years.
- Revisit assumptions about degree requirements. A museum might broaden its pool of qualified applicants by valuing experience in addition to formal education and welcoming historically undervalued workers, including retirees, formerly incarcerated individuals, and people with disabilities.
- Evaluate how remote work might fit into the workplace, and the effect remote work policies might have on equity and inclusion. How can the museum offset the documented tendency for remote and hybrid workers to be passed over for promotions and raises? Conversely, how can it address the inequities of only some staff or some positions being eligible for remote work?
- If the museum does offer remote and hybrid work, focus on how to enhance and support internal connections. Help workers who rarely meet in person get to know each other and foster a culture of belonging and trust.
- Create support mechanisms for staff coping with long COVID. As with most accommodations, these changes may turn out to be good for all workers, improving morale, reducing turnover, and increasing productivity.
- Help communities respond to demographic shifts. Museums might help reshape former business districts into vibrant centers for residents and recreation, pitching their communities as destinations for people who can work anywhere.

Resources

The US Labor Shortage: A Plan to Tackle the Challenge, Committee for Economic Development: The Public Policy Center of the Conference Board, April 2022
Many of this report's recommendations about recruitment, hiring, and workforce development are relevant to museum operations.

ced.org/solutions-briefs/the-us-labor-shortage-a-plan-to-tackle-the-challenge

Museums Moving Forward (MMF)

MMF is a staff-driven coalition working to measure and support equity within museum workplaces. MMF recently fielded a pilot survey across 54 museums with 1,922 art museum staff sharing their perspectives that will be published in a fieldwide report in May 2023. Key topics include pay and promotion rate equity, salary transparency, and various dimensions of organizational culture in art museums.

museumsmovingforward.com

Elizabeth Merritt

Elizabeth Merritt is the Vice President for Strategic Foresight and Founding Director of the Center for the Future of Museums at the American Alliance of Museums. She studied ecology and evolution as an undergraduate at Yale and received her master's degree in cell and molecular biology from Duke University. Her museum career has included working in a children's museum as well as natural history and history museums. She is a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute's Museum Management Program and the Foresight Certificate program at the University of Houston. Prior to starting CFM, Merritt literally wrote the book on museum standards and best practices as Director of the Alliance's accreditation and excellence programs—perfect preparation for her current role as agent provocateur. She challenges museums to question assumptions about traditional practice and experiment with new ways of doing business.

A Digital (R)evolution

CATEGORY: [MUSEUM MAGAZINE](#)

Posted on [Jan 13, 2023](#)

This article originally appeared in Museum magazine's January/February 2023 issue, a benefit of AAM [membership](#).

Has the pandemic sparked an evolutionary leap in practice?

Revolutions usually begin as replacements for older certainties, and not as pristine discoveries in uncharted terrain.

—Stephen Jay Gould, evolutionary biologist

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated existing trends in the adoption and deployment of digital technologies in business, education, and commerce around the world. Some museums went into pandemic lockdown prepared to deploy digital survival strategies, while many others struggled to catch up.

As the world emerges from the pandemic, we may find that the stress of the past three years has accelerated digital adoption to the point where it constitutes an evolutionary leap in practice. Digital competence, in this new era, is not merely nice but necessary, a fact that may induce more museums to approach digital as a pragmatic investment in sustainable operations. However, improving an organization's digital literacy isn't as simple as creating a new job title or even a department. Skillfully navigating digital opportunities requires a human infrastructure of vision and skills integrated throughout the organization. How can museums navigate the transition from proto-digital to digital proficiency and embark on a continual process of adaptation?

The Challenge

Sometimes a disruptive event can transform the world by magnifying the importance of what already exists. In the past 20 years, digital technologies reshaped the world with bewildering speed, transforming how people engage with entertainment, shopping, education, work, and socializing.

The pandemic turbocharged that pace of change. Almost half of consumers increased their use of digital channels to interact with businesses (and most expect to sustain that use), use of messaging apps doubled, and engagement via video increased 300 percent. Companies

met this demand by accelerating their own digital transformation, increasing the amount they spent on digital and speeding improvements to their digital communications strategy. Use of telehealth platforms has stabilized at a level 38 times higher than the pre-COVID baseline. A combination of state and federal funding channeled \$1.3 billion to support K–12 online learning, with an additional \$388 million devoted to closing the “digital divide” that disadvantages less wealthy school districts. The pandemic even sparked the revival of QR codes, turning a technology once disparaged in the US as “niche” into a ubiquitous tool.

These digital adaptations are reshaping the nature of how and where people work. In a recent Gallup poll, 94 percent of employees who can do their work remotely expressed their preference for remote or hybrid work, and many employers are willing to comply. But many jobs still have to be done in person, and pandemic labor shortages prompted many retailers to replace checkout staff with self-service kiosks, waitstaff with ordering apps, and inventory stockers with robots. The World Monetary Fund reports that 43 percent of global companies intend to reduce their workforces through automation.

The reliance on digital technology for business increases the importance of digital literacy, but globally 76 percent of workers feel they are unequipped to operate in a digital-first world, and less than a third are actively involved in digital skills learning and training. This skills gap may, in turn, exacerbate existing inequalities in income and employment.

What This Means for Museums

In the future, the museum sector may look back on the first two decades of the 21st century as a golden era of digital experimentation. Cutting-edge digital labs were hotbeds of experimentation and playful innovation. Digital was hailed as the perfect medium for generously sharing content and cultivating input from and dialog with audiences. Foundations poured millions of dollars into the digitization of collections images and documentation, often in the absence of a specific vision of how those assets would be used.

By 2020, there were signs that the enthusiasm about digital innovation for the sake of innovation was beginning to wane. In the early digital era, several US museums founded digital labs (for example, the Met MediaLab and Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh’s The Studio) to conduct ambitious experiments with new technologies. But perhaps because they were often positioned as amenities, not essential components of museum operations, many of these labs had been sidelined or closed by the beginning of the new decade. Some of the most respected digital innovators left the sector when their influence and autonomy failed to make up for the pay they sacrificed to work in museums.

The museum sector has always been cautious about adopting new practices and technologies, preferring, on the whole, to let others go first and see what works. But during the financial disruptions of COVID, digital practices were often essential in museum survival, plugging gaping holes left by the disruption of place-based operations. Tools that some

regarded as edgy or experimental (for example, online ticketing, variable pricing, contact-free payment systems, and touch-free interactives) went mainstream due to necessity. The pandemic may prove to be the inflection point between an era of experimentation and one of pragmatism in which digital strategy is seen as an essential component of museum operations.



Videos filmed by staff at the William Root House bring life and humor to the interactive touchscreens that guide visitors through the site. Courtesy of Cobb Landmarks & Historical Society, Inc.

The past three years turned into a vast, unplanned experiment in testing audience appetite for engaging with museums via digital pathways. Research from *Culture + Community in a Time of Crisis* showed that in early 2020 a significant chunk of the audience using museums' digital offerings (between 32 and 67 percent, depending on the type of museum) had not used similar place-based offerings in the year preceding pandemic lockdowns. Data (through September 2021) from IMPACTS Experience showed even more people engaging with cultural organizations online as the pandemic continued.

For the most part, museums figured out how to meet this demand. AASLH's 2022 *National Visitation Report* found that over the course of the pandemic, the portion of history organizations offering virtual programming rose almost four-fold, to 40 percent—and more than 80 percent at large institutions. During the past three years, many museums found that digital programs reached more people and attracted a wider range of participants, demographically and geographically, than the place-based programs they replaced. And while it remains challenging to build an income stream around digital programs (in the face of so much free content on the web), the ROI for digital programs that do charge is often exponentially better than for physical ones.

In addition to increased demand for digital engagement, society increasingly needs the benefits digital resources can provide, particularly to support student learning, as kids

struggle to make up lost ground and address stress, anxiety, and isolation. Museums have traditionally met these needs with place-based experiences, but research is beginning to show that online engagement can be meaningful and beneficial as well. Just three minutes of viewing art online can alleviate loneliness and anxiety and improve mood and well-being, comparable to the effect of visiting a museum in real life, and evidence suggests that longer engagements offer greater benefits. In one study, people over the age of 65 who attended weekly 45-minute virtual museum-guided tours for three months significantly increased their well-being.

Catapulted by pandemic disruptions into the digital future, many museums are now assessing whether and how to sustain or expand their investment in digital going forward. These decisions may be driven, in part, by changes in user expectations and behavior. Can museums convert their new virtual audience into in-person visitors, or will many users continue to prefer digital experiences?

Many schools have become hooked on the relative simplicity, lower costs, and wider options afforded by remote field trips. Might this increase the number of students museums serve as teachers and schools realize they can access meaningful experiences without expending the time, and bus money, to schlep to the museum? Will that in turn reduce the yearly tide of class visits to the galleries as more students make use of museums' digital resources?

Conversely, might we see a growing advantage of place-based experiences as people become fatigued by the ever-growing amount of time they spend online? Children's screen time went up during the pandemic — a disturbing trend given the copious research documenting the link between screen time, anxiety, and depression in children and adolescents. Might parents place an even higher value on physical museum visits, with minimal digital overlay, as an antidote to these concerns?

Many museums will need to significantly invest in planning, infrastructure, and training to take advantage of digital opportunities. The sector as a whole went into the pandemic digitally underequipped. In 2019, only one-quarter of museums had a digital strategy, either separate from or incorporated into the strategic plan. Hopefully, museums will use what they learned from ad hoc digital experiments during the pandemic to create formal strategies going forward. Many, still experiencing significant financial challenges, may assess how data collection and business analytics can help them reduce costs and improve the bottom line.

Working out the long-term ROI on digital strategies is complicated. Museums often take advantage of the massively expensive infrastructure (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) created by commercial companies but then are at the mercy of mergers, acquisitions, and policy changes that can sever connections to the audience they have cultivated on those platforms. How might museums buffer themselves against these risks?

Museums that intend to maintain and grow digital audiences may have to figure out how to monetize this engagement, either directly through fees, purchases, or subscriptions or indirectly through cultivating members and donors. Weighing the practical outcomes of digital investments will be challenging, but museum leaders who do so may create a more sustainable approach to digital.

Calibrating Screen Time in the Museum

By Ann Fortescue, President and Executive Director, International Museum of Art & Science, McAllen, Texas

Even before the pandemic-induced shift to virtual instruction, meetings, and socialization, there was concern, particularly among parents and pediatricians, that children were spending too much time looking at screens. Data on the developmental and behavioral effects of too much screen time for children is in tension with perspectives that “not all screens are bad.”

All agree that children need interaction with adults for screen time to be valuable to their development. Anecdotal evidence: I recently met with two moms bemoaning their children’s challenges with in-person socialization. One’s teen live chats and games with friends, each in their own home, and the other’s middle-schooler struggles to make friends because everyone is on their phone. Both agreed that human interaction is either missing, remote, or hard to initiate in their children’s lives.

At the International Museum of Art & Science (IMAS), we are responding to these current (and likely long-term) concerns by intentionally using a variety of media (digital and analog) to create interactive museum experiences for more than two people to do together, or do side-by-side in the same area. As we plan new exhibits, we’re asking for multiples of the same activity so families and friends can interact. We’re also intentionally including cooperative experiences to encourage sharing, even among strangers—recognizing a smile or thumbs up can provide that non-verbal moment of human connection. In our more traditional art galleries, we’re learning from peers, like the Columbus Museum of Art, and including reflection stations for visitors to interact with one another through words and drawings.

We aren’t anti-screen at IMAS; in fact, one of our signature exhibits is NOAA’s *Science on a Sphere*—a room-sized, digital display. However, we are paying more attention to how screen time may be impacting our visitors and what kinds of interactions may be missing or significantly reduced so we can provide museum experiences to make up for that deficit and support our community’s value of raising well-rounded individuals.

Museums Might ...

- Create a digital strategy that establishes a vision and goals for how “digital” in a broad sense can contribute to the work of the museum. To support this strategy, bring a

digital lens to bear on the whole organization, integrating digital resources and goals into all departments.

- Invest in content creation in tandem with developing digital channels. The success of online programming, social media, and digitally mediated place-based experiences rests on the quality of the materials they present.
- Audit current digital assets and assess whether and how they contribute to the museum's operations and strategy. Evaluate the long-term costs of maintaining digital assets, budget for those costs, and ensure there is alignment between the museum's investments in these assets and plans to support those expenses.
- Evaluate the preferences and appetite of current and potential audiences for online participation, the potential for the museum to reach a broader segment of the public locally and internationally, and the business plan for serving these audiences.
- Identify how digital can contribute materially to financial stability through direct income for products and services, behind the scenes by optimizing operations, or by enhancing staff productivity.
- Create a staff development plan for digital literacy that evaluates needs and identifies and supports training. This involves not only building skills but (to quote ACMI Director Seb Chan) "fostering a digital imagination that can invent more creative practices, and build more diverse audiences in the future."

Museum Examples



Courtesy of Cobb Landmarks & Historical Society

Before the pandemic, the **William Root House** in Marietta, Georgia, began testing the use of touchscreens to provide a self-directed visitor experience in lieu of volunteer-led tours. Now the organization has switched the entire site (five structures plus historic gardens) to digitally enabled, self-guided tours. Through the digital content, including videos, the museum brought historic rooms to life, ensured the quality of interpretation around sensitive topics such as slavery, and experimented with content geared at younger visitors. This digital focus positions the museum for future growth while ensuring the campus can operate with just a single staff member if necessary.



Courtesy of Old Salem Museums & Gardens and Black Country Living Museum

Old Salem Museums & Gardens in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and the **Black Country Living Museum** in Dudley, England, turned to TikTok during the pandemic to engage new audiences while traditional, on-site interpretation was closed, using the platform to inspire critical thinking and constructive dialogue. Despite the challenges of producing content (including research into what’s trending on the platform, filming and editing high-quality videos, and managing the public comments and reactions), the museums found that their TikTok presence enhanced visitor experience, not only online but also on-site. At both museums, visitors often say that they decided to visit because of the institution’s TikTok presence.



Pre-COVID, visitors to **Space Center Houston** stood in line for the tram to visit the NASA Johnson Space Center. When it reopened after an initial pandemic closure, staff developed a virtual queue system to facilitate physical distancing. In the process, they discovered that not only did this solution provide a safer way for visitors to wait to board, but it also positively affected the length and quality of their stay. They were now free to roam the exhibits while waiting their turn rather than spending a portion of their visit waiting in line.

Resources

Digital Readiness and Innovation in Museums, Knight Foundation, 2020.

The Knight Foundation commissioned this report to provide a fuller understanding of digital readiness and innovation maturity in the museum sector. The report includes data from 480 museums of all sizes, including art museums, historic institutions and sites, science museums,

and others.

knightfoundation.org/reports/digital-readiness-and-innovation-in-museums/

Elizabeth Merritt

Elizabeth Merritt is the Vice President for Strategic Foresight and Founding Director of the Center for the Future of Museums at the American Alliance of Museums. She studied ecology and evolution as an undergraduate at Yale and received her master's degree in cell and molecular biology from Duke University. Her museum career has included working in a children's museum as well as natural history and history museums. She is a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute's Museum Management Program and the Foresight Certificate program at the University of Houston. Prior to starting CFM, Merritt literally wrote the book on museum standards and best practices as Director of the Alliance's accreditation and excellence programs—perfect preparation for her current role as agent provocateur. She challenges museums to question assumptions about traditional practice and experiment with new ways of doing business.

CENTER FOR THE FUTURE OF MUSEUMS BLOG

Livable Communities for Our Elders

Posted on Jul 17, 2024



The Louisiana State Museum brought together a diverse group of older adults in New Orleans and watched as they related their experiences to the museum's collection and built a lasting community.



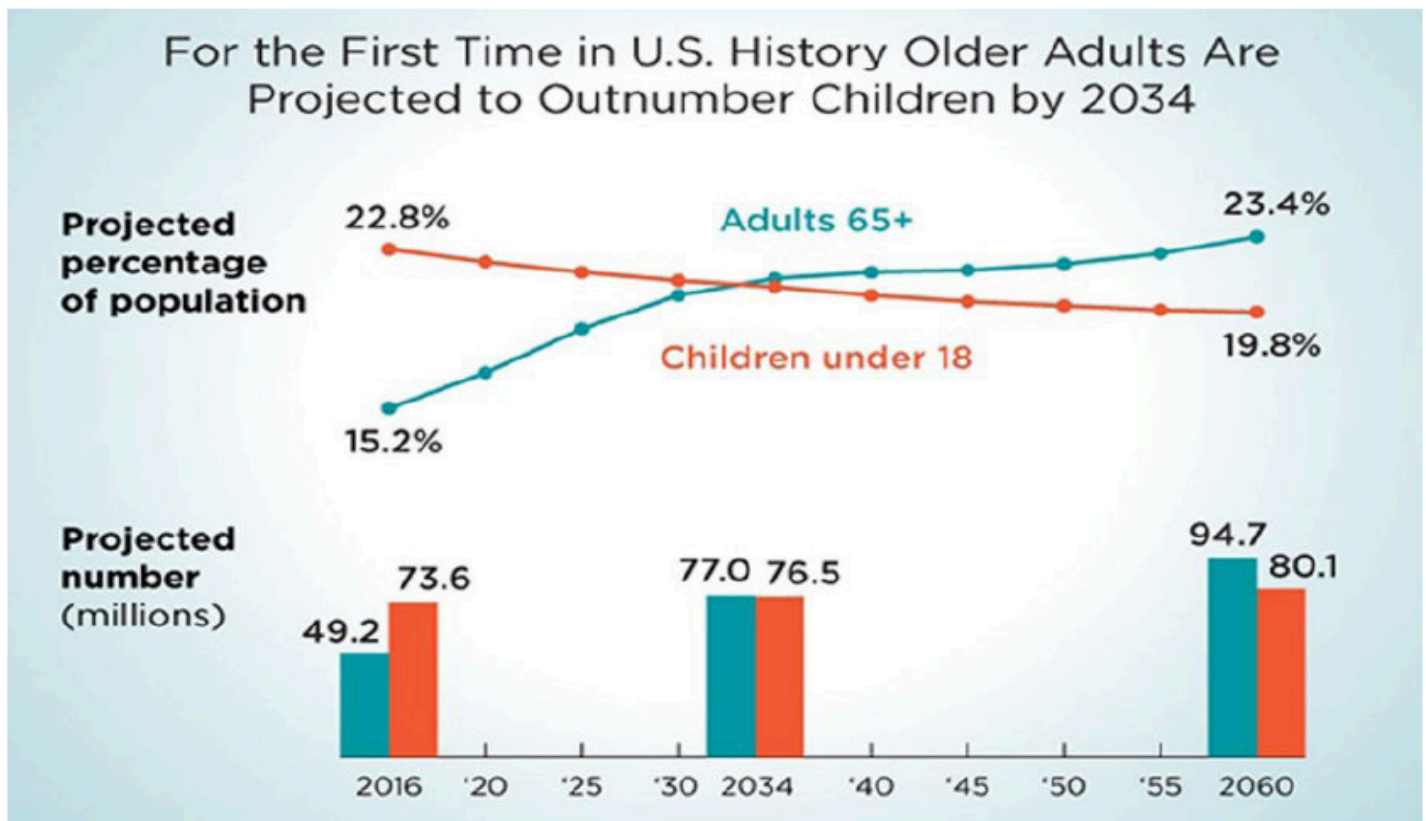
Elizabeth Merritt

This is an excerpt from *TrendsWatch: Museums as Community Infrastructure*. The full report is available as a [free PDF download](#).

“Ageism is a prejudice against our own future selves and takes root in denial of the fact that we’re going to get old.” —Ashton Applewhite, author and age-activist

By 2030, one in five Americans will be over the age of sixty-five, and in some states that figure will top one-quarter. By 2034, older adults will outnumber children in the US population. As the AARP has pointed out, in the past seventy years our primary focus, as a society, has been on meeting the needs of families with children. This focus has shaped every aspect of our lives, from the design of buildings, transportation systems, and neighborhoods to the policies behind zoning and human resources. The unintended result has been the creation of physical and social systems that isolate and marginalize people as they age. This separation is unhealthy for people of all ages. Younger people are deprived of valuable wisdom and expertise, as well as role models for their future selves. Isolating older people from society creates grave risks to their mental and physical health. Museums can play a vital role in creating “age-friendly” communities that support physical activity, social connection, and intellectual stimulation, as well as providing pathways for elders to contribute to their communities and to following generations.

The Challenge



Data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

A woman born today in the US can expect to live to be eighty-one years old, a man seventy-six, and those averages are rising with time. Though Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) have long expressed their intent to work until age sixty-eight, the COVID-19 pandemic has impelled a wave of early retirements, meaning many people face a decade or more of “post-work”

life, while continuing to want opportunities for meaningful engagement and to give back to their communities. This stage of life is not without challenges. Even though the [Age Discrimination in Employment Act](#) protects people age forty or older, those who want to remain in or rejoin the workforce often face discrimination in hiring and on the job. [Forty percent](#) of people over the age of sixty-five have some kind of disability—whether that involves mobility, cognition, hearing, vision, or barriers to independent living. About 20 to 25 percent of older adults have mild cognitive impairment, and about 10 percent experience dementia (though that rate seems to be [falling over time](#)).

Regardless of underlying health or ability, everyone who lives to grow old in the US at some point joins the ranks of people subject to the pervasive, corrosive bias of [ageism](#), a form of discrimination that itself contributes to depression, cognitive decline, ill health, and (perversely) a shorter life span. And [ageism combines](#) with other “isms”—racism, sexism, homophobia, and class prejudices—to create a toxic brew of intersectional damage.

It is increasingly common for older Americans to face these challenges without a network of family or social support. In the US, 27 percent of adults over the age of sixty [live alone](#) (more than double the figure for adults age twenty-five to sixty), and social isolation has a negative impact on health as severe as [smoking up to fifteen cigarettes a day](#). Older Americans are also much less likely than their counterparts elsewhere in the world to live in a household without young children, which contributes to generational isolation as well, denying children access to the care, mentoring, and role modeling that can be provided by older adults. The safety net woven by family relationships will fray even more in coming decades, as the US birthrate drops. In 2010, there were, [on average](#), seven potential caregivers for every senior. The AARP expects this number to drop to four by 2030, and to fewer than three by 2050. Nearly 90 percent of Americans over the age of fifty want to “[age in place](#).” However, the lack of family caregivers, and the absence of any nationally funded and organized substitute, will make it difficult for people to remain in their own homes rather than moving to assisted living facilities. In any case, by the end of this decade, 54 percent of seniors will [not be able to afford either assisted care or independent living](#), precipitating crises in both housing and health.

Meanwhile, we’ve created communities and environments both online and in real life that seem almost intentionally designed to make it hard for elders to remain actively engaged with the world. Only 1 percent of [housing stock](#) in the US features universal design elements such as no-step entrances, single-floor layout, and space designed to accommodate wheelchairs. Some developers create “senior communities” for people over a given age, ranging from housing co-ops to entire suburbs. Though these environments may address challenges of physical accessibility and social isolation, they can become “age bubbles” that isolate residents from a richer spectrum



Similarly, in the broader population, adults over 50 are the *least* likely to visit museums.

So do the math. We are actually under-served, and with our growing population there are a lot more of us that could be museum-goers.

15% of population *today* are 65 or older

22% will be 65 or older *by 2040*



You've already got *us*. To get to all of *them*, you have to address *their* needs, and *their* concerns.



Such as:

- Multi-generational places for family time
- Places that encourage health and well-being
- Increasing social needs
- And more research with non-visitors to learn more about their needs and interests



(BTW, YOU NEED
TO DO THAT
TRANSFORMATIONAL
STUFF TOO!)

**Otherwise, you are missing a big opportunity to serve us and our communities more effectively.
To really matter.**



Data Stories are created for *The Data Museum*, where research conducted by Wilkening Consulting is released. Sources include:

- 2016 Wilkening Consulting broader population sampling
- 2017 Wilkening Consulting Annual Survey of Museum-Goers
- AAM's *Museums and America 2017* (in partnership with Wilkening Consulting)
- US Census Bureau

**Data Stories are about regular museum-goers, who visit multiple museums each year and who responded to a survey about museum-goers. They do not represent casual museum visitors.*

Visit The Data Museum at
wilkeningconsulting.com/datamuseum for supporting context and data.



Data Story courtesy Wilkening Consulting. Graphics courtesy of Longnamedgirl Design.

of community assets. The internet can, theoretically, connect the housebound to the world, but it comes with its own set of challenges, as digital design often features illegible text, tiny icons, and other age-unfriendly features.

Museums have room for progress in becoming age-friendly as well. Though there is a widespread assumption that older individuals are among the most frequent visitors to museums, research shows the opposite to be true. In the US, fewer than a quarter of people age sixty or older visit a museum in any given year. (Older adults may seem to make up a larger share of the audience because those that do go to museums tend to be frequent visitors.) Many aspects of traditional museum design are age-hostile, including the lack of seating, sensory overload, and barriers to physical accessibility. Even museum programming can add to generational segregation, if older people are funneled only towards offerings (like passive lectures) that museum staff believe they will want.

More than 60 percent of people over the age of fifty-five engage in some sort of volunteer activity, formal or informal, and the opportunity to volunteer is one of the major benefits nonprofits provide to society. Copious research documents that volunteering helps individuals expand their connections, feel good about themselves, improve their physical well-being, combat social isolation, reduce stress, and learn new skills—benefits that are particularly helpful in supporting healthy aging. In museums, volunteers typically outnumber staff by a factor of six to one, performing a wide range of work including stocking the gift store, preparing research specimens, working as greeters, planning and running fundraising events, and giving tours. However, the benefits afforded by volunteering are often not equitably shared with a museum's community. Historically, the corps of museum volunteers have skewed towards older adults with the time, inclination, and financial resources that enable them to volunteer. As a result, their demographics typically mirror that of museum personnel (both staff and board)—which is often disproportionately white, well-educated, and relatively well-off. Volunteerism can exacerbate inequality if, as in many museums, it is only accessible to people who are already comparatively privileged.

The Response

In Society

There is growing consensus that the most robust solution to the isolation of aging is to bake better design into the landscape and infrastructure of towns and cities. In 2006, the World Health Organization introduced a framework for age-friendly cities that encompasses eight domains: health care, transportation, housing, social participation, outdoor space, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, and communications and information. As of 2017, over five hundred cities around the world had signed on, pledging to make their communities better places to grow older, and AARP has worked with WHO to extend this practice to 207 communities in the US. As is invariably true of inclusive design, creating age-friendly communities is good for everyone—increasing access to employment, arts and culture, critical services, community participation, and affordable housing. As AARP points out, “Age-friendly communities foster economic growth, and make for happier, healthier residents of all ages.”

In Museums

Museums play many roles in making communities age-friendly as places of social connection, employment, mental and physical engagement, and as influential forces in combatting ageist stereotypes. Since the early 2000s, museums have helped fuel the creative aging movement—using the power of arts engagement to foster healthy, active aging and improve the lives of older people. Research from the Seeding Vitality Arts initiative of Aroha Philanthropies documents that sustained, meaningful arts engagement supports healthy aging, increases the self-confidence and mental engagement of participants, and fosters social connections.



Richard Walter, PhD, MIM's curator for United States/Canada and Europe, takes participants through some of the popular instruments and musical styles of Ireland. Photo credit: © 2021 Musical Instrument Museum.

Museums also step in to meet the needs of the many people experiencing health-related challenges as they age. Programming specifically designed for people with dementia and their caregivers has been shown to reduce levels of depression and improve cognitive functioning and overall quality of life. Engaging with art through viewing, making, and movement can help people coping with Parkinson's disease or other debilitating illnesses to maintain their mobility and social connections.

Museums are also an important component of age-friendly communities regardless of the specific programs they offer. Recent research shows living in a community with various cultural resources confers a five-year advantage in cognitive age, with museums and similar cultural organizations providing the biggest boost to cognitive health. (However, that benefit is skewed by race, with Black populations experiencing less protective benefit from museums, pointing to the need to improve equitable access to museum space.)

The museum sector is still searching for a good model to reconcile the tensions that sometimes arise between volunteers (often older individuals) and paid staff. Some of the approaches being tried include creating a long runway (even a decade or more) to implement structural changes in

AMERICAN MUSEUMS SPEND \$2 BILLION A YEAR ON EDUCATION PROGRAMS, BUT...

75% goes to
K-12 programs.

\$1,5BN

25% goes to
programs for all
those over 18.

\$500MM

Source: Building the Future of Education, American Alliance of Museums

Source: *Building the Future of Education* (AAM, 2014).

volunteer programs, and including volunteers in the process of addressing DEAI and social justice goals. Others focus on creating an organizational culture, backed up by appropriate procedures, that foster a volunteer corps that is diverse with respect to age, race, and other elements of personal identity.

Museum Examples

Fostering Age-Friendly Design

Recently, the **Design Museum** and the Design Age Institute launched a project to establish a new infrastructure for collaboration and co-creation around design and aging. Designing a World for Everyone will bring together researchers, designers, innovators, and policymakers to share the latest research and insights into how design can be used to transform public spaces, cities, and communities to support the aging population. Associated programming includes The Wisdom Hour, a creative storytelling space celebrating positive stories of aging, facilitated by This Age Thing. Over the course of a year, the project will place local community groups at the heart of the decision-making process, respond to the needs and concerns of underrepresented groups, and create social impact by removing and reducing barriers to participation.

Cultivating Social Connection

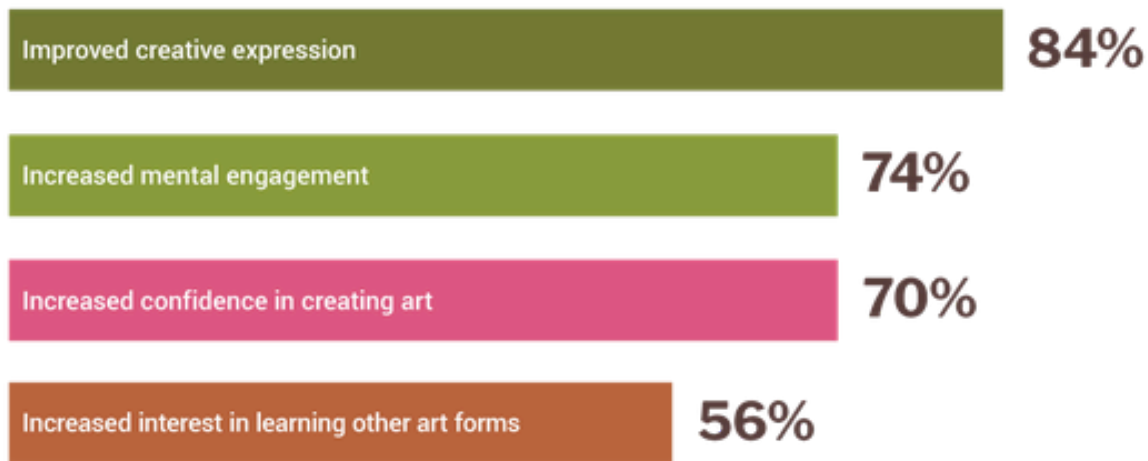
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Musical Instrument Museum** (MIM) in Phoenix partnered with Arizona State University to create virtual programming for senior communities who could not visit the museum in person. The initiative produced two Senior Wellness video series, one for active seniors and one for people in memory care. Teams of music therapy students from ASU developed music therapy interventions that complement virtual tours of MIM's galleries, with a focus on physical skills (drumming, dancing, and other movement), cognitive skills such as attention and memory, and psychosocial components related to self-expression through music.

Creating Intergenerational Connections

The **Museum of Contemporary Art in Tucson's** Stay Gold program supports the intergenerational LGBTQ+ community, connecting generations through creativity and making and using contemporary art to explore relevance and meaning in the lives of the participants. In 2018, older adults from Stay Gold proposed creating an intergenerational version of the teen School of Drag performance. Local drag performers taught the workshops and a youth drag performer emceed the show. During the pandemic, museum staff adapted the Stay Gold programming to an online format, offering artmaking prompts inspired by LGBTQ+ artists to maintain the connection so badly needed during this time of heightened isolation. This work was supported by a Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums grant from Aroha Philanthropies.

Cultivating Creative Aging

Increased Creativity + Mental Engagement



Data from post-program surveys of participants in Seeding Vitality Arts programs between 2017 and 2019.

In 2016, Aroha Philanthropies launched a major multi-year initiative, Seeding Vitality Arts, to foster creative aging programs in a variety of settings, including museums. In 2018, the American Alliance of Museums partnered with Aroha Philanthropies to support a museum-specific cohort through Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums (SVA), providing twenty organizations with training and resources to develop and implement high-quality, intensive arts learning opportunities for older adults. The resulting programs included an Expressive Movement workshop at the **Anchorage Museum** building on Indigenous knowledge and lifeways; “Viva la Vida” artmaking at the **National Museum of Mexican Art**; and traditional drumming and Mardi Gras beading at the **Louisiana State Museum**. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced museums to close their doors, leaving elders at even greater risk of isolation, the SVA museums reinvented their work to engage with participants over remote platforms. The **Olana State Historic Site**, for example, remastered its plans for a place-based eight-session playwriting workshop. Kicking off with a virtual tour of the historic house, participants spent more time on research using digital documents, and seven professional actors read the finished student scripts over Zoom.

Meeting the Needs of Older Audiences

In 2014, noting that only 3 percent of older adults in New York City visit senior centers, the **Museum of Modern Art** created the Prime Time Collective, a diverse group of adults ranging from sixty-one to ninety-four years old, to help identify and address financial, physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers to participation in museum programs. In the past decade, the museum has partnered with community organizations to offer specialized programming for LGBTQ+ older adults, individuals and caregivers coping with Parkinson's or Alzheimer's disease, and for teens and older adults to come together (for example, the 2016 program Act Your Age). In collaboration with the Martha Stewart Center for Living, the museum launched a "social prescription" program, in which physicians and social workers can write a prescription for art programming at MoMA. For housebound seniors, the museum offers online programming in partnership with the Virtual Senior Center.

Supporting Older Adults with Dementia

Since 2010, the **Frye Art Museum** has partnered with the Alzheimer's Association and the Seattle nonprofit Elderwise to develop and implement participatory arts experiences for people living with dementia and their care partners. In the ensuing decade, the museum has fostered a large community of practice by offering professional development to individuals engaged in similar work, and conducting research that adds to the growing body of literature documenting the contribution of arts engagements to healthy aging. One of the signature programs of this effort is the annual Creative Aging Conference, an interdisciplinary exploration of topics related to art, creativity, and aging.

Explore This Future

Signal of Change:

A "signal of change" is a recent news story, report, or event describing a local innovation or disruption that has the potential to grow in scope and scale. Use this signal to spark your thinking about how museums might support age-friendly communities in the future.

Creating an Age-friendly City

In 2021, the Purposeful Aging Los Angeles Initiative (PALA) issued recommendations to advance its goal of making the Los Angeles region “the most age-friendly in the world.” One of the recommendations is to make all tourist attractions and buildings in the Los Angeles region age-friendly. “As new building construction occurs (and buildings are updated over time), it is critical that they provide welcoming, functional environments for all generations. This is especially important for stadiums, **museums**, studios, convention centers, major public facilities, and other tourist attractions that draw a high-volume of visitors, including older adults. The County and City will partner with these institutions/facilities, as well as the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board, USC School of Gerontology, and other partners to develop a **ranking system for major regional tourist attractions**. We anticipate generating awareness of, and attention around tourist facilities that have taken steps to become age-friendly.” (Emphasis added.)

Explore the implications of this signal:

Ask yourself, what if there was more of this in the future? What if it became the dominant paradigm? Write and discuss three potential implications of this signal:

1. For yourself, your family, or friends
2. For your museum
3. For the United States



Retirees donate thousands of hours every year to museums to give back to their communities. Photo credit: Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California / Odell Hussey Photography.

Critical Questions for Museums

- What aspects of conventional museum design and operation pose barriers to access for older audiences?
- How can museums elevate the power, voice, and status of older individuals, helping to create a culture that honors, values, and empowers elders?

- How can museums promote the creation of age-friendly communities and integrate themselves into a seamless network of support?
 - How can museums make volunteer opportunities accessible to a broad diversity of older individuals?
 - How can museums address ageism in the steps they take to promote diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in their own work cultures?
 - How can museums shift older adults from the group least likely to use museums to one of their biggest audiences?
 - How might museums bolster their own sustainability by serving older adult audiences better?
-

A Framework for Action

To help create age-friendly communities, museums can:

- Inventory barriers to access or use. This might include physical barriers (including stairs, ramps, handrails, and restrooms), comfort (including seating, acoustics, lighting, and readability of signage), cultural or social barriers (including attitudes and behavior of staff and ageism reflected in marketing, exhibits, and programming), and transportation (including availability and location of parking and access to public transportation). Ensure that digital design is age-friendly as well.
 - Provide age-equitable opportunities for employment and volunteering. Consider training managers and human resources staff on how to avoid ageism in hiring and employment, establishing a working group of paid and volunteer staff to identify how to value and support older volunteers, including age and ageism in the museum's DEAI plans and policies, and addressing age-related stereotypes and assumptions in DEAI training.
 - Assess how older adults are represented in your content, from exhibits to marketing, and work to ensure that elders are both seen and valued.
 - Identify older adults in your community who are "culture-bearers" and give them platform, power, and authority to transmit the knowledge, experience, skills, and stories that they care for.
 - Design programs and services that actively foster intergenerational connections: In addition to creating rewarding relationships, dialogue between older adults and youth has been shown to be an effective tool to reduce ageist attitudes and behaviors.
-

Additional Resources

- *Museums and Creative Aging: A Healthful Partnership* (AAM, 2021). This report, authored by Marjorie Schwarzer, opens with an overview of aging and ageism in our country, documents actions being taken to foster positive aging, profiles the work of museums providing creative aging programming, and shares lessons learned from the Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums initiative, funded by Aroha Philanthropies, now known as E.A. Michelson Philanthropy.
- *Age-Friendly Standards for Cultural Organizations* (The Family Arts Campaign, 2017). These standards are designed to help cultural organizations provide a welcoming and positive experience for everyone, regardless of their age, and to facilitate intergenerational interactions.
- *Global report on ageism* (World Health Organization, 2021). This report outlines a framework for action to reduce ageism for use by governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations, and includes a toolkit for the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism.
- The Old School Anti-Ageism Clearinghouse is an online compendium of free resources to educate people about ageism and help dismantle it. It includes information about and links to blogs, books, articles, videos, speakers, and other tools (workshops, handouts, curricula, etc.) accessible to the general public.



Elizabeth Merritt

Upcoming Events



THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2024

Curator-Led Tour of Surrealism & Us: Caribbean and African Diasporic Artists Since 1940

Presented by:
ArtTable

📍 Fort Worth, TX



FRIDAY, JULY 19, 2024

Curator-Led Tour of Arlene Shechet: Girl Group at Storm King Art Center

Presented by:
ArtTable

📍 New Windsor, NY



TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2024

Beatrice Glow: When Our Rivers Meet Tour with the Artist & Curator at the New-York Historical Society

Presented by:
ArtTable

📍 New York, NY



FRIDAY, JULY 26, 2024

Private Guided Tour of the Seattle Art Fair

Presented by:
ArtTable

📍 Seattle, WA

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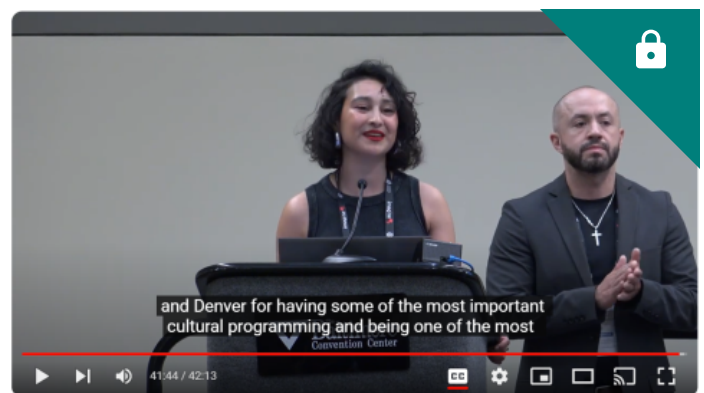
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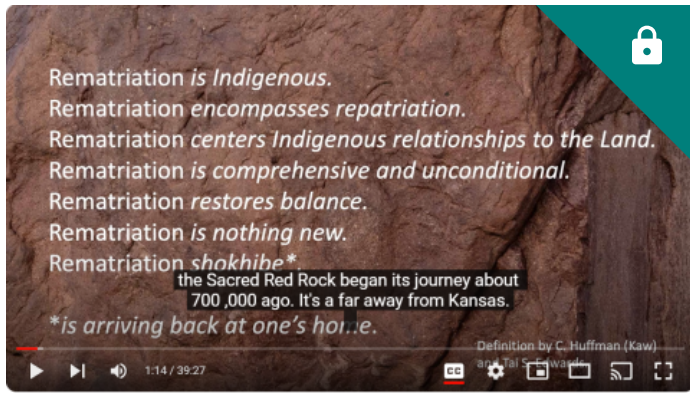
ON-DEMAND PROGRAMS

F&B/Retail and Rentals that Consider Mission, Community, and DEAI



ON-DEMAND PROGRAMS

Creating Access, Inclusion, and Belonging through Language



ON-DEMAND PROGRAMS

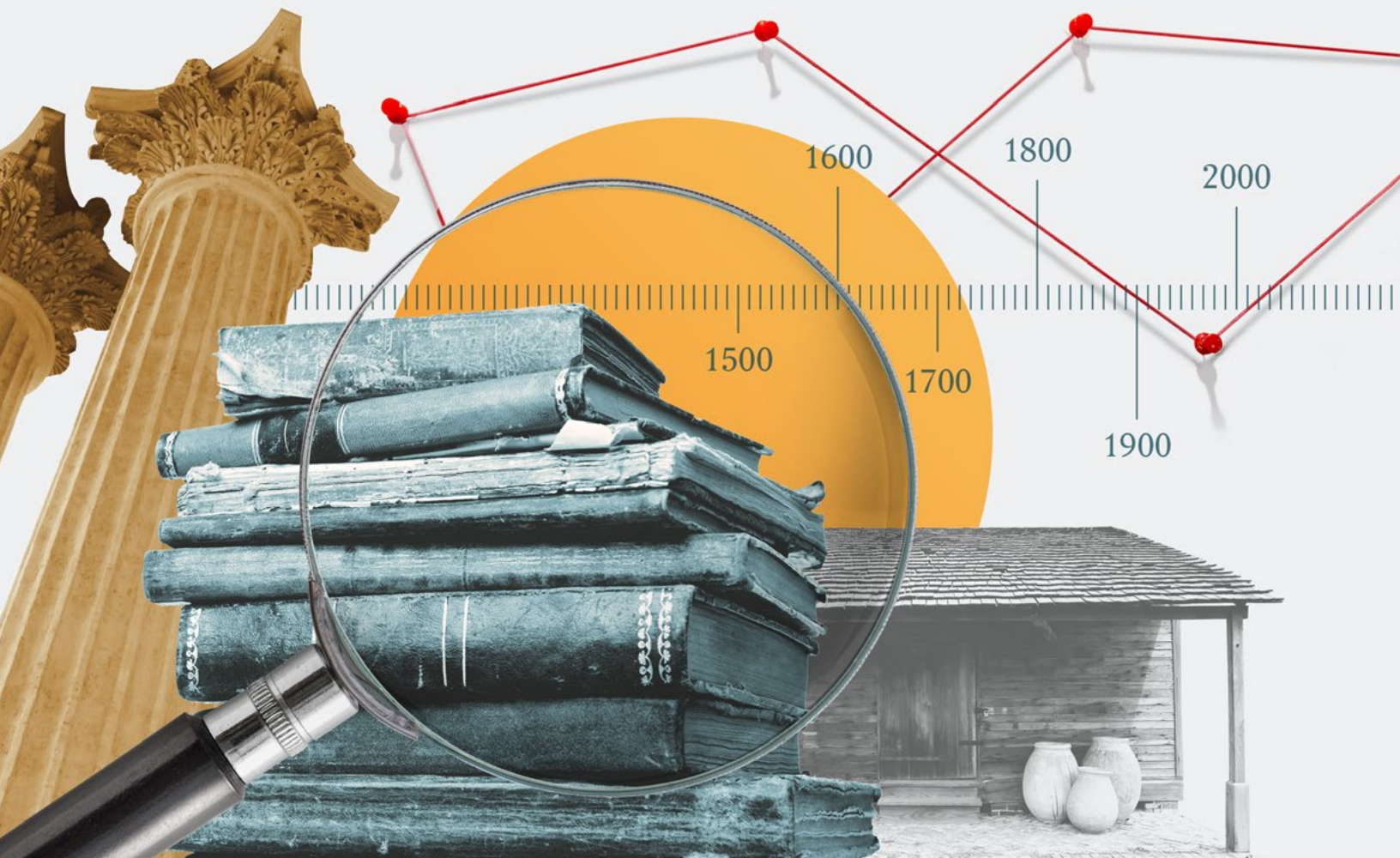
Rematriation of the In'zhúje'waxóbe/Sacred Red Rock

MUSEUM MAGAZINE

Message from the President: Museums for an Open Mind

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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Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement

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February 2022

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THE
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 Reframing
History

 **AASLH**
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

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About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organization's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis®, offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it, and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding. To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing, through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks®, toolkits, online courses, and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

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About AASLH

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), a national nonprofit association, provides leadership and resources to help the history community thrive and make the past more meaningful for all people. AASLH serves the tens of thousands of history organizations, professionals, and volunteers around the country who help people of all ages develop critical thinking skills and understand how learning history helps society make progress toward justice. Through research, advocacy, and our field-leading professional development program, AASLH advances public history practice and connects history practitioners to critical issues in the field and to one another.

Learn more at www.aaslh.org

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History is currently the subject of high-profile political debate.

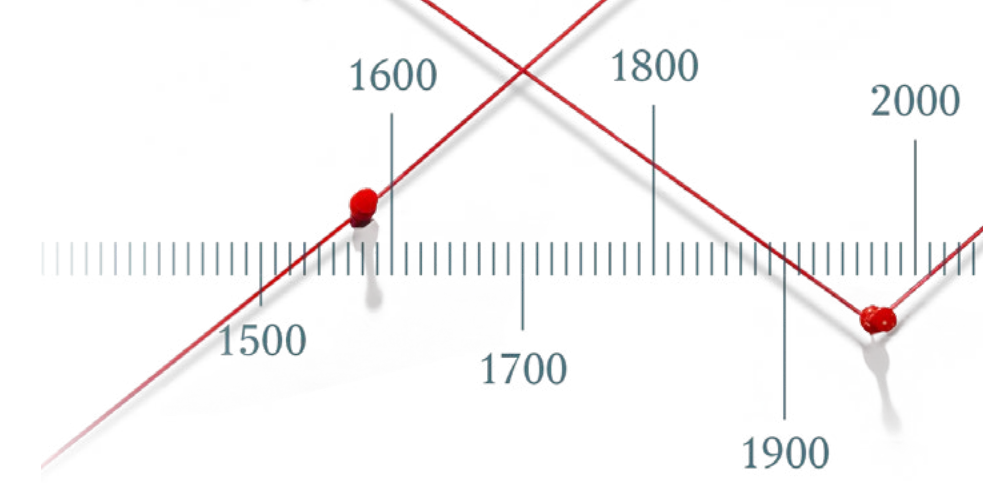
With the New York Times’ “1619 Project,” and more recently debates over “critical race theory,” history has become a lightning rod of political discourse. While scholars and advocates are making concerted efforts to make sense of and address our country’s past injustices¹, a well-organized conservative backlash against talking about these injustices is taking hold.² These conflicts have far-reaching policy implications, as the current attempt to legislate against teaching about systemic racism demonstrates.³

Debates around history are bound up with ideas about race and racism, justice, American identity, and more. They are also channeled by widely shared assumptions about history itself—what it is, how we come to understand the past, and why this is important. These debates often run aground on abstract notions of history as discovering a singular “truth” about the past that obstruct constructive engagement with history, make people suspicious of historians’ evolving work as unreliable and biased, and make it hard for people to see what inclusive history looks like. And while the ubiquity of these debates in the news and on social media can create the impression that everyone is concerned about history, the reality is that people tend to think of history as a hobby for enthusiasts rather than as something they should be concerned about.

We need a more productive public conversation about history, one that builds understanding of what inclusive history looks like—especially the histories of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and other historically oppressed groups—and of its

importance for all of us. In this report, we outline a framing strategy to get there. By adopting a critical engagement frame, communicators can overcome the polarized discussions surrounding the search for a singular “truth” of American history and engage the public in a more productive conversation about the past and the role of history in American society.

This framing strategy is the result of a two-year, deep-dive research project undertaken in partnership with the American Association for State and Local History, the National Council on Public History, and the Organization of American Historians and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In this report, we focus on the framing strategy, which includes a set of specific recommendations for communicators. This report is accompanied by an earlier report summarizing the public’s existing understandings of history,⁴ as well as a supplement that summarizes the research methods used in the project and describes the evidence behind each of the recommendations presented here.



The Framing Strategy: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement

The public widely assumes that making sense of the past is about finding the one objective “truth” about what happened by recording and documenting “just the facts.” This way of thinking makes it hard for people to make sense of critical debate about what happened in the past and what it means. Because what happened is assumed to be simple and straightforward, differing interpretations of the past are assumed to be illegitimate—a sign that someone is inserting subjective opinion and bias into the conversation. This thinking contributes to the currently polarized cultural climate in which ideological camps argue about who has the most authority over the “truth” about the past.

To make their way out of this endless debate, communicators need to shift the conversation from being about abstract truth to critical engagement. Adopting a critical engagement frame involves three big moves:

1. **From truth to critical thinking.** The strategy centers the conversation on critical thinking, which opens a space for people to see the complexity of historical interpretation and the importance of considering different perspectives and accounts.

2. **From abstract debate to concrete engagement.** The strategy anchors thinking about history in a grounded understanding of historical practice—what interpretation involves—and in concrete examples of inclusive history. Engaging people in concrete and grounded ways keeps them from getting stuck in abstract ideological conflicts.
3. **From winning the debate to progress toward justice.** By shifting the focus from who is right to how learning from the past can move us toward justice, the strategy can help people understand why history should matter to them.

Taken together, these framing moves add up to a big frame shift that builds understanding of what historical interpretation involves, why history matters to society, and why a more inclusive, shared history of the United States is needed.

Below, we outline specific recommendations that communicators can follow to put the critical engagement frame into practice. These recommendations explain what it means to place critical thinking at the center of how we talk about history and show how a specific metaphor and value and certain types of examples can be used to frame history effectively.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Talk about critical thinking to shift perceptions about what history involves.

How the public currently thinks

The public assumes that there is one “truth” to be found about the past. This truth is unchanging and exists “out there” in the world. This way of thinking makes it difficult for people to recognize the complexity of historical interpretation and how understandings of history necessarily do and should evolve and change over time. This way of thinking about history leads people to assume that new interpretations of history or differing opinions are nothing more than unreliable, subjective bias. Since historical truth is thought to be singular and static, once that truth has been “found,” it shouldn’t, people widely assume, need to be reconsidered or updated.

What to do

Talk about how the practice of history involves critical thinking and how learning history fosters critical thinking skills. Describe in detail how making sense of the past helps develop critical thinking skills, such as the ability to analyze and evaluate evidence and diverse accounts about the past.

This framing strategy is a productive middle path between focusing on “historical truth” or describing history as simply a set of “stories” that we tell. As we discuss above, talking about truth makes it hard for people to recognize the complexity of historical interpretation. When discussions center on “truth,” they become mired in an unresolvable debate over what’s objectively “true” or “false.” Yet simply dropping references to truth or validity and elevating the idea of history as “stories” is likely to cue the same worry, that those who tell these stories are telling biased versions

of the past that are nothing more than opinions. The idea of “critical thinking” is a way of talking about validity and evaluation of evidence that allows a place for interpretation without triggering worries about unfettered subjectivity.

How to do it

Emphasize the role of critical thinking in historical practice. Explain how the practice of history requires using critical thinking to evaluate different sources and perspectives about the past and different understandings of the significance and meaning of events and trends.

Explain how learning history builds critical thinking skills that can be used in other parts of life. This is a productive way to connect the practice of historians to public engagement with history.

Use the idea of critical thinking to anchor talk about the many stories that make up history. While it is vital to emphasize that history involves many different stories and perspectives, it is important to ground discussions of different perspectives in the idea of critical evaluation of evidence to avoid the sense that these stories are nothing more than personal opinions or perspectives.

Avoid talking about historical “truth.” This will cue unproductive thinking about truth versus bias and will lead people to assume that interpretations about the past—including those made by historians—are inherently “biased.”

What it looks like

Instead of...

Studying history is more complicated than figuring out “what really happened.” It involves piecing together many different stories to learn about the past. Each of these stories might have something different to say, and sometimes the stories might conflict. By studying history, we make sense of the past by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting these stories.

Try...

Studying history means thinking critically about the world and our place in it. It involves evaluating many different perspectives and figuring out how past events affect our lives today. By studying history, we build critical thinking skills that apply to all aspects of our lives— and we develop a deeper understanding of our society and how it came to be.

What this accomplishes and why it works

Foregrounding critical thinking as the core of history helps people to better understand what historical interpretation means, builds appreciation for its importance to individuals and to society, and generates public support for devoting greater resources to the field of history.⁵ This strategy is more effective than other frames used to describe the benefits of history, such as emphasizing the importance of history for

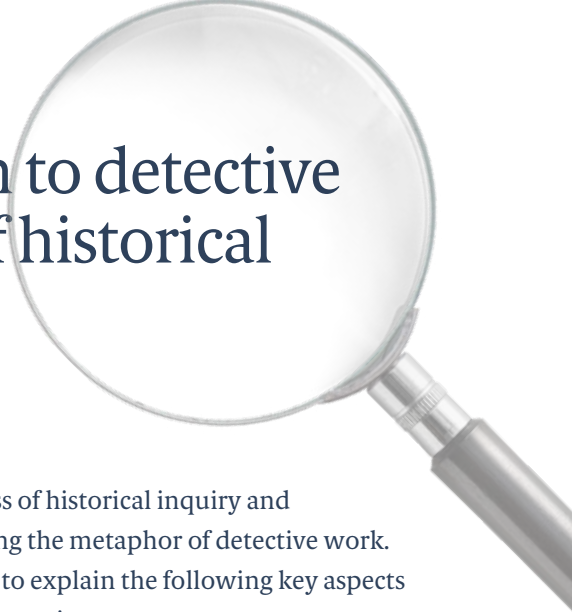
democratic participation or talking about how history can reduce prejudice in society.

Focusing on critical thinking helps people recognize the value of grappling with different perspectives and understandings of the past. It helps people see that history can be rigorous and grounded while admitting discussion of different ideas and reconsideration of old understandings. In other words, it provides a productive way of thinking about the validity of evidence-based interpretation that avoids cuing and reinforcing people’s unproductive assumptions about a singular historical “truth” that must simply be found and reported.

In addition, by focusing attention on the tangible skills that people gain when they learn history, this frame helps people get past the idea that history is just a hobby or vocation for particular people and instead helps them see it as something that matters to all of us. The frame enables communicators to connect the practice of history to what people gain by learning history as historians engage in critical thinking and anyone who learns history develops critical thinking skills. We suspect that this is one of the reasons why this strategy is more effective than others—it helps people recognize the links between historical practice and learning.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Compare historical interpretation to detective work to deepen understanding of historical practice.



How the public currently thinks

People generally don't have a clear sense of what historians do or what the process of historical interpretation involves. People think of historians as "journalists of the past" who document and report "just the facts" and describe events exactly "as they happened."⁶ This idea leads the public to focus on eyewitness accounts of past events as the main source of evidence and makes it hard for people to understand the ways historians use different types of historical sources and analyses and process the evidence through discussions to build academic consensus. The belief that the past can be easily and straightforwardly documented and reported on is connected to the public's belief that "one truth" about the past is out there waiting to be found.

While people tend to model historical inquiry on journalism, which they see as straightforwardly reporting on "just the facts," there is another—if less prevalent—understanding available to most people. In this alternative way of thinking, historical interpretation requires examining multiple perspectives to find out what happened in the past. This way of thinking better aligns with the actual process of historical interpretation. Effective framing pulls forward this way of thinking while pushing to the background the idea that history simply involves documenting self-explanatory facts.

What to do

Explain the process of historical inquiry and interpretation using the metaphor of detective work. Use the metaphor to explain the following key aspects of historical interpretation:

1. **The range of sources.** Historical investigation, like detective work, integrates information from a wide range of sources.
2. **The range of methods.** Just as detective work uses different tools and techniques to understand what happened in the past, historical inquiry uses a wide range of methods.
3. **The ability to update understandings.** Both detective work and historical interpretation involve the accumulation of new evidence and perspectives that lead to new, updated understandings of what happened.

How to do it

Focus on the process of historical interpretation rather than the goal of interpretation. The idea of "solving a case" can cue unproductive thinking about "finding the truth" about the past.

Talk about the practice, not the person. Compare historical investigation to detective work, not historians to detectives. Talking about detectives can activate associations with police that aren't productive.

Use the metaphor to explain how historical interpretation engages with multiple perspectives and sources of evidence. People tend to think that what happened in the past is plain to discern and can be gleaned from eyewitness accounts. Talking about how history, like detective work, requires grappling with different accounts and sources can counter these inaccurate understandings.

Emphasize that historical interpretation, like good detective work, is an ongoing process that requires updating based on the latest evidence. The metaphor can help people recognize that new interpretations can be more valid than old ways of understanding the past.

What it looks like

Instead of...

What do historians do?

Historians are like detectives, trying to figure out the truth. Both historians and detectives gather evidence from the "scene of the crime" to understand what really happened. For example, historians might rely on eyewitness accounts and gather evidence like historical letters and other written accounts. All of this evidence helps to "solve the case" and figure out the truth of what happened in the past.

Try...

What do historians do?

Historians' work to investigate the past is a lot like detective work. They gather different accounts of the past, each offering different perspectives, to get as complete an understanding as possible. Historians use many kinds of evidence, such as written records, objects, interviews, and more—just like how many kinds of evidence are used when doing detective work. They analyze this evidence using various tools and methods to see how the "clues" all fit together. Then, when new evidence comes to light, they use it to update our understanding of the past.

What this accomplishes and why it works

Metaphors provide a powerful way to shift people's understanding of how things work. Comparing a less-understood concept with something more familiar gives people a new way of understanding it. Our research found that the metaphor of detective work gives people readily accessible language for talking about the iterative, sometimes messy process of investigation and interpretation (see appendix for more information). People already recognize that detective work requires multiple sources, consideration of conflicting accounts, and updating of views, so when they map historical inquiry onto detective work, they come away with a more accurate understanding of how history works and what it involves.

The detective metaphor is highly effective in building a more accurate understanding of the process of historical interpretation. The metaphor moves people beyond the idea that history is about recording facts and dates and helps them recognize that historical interpretation requires critical engagement with different sources of evidence, conflicting accounts, and different perspectives. The metaphor also builds support for policies that would promote more inclusive, equity-based engagement with history, such as including more diverse accounts of the past from BIPOC and women in history textbooks and establishing a government commission to make sense of and reckon with the country's past injustices, especially racial injustices.

The metaphor's ability to help people recognize the need to consider multiple perspectives accounts for its success in building support for a more inclusive approach to history. Historians, like detectives, must consider many different perspectives to understand what happened; an incomplete investigation in either case can't provide a full picture.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Emphasize how history helps us make progress toward a just world to increase recognition of history’s importance.

How the public currently thinks

People recognize that learning about the past can potentially help society learn from past mistakes, and they view societal progress as an empirical process of learning from past mistakes through trial and error.⁷ Members of the public widely recognize that learning from the past is necessary to improve as a society. This is a productive starting point for deepening appreciation for history’s importance. That said, what it means for society to learn from its mistakes and “move forward” varies for people and is inseparable from their diagnosis of society today. For example, people who think we have achieved racial equality assume we have already learned from and moved past racial injustice (if they believed it existed in the first place), while others recognize that taking the past seriously deepens our understanding of what we must change as a society to achieve racial justice. Moreover, the commonly used language that history helps us learn from past “mistakes” can downplay the painful past injustices of slavery and genocide that continue to inform our society today and that must be addressed in order for us to move forward.

In addition, while people recognize the need for society to learn from its past mistakes, people are sometimes fatalistic about the possibility of this happening. At times, people assume that history is doomed to repeat itself. When people think this way, they see less value in engaging with history because doing so is unlikely to make a practical difference for the future.

What to do

Make the case that history is essential for us to make progress as a country. Use the value to explicitly invoke the idea of learning from the past—from both what went right and what went wrong.

Because, as we discuss above, progress means different things to different people, it’s important for communicators to be clear and specific about the goal of progress. Specifically, communicators should explicitly say, using values language, or implicitly show, using examples, that history can help us move toward justice. For example, in the context of a conversation about racism, communicators might explicitly talk about how engaging with history can help us make progress toward racial justice. Alternatively, the same idea can be communicated by providing examples of how engaging with history could help us redress the legacy of racism.

Our research suggests that the language of “justice” is not as polarizing as some might suspect—it doesn’t automatically cue partisan politics or close off conversations with people on the right end of the political spectrum. We explored combining the language of “justice” with the language of “progress” in focus groups conducted in summer 2021, at the height of the debate around “critical race theory,” and found that participants did not treat the language of “justice” as ideological or partisan terminology. In other words, while terms like “social justice” have become associated

with the left in some corners of public discourse, our research suggests that the broader language of “justice” is widely usable and doesn’t elicit a charged response.

That said, it is worth emphasizing that the key is communicating the concept of justice, not necessarily using the term. If communicators choose to, they can avoid the specific terminology of “justice” and get the idea across with examples of how history can help us grapple with past wrongs and critically examine the past so that we can address those wrongs and do better going forward. Communicating this idea—either explicitly or implicitly—is important to avoid conveying a triumphalist narrative of American infallibility.

How to do it

Connect progress to the idea of learning from past wrongs. This idea is already available to people and can be invoked to orient people toward the importance of critical engagement with the past.

Make clear, by showing or telling, that the goal of progress is justice. Communicators can either explicitly say that history can help us make progress toward realizing justice or, if they would rather not use this language explicitly, provide examples that show how engagement with history helps us grapple with wrongs and do better.

What it looks like

Instead of...

We believe history is worth supporting, preserving, and disseminating. Historical knowledge doesn’t just honor the past, it helps us understand our present. At the Historical Society, we are committed to studying history that is relevant to our lives today.

Try...

We believe history can—and should—be used to move our country forward. Making progress means studying the past, grappling with where we’ve gone wrong, and learning from what we’ve done right. At the Historical Society, we are committed to pursuing a more just future through engaging with the past.

—or—

We believe history can—and should—be used to move us forward. At the Historical Society, we believe in providing people with opportunities to confront the painful legacy of racism, from highlighting the experiences of Chinese railroad workers to telling the often-untold story of slavery in our state. Through history, we can better understand where we have been, where we are now, and how we can do better.

What this accomplishes and why it works

This value increases people’s sense that history matters for society. It also builds support for dedicating more resources—including public resources—to engage the public in historical learning (for example, through funding of museums and historical sites and funding for scholarships in history).

The value of progress, when appropriately grounded and specified, cues the productive idea that we must learn from the past—from both what we did right and what we did wrong. Connecting progress and justice, using values language or examples, orients people toward a more inclusive vision of history while boosting recognition that history matters to all of us—that it is more than just a hobby for history buffs.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Use concrete, location-specific, solutions-focused examples to build support for inclusive history.

How the public currently thinks

In our research, we found that many participants—particularly those from dominant groups (for example, white people and men)—tended to treat historical narratives that center white men as the “neutral,” depoliticized American history that should be taught in schools (for example, learning about the Founding Fathers). In this view, narratives about historically oppressed groups such as BIPOC and women are seen as “extras” that are optional and unnecessary for everyone to learn. While interview participants from historically oppressed groups typically recognized this as an unfair double standard, they expressed doubt whether this could change in a meaningful way in our school systems or society.

While people often assume that dominant groups should or inevitably will be the focus of history, at times people are able to recognize that examining the past from the perspectives of different groups makes the historical record more accurate. Relatedly, some members of the public, particularly BIPOC, recognize that the exclusion of oppressed groups from history is a way of perpetuating dominant groups’ power.⁸

It is worth noting that since we began this project in 2019, we have seen an important shift in people’s thinking about past injustices. In our research, we have seen a rise in the recognition that our country needs

to talk about painful or troubling things that have happened in the past. In 2019, many of our research participants, particularly white people, thought about past injustices such as slavery or genocide as too “unpleasant” to talk about and unnecessary to engage with because they are “in the past” and therefore irrelevant to today’s society. We also found that participants of color were hesitant to bring up these topics because they made “other people” (that is, white people) uncomfortable.⁹ Our subsequent research in 2020–2021 has found that members of the public are more commonly critiquing this “ignorance is bliss” way of thinking. Interview participants from diverse backgrounds, including some white people, were more likely to recognize that past injustices need to be talked about and remembered in order to make sense of current problems in society, such as racial inequality and police brutality. Other FrameWorks research conducted over the past year has found an increase in systemic thinking about racism since the uprisings of summer 2020, and while these trends appear to be more prevalent among younger people and Democrats,¹⁰ it is notable that people across racial and ethnic backgrounds appear to be recognizing the need to talk about and make sense of society’s past wrongs rather than brushing over them.

What to do

Examples are a powerful strategy for helping people recognize the need to include the perspectives and experiences of historically oppressed groups in our accounts of the past. The right kinds of examples activate the existing recognition that multiple perspectives improve the accuracy of history while also defusing the sources of backlash to inclusive history.

There are three features of examples that make them especially effective:

1. **Specificity.** Examples are more effective if they’re specific. For example, rather than mentioning museums as an important place for inclusive historical learning, invoke specific museums and exhibits and explain how they enable people to engage with multiple accounts of the past and the perspectives of historically oppressed groups.
2. **Connected to place.** Connecting examples to a local context or physical site not only adds to their specificity but also helps people see the value of confronting historical injustices. For example, you might mention the Manzanar National Historic Site when talking about Japanese internment during World War II.
3. **Solutions focus.** Rather than focusing on the problems with current approaches toward history and their failure to be inclusive, you should highlight examples of successful inclusive history—examples that illustrate how we can solve the problem of a lack of inclusive history.

How to do it

Integrate examples with the other recommended frames. When people process examples, there’s a danger they get focused on the details of the cases and lose the forest for the trees. Using the other frames described above to articulate general takeaways about history can help people move from the specific case to the bigger picture.

Go local. Local examples bring inclusive history home and help ward off abstract worries about the “liberal agenda” of distant elites being imposed at home. Using local museums, historical sites, or events to show what it means to engage with different perspectives and sources of history can help people see the value in this approach.



How to talk about “diversity & inclusion”

While people are familiar with the terms “diversity and inclusion,” most members of the general public don’t have a clear sense of what these concepts mean or why they’re relevant to today’s society. The terms simply don’t have the currency with the public that they have with many activists, scholars, and other history and museum professionals. For most people, these terms don’t carry the deeper equity-related meanings they do in the field.

This means that these terms can’t carry too much weight in a message. When using these terms, make sure you’re clearly explaining what they mean and connect them to concrete examples. Concrete, solutions-focused examples are the best way to build an understanding of what it means to include diverse perspectives in history and why this is so important.

What it looks like

Instead of...

Historic sites offer a special opportunity to engage with the past. Too often, though, that past is exclusionary and leaves out the stories of people who were not white and wealthy. The way we interpret history at historical sites needs to change in order to provide the diverse and inclusive history visitors deserve.

Try...

Historic sites offer a special opportunity to encounter the past—especially when they give visitors a chance to grapple with our country’s historic injustices. For example, the Whitney Plantation Museum in Edgard, Louisiana, focuses on the history of the enslaved people who were held there. We need more historical sites that tell the stories of people from historically oppressed groups and more opportunities for visitors to confront painful legacies such as slavery. Making progress toward a more just society requires this sort of deep engagement and reckoning with the past.

What this accomplishes and why it works

Specific, solutions-focused examples help people imagine what a shared, inclusive history of the United States looks like in practice and create a sense that this approach to history is truly possible. Focusing examples on how we can do better—on solutions, not just existing problems—helps to overcome fatalism about the possibility of decentering dominant groups in our collective recollection of the past. These examples help people think about what it means to critically engage with the experiences of people who are different from them, which helps build understanding that it is possible to learn about the past from the perspectives of other groups.

Grounding examples in specific places and cases makes it harder for people to deny the value of confronting historical injustices because they are confronted with a particular case from the past and would have to deny the value of learning about that case and the perspectives of particular excluded groups. By connecting inclusive learning to specific sites and places, examples can make it harder for people to escape into general worries about “bias” or national pride.

The debate over “critical race theory”

The recent backlash against “critical race theory” (that is, teaching about systemic racism in schools and universities) is grounded in the assumption that when it comes to history, what matters and counts is the history of white people. This can be seen in arguments that “straight, white people—including children” need to be “protected” from learning about systemic racism in our country’s past and present.¹¹ These arguments assume that the perspectives of dominant groups are the ones that matter, and that history that centers the perspectives and experiences of Black and brown people should be treated as peripheral. At most, this is—according to this way of thinking—history that only people of color should learn.

By assuming that white people need not learn about the past from the perspectives of people who aren’t like them, this thinking reinforces white supremacist logic. Because dominant groups’ perspectives are equated with history itself, the attempt to give the perspectives of historically oppressed groups equal standing with the perspectives of dominant groups is seen as a threat to proper, “objective” history.

While this way of thinking is obviously present in our current discourse, it is important to underline that people generally, across racial and ideological lines, are able to think in more productive ways about the importance of grappling with past injustices. As we note above, people widely recognize that history involves learning from our mistakes so that we can move forward. Providing specific examples of shared, inclusive history that show how particular institutions help us reckon with past injustices activates and expands this way of thinking and pushes into the background the idea that what matters is the history of dominant groups.

In addition, moving away from abstract debate over “the truth” about our history and our country and grounding conversations in specifics and the idea of critical engagement can make it harder for people to challenge the value of inclusive history. Showing people what it looks like in practice to center the perspectives and experiences of historically oppressed groups preempts abstract worries about bias and engages people constructively around the practice and purpose of inclusive history.

In recent focus groups that were specifically focused on the debate around “critical race theory,” which FrameWorks conducted for partners who engage in anti-racist education work, we confirmed that the above framing strategies are productive ways of intervening in this debate.¹² Participants widely agreed that in order to address racism, we must know our past. Clarifying how history can help us grapple with injustice and move beyond it—that is, how history helps us make progress toward justice—proved particularly effective with Republicans. These sessions also confirmed the importance of shifting from talking about “the truth” to talking about critical evaluation of evidence.



Conclusion

History is at the center of our public conversations, but right now these conversations are generating more heat than light. Too frequently they get stuck in abstract debates over truth and worries about “bias,” as misunderstandings of what historical interpretation involves short-circuit hard conversations about confronting past injustices.

The *critical engagement* frame can productively disrupt this cycle. Shifting the conversation away from abstract truth and toward grounded, critical engagement can help us build understanding of historical interpretation and the value of inclusive history. Tapping into the existing recognition that we must learn from the past—what we have done right and wrong—can help people see the need to confront injustice in order to make progress going forward.

Identifying a frame with the potential to change the conversation is a promising start, but this potential will only be realized if we find ways of getting the frame into public discourse. The next step will be to develop a strategy for getting the frame out—through different channels, from different people and organizations—so that, over time, our conversation about history begins to shift in productive ways.

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Making History Matter:
From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement

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TrendsWatch

MUSEUMS AS COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE



Center for the Future
of Museums

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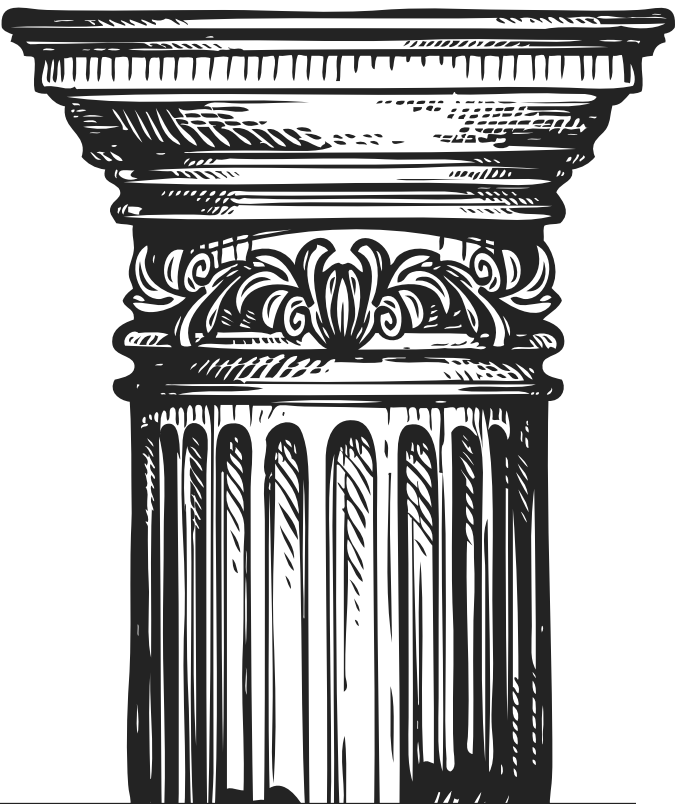
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Introduction

Crises function as stress tests—pitilessly exposing any weakness in how systems are designed, implemented, and maintained. Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has tested America on a massive scale, and many of our systems—health, education, housing, childcare, elder care, emergency response, and others—have fallen short. In the wake of over five million deaths worldwide, with over eight hundred thousand deaths in the US alone, it would be a profound moral tragedy if we did not use what we’ve learned from this test to rebuild our systems to be stronger, more resilient, and more equitable.

“System” comes from the Greek “systema,” referring to entities that interact in an orderly and organized fashion. The infrastructure that supports our communities encompasses “entities” of all types: public schools and small businesses, churches and American Legion posts, local governments, and private foundations. This edition of TrendsWatch makes the case that museums are vitally important entities in that infrastructure as well, by virtue of their contributions to five pillars of community strength and resilience as outlined in this report:

- ❖ Education for our children
- ❖ Livable communities for our elders
- ❖ Mental health
- ❖ Emergency response in the face of disasters
- ❖ A human-centered culture of sustainability

Making the Case for Museums as Essential Community Infrastructure

Some people intrinsically care about nature—animals or habitats—and passionately believe it is worthy of public support. However, many people don’t value nature as a thing in and of itself. To make an effective case for conservation that sways this latter group, advocates have learned to focus on nature’s contributions to people (aka “ecosystem services”). This approach works: research shows that when people understand how nature improves their own health and wallets, they are more likely to support funding and legislation that protects the planet.

Similarly, there are some people who simply “get” museums—they visit them regularly and value the role they play in preserving and presenting art, science, history, and myriad other topics. But many people don’t: data on the general public from Wilkening Consulting’s [Annual Survey of Museum-Goers](#) consistently shows that 70 to 75 percent of US adults have not visited a

“You can’t fund infrastructure with bake sales.”

— Anonymous



single museum in any given year. Even people who do appreciate and use museums on a regular basis may not understand why they should go beyond paying admission or becoming members to support museums through government funding and their own philanthropy. This edition of TrendsWatch focuses on the good museums do for people and communities whether or not that contribution is directly tied to their missions. This is about the value of museums not as museums per se, but as big bundles of assets that make their communities better, stronger, and more resilient through how they choose to operate.

Prioritizing Community Impact

As Americans rally around the need to strengthen our networks of community support, we are beginning to see some awareness that museums are essential components of those systems. Here's one example: in its [2021 National Risk Assessment Report](#), the First Street Foundation acknowledged the importance of social infrastructure, including museums, that help communities develop "a sense of belonging." This statement captures only a small portion of the truth. It's up to museums, working together, to expand that insight, helping the public, government, and funders realize the full scope of how museums support their communities.

There have always been museums that foreground a community-centered approach to their work. When the [Wagner Free Institute of Science](#) opened its doors in 1865, for instance, it took the form of a natural history museum, rather than a club or society, as means to make science education accessible to everyone in its community, regardless of class, income, or gender, in an age when education was a vital resource for social and economic advancement as well as individual enrichment. Over a century and a half later, the original buildings and collections are still used as tools for providing educational enrichment for children and adults in Philadelphia. [Project Row Houses](#) (PRH) is a contemporary example of a community-centered museum, created in 1993 by seven visionary Black artists to serve the community of Houston's Third Ward. These founders saw historic preservation as a means to foster art, and art as a means to "empower people and enrich communities." Now, this self-described "community platform" is a nexus of support for underserved neighbors, including young single mothers, local small businesses, and socially minded artists. While PRH employs some traditional museum formats (e.g., exhibitions, historic preservation, and artist residencies) they have also at various points in their history hosted a community laundromat, a residential program for young mothers, a business incubator, and tutoring services—doing whatever needs to be done.

Organizations like the Wagner Free Institute and Project Row Houses may seem like extreme examples of museums shaping themselves around community needs. But look closely at almost any museum and you will find programs and services that support communities in "non-traditional" ways: [raising](#) and [distributing](#) food, creating [housing for homeless artists](#), providing [self-care programs](#), fostering [happiness](#), keeping [teens out of prison](#), supporting [childhood health](#), providing [art therapy for military veterans](#), and serving as [voter registration centers](#) and [polling stations](#). However, seldom do individual museums, much less the field as a whole, get the credit they deserve for all the good they do. While we can build a strong case around the role museums play in local systems, that case would be even stronger if more museums measured these impacts and touted them as metrics of success.

Building on Success

One of the principal goals of the American Alliance of Museums is advocating for museums: helping legislators understand the value museums provide to society and encouraging them to provide commensurate support. Some legislators are already on board, reliably helping to secure robust funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, even in difficult times. Their support has been critical in ensuring that museums have been included in pandemic relief funding as well, such as the \$1.2 billion for museums in Shuttered Venue Operators Grant funds and more than \$1 billion from the Paycheck Protection Program. As another example, the bipartisan \$1.2 trillion [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act \(IIJA\)](#) recently signed into law by President Biden includes \$50 million in grants for museums and other nonprofits to upgrade their facilities for energy efficiency and \$65 billion to support broadband access for all. As I discuss later in this report, while some people [simply “get” museums](#), others will support our field only when they understand the tangible, quantifiable benefits museums provide to society. This is true of our elected representatives as well—by framing museums as essential community infrastructure, we can convince more legislators to support museums, not as amenities that are merely “nice” to have, but as essential contributors to their constituents’ health, education, and safety.

Raising the Stakes

In addition to making an effective case for support, quantifying the benefits museums provide to their communities will influence museum practice as well. This is a good thing, because as much good as museums do now, they could do even more. As I discuss in chapter five, “Right-Sizing the World,” the way we choose to define success shapes the systems we create. A narrow focus on traditional metrics such as attendance, collections size, and square footage constrains the potential of what museums can achieve. It is my hope that this report will inspire you to reexamine how your organization defines success and create metrics that challenge you to expand your thinking about what the museum can achieve.

In 1910, [Daniel Burnham](#) exhorted city planners to “make big plans; aim high in hope and work.” Museum planners should have equally lofty goals: to become vital players in the complex systems that help their communities thrive in the face of crises yet to come.

Yours from the future,



Elizabeth Merritt

VP Strategic Foresight and Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums
American Alliance of Museums

“Museums, aquariums, and zoos are key partners with cities, states, and the federal government as we work together to build a more sustainable and equitable future. These institutions are national treasures—serving as centers of conservation and research, while also helping to educate and inspire future generations ... These institutions, located across the country in thousands of cities and towns, represent our cultural heritage and are social, economic, and educational pillars of our communities.”

—US Representatives Mike Quigley (IL-05) and Jesús “Chuy” García (IL-04), in an April 19, 2021, letter to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure calling for strong support for museums in infrastructure funding

How to Use This Report

This edition of *TrendsWatch* frames the case for museums as essential community infrastructure. The format is designed to help you start discussions among your museum's board and staff, consider how you might maximize the "positive externalities" of your work, and make the case to funders and legislators for support commensurate with the good you do.

Each chapter is devoted to one "pillar" of infrastructure, and:

- ❖ Introduces the **issue**
- ❖ Suggests **critical questions** for museums
- ❖ Describes the **challenge**
- ❖ Summarizes how society, and museums, are **responding**
- ❖ Presents a **framework for action**
- ❖ Documents **examples** of museums tackling these issues
- ❖ Shares a **"signal of change"** (story, report, or event) to help you explore the future
- ❖ Provides additional **resources**

We know that each download of *TrendsWatch* is shared, on average, with ten other readers. This year, please double down on that practice. Share the report with:

- ❖ Everyone on the museum's board, staff, and volunteer corps to provide a starting point for tackling these difficult topics.
- ❖ Funders, to support a conversation about how they can sustain the museum, and how you, in turn, can help them achieve their goals.
- ❖ Journalists, to help them do a better job of reporting about your museum and the field as a whole.
- ❖ Policymakers, to help them understand how museums can be integrated into a "whole-of-society" approach to critical infrastructure.
- ❖ Local leaders and government officials, to build awareness of the essential roles your museum does and can play in supporting the community.

Here are some suggestions for how to use the report with board and staff:

- ❖ Share a printout of the report in a breakroom, or a digital copy in a workspace online, and encourage staff to annotate with questions, observations about how it resonates with their experience, and ideas about how what the museum might do.
- ❖ Dedicate a board meeting to discussion of the five “pillars” explored in this report, or parcel them out as agenda items across a series of meetings.
- ❖ Use individual chapters as the basis for a deep dive with staff into issues of concern to your museum.
- ❖ Use the critical questions to guide discussions.
- ❖ Document how your museum contributes to the five pillars of community infrastructure explored in this report and use these metrics in reports to your members and the community in support of your advocacy efforts.

DON'T leave this report to languish on a digital shelf. Think of it as a museum PFD (Personal Futurist Device)—it can't help you stay afloat if it's left in the closet at home.

I look forward to connecting with you in the coming year to explore these topics more deeply. Please share your thoughts and questions by:

- ❖ Tagging [@futureofmuseums](#) on Twitter.
- ❖ Posting to the Alliance discussion forum [Museum Junction](#). (Directors are welcome to join the CEO Forum on Museum Junction.)
- ❖ [Submitting guest posts](#) to the [CFM blog](#).
- ❖ Emailing CFM at emeritt@aam-us.org.

My colleagues and I are available to support your work via speaking engagements, workshops, moderating discussions, and consulting. For more information on those services and to request our help, visit [Alliance Advisors and Speakers Bureau](#) on the AAM website.

Five Pillars of Community Infrastructure





Pillar One:

Education for Our Children

Twenty years into the new millennium, the US is still struggling to create a P-12 education system that provides each child with the support they need to become a healthy, well-balanced, self-sustaining adult. [Copious research](#) suggests that the system we inherited from the last century, with its focus on age-based cohorts and standardized curricula, is poorly suited to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, synthesis, innovation, creativity, teamwork, and collaboration—skills widely seen as essential for thriving in the twenty-first century. The COVID-19 pandemic has added to these challenges by exposing the fragility of our educational infrastructure, widening existing educational disparities and demonstrating that alternate forms of learning can be better, more effective, and more accessible for some. Museums have been living the educational future for decades, providing the kind of self-directed, experiential, social, and distributed learning that is proving to be both effective and resilient. Building on these strengths, the museum sector can play a vital role in rebuilding and transforming P-12 education to be better, stronger, and more equitable for all of America's children.

The Challenge

Like so many US systems, from finance to justice to government, the existing education system is structurally inequitable in its design. As currently constituted, our public and private systems of education reinforce and perpetuate advantages based on race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, ability, and socioeconomic status. This structural inequity exists not only because of zip-code-based allocation of resources (which could theoretically be fixed by giving more and better access to historically marginalized groups), but because the system is fundamentally designed to favor a specific, narrow range of abilities and learning styles. To paraphrase education critic Sir Ken Robinson, the whole system of public education has been created in the image of higher

“Given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed — it needs to be transformed.”

—Sir Ken Robinson, author, speaker, and international advisor on education

Critical Questions for Museums

- Working with traditional schools (public and private), how might museums help create better educational experiences for all students?
- How can museums provide alternative educational pathways for learners who aren't well served by the current system, including homeschooled students?
- How can museums capitalize on their expertise in fostering twenty-first century skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, synthesis, innovation, creativity, teamwork, and collaboration?
- How can museums ensure they are recognized, valued, and supported for the essential roles they play in education?



Solar ovens at the Little Scholars Program, Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. Photo credit: Nadia Fuentes.

education, and treats primary and secondary school as a protracted university entrance exam. “The consequence,” he explains in a [TED talk](#), is that “many highly talented, brilliant, creative people think they’re not [brilliant and talented], because the thing they were good at at school wasn’t valued, or was actually stigmatized.”

In the past decade, top-down educational reform has largely focused on creating a common set of standards and doubling down on standardized testing. These efforts have been, at best, unsuccessful, and may have actually made things worse for both students and teachers. The Common Core standards, introduced in 2010, have cost billions of dollars without resulting in [any measurable improvement in results](#). Many critics feel that the emphasis on testing has disempowered and demoralized teachers, helping fuel a chronic shortage of qualified, skilled educators, especially in low-income communities and hard-to-staff roles.

We already knew that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn’t work for many children, and the COVID-19 pandemic threw that into stark relief. While prolonged disruption set back student learning overall, the effect was especially severe for [Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities](#). Low-income families were less likely to be able to provide the internet access, devices, and dedicated, quiet study space needed for successful online learning. [As of spring 2021](#), nearly one-fifth of households with school-age children did not have consistent access to the internet for education, and this lack of access was highest for Latinx, Black, and mixed-race households, with predictable results. A [study](#) by the consulting firm McKinsey suggested that students of color lost three to five months of math learning over the 2019-2020 school year, compared to one to three months lost by white students. A metadata analysis by the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights found that pandemic learning disruptions

were also particularly severe for students learning English as a second language, students with [disabilities](#), LGBTQ+ students, and students who are caregivers for their families.

The pandemic was devastating for educators as well, placing them in the role of front-line emergency responders with limited training or support. Teachers found themselves working even longer hours, learning how to teach online, and in many cases juggling both in-person and online teaching simultaneously. While [teacher turnover](#) actually declined in 2020 (because, heroes), the pandemic took a heavy toll on morale, with one-third of teachers saying it has made them more likely to leave teaching or retire early. [Almost twenty-five thousand people quit](#) the public education sector in August 2021, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics [forecasts](#) that the annual turnover rate for experienced educators and school principals will rise to 42 percent.

But the pandemic also surfaced important signals of potential positive change. While distance education was a disaster for some children who thrived in traditional schools, it proved to be a superior option for some kids disadvantaged by the established system. A number of students, including some with [ADHD, autism, or other neurodivergent conditions](#), found it easier to concentrate when they were not around classmates. Teachers who work with the online learning platform Edutopia reported that some “[shy kids, hyperactive kids, and highly creative kids](#)” are doing better with remote learning than they did

Student at the Great Lakes Science Center’s Learning Lab. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Great Lakes Science Center.



Second-grade student from Butler Elementary School engaged in a scavenger hunt at the Kidzeum as part of the STEAM Residency Program, December 2021. Photo credit: Kari Bedford.

in physical classrooms. Others noted that some students who have been the victims of physical or verbal bullying at school found home to be a safer space for learning. (Some of these beneficial aspects of remote learning mirror strategies that promote [health and wellbeing in the workplace](#) as well, including being flexible about where, when, and how work gets done, and revisiting what constitutes a reasonable workload.)

How can we take what we learned from pandemic-era innovations and use it to improve education long-term? How can we use this disruption as an opportunity to build back better and stronger, transforming the systems we know to be damaging to so many young people?

The Response

In Society

Pre-pandemic, the US was already shifting away from the top-down, federally driven reform efforts characterized by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Guided by the 2015 successor to NCLB, the Every Student Succeeds Act, states began promoting flexibility in setting goals, making improvements, and supporting students through a wide range of approaches. As the KnowledgeWorks Foundation observed in a [2018 report](#), “These shifts, some of which have been gaining ground for several years, are creating a more decentralized environment in which changemakers of every stripe have increasing ability to influence public education—and in more ways than before.”



A Framework for Action

To embed themselves in the educational infrastructure of their communities, museums may want to:

- Invest in their capacity to work with schools: for example, by dedicating one or more full-time staff positions to developing and sustaining museum-school partnerships.
- Develop resources that help educators, parents, and students integrate museum assets into school curricula (with particular attention to research documenting [what educators want from digital museum resources](#)).
- Build learning networks that connect diverse educational nodes: museums, libraries, after-school programs, and schools. These learning organizations can work together to reinforce each other's efforts, meet the needs of all learners, and provide formal credit for learning that occurs across the community.
- Double down on digital. Museums can help bridge the digital divide in education by providing internet access and teaching digital skills as well as enriching education with their own digital learning materials and experiences.
- Create permanent “learning labs” to serve diverse learners, including public school, charter school, or homeschool students needing internet access, equipment, quiet, and mentoring to support successful online learning, as well as home-based learners looking for classroom space.
- Consider joining the growing number of “museum schools,” whether by offering a home for an independent school in museum space, helping a school create its own student-run museum, or starting their own schools run by museum staff.



At the Grand Rapids Public Museum School, students use the museum's exhibits—and the city of Grand Rapids—as their campus.
Photo credit: Grand Rapids Public Schools.

The disruptions created by COVID-19 demanded innovation and flexibility, and it is widely recognized that education will not simply reset to pre-pandemic norms. Having been essentially drop-kicked into the future, schools have begun to build the infrastructure they need to support distance learning and online instruction. These efforts were given a boost by funding from the [Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan](#) to improve broadband access and close the digital divide. The extended pandemic educational experiment bolstered teachers' confidence in trying out new ideas for how to teach, collaborate with their colleagues, communicate with families, and use technology to engage with students. Now more than two-thirds of teachers [surveyed in 2021](#) say they intend to incorporate tools they adopted during the pandemic into their ongoing teaching repertoire.

This extended, forced experiment in remote learning accelerated some shifts in education policy that were already underway. In 2012, [thirty-six states](#) had already disconnected “seat time” (time spent in the classroom) from the awarding of educational credit. States are waiving seat time in [many different ways](#) (including basing credits on mastery of material and allowing for individual seat-time waivers) and for students with many different needs (including those who have fallen behind, those

who excel, those who don't do well in traditional academic environments, etc.) Asynchronous distance learning can be used to reinforce this trend, empowering students to spend as little or as much time as they need to master the material, and to be evaluated on outcomes rather than facetime.

The pandemic also accelerated parents' search for educational alternatives. Prior to 2020, the US had already seen a slow but steady growth in homeschooling and in the number of students attending charter schools. The COVID-19 pandemic supercharged this trend. [Homeschooling](#) is projected to increase by at least 10 percent, and [charter school](#) enrollment rose by over 7 percent. Non-charter public school enrollment dropped 3.3 percent, representing 1.5 million students. As school funding follows students, such shifts in enrollment will create a sizeable drain on the public education system.

In Museums

The seminal AAM report [Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystem](#) (2014) chronicled the steady evolution of museums from "informal" educational extras to critical players in mainstream education.

In addition to supporting schools, teachers, and learners with content, field trips, and after-school programs, museums are experimenting with ways to be the primary education provider for some children. The past two decades have seen the creation of a growing number of museum schools of various forms, including schools that operate museums or use museums in their community as classrooms and learning locations, schools co-locating in museum space, and museums founding and operating schools. As we point out in the *Building the Future* report, museums are preadapted for the next era of education, as they are already expert in the kind of self-directed, experiential, distributed learning that fosters the twenty-first century skills of critical thinking, synthesis of information, innovation, creativity, teamwork, and collaboration. They bring these strengths to museum-school partnerships of all types.

The pandemic gave museums the opportunity to demonstrate their educational expertise by stepping in to fill many of the gaps created by the fragility of traditional education systems. Over the past two years, many students lacked critical resources for successful online learning: quiet space, good internet connectivity at home,

During the pandemic, this sixth-grade class from Woodstock Elementary School used a restored barn at Billings Farm & Museum as its classroom. Photo credit: Courtesy of Billings Farm & Museum.



mentors to help with technology and assignments. Many museums responded by creating study halls and providing learning mentors. When some schools needed more room to practice safe physical distancing, local museums, closed to the public, made their buildings and grounds available as classroom space for months on end. Museum educators turned their time and talent to creating virtual field trips, online classes, curricula, and lesson plans to support teachers and parents who were trying to provide a rich learning experience for children cut off from normal schooling. These efforts introduced many teachers to the wealth of digital resources provided by museums, and taught museums that they can serve educators and students across the country, not just in their geographic communities.

Like teachers, museums may make long-term changes based on what they learned during the pandemic. Many museums found that their digital offerings reached people who were unlikely to visit the museum even in normal times, because of time, distance, or other barriers to accessibility. (These anecdotal reports are bolstered by data from the [Culture and Community in a Time of Crisis](#) project, which found museums of all types reached significant numbers of non-museum-goers through digital experiences.) Museums may also decide to continue some of the place-based learning innovations sparked by the pandemic. For example, the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, which provided space for students engaged in virtual learning, has decided to launch a new museum charter school focusing on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). Classroom teachers have told the [Pacific Science Center](#) that they want virtual field trips implemented during the pandemic to stay, because it is an efficient use of class time, simplifies logistics, and can more easily be customized to teacher and student needs.

Museum Examples

Museums Supporting Pandemic Education

During the pandemic, some museums, closed to the public, have hosted schools needing more space. [The Children's Museum of Fond du Lac](#) housed students from Treffert Way for the Exceptional Mind, a public charter school that “seeks to teach to children’s individual strengths



Children reading at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History's Little Scholars Program. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History.

and emphasizes experiential learning.” The [Louisiana Children's Museum](#) in New Orleans gave exclusive access to its building and grounds to pre-K and kindergarten classes from the Langston Hughes Academy, a FirstLine charter school whose students are 98 percent Black and 74 percent eligible for free lunch. Sixth graders from Woodstock Elementary in Vermont found themselves studying at [Billings Farm and Museum](#), in close proximity to the museum’s exhibits and award-winning herd of Jersey cows.

Many schools went virtual, leaving students in need of quiet spaces with good internet connections to support successful virtual learning. Many museums responded by adapting some of their space as in-person learning labs. The [Great Lakes Science Center](#) hosted learning camps during the summer of 2020, with museum staff leading STEM-based activities as well as helping students complete online work assigned by their schools. [The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History's](#) Little Scholars program allowed first- through fifth-graders to do their virtual classes from inside the exhibit halls. The museum provided laptops and Wi-Fi, and museum facilitators were on hand to answer children’s questions and help them get online. The [Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science](#) in Miami created the Pods Program to host kindergarten through fifth-grade students accessing virtual school, with museum educators providing homework

assistance and technical support.

Museums Providing Formal, Credentialed Learning Experiences

Futures-oriented organizations such as KnowledgeWorks, Big Picture Learning, and Ashoka envision the [future of education](#) as being distributed across the community, with learning taking place in a variety of organizations that are empowered to grant formal credit to students. In 2013, Vermont launched the Flexible Pathways Initiative (Act 77), giving secondary school students the right to create personalized learning plans that include educational experiences outside the formal school setting. Now some museums in that state, including [Shelburne Farms](#) and the [Lake Champlain Maritime Museum](#), are marketing programs as place-based learning that can integrate into personalized learning plans and meet proficiency-based graduation requirements. During the pandemic, [The Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan](#) worked with teachers and homeschool parents to award extra credits for free, independent field trips to the museum's planetarium programs.

Four Kinds of Museum Schools

Schools Using Local Museums as Classrooms

Some examples include the [New York City Museum School](#) (a magnet school in Manhattan for grades nine through twelve), [Normal Park Museum Magnet School](#)

Junior Curators work with collections at the John Early Museum Magnet Middle School. Photo credit: Becky Verner.



(a magnet school in Chattanooga, Tennessee, for kindergarten through eighth grade), and [The Museum School of Avondale Estates](#) (a public charter school in Decatur, Georgia, for kindergarten through eighth grade). These schools build their curricula around “learning expeditions,” using their local museums as extensions of classroom learning, enabling students (either as a full grade level or a single class) to structure learning around in-depth interactions with exhibits and artifacts.

Schools Creating Museums

The [John Early Museum Magnet Middle School](#) (a magnet school in Nashville, Tennessee, for grades five through eight) and The Webb Schools (a private school in Claremont, California, for grades nine through twelve) have created full-fledged museums that engage students in the process of creating exhibits, curating collections, and conducting research. The Webb Schools' [Raymond M. Alf Museum of Paleontology](#) is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.

Schools Hosted on Museum Campuses

The [Manchester Academic Charter School](#) middle school is sited on the campus of the **Pittsburgh Children's Museum** and makes extensive use of its Museum Lab. The [Dr. Charles R. Drew Science Magnet Museum Site](#) houses grades three through eight at the **Buffalo Museum of Science**. The [Lincoln Nursery School](#) is integrated into the **deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum**, and the [Wonder School](#) preschool collaboration uses the **Columbus Museum of Art** as one of its campuses.

Museums Creating or Co-Creating a School

At the [Grand Rapids Public Museum High School](#) (GRPMHS), students work with staff of the **Grand Rapids Public Museum** to catalog and research collections and curate exhibits while using the museum exhibits for place-based learning. GRPMHS, which was one of ten schools internationally to receive the XQ Super School grant in 2016, is an ongoing collaboration between the Grand Rapids Public Museum, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, the City of Grand Rapids, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., [XQ Super School](#), and the Parent Teacher Community Council.

[The Henry Ford Academy](#) is a public, tuition-free charter high school hosted by **The Henry Ford**. Founded in 1997 and developed in partnership with The Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Co., it serves five hundred students grades 9-12 split between The Henry Ford's **Museum of American Innovation** and historic [Greenfield Village](#).

For a map identifying museum schools across the US, visit the website of the [National Association of Museum Schools](#).

Explore the Future

Signal of Change:

A “signal of change” is a recent news story, report, or event describing a local innovation or disruption that has the potential to grow in scope and scale. Use this signal to spark your thinking about how museums might engage with the education system in the future.

[Are Microschools the Future of Online Learning?](#)

WGBH, June 28, 2021

The coronavirus pandemic dramatically changed the way tens of millions of kindergarten through twelfth-grade students “do school,” and for some families, it was the push they needed to find alternative educational models tailored to their students’ unique needs and interests. An Arizona-based company called Prenda is helping parents to set up “microschools” in their homes for small groups of students. During the pandemic, Prenda’s enrollment multiplied by four times, and the company now supports more than four hundred microschools. Starting this fall, the New Hampshire Department of Education will partner with Prenda to provide learning pods, in multi-age small-group settings, to help up to five hundred students who struggled with setbacks during the pandemic.

Explore the implications of this signal:

Ask yourself, what if there was more of this in the future? What if it became the dominant paradigm? Write and discuss three potential implications of this signal:

1. For yourself, your family, or friends
2. For your museum
3. For the United States



Students in the ten-day residential Junior Scholars Summer Paleontology Program at the Raymond M. Alf Museum of Paleontology at The Webb Schools. Photo credit: Nancy Newman/The Webb Schools.

Additional Resources

- [Shaping the Future of American Public Education: What's Next for Changemakers?](#), Katie King and Katherine Prince (KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2018). This paper presents four scenarios of educational changemaking to explore how and why education changemakers might influence American public education over the next decade.
- [Building the Future of Education: Museums and the Learning Ecosystem](#) (American Alliance of Museums, 2014). This white paper summarizes the content and ideas coming out of a 2013 assembly of over four dozen educational policy experts, practitioners, funders, education innovators, reformers, student activists, and others shaping the conversation about US education, convened by the American Alliance of Museums and hosted by the National Building Museum in Washington, DC.



Pillar Two:

Livable Communities for Our Elders

By 2030, one in five Americans will be over the age of sixty-five, and in some states that figure will top one-quarter. By 2034, older adults will outnumber children in the US population. As the AARP has pointed out, in the past seventy years our primary focus, as a society, has been on meeting the needs of families with children. This focus has shaped every aspect of our lives, from the design of buildings, transportation systems, and neighborhoods to the policies behind zoning and human resources. The unintended result has been the creation of physical and social systems that isolate and marginalize people as they age. This separation is unhealthy for people of all ages. Younger people are deprived of valuable wisdom and expertise, as well as role models for their future selves. Isolating older people from society creates grave risks to their mental and physical health. Museums can play a vital role in creating “age-friendly” communities that support physical activity, social connection, and intellectual stimulation, as well as providing pathways for elders to contribute to their communities and to following generations.

The Challenge

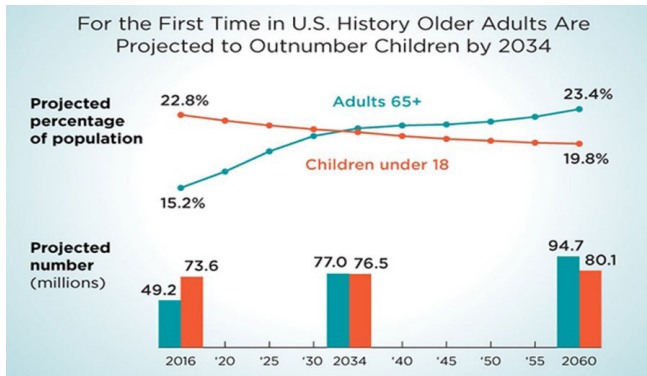
A woman born today in the US can expect to live to be eighty-one years old, a man seventy-six, and those averages are rising with time. Though Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) have long expressed their intent to work until age sixty-eight, the COVID-19 pandemic has impelled a wave of early retirements, meaning many people face a decade or more of “post-work” life, while continuing to want opportunities for meaningful engagement and to give back to their communities. This stage of life is not without challenges. Even though the [Age Discrimination in Employment Act](#) protects

“Ageism is a prejudice against our own future selves and takes root in denial of the fact that we’re going to get old.”

—Ashton Applewhite, author and age-activist

Critical Questions for Museums

- What aspects of conventional museum design and operation pose barriers to access for older audiences?
- How can museums elevate the power, voice, and status of older individuals, helping to create a culture that honors, values, and empowers elders?
- How can museums promote the creation of age-friendly communities and integrate themselves into a seamless network of support?
- How can museums make volunteer opportunities accessible to a broad diversity of older individuals?
- How can museums address ageism in the steps they take to promote diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in their own work cultures?
- How can museums shift older adults from the group least likely to use museums to one of their biggest audiences?
- How might museums bolster their own sustainability by serving older adult audiences better?



Data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

people age forty or older, those who want to remain in or rejoin the workforce often face discrimination in hiring and on the job. [Forty percent](#) of people over the age of sixty-five have some kind of disability—whether that involves mobility, cognition, hearing, vision, or barriers to independent living. About [20 to 25 percent](#) of older adults have mild cognitive impairment, and about 10 percent experience dementia (though that rate seems to be [falling over time](#)).

Regardless of underlying health or ability, everyone who lives to grow old in the US at some point joins the ranks

of people subject to the pervasive, corrosive bias of [ageism](#), a form of discrimination that itself contributes to depression, cognitive decline, ill health, and (perverse-ly) a shorter life span. And [ageism combines](#) with other “isms”—racism, sexism, homophobia, and class prejudices—to create a toxic brew of intersectional damage.

It is increasingly common for older Americans to face these challenges without a network of family or social support. In the US, 27 percent of adults over the age of sixty [live alone](#) (more than double the figure for adults age twenty-five to sixty), and social isolation has a negative impact on health as severe as [smoking up to fifteen cigarettes a day](#). Older Americans are also much less likely than their counterparts elsewhere in the world to live in a household without young children, which contributes to generational isolation as well, denying children access to the care, mentoring, and role modeling that can be provided by older adults. The safety net woven by family relationships will fray even more in coming decades, as the US birthrate drops. In 2010, there were, [on average](#), seven potential caregivers for every senior. The AARP



At the Speed Art Museum, Toya Northington led workshops on making art from memories. Photo credit: Courtesy Speed Art Museum.

A Framework for Action

To help create age-friendly communities, museums can:

- Inventory barriers to access or use. This might include physical barriers (including stairs, ramps, handrails, and restrooms), comfort (including seating, acoustics, lighting, and readability of signage), cultural or social barriers (including attitudes and behavior of staff and ageism reflected in marketing, exhibits, and programming), and transportation (including availability and location of parking and access to public transportation). Ensure that digital design is age-friendly as well.
- Provide age-equitable opportunities for employment and volunteering. Consider training managers and human resources staff on how to avoid ageism in hiring and employment, establishing a working group of paid and volunteer staff to identify how to value and support older volunteers, including age and ageism in the museum's DEAI plans and policies, and addressing age-related stereotypes and assumptions in DEAI training.
- Assess how older adults are represented in your content, from exhibits to marketing, and work to ensure that elders are both seen and valued.
- Identify older adults in your community who are "culture-bearers" and give them platform, power, and authority to transmit the knowledge, experience, skills, and stories that they care for.
- Design programs and services that actively foster intergenerational connections: In addition to creating rewarding relationships, dialogue between older adults and youth has been shown to be an [effective tool](#) to reduce ageist attitudes and behaviors.



Teaching artist Baba Luther Gray leads a course on the influences and rhythms of New Orleans music at the Louisiana State Museum. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Louisiana State Museum.

expects this number to drop to four by 2030, and to fewer than three by 2050. Nearly 90 percent of Americans over the age of fifty want to "[age in place](#)." However, the lack of family caregivers, and the absence of any nationally funded and organized substitute, will make it difficult for people to remain in their own homes rather than moving to assisted living facilities. In any case, by the end of this decade, 54 percent of seniors will [not be able to afford either assisted care or independent living](#), precipitating crises in both housing and health.

Meanwhile, we've created communities and environments both online and in real life that seem almost intentionally designed to make it hard for elders to remain actively engaged with the world. Only 1 percent of [housing stock](#) in the US features universal design elements such as no-step entrances, single-floor layout, and space designed to accommodate wheelchairs. Some developers create "senior communities" for people over a given age, ranging from housing co-ops to entire suburbs. Though these environments may address challenges of physical accessibility and social isolation, they can become "age bubbles" that isolate residents from a richer spectrum of community assets. The internet can, theoretically, connect the housebound to the world, but it comes with its own set of challenges, as digital design often features illegible text, tiny icons, and other [age-unfriendly features](#).

Museums have room for progress in becoming age-friendly as well. Though there is a widespread assumption that older individuals are among the most frequent visitors to museums, research shows the opposite to be true. In the US, [fewer than a quarter](#) of people age sixty or older visit a museum in any given year. (Older adults may



Similarly, in the broader population, adults over 50 are the *least* likely to visit museums.

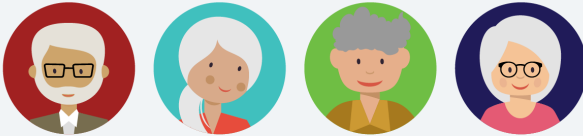
So do the math. We are actually under-served, and with our growing population there are a lot more of us that could be museum-goers.

15% of population today are 65 or older

22% will be 65 or older by 2040



You've already got us. To get to all of *them*, you have to address *their* needs, and *their* concerns.



Such as:

- Multi-generational places for family time
- Places that encourage health and well-being
- Increasing social needs
- And more research with non-visitors to learn more about their needs and interests



(BTW, YOU NEED TO DO THAT TRANSFORMATIONAL STUFF TOO!)

Otherwise, you are missing a big opportunity to serve us and our communities more effectively. To really matter.



Data Stories are created for *The Data Museum*, where research conducted by Wilkening Consulting is released. Sources include:

- 2016 Wilkening Consulting broader population sampling
- 2017 Wilkening Consulting Annual Survey of Museum-Goers
- AAM's Museums and America 2017 (in partnership with Wilkening Consulting)
- US Census Bureau

*Data Stories are about regular museum-goers, who visit multiple museums each year and who responded to a survey about museum-goers. They do not represent casual museum visitors.

Visit *The Data Museum* at wilkeningconsulting.com/datamuseum for supporting context and data.

Data Story courtesy Wilkening Consulting. Graphics courtesy of Longnamedgirl Design.

seem to make up a larger share of the audience because those that do go to museums tend to be frequent visitors.) Many aspects of traditional museum design are [age-hostile](#), including the [lack of seating](#), sensory overload, and barriers to physical accessibility. Even museum programming can add to generational segregation, if older people are funneled only towards offerings (like passive lectures) that museum staff believe they will want.

More than [60 percent](#) of people over the age of fifty-five engage in some sort of volunteer activity, formal or informal, and the opportunity to volunteer is one of the major benefits nonprofits provide to society. Copious research [documents](#) that volunteering helps individuals expand their connections, feel good about themselves, improve their physical well-being, combat social isolation, reduce stress, and learn new skills—benefits that are particularly helpful in supporting healthy aging. [In museums](#), volunteers typically outnumber staff by a factor of six to one, performing a wide range of work including stocking the gift store, preparing research specimens, working as greeters, planning and running fundraising events, and giving tours. However, the benefits afforded by volunteering are often not equitably shared with a museum's community. Historically, the corps of museum volunteers have skewed towards older adults with the time, inclination, and financial resources that enable them to volunteer. As a result, their demographics typically mirror that of museum personnel (both staff and board)—which is often disproportionately white, well-educated, and relatively well-off. Volunteerism can exacerbate inequality if, as in many museums, it is only accessible to people who are already comparatively privileged.

The Response

In Society

There is growing consensus that the most robust solution to the isolation of aging is to bake better design into the landscape and infrastructure of towns and cities. In 2006, the World Health Organization introduced a [framework for age-friendly cities](#) that encompasses eight domains: health care, transportation, housing, social participation, outdoor space, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, and communications and

information. As of 2017, over five hundred cities around the world had signed on, pledging to make their communities better places to grow older, and AARP has worked with WHO to extend this practice to 207 communities in the US. As is invariably true of inclusive design, creating age-friendly communities is good for everyone—increasing access to employment, arts and culture, critical services, community participation, and affordable housing. As [AARP points out](#), “Age-friendly communities foster economic growth, and make for happier, healthier residents of all ages.”

In Museums

Museums play many roles in making communities age-friendly as places of social connection, employment,

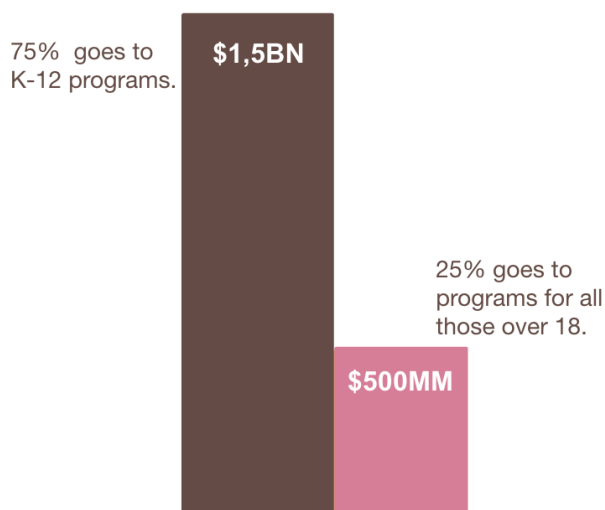
mental and physical engagement, and as influential forces in combatting ageist stereotypes. Since the early 2000s, museums have helped fuel the creative aging movement—using the power of arts engagement to foster healthy, active aging and improve the lives of older people. [Research](#) from the Seeding Vitality Arts initiative of Aroha Philanthropies documents that sustained, meaningful arts engagement supports healthy aging, increases the self-confidence and mental engagement of participants, and fosters social connections.

Museums also step in to meet the needs of the many people experiencing health-related challenges as they age. Programming specifically designed for [people with dementia](#) and their caregivers has been shown to reduce

Richard Walter, PhD, MIM’s curator for United States/Canada and Europe, takes participants through some of the popular instruments and musical styles of Ireland. Photo credit: © 2021 Musical Instrument Museum.



AMERICAN MUSEUMS SPEND \$2 BILLION A YEAR ON EDUCATION PROGRAMS, BUT...



Source: *Building the Future of Education* (AAM, 2014).

levels of depression and improve cognitive functioning and overall quality of life. Engaging with art through viewing, making, and movement can help people coping with Parkinson's disease or other debilitating illnesses to maintain their mobility and social connections.

Museums are also an important component of age-friendly communities regardless of the specific programs they offer. [Recent research](#) shows living in a community with various cultural resources confers a five-year advantage in cognitive age, with museums and similar cultural organizations providing the biggest boost to cognitive health. (However, that benefit is skewed by race, with Black populations experiencing less protective benefit from museums, pointing to the need to improve equitable access to museum space.)

The museum sector is still searching for a good model to reconcile the tensions that sometimes arise between volunteers (often older individuals) and paid staff. Some of the approaches being tried include creating a long runway (even a decade or more) to implement structural changes in volunteer programs, and including volunteers in the process of addressing DEAI and social justice goals. Others focus on creating an organizational culture,

backed up by appropriate procedures, that foster a volunteer corps that is diverse with respect to age, race, and other elements of personal identity.

Museum Examples

Fostering Age-Friendly Design

Recently, the [Design Museum](#) and the [Design Age Institute](#) launched a project to establish a new infrastructure for collaboration and co-creation around design and aging. [Designing a World for Everyone](#) will bring together researchers, designers, innovators, and policymakers to share the latest research and insights into how design can be used to transform public spaces, cities, and communities to support the aging population. Associated programming includes [The Wisdom Hour](#), a creative storytelling space celebrating positive stories of aging, facilitated by [This Age Thing](#). Over the course of a year, the project will place local community groups at the heart of the decision-making process, respond to the needs and concerns of underrepresented groups, and create social impact by removing and reducing barriers to participation.

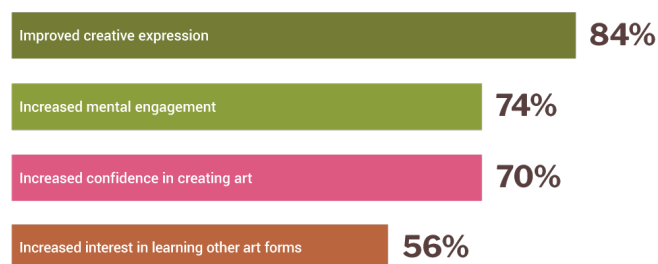
Cultivating Social Connection

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Musical Instrument Museum](#) (MIM) in Phoenix partnered with Arizona State University to create virtual programming for senior communities who could not visit the museum in person. The initiative produced two Senior Wellness video series, one for active seniors and one for people in memory care. Teams of music therapy students from ASU developed music therapy interventions that complement virtual tours of MIM's galleries, with a focus on physical skills (drumming, dancing, and other movement), cognitive skills such as attention and memory, and psychosocial components related to self-expression through music.

Creating Intergenerational Connections

The [Museum of Contemporary Art in Tucson's](#) Stay Gold program supports the intergenerational LGBTQ+ community, connecting generations through creativity and making and using contemporary art to explore relevance and meaning in the lives of the participants. In 2018, older adults from Stay Gold proposed creating an intergenerational version of the teen School of Drag performance. Local drag performers taught the workshops

Increased Creativity + Mental Engagement



Data from post-program surveys of participants in Seeding Vitality Arts programs between 2017 and 2019.

and a youth drag performer emceed the show. During the pandemic, museum staff adapted the Stay Gold programming to an [online format](#), offering artmaking prompts inspired by LGBTQ+ artists to maintain the connection so badly needed during this time of heightened isolation. This work was supported by a Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums grant from Aroha Philanthropies.

Cultivating Creative Aging

In 2016, Aroha Philanthropies launched a major multi-year initiative, Seeding Vitality Arts, to foster creative aging programs in a variety of settings, including museums. In 2018, the American Alliance of Museums partnered with Aroha Philanthropies to support a museum-specific cohort through [Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums](#) (SVA), providing twenty organizations with training and resources to develop and implement high-quality, intensive arts learning opportunities for older adults. The resulting programs included an Expressive Movement workshop at the [Anchorage Museum](#) building on Indigenous knowledge and life-ways; “Viva la Vida” artmaking at the [National Museum of Mexican Art](#); and traditional drumming and Mardi Gras beading at the [Louisiana State Museum](#). When the COVID-19 pandemic forced museums to close their doors, leaving elders at even greater risk of isolation, the SVA museums reinvented their work to engage with

participants over remote platforms. The [Olana State Historic Site](#), for example, remastered its plans for a place-based eight-session playwriting workshop. Kicking off with a virtual tour of the historic house, participants spent more time on research using digital documents, and seven professional actors read the finished student scripts over Zoom.

Meeting the Needs of Older Audiences

In 2014, noting that only 3 percent of older adults in New York City visit senior centers, the [Museum of Modern Art](#) created the [Prime Time Collective](#), a diverse group of adults ranging from sixty-one to ninety-four years old, to help identify and address financial, physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers to participation in museum programs. In the past decade, the museum has partnered with community organizations to offer specialized programming for LGBTQ+ older adults, individuals and caregivers coping with Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s disease, and for teens and older adults to come together (for example, the 2016 program Act Your Age). In collaboration with the Martha Stewart Center for Living, the museum launched a “social prescription” program, in which physicians and social workers can write a prescription for art programming at MoMA. For housebound seniors, the museum offers online programming in partnership with the [Virtual Senior Center](#).

Supporting Older Adults with Dementia

Since 2010, the [Frye Art Museum](#) has partnered with the Alzheimer’s Association and the Seattle nonprofit Elderwise to develop and implement participatory arts experiences for people living with dementia and their care partners. In the ensuing decade, the museum has fostered a large community of practice by offering professional development to individuals engaged in similar work, and conducting research that adds to the growing body of literature documenting the contribution of arts engagements to healthy aging. One of the signature programs of this effort is the annual [Creative Aging Conference](#), an interdisciplinary exploration of topics related to art, creativity, and aging.

Explore This Future

Signal of Change:

A “signal of change” is a recent news story, report, or event describing a local innovation or disruption that has the potential to grow in scope and scale. Use this signal to spark your thinking about how museums might support age-friendly communities in the future.

Creating an Age-friendly City

In 2021, the [Purposeful Aging Los Angeles Initiative](#) (PALA) issued [recommendations](#) to advance its goal of making the Los Angeles region “the most age-friendly in the world.” One of the recommendations is to make all tourist attractions and buildings in the Los Angeles region age-friendly. “As new building construction occurs (and buildings are updated over time), it is critical that they provide welcoming, functional environments for all generations. This is especially important for stadiums, **museums**, studios, convention centers, major public facilities, and other tourist attractions that draw a high-volume of visitors, including older adults. The County and City will partner with these institutions/facilities, as well as the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board, USC School of Gerontology, and other partners to develop a **ranking system for major regional tourist attractions**. We anticipate generating awareness of, and attention around tourist facilities that have taken steps to become age-friendly.” (Emphasis added.)

Explore the implications of this signal:

Ask yourself, what if there was more of this in the future? What if it became the dominant paradigm? Write and discuss three potential implications of this signal:

1. For yourself, your family, or friends
2. For your museum
3. For the United States



Retirees donate thousands of hours every year to museums to give back to their communities. Photo credit: Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California / Odell Hussey Photography.

Additional Resources

- [Museums and Creative Aging: A Healthful Partnership](#) (AAM, 2021). This report, authored by Marjorie Schwarzer, opens with an overview of aging and ageism in our country, documents actions being taken to foster positive aging, profiles the work of museums providing creative aging programming, and shares lessons learned from the Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums initiative, funded by Aroha Philanthropies, now known as E.A. Michelson Philanthropy.
- [Age-Friendly Standards for Cultural Organizations](#) (The Family Arts Campaign, 2017). These standards are designed to help cultural organizations provide a welcoming and positive experience for everyone, regardless of their age, and to facilitate intergenerational interactions.
- [Global report on ageism](#) (World Health Organization, 2021). This report outlines a framework for action to reduce ageism for use by governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations, and includes a toolkit for the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism.
- The [Old School Anti-Ageism Clearinghouse](#) is an online compendium of free resources to educate people about ageism and help dismantle it. It includes information about and links to blogs, books, articles, videos, speakers, and other tools (workshops, handouts, curricula, etc.) accessible to the general public.



Pillar Three:

Mental Health for All

The United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#) identify “good health and well-being” as critical elements in creating a peaceful and prosperous future. Within that broad mandate, the need to foster mental health is particularly acute. The stigma attached to mental illness inflicts additional damage through bias and exclusion, and if people do seek help, they may face financial, geographic, or social barriers to accessing care. COVID-19 may amplify this challenge in the coming decades, with long-term impacts including increased rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. A deep body of research has already documented the role museums can play in a resilient and equitable infrastructure of health writ large. The stress test of the COVID-19 pandemic showed that museums can be essential partners in a network of support for mental health as well.

The Challenge

In Western society, the theory and practice of mental health has been shaped by history, philosophy, and traditions that view the mind and body as separate entities. Only recently have we begun to recognize the duality of body and mind as false, and to acknowledge that people experiencing mental illnesses should receive the same respect, compassion, and access to care as people coping with physical challenges.

This welcome step toward a rational and caring approach to mental illness comes none too soon. Mental health has been [declining in the US](#) since the early twentieth century. Some research suggests one culprit is a cultural shift from intrinsic to extrinsic goals. Other contributing factors include the cumulative effects of racism and discrimination, the rising number of people living alone, and (especially for teens) the dark side of social media, including

“What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation.”

—Glenn Close, actress

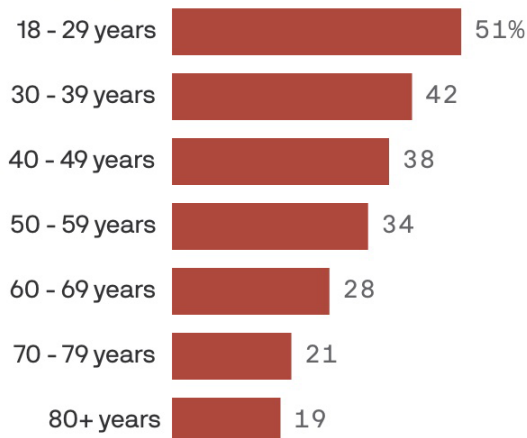
Critical Questions for Museums

- What groups, on the museum's staff and in its communities, are at high risk from stress, isolation, and other factors that can damage mental health?
- How can museums combat the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination attached to mental illness?
- How can museums foster mental health among their own staff and volunteers, create a healthy work culture, and support people in managing mental illness for themselves and their families?
- How can museums equip their staffs with the training, tools, and support they need to address the topic of mental health safely and effectively?
- How can museums play a meaningful role in the network of support and services that address mental health in their community?

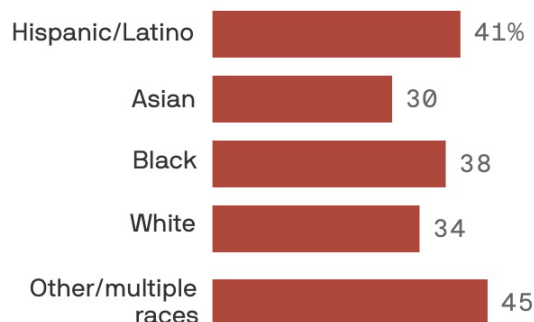
Percentage of population who have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder

Survey of U.S. adults conducted between April 23, 2020, and October 11, 2021

By age group



By race/ethnicity



Data: CDC; Note: Asian, Black, and white respondents identified as non-Hispanic, and are of a single race. Chart: Jacque Schrag/Axios.

bullying and body-shaming. Whatever the cause, by 2018, one in five Americans were experiencing challenges to their mental health, and one in twenty faced serious mental illness.

Then came the additional stress, isolation, and fear induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, one in every three Americans reported they were [suffering from depression](#), and [anxiety and depression severity scores](#) were one and a half to two times higher than they were in 2019. The pandemic's effects on mental health were particularly severe for people disadvantaged by or excluded from existing networks of support, including [women](#); people who are unmarried; low-income households; children age eleven to seventeen; LGBTQ+ youth; people who identify as Black, Native American, and Asian or Pacific Islander; and people already experiencing mental illness. Medical historians tracking mental health in the wake of [other large-scale disasters](#), including the Chernobyl nuclear accident in Ukraine (1986), the SARS pandemic (2003), and Hurricane Katrina (2005) have found long-term increases in the rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and other mental health problems. The COVID-19 pandemic will likely have a

similar long-term impact on mental health. This damage to individuals translates into damage for critical systems as well. The past two years have been particularly hard on front-line workers, with one result being that many essential personnel, including [health care workers](#) and [teachers](#), may leave their professions, further weakening our ability to support community needs.

Over the course of the pandemic, as museums were forced to close their doors to the public, many museum workers experienced layoffs, furloughs, and financial stress. Others scrambled to move their work online or fill different roles. Reopening brought its own challenges, including increased workloads and the stress of enforcing safety policies with occasionally hostile or combative patrons. The results of a [survey](#) conducted by the Alliance in March 2021 reflected the toll this has taken on people working in the museum sector, with respondents rating the pandemic's effect on their mental health and well-being at an average of 6.6 on a scale of zero to ten (ten being the worst). Fifty-seven percent of respondents were worried about burnout, and, perhaps in consequence, fewer than half were confident they would be working in the sector in three years.

The Response

In Society

Pre-pandemic, America was making slow but measurable progress in improving attitudes towards and support for people experiencing mental illness. Many businesses are making voluntary improvements to policies, procedures, and benefits, for example, by offering mental health days or explicitly defining “sick leave” to include time taken to tend to mental health. Increasingly, employees are encouraged or required to use all their vacation time. And human resources staff have learned that it isn’t enough to simply offer mental health support through an employee assistance program; it’s critical to actively cultivate the use of these services by, for example, educating staff on the benefits, simplifying the enrollment process, and providing assurance that personal information is kept private.

We are making progress at the federal level as well. The Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 required large-group employer insurance plans to cover mental health services at the same level as medical and surgical interventions. Still, many people fell through the holes of existing safety nets. When the [Affordable Care Act](#) (ACA) passed in 2010, more than forty-eight million people in the US were uninsured, and many individual and small-group plans did not cover mental health treatment at all. ACA has expanded coverage and access to mental health care and seems to be improving outcomes.

But ACA cannot address some fundamental barriers to mental health treatment, including the stigma attached to mental illness and lack of accessible treatment in some communities. Paradoxically, by making things worse, the COVID-19 pandemic may have sparked progress on those fronts, in particular by accelerating the [adoption of telemedicine](#) by practitioners and the public. Between January 2020 and February 2021, mental health televisits [increased by 6,500 percent](#). (That is not a typo.) In addition to connecting to a medical practitioner for a traditional visit over the internet, people in need of counseling can now choose from a burgeoning number of [mental health apps](#) to access therapy and cope with stress, anxiety, addiction, eating disorders, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Early assessment suggests



Sit, Stay, Heal brings therapy dogs to the museum setting.
Photo credit: Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.

these digital interventions can be effective and reach people without access to traditional care.

The pandemic may provoke a profound cultural shift as well. The past two years have brought conversations about mental illness out into the open in daily conversation, the press, and social media, as people struggled with their own mental health or to support friends and family facing similar challenges. It is possible that this mass shared experience will have a long-term effect for the better, helping reduce the shame, ostracism, discrimination, and marginalization attached to mental illness. Our national challenge is to build on these advances, making permanent changes that support remote access to appropriate care, elevating the importance of mental health, and destigmatizing mental illness.

In Museums

A large body of research documents that engaging with art (through viewing, making, or museum visits) has tangible psychological benefits, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression as well as reducing social isolation and loneliness. Building on this work, any museum can find ways to explore and illuminate the experience of mental health in ways consonant with their missions.

Science museums often tackle the topic head-on, as the [Museum of Science, Boston](#), and the [Science Museum of Minnesota](#) did in recent major exhibitions. Historic houses and sites, of which there are an estimated eighteen thousand in the US, also have a compelling opportunity to address the topic, because many of the people they memorialize and interpret faced mental health

challenges. (To name just a few from what would be a very long list: Abraham and Mary Lincoln, Nikola Tesla, Eugene O'Neill, and Winston Churchill). This provides an opportunity to surface and normalize the experience of mental illness, even though that conversation may not be the content visitors expect. Staff may need to navigate public expectations as they reframe how a site interprets the history and current impact of mental health.

Any museum can use the human element behind its topic—art, science, music, literature, natural history, or other—to address mental health in some part of its interpretation. Simply acknowledging the fact of mental illness as an important component in the lives of notable people can help to destigmatize the topic and recognize a range of conditions as part of the human experience.

A Framework for Action

Inward Action

To create a healthy work environment inside the museum, museums may want to:

- Create a [work culture](#) that does not stigmatize mental illness. This includes paying attention to the language used in the workplace, training people to recognize and avoid inappropriate or disrespectful terminology.
- Teach managers how to provide appropriate support and assist the people they supervise in accessing help.
- Have leadership set an example by being open and honest about any challenges they themselves face, and by creating a safe space for others to speak up about their needs.
- Use regularly scheduled surveys to gauge levels of stress among staff and detect early warning signs of burnout.
- Offer staff training around mental health, helping everyone to recognize signals of colleagues who may be in distress, offer appropriate non-judgmental support, and help people to access assistance.
- Implement employment practices that foster stability and resilience. Review the security of employment, e.g., the use of short-term contracts or part-time work that does not include benefits, which can add significantly to employee stress and disproportionately impact front-line workers.

Outward Action

To foster mental health, support people experiencing mental illness, and combat stigma, museums may want to:

- Develop relationships with community resources and agencies, such as health and counseling centers, hospitals, and academic research programs, to explore how the museum can learn from and contribute to their work.
- Familiarize themselves with the research on how arts engagement can foster mental health and assess how to integrate such engagement into their exhibits and programming.
- Provide training for staff and volunteers to support their engagement in the topic of mental health, including how to interface with the public around sensitive and potentially triggering issues and how to manage the personal impact of this work.
- Design safe spaces for the public to explore challenging and potentially uncomfortable or disturbing subject matters. This might include warning visitors about content, providing them with choices to engage or not engage, and providing places designed to support reflection and processing of difficult emotions.
- Consider how the museum will continue to support communities and individuals who collaborate with your organization around mental health. Think about what any given project will produce—information, resources, relationships, etc.—that will continue to benefit these groups after an exhibit or program concludes.



Visitors on a Mood Tour at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg. Richard Hall, 1860-1942, *Gathering at Church Entrance*, 1884, Oil on canvas, Gift of Simon Rosen. Photo credit: Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.

Sometimes museums can also help with struggles that are not just individual, but traumas shared by a community. Many museums have stepped forward to take on this role in the wake of disasters, for example, by fielding teams for rapid response collecting to help the community remember and process what has happened. Some museums are specifically created to help communities memorialize, contextualize, and process the impact of tragic events. These museums often take a trauma-informed approach to their exhibit design and offer programming to support the healing of their communities.

While museums contribute unique strengths to the infrastructure of mental health, they rarely have staff who are experts in dealing with mental illness or in communicating around a topic that can be very sensitive and upsetting. For this reason, museums that address mental health skillfully and powerfully often draw on the expertise of hospitals, university research departments, and social service organizations.

During the pandemic, museums had to look to the safety and wellbeing of their own staffs to create a stable base from which to help their communities. The same AAM research referenced above that explored the damage inflicted by the pandemic on people working in the museum sector also documented what museums were doing to care for their employees. Some of the actions most appreciated by staff included providing clear communications about information and decisions, offering a flexible work schedule, and including staff in decision-making. These lessons can help museums lay the foundation for a healthy work culture in post-pandemic times as well.

During the COVID crisis, museums also looked beyond their walls to support the mental health of their communities in many creative and generous ways. Some created outdoor art installations to boost the spirits of people in nursing homes and hospitals. Others provided online art therapy programs or used their collections and connections to offer mindfulness and meditation experiences online or via podcasts. The success of these programs may ensure they continue to be offered even as the pandemic fades.

Museum Examples

Helping Communities Process Shared Trauma

After the Champlain Towers collapse in 2021, [HistoryMiami](#) staff gathered and preserved hundreds of letters, artworks, and personal items placed by friends and families of victims on an impromptu “Wall of Hope” near the site of the disaster. The [Orange County Regional History Center](#) (OCRHC) filled a similar role after the Pulse Nightclub mass murders in 2016, creating the One Orlando Collection from thousands of objects left at public memorials or donated to the museum. The [Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum](#), the [9/11 Memorial and Museum](#), and—picking up on the work begun by OCRHC—the [National Pulse Memorial & Museum](#) are all dedicated to the long-term work of helping their communities memorialize and process the impact of local tragedies.

Creating Networks of Collaboration

The [National Museum of Mental Health](#) project is a “museum without walls” that works with artists, curators, mental health professionals, and people with lived

experience of mental illness to create touring exhibits, as well as collaborating with community, local, and national not-for-profit, for-profit, governmental, and educational entities interested in creating positive mental health outcomes.

Making Art Therapy Accessible Online

During COVID lockdowns in Ontario, the [Art Gallery of Windsor](#) partnered with the local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association to offer online art therapy programs to support mental health and wellbeing. The [National Museum of Qatar](#) worked with art psychotherapists, psychiatrists, and physicians to create and pilot a telehealth art therapy program for children to counteract the effects of social distancing and isolation. [The Tampa Museum of Art](#) provides both virtual and in-person sessions for Connections, its free mental healthcare community art engagement program.

Partnering with Community Health Organizations

In 2015, the [Tate Modern](#) collaborated with a range of mental health organizations, including arts networks, art



The travelling exhibit *Mental Health: Mind Matters* creates a safe space for important conversations about mental illness. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Science Museum of Minnesota.

studios, and community service providers, to produce workshops and installations celebrating positive mental health to mark World Mental Health Day. In 2017, [Utica Children's Museum](#) merged with the ICAN Family Resource Center, a nonprofit dedicated to providing "individualized and non-traditional services and care to the highest risk individuals and families with social, emotional, mental health and behavioral challenges." ICAN is in the process of building a new facility that will house the museum together with family services, using trauma-informed approaches to design exhibits and programs to create a welcoming space for all children. Some of the staff at the newly reopened museum will have degrees in social work and will draw on ICAN's clinicians and social workers for additional training.

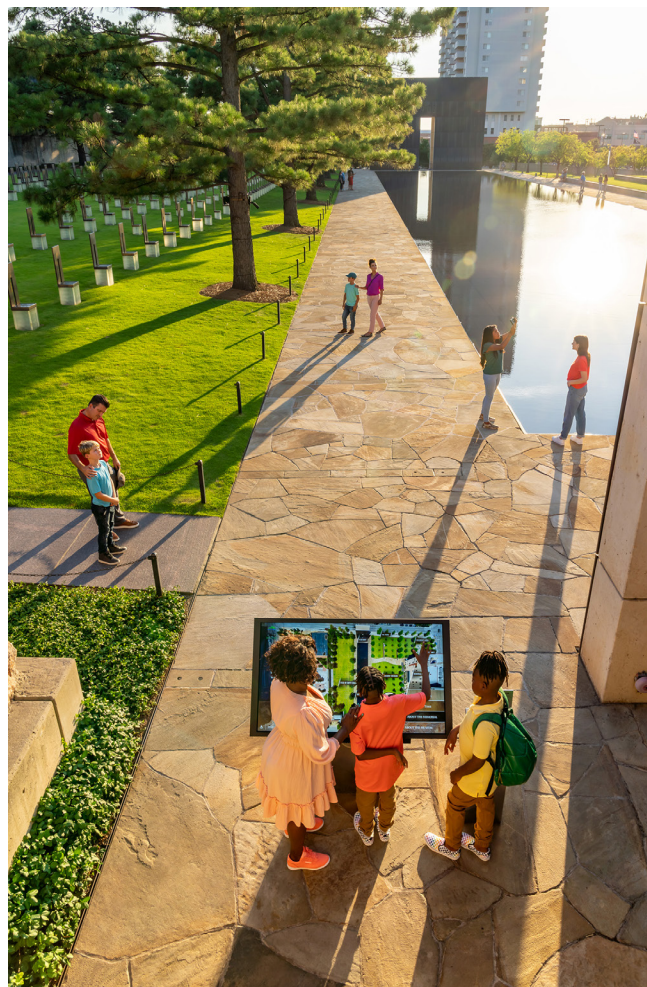
Addressing Mental Illness Through the Lens of Mission

In 2017, the **National Building Museum** opened [Architecture of an Asylum](#), an exhibition exploring the evolution of the theory and practice of caring for the mentally ill through an examination of the history of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, DC. The exhibit traced how reformers such as Dorothea Dix helped foster the development of a more humane and compassionate approach towards caring for people with mental illness. In 2020, **Kew Palace** opened [George III: The Mind Behind the Myth](#), an exhibit that used historic and contemporary displays to challenge contemporary attitudes towards mental ill health. Members of the public contributed objects and recorded videos documenting their own personal mental health stories. Working with the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM), a suicide prevention charity, Kew staff provided items, including beer coasters and postcards, designed to support public conversation, and trained staff on how to talk about mental health and suicide in a museum setting.

Explore the Future

Signal of Change:

A "signal of change" is a recent news story, report, or



"We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence. May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity." — Mission statement of the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum.

event describing a local innovation or disruption that has the potential to grow in scope and scale. Use this signal to catalyze your thinking about how museums might support mental health in the future.

[Brussels doctors to prescribe museum visits for Covid stress](#)

The Guardian, September 2, 2021

Doctors in Brussels will be able to prescribe museum visits as part of a three-month trial designed to rebuild mental health amid the COVID pandemic. Patients being treated for stress at Brugmann hospital, one of the largest in the Belgian capital, will be offered free visits to five public museums in the city, covering subjects from

fashion to sewage. The results of the pilot will be published next year, with the intention that the initiative can be rolled out further if successful in alleviating symptoms of burnout and other forms of psychiatric distress. The alderman responsible for culture in Brussels said she had been inspired by a scheme in Quebec, Canada, where doctors can prescribe up to fifty museum visits a year to patients. In the Brussels pilot, accompanied visits will be prescribed to individuals and groups of in-patients at Brugmann hospital.

Implications:

Ask yourself, what if there was more of this in the future? What if it became the dominant paradigm? Write and discuss three potential implications of this signal:

1. For yourself and your family and friends
2. For your museum
3. For your community



In the years since the 2016 mass shooting at Pulse nightclub, the site has become an informal memorial to the lives lost. Now, it will become a permanent memorial and museum, following a long process of community consensus-building. Image credit: Coldefy & Associés with RDAI, Courtesy of onePULSE Foundation.

Additional Resources

- [The Recovery Room](#), created by Rachel Mackay, Manager of the History Royal Palaces properties within the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, shares resources related to working with staff and the public around mental health. These include [Our Stories, Our Visitors, Our Selves: a model for looking after front-facing teams when telling challenging stories](#), [10 Tools for Supporting Front of House \[Staff\]](#), and a video on [mental health and front-of-house staff](#).
- [The Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance](#), a free membership organization based in the UK, provides information, training, and peer support. Its resources include toolkits, fact sheets, case studies, research, and evaluation.
- [Contemporary Collecting: and ethical toolkit for museum practitioners](#) (London Transport Museum, 2020). This toolkit explores some of the ethical judgments that contemporary collectors make and offers case studies, reflection, guides, and further information. One of the chapters addresses the issues inherent in collecting around topics that might prompt or relate to a person's experience with trauma or distress.



Pillar Four:

Emergency Response in the Face of Disasters

America's communities face a multitude of threats in coming decades, including severe storms, cold and heat emergencies, power outages, civil unrest, and resulting disruptions to essential services and supply chains. The systems we've created to respond to these emergencies are fragmented and fragile, and often prioritize the protection and repair of privileged communities. It will take a "[whole-of-society](#)" approach, integrating for-profit, nonprofit, and government entities, to create a robust and equitable system to prepare for and respond to disasters and take steps to reduce future risk. Many of these risks are driven by climate change, and museums can use their nonpartisan credibility and their communications skills to build consensus on climate policy. Through how they do their work and deploy their resources, museums can be an integral part of a collective approach to minimizing the risk of disasters and aiding their communities when disaster does strike.

The Challenge

Communities have always been at risk from natural and man-made disasters, but we are entering an era in which many of these risks will be radically amplified. Much of this shift is being driven by climate change, which is intensifying temperature extremes, thereby causing flood and drought and making severe weather events more frequent. Heat waves are already the leading cause of weather-related deaths in the US, and extreme heat events could increase substantially by the end of the century. Warmer, drier conditions and a longer fire season are projected to result in a 30 percent increase in the areas burned by lightning-sparked [wildfires](#) between 2011 and 2060. Climate change also brings climate instability, with some states experiencing extreme precipitation

"There's nothing like a jolly good disaster to get people to start doing something."

—Prince Charles

Critical Questions for Museums

- How can museums prepare themselves for an era of rising risk?
- How can museums, having secured their own safety in the face of these threats, extend this protection to their community, particularly groups that are neglected by current systems of disaster management?
- How can museums combat climate change and reduce its effect as a [threat multiplier](#) before, during, and after disasters?
- How can museums weave themselves into an integrated network of resilience and response?
- What role can museums play in helping their communities understand the changing landscape of risk and create long-term plans for adaptation?

while others bake in drought. Given the global lack of progress in slowing the climate crisis, climate risk is going to continue to rise in the coming century.

Because climate change is driven by anthropogenic forces, it seems misleading to call flood, storm, and fire “natural,” in contrast to “man-made,” disasters. Be that as it may, the US is experiencing a rise in civil disruptions as well, with 2020 marking [record levels](#) of violent mass demonstrations and rioting. Given our country’s level of political polarization, and the fact that a third or more of citizens regardless of political identity believe that [violence is justified](#) to achieve political goals, this trend is unlikely to slow or reverse anytime soon.

In fact, the rising risks of climate events and civil violence are intertwined. The damage from climate disasters falls disproportionately on poor communities and communities of color, while federal disaster spending [favors the wealthy and white](#). (Indeed, disasters have been shown to [exacerbate wealth inequality](#).) Cities are notorious heat islands, which in turn contributes to heat-related illness and death. [Communities of color](#) experience the highest temperatures because they have fewer public amenities that lower temperatures, such as trees, landscaped medians, and parks, and are less likely to have air conditioning. The correlation between race and temperature is so strong that historic maps of [redlined neighborhoods](#) mirror contemporary urban heat maps. These inequities, the social movements they spark, and the backlash

against calls for reform add fuel to cultural and political tensions that can lead to violence.

Over the next century, climate change will threaten the very existence of some communities. The residents of [Isle de Jean Charles](#), a largely Native American community in the bayous of Louisiana, were tagged as the “first US climate refugees” when the tribe lost 98 percent of its land to rising sea levels. They will not be the last. Climatologists project that, due to flooding and extreme heat, some major cities, including Miami, New Orleans, and Chicago, may become [“unbearable for humans”](#) by 2100. That doesn’t mean humans, being both resilient and stubborn, will abandon their homes, but it does dramatize the level of risk communities face, especially vulnerable communities without sufficient access to protection, relief, or ability to evacuate.

The Response

In Society

In 2020, the US experienced [twenty-two separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters](#), shattering previous annual records. This roster of destruction included seven disasters linked to tropical cyclones, thirteen linked to severe storms, one linked to drought, and one linked to wildfires. Together, these events inflicted \$95 billion in damages. We don’t, and arguably can’t, maintain a large enough cadre of government workers devoted to disaster response to cope with this level of impact. Instead,

As the country strengthens its disaster response, we also need to reduce inequity and address some of the concerns that underlie social unrest. Some strategies for mustering emergency responders create their own harm. For instance, many states depend on prisoners to supplement their professional firefighting crews, paying them nominal wages and, because Black people are incarcerated in disproportionate numbers, adding to the racial inequity of climate-related risk. (In [California](#), pre-pandemic, inmates made up a third of the wildfire-fighting personnel.) Nationally, we’ve created a perverse system of incentives that lead agencies charged with protecting property and providing relief to maximize their economic impact by prioritizing high-value properties. The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) National Advisory Council has [called on the agency to reform programs that favor victims who are wealthy and own property \(and are more likely to be white\)](#). However, FEMA has yet to implement any of the council’s recommendations.



In February 2021, the International Museum of Art & Science converted itself into a daytime warming center for residents of McAllen, Texas, who lost heat, power, and water during Winter Storm Uri. Photo credit: Courtesy of Vanessa Vasquez, @homeschoolme.

the US relies on networks of response, using reservoirs of paid and volunteer labor to supplement the standing workforce of emergency responders. The [American Red Cross](#) draws on a network of three hundred thousand volunteers to respond to more than sixty thousand disasters every year. In California, which ranks second in the list of [states most likely to experience natural disasters](#), all state employees can be called up and reassigned for emergency response.

Planners increasingly look to systems-level efforts to buffer the risks of climate disasters, integrating protection into the design of neighborhoods and cities. Over time the focus of flood control has expanded from hard engineering (i.e., levees, dams, and reservoirs) to encompass “soft” strategies such as zoning, forestation, and controlled flooding. Cities are setting goals for [tree canopy coverage](#) and [green space](#), including parks and gardens, to lower city temperatures. State and local governments are encouraging or mandating xeriscaping (landscaping

with plants that need little or no water), even paying residents to [rip out their lawns](#), to adapt to drought. More and more often, mitigation is being seamlessly integrated into urban design, for example, in the form of a [skate-park-cum-urban-sculpture](#) in Denver that doubles as a “bioswale” that soaks up stormwater and prevents flooding.

The sheer cost, both human and financial, of responding to climate disasters underscores the wisdom of investing in the largest scale of prevention—slowing the pace of climate change and hopefully staving off the worst-case projections. The US [recently committed](#) to cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent or more (compared to 2005 levels) by 2030, and reaching a net-zero emissions economy no later than 2050. While federal action lagged under the previous administration, [state and tribal governments](#) stepped in to take action. Currently fifteen states and territories are implementing plans for a 100 percent clean energy future, and more

A Framework for Action

Inward Action

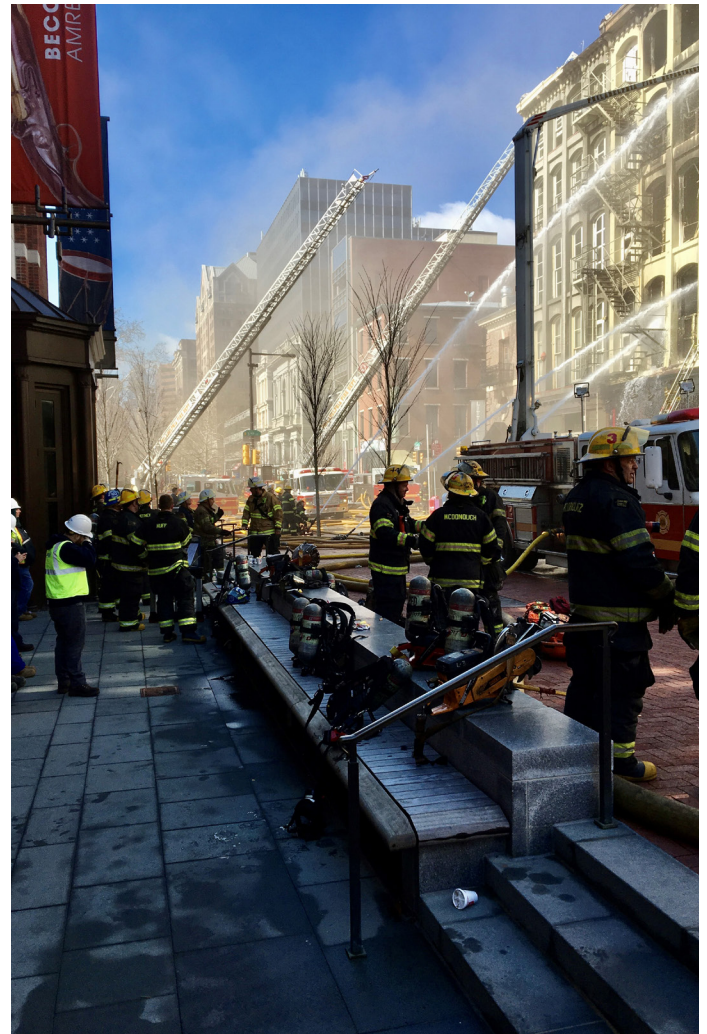
To incorporate community risk mitigation and disaster response into their internal planning, museums can:

- Identify existing assessments of local climate risk, or if there are none, advocate for their development.
- Create risk management and disaster response relationships before the next disaster strikes and maintain them between crises.
- Incorporate design elements into renovations or master planning that help the museum's property buffer the community against risks such as flood, heat, and fire.
- Include community needs in disaster planning and emergency response plans.
- Create policies and procedures for deploying staff as needed (at the level of community, city, or state) as part of larger relief and response efforts.

Outward Action

To become a formal part of our infrastructure of disaster response, museums can:

- Integrate the museum into a larger network of responders, for example by connecting with local and state emergency managers to incorporate the museum and its resources into government or agency response plans.
- Identify the biggest risks to the museum's community and assess how the museum can help with mitigation and relief. In particular, consider how the museum might make disaster preparedness and response more equitable by addressing the needs of communities marginalized by current systems.
- Create and disseminate educational materials that raise public awareness of risk and train people on how to prepare for disasters.
- Help community leaders and residents engage in long-term thinking about how they will respond to a changing landscape of risk. Collaborate with city planners, architects, artists, scientists, and policy-makers to create scenarios, bring them to life via design charrettes and exhibits, and invite the public to use these designs to help envision the future they want to build for their community.



In February 2018, the Museum of the American Revolution sheltered and fed neighbors displaced by a four-alarm fire. Photo credit: ZeeAnn Mason, Museum of the American Revolution.

than fifty tribal climate action plans are in place in North America. Pushed by investors, consumers, employees, activists, and in some cases the courts, a growing number of for-profit companies have [pledged](#) to reduce their emissions (though it can be [difficult to parse](#) which commitments are real and which are “[carbonwashing](#)”). And while focusing on climate-friendly steps individuals can take diverts attention from the critical responsibility of government and industry, it is certainly true that individuals, companies, industry, and government need to be “[all-in](#)” [together](#) if we are to slow the pace of climate disaster.

Even if our united climate action does succeed in steering us towards the best outcome that is still possible, we need to plan for what we can't



Last year, **Brianna Correa**, a guest services cashier from the San Bernardino County Museum, found herself using her museum pro skills to provide support and morale boosts to overworked ICU nurses when California government museum workers were deployed into critical emergency roles. **She shares with us it what it was like.**



change in the face of escalating natural disasters, up to and including [managed retreat](#) from areas that are no longer habitable. States, cities, and communities are making plans for how to adapt to a future of drought, heat, and rising sea levels. Governments and insurance providers are reexamining the policies and subsidies that have masked the risk of living in floodplains and on seaside properties. Many coastal communities are using federal and state funding to raise homes up above flood level, buy out homeowners entirely, or swap public open spaces in the interior for private land on the shore. In the future, more communities may [follow the lead of Valmeyer, Illinois](#), which moved the whole town two miles farther away from the flood risk posed by the Mississippi River. The residents of Valmeyer were overwhelmingly white and well-off. How can we ensure that communities that are less white and less wealthy are able to “manage retreat” as well, while keeping their culture and identities intact?

In Museums

As public-facing organizations, many of which are devoted to the long-term care of heritage, museums are uniquely positioned to help the public in times of

emergency. By expanding their attention from inside the organization to the outside world, museums' disaster response can encompass their community as well. Most museums devote considerable resources to climate control, preadapting them to act as cooling stations for their neighbors during heat emergencies. Many museums in high-risk areas have armored their buildings and property to withstand earthquakes, fire, and flood. Through their own disaster planning, they may have formed connections with local emergency responders. These preparations put them in an excellent position to offer refuge and assistance to their community when disaster strikes—whether that takes the form of opening their galleries and classrooms to provide safe space, serving as a staging area for emergency responders, or helping to distribute relief.

Some museums are, by virtue of their governance, part of a larger network of response, for example, within a university or a state. Others voluntarily integrate themselves into local systems, sharing staff whose knowledge, training, and skills can be adapted to disaster response. Even more step in as need arises, in response to local disasters ranging from fire and flood to tragedies resulting from violence and hate.

A growing number of museums are reshaping their properties to function as part of a larger buffer of protection for their community's green infrastructure: creating plantings that slow runoff, cache water, and reduce flooding; designing green, cooling areas in urban landscapes; or xeriscaping their grounds to reduce water use. The impact of these efforts is magnified through museum education, showing individuals and other businesses how they can follow suit.

One of the most powerful things museums can do to help society tackle systems-level change is to foster public understanding about climate science and risk. As has been widely recognized at the international level, [museums are key sites for climate education, engagement, action, and research](#). Though climate change has become a highly partisan issue in the US, museums enjoy strong, nonpartisan trust on the part of the American public and can use that trust, together with their skills



Photo credit: Courtesy of the Louisiana Children's Museum.

at communicating science and fostering conversation, to create a common basis for a national consensus on climate policy.

Museum Examples

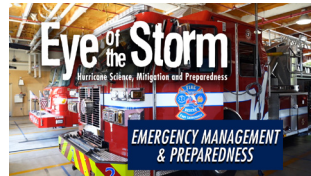
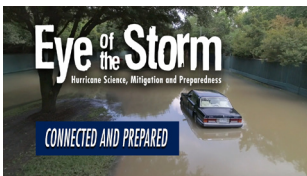
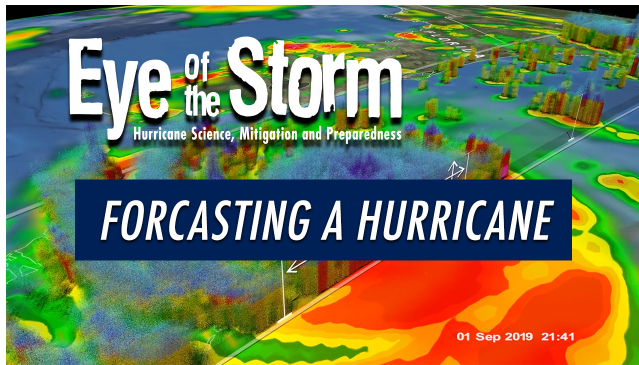
Responding to Immediate Needs

In the early morning hours of Sunday, February 18, 2018, a four-alarm fire broke out in an apartment building across the street from the newly opened [Museum of the American Revolution](#) in Philadelphia. As the blaze escalated, residents and guests from an adjacent hotel evacuated into freezing cold temperatures. At the request of the fire chief, the museum's operations team opened the museum to dozens of displaced neighbors, offering warmth, restrooms, and water. When it became clear the museum would be closed to the public that day, the catering team provided evacuees with a sumptuous brunch, prepared for a now-cancelled event. In the following weeks, the museum collected donations from visitors eager to provide aid, as well as supplying workspace for emergency personnel and staff of the shuttered hotel.

In February 2021, oscillating pressure patterns in the Arctic created a record-breaking “[deep freeze](#)” in Texas and plunged the state into darkness. As the power grid faltered, nearly three million families were left without heat, and as pipes burst, many lacked water as well. In McAllen, the [International Museum of Art and Culture](#) quickly turned itself into a daytime warming center, waiving admission for three days and setting up socially distanced stations for people to work, study, and charge their electronic devices. Staff treated visitors to hot cocoa, led tours, and trotted out the museum's Animal Ambassadors to entertain the children.

Resilient Design as Part of Community Buffering

Following Hurricane Katrina, [the Louisiana Children's Museum in New Orleans](#) reimagined its mission and purpose to meeting the needs of its recovering community. Its new campus, which opened in 2019, models resilient design and contributes to community flood control. The site includes a lagoon edged with native plantings that can retain up to three feet of water from a storm event, reducing flooding in the surrounding neighborhood.



Courtesy of the Museum of Discovery and Science, Ft. Lauderdale.

In 2018, the [Charles H. Wright Museum](#) of African American History in Detroit partnered with the **Michigan Science Center** to launch the [Ripple of Impact: Museum Stormwater Initiative](#) to manage stormwater diversion in the neighborhood that unites their campuses. Through the use of bioswales, urban garden space, and permeable paving, the project reduces runoff, mitigates flooding, and prevents pollution of the Detroit River.

Integrating with Networks of Response

In California, the state government code stipulates that all public employees—including staff of state or county museums—can be called up as disaster service workers in response to “natural, man-made, or war-caused emergencies.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the staff of the [San Bernardino County Museum](#) was reassigned to temporary roles in the community, while the museum itself was closed to the public. Their assignments included working at a regional medical center as contact tracers and supporting the November 2020 election as poll workers and drivers.

The [Wisconsin Historical Society](#) (WHS) set a voluntary goal of supporting agencies at the forefront of the state’s pandemic response. Together with employees of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and the Department of Health Services, more than fifty WHS staff—including archivists, registrars, curators, cartographers, and librarians—formed a joint COVID Response Team. One staff member applied her logistics skills to helping coordinate the distribution of supplies for

testing. The director of one WHS site co-led an Equity in Testing workgroup dedicated to ensuring that Indigenous communities had access to testing and support. WHS’s Cultural Cartographer used his training to build a data model and mapping system to track COVID hotspots for the state.

Public Education

Communities across Florida are at risk from hurricanes from June through November each year, and these storms are growing in frequency and intensity. In 2020, the state experienced a record high of thirty named storms. With a large proportion of the population at risk, it is essential to provide accurate, timely, and trusted information about how to prepare for hurricanes. The **Museum of Discovery and Science** in Ft. Lauderdale works with the International Hurricane Research Center at Florida International University, Broward County Emergency Management Division, and the City of Fort Lauderdale Domestic Preparedness and Emergency Management Bureau to present an annual “Eye of the Storm” hurricane preparedness program, free to the public. In 2020, during pandemic shutdown, the event went virtual, resulting in a twelve-episode [video series](#) available on YouTube, Facebook, and the museum’s own website.

Promoting Long-Term Thinking

From 2009 to 2010, **MoMA PS1** in New York City hosted an architects-in-residence program to [re-envision the coastlines surrounding New York Harbor](#), prioritizing “soft” resilient infrastructure to mitigate the risk from sea level rise. In 2010, the **Museum of Modern Art** presented the resulting designs from five interdisciplinary teams in an associated exhibition, *Rising Currents: Projects for New York’s Waterfront*. The proposed solutions encompassed building spongelike sidewalks, suspending housing over the water, and turning the Gowanus canal into an oyster hatchery.

In 2016, [Catalyzing Newport](#), guided by cultural organizations including the **Newport Art Museum**, **Rhode Island Historical Society**, the **International Tennis Hall of Fame**, and the **Preservation Society of Newport County**, commissioned [Mayor’s Office 2061](#), a pop-up installation imagining what it might be like to live

and work in Newport, Rhode Island, in the future. Working from a scenario written by futurist Jake Dunagan, designers worked with local museum staff, artists, and students to help the public envision the effects of rising sea levels on their community.

Explore the Future

Signal of Change:

A “signal of change” is a recent news story, report, or event describing a local innovation or disruption that has the potential to grow in scope and scale. Use this signal to catalyze your thinking about how museums might play a role in a whole-of-society approach to mitigating risk for their communities.

Phoenix establishes ‘heat office’

Santa Fe New Mexican, November 13, 2021

David Hondula recently got a job he never dreamed of—director of Phoenix’s Office of Heat Response and Mitigation, the first publicly funded municipal office of its kind. Heat is the No. 1 weather-related killer in the US, killing an average of 138 people a year from 1990 to 2019, and in 2020, heat killed 313 people in Arizona alone. Phoenix has committed to stopping that trend. The City Council in May approved a budget that included \$2.8 million focused on climate change and heat readiness. Hondula’s staff of four will collaborate with other city departments, such as Parks and Recreation and Street Transportation. One project will focus on increasing the tree canopy throughout Phoenix, with a goal of reaching 25 percent tree canopy cover in the city by 2030. Another will focus on built infrastructure—increasing shade structures and developing ways to cool structures and streets, particularly at night. Miami-Dade County (Florida); Athens, Greece; and Freetown, Sierra Leone, are the only other places with city officials in charge of managing heat. In Miami-Dade County, the position is funded by the Extreme Heat Resilience Alliance, which aims to reduce extreme heat risk for the most vulnerable populations.

Explore the implications of this signal:

Ask yourself, what if it became common for cities or regions to have dedicated departments tasked with creating an integrated response to heat risk? Or, more broadly, for city or state officials to work with a variety of government agencies and for-profit and nonprofit organizations to mitigate the impacts of climate stress? Discuss three potential implications of this signal:

1. For yourself, your family, or friends
2. For your museum
3. For the United States

Additional Resources

- The National Association of Counties’ [Resilient Counties Initiative](#) strengthens the ability of local government to prepare for and recover from hurricanes, wildfires, economic collapse, and other disasters, natural or man-made. Its reports and tool-kits include resources on public health, flood protection, national data on county emergency management, and use of technology in managing disasters.
- [The Role of Culture in Climate Resilient Development](#) (United Cities and Local Governments, 2021). This report documents the initiatives of cities and local or regional governments from all continents on cultural policies, sustainable cities, and climate resilient development. It includes a diverse pack of case studies from across the world and addressing the whole set of the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals.
- The Environmental Protection Agency’s [Climate Change Adaptation Resource Center](#) (ARC-X) is an interactive resource to help local governments create integrated information packages tailored to their local needs: risks, adaptation strategies, and case studies. Users of the site can tailor their search for information by region, and by area of interest (air, water, waste, public health, or adaptation planning).



Pillar Five:

Right-Sizing the World

One of the greatest threats facing society today is unsustainable growth: the inequities, damage, and instability created by systems fueled by a philosophy of “more is better.” To date, museums have largely shaped their behavior around for-profit values of power, productivity, and economic metrics of success. As a result, success is often measured by increasing attendance, growing collections, and expanding facilities. But as nonprofits, museums have the freedom to experiment with other models. How can they challenge the paradigm of perpetual growth and model what it looks like to build healthy, sustainable systems based on values of public service?

The Challenge

In the past half-century, as the global population broke record after record, the Western world began to grapple with the realization that unconstrained growth—whether of consumption, tourism, communities, or organizations—is unsustainable. This realization was captured in *Limits to Growth*, a 1972 report commissioned by the Club of Rome, based on computer modeling of five key resources: population, food production, industrialization, pollution, and consumption of non-renewable natural resources. The study’s mathematical models generated three scenarios, two of which foresaw civilization burning through all available resources, resulting in the collapse of civilization in the last half of the twenty-first century. Only the third, in which humanity significantly restricted its resource consumption, resulted in a stable state. Now it is becoming clear that the limiting factor to growth might not be any of the specific resources that *Limits to Growth* examined, but the cumulative effect of human activity on the climate.

“I don’t know why people feel unhappy when the curve of a graph fails to keep going up, but they do. Even when we find something we’d like to reduce, such as highway fatalities, it doesn’t always sound as though we had our heart in it.”

—E.B. White, author and editor

Critical Questions for Museums

- What are the limits of traditional metrics of museum success such as growth in attendance, collections, and endowment?
- What metrics would foster more equitable and sustainable outcomes?
- How can museums contribute to healthy, equitable economies through the jobs they create?
- How can museums help their communities foster sustainable tourism?
- How can museums in shrinking cities “right-size” in a way that prioritizes equity and preserves heritage?



Photo credit: Anonymous.

“It is troubling that only 11% of institutions have adequate storage facilities for all their collections.”

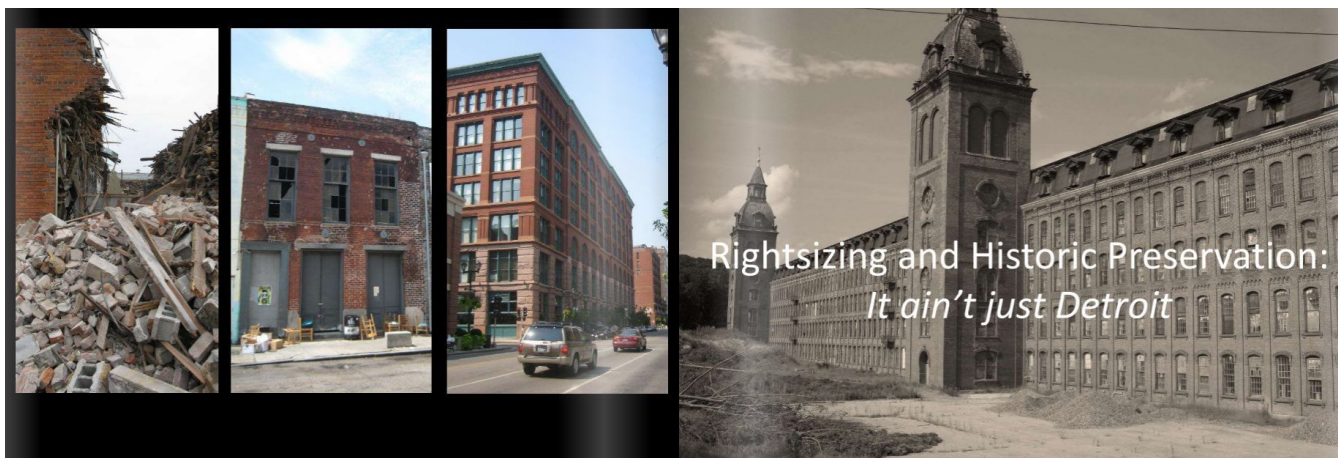
– Heritage Health Index (2005)

On an accounting sheet, growth often seems profitable because many of the underlying costs are offloaded onto ecosystems, vulnerable communities, or society in general. These costs, called “negative externalities,” may be environmental (i.e., waste, pollution, and degradation) or human (i.e., worsened public health and precarity of employment). This formula creates systems that may succeed in the short term as measured by narrow financial metrics, but are in the long term destined to fail, bequeathing the externalized damage they’ve done to future generations.

As the axiom states, you get what you measure, and if the primary measure of success is financial profit, companies are incentivized to minimize costs to improve the bottom line. One of the principal costs is labor, and left to themselves most businesses, particularly large publicly traded companies beholden to stockholders, will try to minimize

wages and maximize the flexibility of their workforce. But subpar wages and precarious work fuel profits while undermining the economy overall, and local communities in particular. In 2020, the Government Accountability Office [issued a study](#) showing that taxpayers effectively subsidize the low wages of major employers including McDonald’s, Amazon, Uber, and CVS through services like Medicaid and food stamps. These companies are in effect relying on society to cover the externalized costs of their labor.

Nonprofits in general, with museums being no exception, generally buy into the dominant for-profit model of success. In the quest for appropriate “KPIs” (Key Performance Indicators), museums have become accustomed to reporting things that are relatively easy to measure: attendance, number of items added to the collections, dollars raised in a capital campaign, and square feet of new space. The assumption, stated or



Courtesy of [PlaceEconomics](#).

unstated, is that success means making these numbers go up. But museums are beginning to grapple with the realization that success lies not on an increasing trendline but somewhere on a numeric bell curve. There is actually such a thing as too much: Too many visitors—to the point the press of the crowds degrades the experience, puts undue stress on staff, and in some cases endangers the collection or the site. Too many collections—to the point that the number of objects exceeds the capacity of museums to care for or make use of them. Too big of a building—to the point that the cost, though a powerful lever for fundraising, does not justify the benefits it provides to the community.

Nonprofit museums are especially vulnerable to economic imperatives that favor outputs at the expense of labor. While there is a clear moral case to be made for prioritizing people over profit, low wages in the nonprofit sector can be framed as prioritizing mission, and the public good, above all. (This has been variously referred to as “[the systematic starvation of those who do good](#)” or the “[nonprofit culture of poverty](#).”) This attitude has been reinforced by a complex mix of history and funder expectations. The nonprofit workforce has long been predominantly female, so nonprofits inherit the gender inequities attached to compensation. For many decades, donors and funders were trained to see “overhead” (largely comprised of staff salaries) as wasteful spending, and to look for a low ratio of overhead to programmatic spending as a measure of a well-run nonprofit. The cumulative result has been pervasively low wages, burnout, and high turnover. Long term, the field is grappling with how to institute reforms that ensure museums cover the true cost of working in a museum, rather than expecting individuals, families, communities, and society to cover the gap.

The Response

In Society

Here is a brief round-up of some of the social and economic movements attempting to reframe American attitudes towards growth and develop sustainable measures of success:

Circular Economy

More industries are trying to create “circular economies”—systems of production and consumption that repair, reuse, and recycle materials to the greatest extent possible, in the interest of reducing the use of scarce resources and the generation of waste. A growing number of makers and vendors are using recycled or upcycled materials to produce their goods, and in turn to market their brand. In 2021, the UK passed a “[right to repair](#)” law that requires manufacturers to provide parts that support the repair of their products (rather than forcing consumers to discard old electronics and buy new). Almost every state in the US is considering similar legislation, and President Biden recently signed an executive order directing the Federal Trade Commission to make third-party product repair easier. Responding to pressure from shareholders, [Apple](#) recently reversed its long-term policies and will start selling replacement parts and tools to make it easier for consumers to make their digital devices last longer than the average four to five years.

Sustainable Tourism

In the past few years, major tourist destinations such as Venice, Barcelona, and Amsterdam have begun to grapple with the downsides of their popularity—overcrowding, unaffordable housing, environmental degradation, and a decline in the quality of life for local residents. In 2018, the mayor of [Dubrovnik](#) declared the city would

cap the number of cruise ships allowed to dock each day. [Venetians](#) have used the pandemic pause in tourism to envision how the city might join the “sustainable tourism” movement by encouraging fewer, longer stays that foster meaningful engagement with art and culture, promote and expand local universities, and build jobs untethered from tourism. In November 2021, the governor of [Yucatán](#) signed a collaborative agreement with UNESCO to develop tourism that protects, promotes, and safeguards the cultural and natural heritage of the state. These efforts may presage a larger cultural and economic shift toward thoughtful management of tourism that measures its full costs and benefits.

Right-Sizing Cities

At least eighty US cities are [shrinking in population](#), due to shifts in manufacturing, demographics, and economic decline. In some cities, this means demolishing thousands of buildings—in some cases buying out and shuttering entire neighborhoods. Others, such as [New Bedford, Massachusetts](#), are trying to compensate for the collapse of traditional industries by reinventing themselves as tourist destinations. For all these communities, the question is how to “right-size” in a way that minimizes damage to people and to heritage and results in a livable, equitable, sustainable urban landscape.

Reshaping For-Profit Culture

We are seeing a slow shift in the attitudes of corporations from a narrow focus on shareholders to a broader responsibility for “stakeholders.” In 2019, the Business Roundtable issued a [statement on “the purpose of a corporation”](#) that, overturning thirty years of precedent, argued that companies should be concerned not only about the profit of their shareholders but also the wellbeing of their employees, the state of the environment, and the ecology of suppliers who support their work. All this in the interest of creating “a more inclusive prosperity.” (The statement is a pointed refutation of the philosophy articulated by economist Milton Friedman in 1970 that “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits.”)

Employee Wellbeing as a Metric of Success

One important plank in the Business Roundtable statement is a commitment to the wellbeing of employees

through fair compensation, training, education, and fostering diversity, inclusion, dignity, and respect. That shift in philosophy may prove to be too little, too late to stave off what is being called the “[Great Resignation](#)”—the current swell of people leaving for better jobs, or, in some cases, quitting the workforce entirely. Some of this exodus is the result of people shopping for better wages in a tight labor market, or of stress and burnout during the pandemic, but the Great Resignation is also a rational response to systems that fail to provide workers with childcare, health care, elder care, and affordable housing within a decent commute range of their workplace. This response may accelerate a trend that existed before the pandemic as well—a reset away from “productivity” of work output being the be-all and end-all measure of a good life or a good worker. Even in [Japan](#), where work culture is so hardcore that “karoshi” (“death from overwork”) is an actual thing, reforms are beginning to germinate, with initiatives ranging from caps on excessive working hours to increased flexibility, as well as a requirement for employers to mandate at least five days off work for staff compiling at least ten days of unused leave.

Questioning “More is Better”

The movements described above tackle specific systems, but proponents of “[degrowth](#)” argue that we need a larger paradigm shift, from systems that rely on growth for continued success to more sustainable values, notably environmental sustainability and social justice. Proponents

Climate Central’s [Picturing Our Future](#) collection provides science-based videos and visualizations comparing potential outcomes of sea level rise for nearly two hundred landmarks and iconic neighborhoods around the world.





The [Active Collections](#) movement generates discussion and action across the museum field to develop a new approach to collections, one that is more effective and sustainable. Image credit: Ray Rieck.

envision a future in which people in wealthy countries will learn to “live well with less”: less travel, less consumption, and less impact overall on the environment. Degrowth has allied itself with several movements in which museums are already involved, including decoloniality, slow culture, and the “We Are Still In” initiative supporting the goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Accords.

In Museums

Museums, stressed by disruptions to conventional sources of income, are beginning to challenge their own traditional metrics of success, including attendance, size of collections, and new buildings or expansions fueled by capital campaigns, and to search for meaningful alternatives.

Attendance

Some museums have designed their buildings and experiences around limited attendance in order to provide smaller, more intimate experiences for the visitor. Others have experimented with the practice on an ad hoc basis. During pandemic-induced attendance caps, some museums found that visitor satisfaction rose as crowding declined. [Researchers in the attractions industry have suggested that](#), post-pandemic, visitors may retain a preference for lower density, social distancing measures, and even less interaction with museum staff. If this holds true, museums might follow the lead of cities adopting sustainable tourism: fostering fewer, deeper, longer interactions, providing exclusive experiences, and supplementing admissions revenue with a wider variety of secondary income streams, including digital programs and online merchandise.

A Framework for Action

Inward Action

To create systems that foster healthy, sustainable practice, museums can:

- Engage the governing authority and staff in a thoughtful exploration of what values the museum wants to embody in its work and what constitutes “success.”
- As part of this discussion, explicitly consider the “right size” for the museum in terms of optimizing benefits for the community, including both visitors and staff.
- Choose metrics that support these values and goals, and educate funders and donors about these measures.
- Create the capacity to collect the data needed to support these metrics, through staffing (in-house or contract), training, and integrating evaluation into program design.
- Examine the museum’s labor and compensation policies to ensure the museum is supporting the true costs of working for the organization.

Outward

To help their communities achieve the right size for success, museums can:

- As tourist destinations, help cities that are tackling “over-tourism” to craft strategies that benefit residents economically, preserve quality of life, and distribute tourism to underappreciated destinations.
- If located in communities that are shrinking due to economic and demographic forces, help create plans to manage that downsizing in a way that results in livable, right-sized communities, while preserving public heritage such as historic structures, districts, and public art.

Collections

The accretion of unpruned collections can become the museological equivalent of barnacles—a drag on the organizational ship. The museum sector is finally beginning to chip away at the barriers to deaccessioning, not as a source of financial relief, but to rationalize the allocation of resources to produce the greatest good for the public. Besides the logistical barriers (the time and money it takes to deaccession responsibly), this shift requires a cultural change in museums' measure of success. Acquisitions are a source of pride, while deaccessioning offers few rewards, either financial (due to ethical guidelines for use of the resulting funds) or professional. Some museums are tackling these hurdles and downsizing their holdings; others are slowing growth through joint acquisitions and collections-sharing. Technological advances in the last decade have added an interesting twist to this issue, as museum staff consider how the rapidly expanding universe of accessible digitized collections might influence choices about what to add to the physical collection or archive.

Use of Capital

The cultural sector as a whole is having a moment of reckoning regarding physical growth. In 2012, the University of Chicago's report [Set In Stone: building America's new generation of arts facilities, 1994-2008](#) confirmed what many had long suspected to be true: many of the major cultural facilities projects that marked the turn of the century were, in fact, overbuilt and unsustainable. The researchers found that many of the biggest projects (and notably, some of the least successful), were driven by the ambitions of leaders and donors, not by the needs of the community. But overbuilding is a natural result of museum economics. Traditionally it's been easier to attract gifts associated with naming rights on a beautiful building than for intangible social goods. Despite that handicap, some museums are beginning to ask how capital campaigns can fund improvements to the well-being of staff and the community. In the absence of such capital, programs are often dependent on grant funding, and even successful programs that produce measurable good are too often terminated when the grant ends.

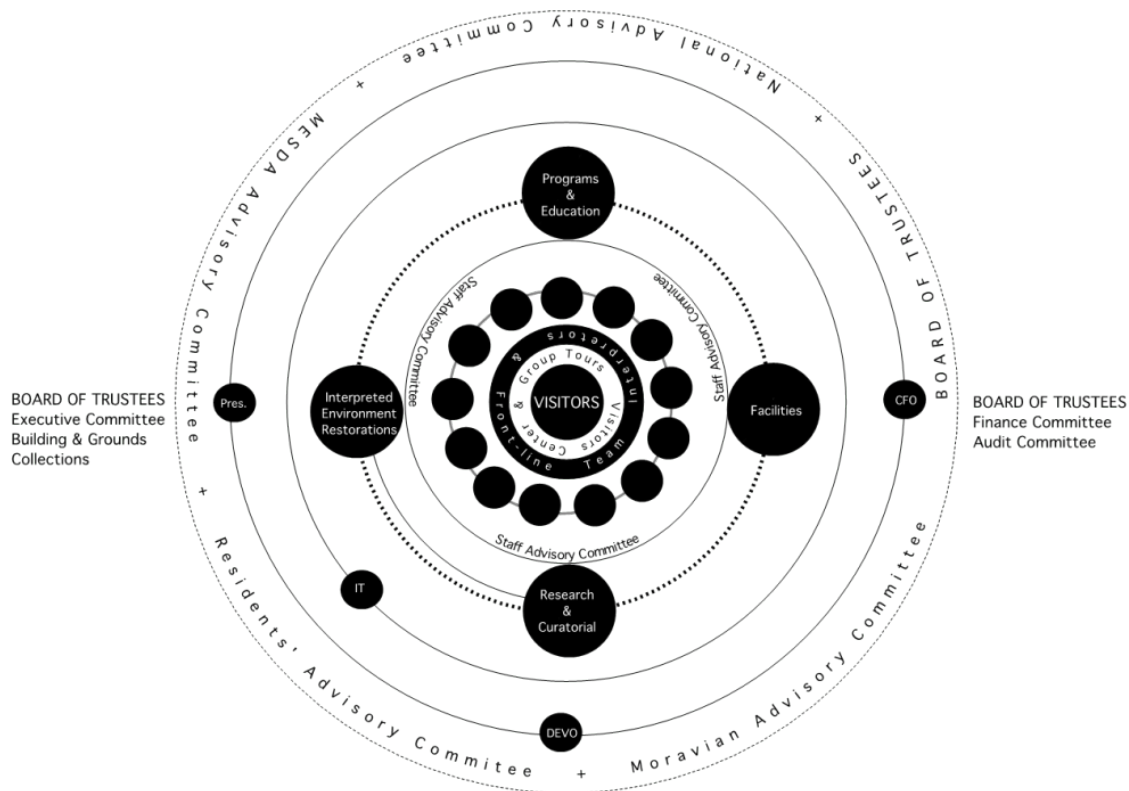
Labor

Even before the pandemic, labor conditions and low wages had contributed to the pressures leading to a rise in the number of museum staff seeking to join unions. COVID-19 dramatized the vulnerability of museum staff in the lowest paid, least stable positions. By [fall 2020](#), pandemic impact had led over half of US museums to lay off or furlough staff, with front-of-house positions being most at risk. At some museums, directors and leadership staff took pay cuts to mitigate the impact; at others staff banded together to create [mutual aid funds](#) to support out-of-work colleagues. Now we see museums that are factoring job security, wages, benefits, and equity into their plans to rebound and rebuild.

Systems-Level Change

Just as with society, real change for museums will require systemic reform, both of how museums define success for themselves and how they are judged by funders and donors. It seems likely that one reason museums uncritically adopt for-profit measures of success is that their boards of trustees are often dominated by people from the business world. Now there is a national effort, led by organizations that include the American Alliance of Museums and the Black Trustee Alliance for Art Museums, to help museums recruit trustees who bring diverse experiences, perspectives, and values to the boardroom. Boards that reflect the community the museum serves may be more likely to value metrics that track the good a museum does for that community.

The charitable funding sector is addressing the need for systemic change as well. In 2013, GuideStar, BBB Wise Giving Alliance, and Charity Navigator (all major players in the realm of scoring and reporting on nonprofit performance) launched the [Overhead Myth](#) campaign to combat the false conception that financial ratios in general, and overhead "efficiency" in particular, are an appropriate measure of overall nonprofit performance. Museums can accelerate this reform by preemptively adopting better metrics of success, adding to the yardstick of "service to mission" measures that challenge them to maximize community wellbeing.



Old Salem Museum and Gardens and The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, have inverted the traditional hierarchical organization chart, re-envisioning operational functions to place front-line staff and visitors at the center of everything they do.

Museum Examples

Attendance

Even after a major expansion in 2018, the **Glenstone** museum in Potomac, Maryland, uses timed ticketing to [limit attendance to about four hundred people](#) a day in order to provide a contemplative experience conducive to deep engagement with the art in its building and on its grounds. Starting in 2021, Old Salem Museums & Gardens and The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts began limiting school groups visits to three days a week, with a cap of three hundred students per day. The strategy is to spread out the school visitation over many days (with fewer students), which in turn will require less staff all while providing a better visitor experience. Extensive analysis of operational data convinced the museum's leadership team that directing the visitor engagement to a manageable scale was a far better operations model than the previously held "bigger is better" and "be everything to everyone at all times" model.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced attendance limits on museums, the **Vatican** and the **Louvre** took steps to limit visitation because over-tourism was degrading the experience, stressing staff, and in some cases damaging historic structures. In 2021, [the Uffizi Galleries](#) in Florence, Italy, launched the "Uffizi Diffusi" ("Scattered Uffizi") initiative to reduce overcrowding in their historic palaces and distribute tourism more broadly in their region by pushing treasures from their collections outside their galleries and into other parts of Tuscany.

Collections

The University of California, Irvine's newly forming **Institute and Museum of California Art (IMCA)** is making collections-sharing a core aspect of its operation and mission. In support of this strategy, the museum plans to build a "technological, logistic, and collaborative platform" that will facilitate sharing across academic, municipal, and private art museums. IMCA is currently selecting peer institutions to participate in the design of the platform with the goal that, over time, more users and more collections will join the structure.

INCREASED HEALTH AND WELL BEING



INCREASED INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE



CONTINUED EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT



STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS



People who visited museums participating in the [Utah Pilot Social Impact Study](#) reported statistically significant increases in the four major outcomes that the study measured. Image credit: Todd Anderson/Utah Department of Cultural and Community Engagement.

In 2015, the [Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields](#) embarked on the Collections Ranking Project initiative to assign letter grades to each of the fifty-four thousand items in its collections. Items receiving a rank of "D" (approximately 20 percent of the collection) were flagged for potential sale or donation to another institution. (The alternative would have been to spend about \$14 million to double the museum's storage space.) As of 2019, the museum had deaccessioned 4,615 objects, the vast majority through sale, and transferred 124 objects to other institutions. In 2018, [History Colorado](#) embarked on a similar project to survey, assess, and refine (i.e., downsize) target areas in the museum's 225-thousand-artifact collection.

Using Capital for Sustainable Good

In February 2021, the [Baltimore Museum of Art](#) announced it had secured \$1.46 million in private gifts

to fund DEAI initiatives. \$110 thousand were dedicated to raising the base salary of fifty workers from 13.50 to fifteen dollars an hour, with a goal of raising base pay for guards and visitor service personnel to twenty dollars per hour by the end of 2023. In November, the [Toledo Museum of Art](#) announced it had received two bequests totaling \$2.5 million, dedicated to employee professional development and engagement.

In March 2020, the [Yale Peabody Museum](#) in New Haven, Connecticut, closed to the public for an extensive renovation of its building. The capital campaign for the project was seeded by a \$160 million lead gift from Yale alumnus Edward P. Bass. In November 2021, [the university announced](#) that some of the funds amassed through the campaign would be used to fund free admission for the public in perpetuity.



The 2020 capital campaign for the Yale Peabody Museum will fund free admission for the public in addition to building renovations. Photo credit: Jack Devlin.

Building Equity into Employment Practices

In 2017, [Old Salem Museums & Gardens](#) and [The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts](#) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, began to fundamentally reshape their operations to reverse a decades-long slide towards insolvency. They began by expanding their leadership team to represent every division in the organization, making it more diverse in terms of race, gender, and economic status, and flattening the organizational chart to reduce the distance between senior and front-line staff. They produced a new balanced application and review process that reduces basic requirements for positions and values lived experiences as well as traditional educational attainments. All pay and job discussions now go through a collaborative senior leadership team, and Old Salem has

launched an equity initiative that includes commitments to paying above a living wage for the area, implementing a cost-of-living raise for hourly staff, providing mental health benefits, and reducing the pay ratio of the CEO to lowest-paid exempt employees from seven-to-one to four-to-one.

New Metrics of Success

The national [Measurement of Museum Social Impact](#) (MOMSI) project is working with thirty-eight museums to measure museum impact on health and wellbeing, valuing diverse communities, continued education and engagement, and strengthened relationships. This work builds on a pilot project in 2017-2018 headed by the Utah Division of Arts & Museums in partnership with

the nonprofit museum complex **Thanksgiving Point** for a statewide social impact study, collecting data from almost four hundred visitors through eight participating museums. The [pilot evaluation](#) showed that 96 percent of the 104 indicators tracked by the project showed a statistically significant positive change. The results from the national MOMSI project will be released in 2022, followed in 2023 by the release of a free toolkit with resources to help museums measure their social impact.

Explore the Future

Signal of Change:

A “signal of change” is a recent news story, report, or event describing a local innovation or disruption that has the potential to grow in scope and scale. Use this signal to catalyze your thinking about how museums might help society create healthy and sustainable metrics of success.

A King County nonprofit raised all staff salaries to \$70,000 minimum. Will more organizations follow?

The Seattle Times, November 15, 2021

In November 2021, Choose 180, a youth diversion nonprofit, raised all its staff salaries to a minimum of seventy thousand dollars a year. For some of the organization’s twenty-four staff, the pay hikes amounted to a twenty-thousand-dollar annual raise in an instant, using existing funds. (According to MIT’s [Living Wage Calculator](#), a parent would need to make just shy of seventy-six thousand dollars to live in King County.) The increases added about four hundred thousand dollars to Choose 180’s 2022 budget, an amount the board supported unanimously. Executive Director Sean Goode said that when staff first suggested changing the pay structure, he initially balked. But one director reminded him that the philosophy of Choose 180 was that the living conditions of the young people they worked with needed to change in order for them to have a fighting chance to live beyond what he called “the disease of violence and the stress of poverty.” Could it be that they were paying their own team members to live in the same conditions? Goode said the conversation was a “gut punch” that sparked a transformation, and that he is confident he can fundraise to support the change going forward.

Explore the implications of this signal:

Ask yourself, what if paying a living wage became the norm for American nonprofits (perhaps even a metric of excellence valued by donors and funders)? Discuss three potential implications of this signal:

1. For yourself, your family, or friends
2. For your museum
3. For the United States

Additional Resources

- [Active Collections](#), edited by Elizabeth Wood, Rainey Tisdale, and Trevor Jones (2017). This collection of essays critically examines traditional approaches to museum collections, and explores new paradigms of stewardship, including “quality over quantity.” The corresponding Active Collections website ([activecollections.org](#)) shares “A Manifesto for Active History Museum Collections” (which states “we believe collections must either advance the mission or they must go”), case studies on right-sizing collections, and a section on crazy ideas, including the creation of a “deaccession special ops” team, and creating a “usefulness meter” for collections.
- [Putting the Right In Right Sizing: A historic preservation case study](#) (Michigan Historic Preservation Network, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2021). This case study offers a number of observations for preservation and planning professionals about the role of preservation in cities undergoing right-sizing.



About this Report

Where to Find the Future

Most of the Center for the Future of Museums' content is available free over the web.

- ❖ [The CFM home page](http://bit.ly/futureofmuseums) on the Alliance website (<http://bit.ly/futureofmuseums>) includes links to all of our projects and reports, including past editions of *TrendsWatch*.
- ❖ [The CFM Blog](http://aam-us.org/category/future-of-museums) (aam-us.org/category/future-of-museums) features a mix of essays by CFM's Director, guest posts from people in and around the field, recommended reading and viewing, and commentary on current news. The trends featured in this report will be explored in more depth on the blog throughout 2022.
- ❖ CFM's weekly e-newsletter, "[Dispatches from the Future of Museums](http://bit.ly/dispatchesfromthefuture)," (<http://bit.ly/dispatchesfromthefuture>) contains summaries of and links to news items about trends, projections, museum innovations, and tools for the future.
- ❖ [The CFM Twitter](https://twitter.com/futureofmuseums) ([@futureofmuseums](https://twitter.com/futureofmuseums)) features links to news, research, opportunities, and current events.
- ❖ [CFM's Pinterest boards](https://pinterest.com/futureofmuseums/) (pinterest.com/futureofmuseums/) are devoted to images illustrating the trends we follow, recommended reading and viewing, and glimpses of potential futures.
- ❖ [CFM's Facebook page](https://facebook.com/futureofmuseums) (facebook.com/futureofmuseums) shares links and brief commentary on stories related to museums.
- ❖ [CFM's YouTube channel](https://youtube.com/futureofmuseums) (youtube.com/futureofmuseums) hosts interviews with museum professionals around the world as well as recordings and screencasts of talks by CFM staff, while our "Favorites" list is a compilation of futures-related videos from a wide variety of sources.
- ❖ [The Alliance Advisors and Speakers Bureau](http://aam-us.org/programs/alliance-advisors/) (aam-us.org/programs/alliance-advisors/) allows you to book lectures, workshops, and other engagements from CFM and other AAM staff.

About the Author

Elizabeth is the Vice President for Strategic Foresight and Founding Director of the Center for the Future of Museums at the American Alliance of Museums. She studied ecology and evolution as an undergraduate at Yale and received her master's degree in cell and molecular biology from Duke University. Her museum career has included working in a children's museum as well as natural history and history museums. She is a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute's Museum Management Program and the Foresight Certificate program at the University of Houston.

Prior to starting CFM, Elizabeth literally wrote the book on museum standards and best practices, as Director of the Alliance's accreditation and excellence programs. She notes this was perfect preparation for her current role as agent provocateur—challenging museums to question assumptions about traditional practice and experiment with new ways of doing business. Elizabeth is the author of the Alliance's annual *TrendsWatch* report and works with museums around the world to help them build a better tomorrow.

About Us

The American Alliance of Museums' Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) helps museums explore the cultural, political, and economic challenges facing society and devise strategies to shape a better tomorrow. CFM is a think tank and R&D lab for fostering creativity and helping museums transcend traditional boundaries to serve society in new ways.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) is the only organization representing the entire museum field, from art and history museums to science centers and zoos. Since 1906, we have been championing museums through advocacy and providing museum professionals with the resources, knowledge, inspiration, and connections they need to move the field forward.

Our Alliance of thirty-five thousand museums and museum professionals seeks to better our communities, and our world, through collaborative human-centered experiences, education, and connection to histories, cultures, the natural world, and one another. Our members spark curiosity and wonder, widen horizons and understanding, and create community connection through a shared commitment to equity and learning.

Learn more at aam-us.org.

Design Credit

Selena Robleto, Red Velvet Creative

Cover

The building housing the Supreme Court of Poland in Warsaw features caryatids by sculptor Jerzy Juczkowicz symbolizing faith, hope, and love. Photo credit: Tan4ikk/Adobe Stock

Acknowledgements

TrendsWatch is made possible by the collective wisdom of many people inside and outside the museum field who contribute their time and creativity to CFM's work. For their help with this edition, I would particularly like to thank:

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Frank Vagnone, CEO, Old Salem Museums & Gardens and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts

About Our Corporate Partners



“2021 proved to be another year of change and adaptation for all of us in the museum community. Elizabeth Merritt and our friends at AAM have delivered a thoughtful *TrendsWatch* report to anchor us around how to continue forging a path in the current landscape. We are honored to support this report every year, and our hope is that you are all buffered by the ideas and content within.”

—Dale Strange, President & GM, Blackbaud Arts & Cultural

With a focus on contactless experiences and digital enablement, **Blackbaud** is the technology backbone to support your organization and its mission. Blackbaud provides comprehensive, cloud-based software solutions to arts and cultural organizations seeking to optimize their operations, build and grow lifelong, loyal patron relationships, and maximize revenue.



“I always look forward to reading CFM’s annual *TrendsWatch* report as it provides a window into the world of what concerns museums most. The highlighted trends often provide a spotlight on current perils and exposures and thus potential helpful clues about how we need to modify risk management techniques to better serve the museum community.”

—Joe Dunn, President & CEO, Huntington T. Block Insurance Agency, Inc.

Huntington T. Block Insurance manages AAM-recognized insurance programs offering Museum Collections, Exhibitions & Temporary Loans/Fine Art; Property & Casualty; and Trustees/Directors & Officers Liability insurance. Each unique program strives to provide broad coverage at very competitive premiums with service from a knowledgeable and responsive team of risk professionals.



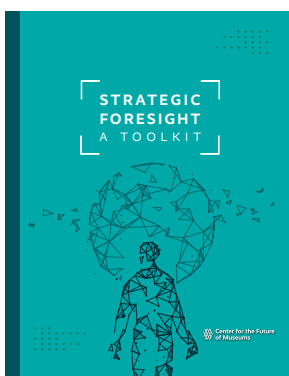
NEW from AAM's Center for the Future of Museums

This new resource is packed with worksheets, games, and exercises, providing a comprehensive introduction to strategic foresight—a vital skill set that enables individuals and organizations to anticipate change, craft effective plans, and shape the future they want to see.

Use this toolkit for:

- Professional development
- Staff enrichment
- Board education
- Strategic planning
- Creative brainstorming sessions
- Building connection within teams
- Livening up meetings

Strategic foresight provides a powerful assist to strategic planning, identifies critical risks and opportunities, and helps leaders avoid being blindsided by disruption. Develop “futures literacy” in yourself and your team to feed informed and thoughtful planning and decision-making.



Download your toolkit today

Nonmembers: \$60

AAM Members: \$50

<https://www.aam-us.org/programs/toolkits/strategic-foresight-toolkit>





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Alliance of
Museums**

Help Us Keep an Eye on the Future

TrendsWatch and other Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) activities are supported by American Alliance of Museums member dues and donations. If this report sparked your thinking and you would like to see *TrendsWatch* prosper, please consider supporting the Alliance by joining or making a tax-deductible contribution. For over a decade, CFM has been helping museums explore today's challenges and shape a better tomorrow. We welcome your investment in our shared future.

Support CFM today and help create a better future for museums.
Visit aam-us.org/membership or aam-us.org/donate.

Corporate or foundation support are also welcome. To learn more, contact Shelagh Grimshaw at sgrimshaw@aam-us.org.

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TRENDSWATCH NAVIGATING A VOLATILE FUTURE





Strategic Foresight Toolkit

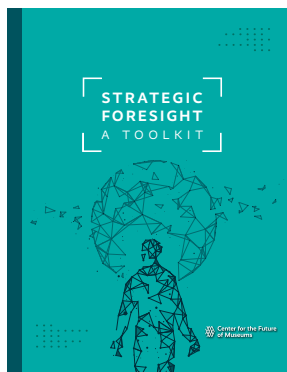
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Get your toolkit today! Scan the code or visit:
aam-us.org/strategic-foresight-toolkit





A 2019 Harley-Davidson FXDRS-114, with an 1868 cc, 8-valve V-twin engine. Also *TrendsWatch* author Elizabeth Merritt.

About the Center for the Future of Museums

The American Alliance of Museums' Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) helps museums explore the cultural, political, and economic challenges facing society and devise strategies to shape a better tomorrow. CFM is a think tank and R&D lab for fostering creativity and helping museums transcend traditional boundaries to serve society in new ways. Find research, reports, blog content, and foresight tools at aam-us.org/programs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/.

About the Author

Elizabeth Merritt is the Vice President for Strategic Foresight and Founding Director of the Center for the Future of Museums at the American Alliance of Museums. She studied ecology and evolution as an undergraduate at Yale and received her master's degree in cell and molecular biology from Duke University. Her museum career has included working in a children's museum as well as natural history and history museums. She is a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute's Museum Management Program and the Foresight Certificate program at the University of Houston. Prior to starting CFM, Elizabeth literally wrote the book on museum standards and best practices as Director of the Alliance's accreditation and excellence programs. She considers this perfect preparation for her current role as agent provocateur—challenging museums to question assumptions about traditional practice and experiment with new ways of doing business.

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Nick Merriman, Chief Executive, Horniman Museum and Gardens, UK

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In 2018, the exhibition "Carbon Ruins" at Lund University addressed the question "What would a museum of the fossil fuel age look like if we set it in a near future where we successfully transitioned away from fossil fuels?"

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TRENDSWATCH: NAVIGATING A VOLATILE FUTURE

Cover: Our cover image was generated by the artificial intelligence platform Midjourney in response to the prompt "A landscape of modern wind generators and solar panels in the style of Hilma af Klint."



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Håkan Röjder

The Alliance wishes to thank our corporate partner, who has generously supported this year's *TrendsWatch*:



Affinity Nonprofits

"I always look forward to reading CFM's annual TrendsWatch report as it provides a window into the world of what concerns museums most. The highlighted trends often provide a spotlight on current perils and exposures and thus potential helpful clues about how we need to modify risk management techniques to better serve the museum community." —Joe Dunn, President & CEO, Huntington T. Block Insurance Agency, Inc.

Huntington T. Block Insurance manages AAM-recognized insurance programs, offering Museum Collections, Exhibitions & Temporary Loans/Fine Art; Property & Casualty; and Trustees/Directors & Officers Liability insurance. Each unique program strives to provide broad coverage at very competitive premiums with service from a knowledgeable and responsive team of risk professionals.

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**MUSEUM
SOCIAL
IMPACT**

MUSEUM TOOLKIT

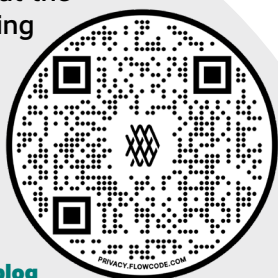
Download your **free** digital copy of this resource developed by the Measurement of Museum Social Impact (MOMSI) initiative!

The toolkit—complete with resources, practical tips, templates, and insights from participating museums—offers a reliable framework for measuring a museum's social impact, as demonstrated through outcomes in these **key areas**:

- Continuing learning and engagement
- Enhancing health and well-being
- Valuing diverse communities
- Strengthening relationships

Scan the QR code to learn more about the toolkit and exploring social impact measurement for museums!

Also available by visiting:
bit.ly/social-impact-blog



Stay tuned for more resources from AAM to help you measure your museum's social impact!





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Museums

Connect with museum professionals around the world for the second Future of Museums Summit! With this Summit, we take the theoretical framework from our annual forecasting report, *TrendsWatch*, even further. Join this virtual convening to gain tactical strategies and takeaways to plan for a brighter future for you, your museum, and your community. Stay tuned for additional details and registration!

Sign up for updates at summit.aam-us.org to ensure you don't miss a thing.

FUTURE^{OF} MUSEUMS SUMMIT

OCTOBER 29-30, 2024

JUST RELEASED:

Museum Board Leadership: A National Report **2024**

We are proud to present the findings of a new national report on museum board leadership. This second edition of the report first fielded in 2017 finds noteworthy progress in recent years, as well as challenges to continued improvement in museum governance including board diversity. Each of the three sections—The People, The Work, and The Finances—presents key finding and resources to guide your progress on tasks ranging from diversifying your board to creating the core governing documents that undergird your museum's stability.

Download your free copy today. Visit: bit.ly/2024-board-leadership



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Alliance of
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Ahead of Our Time

Welcome to the future, *Museum* readers! This special issue of the magazine is dedicated to the latest edition of our Center for the Future of Museums' annual *TrendsWatch* report, which shares trends emerging on the margins of our field that may become dominant in museum practice over time.

Using the methodology of strategic foresight, the report's author, Elizabeth Merritt, identifies phenomena cropping up in her research, then works with museum experts to anticipate how those trends might impact the field as they develop. Through invaluable context-setting, cutting-edge examples, and incisive recommendations, *TrendsWatch* has for a decade running helped museums stay ahead of changes in society, such as QR codes and the "internet of things" (in the 2013 edition), big data and analytics (2014), and happiness and well-being as metrics of success (2016).

How we imagine the future depends a lot on what's happening in the present, and as this year's featured themes demonstrate, the present feels unstable. A new era of culture wars is unfolding, with cultural and educational institutions like museums caught in the middle, taking heat both for embracing and demurring on progressive stances. Dramatic advances in artificial intelligence technology have made their way to market, trailing with them a morass of questions about misinformation, job security, and intellectual property. Meanwhile, record-breaking wildfires and temperatures have

revealed the extent of the continuing climate crisis, urging us all to contemplate how we can reduce our carbon consumption.

This year's *TrendsWatch* asks how we might emerge from the volatile future these trends present not just intact, but better for it. After all, a future-minded museum is one in touch with its community—and poised to be a true community resource. As the people around us navigate the destabilizing changes of the future, they will need solid information, ethical solutions, and models of resilience. The better we try to stay not just with but ahead of our time, the better we will be able to guide and partner with our communities, actualizing our purpose in society more than ever before.

Consider this issue your invitation to start thinking big about our future, what challenges and opportunities will come with it, and how we can shape it for the better. At the Alliance, we look forward to building it along with you.

10/23/2023



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brooke Leonard".

Brooke Leonard is the Interim CEO & Chief of Staff at the American Alliance of Museums.

Our Volatile World

160

Educators fired
for political
reasons from
2020–2022.

30%

Percentage of hours
worked today that
could be automated by
2030 with the adoption
of generative AI.

300 million

Current jobs that could be eliminated or
diminished, globally, by generative AI.

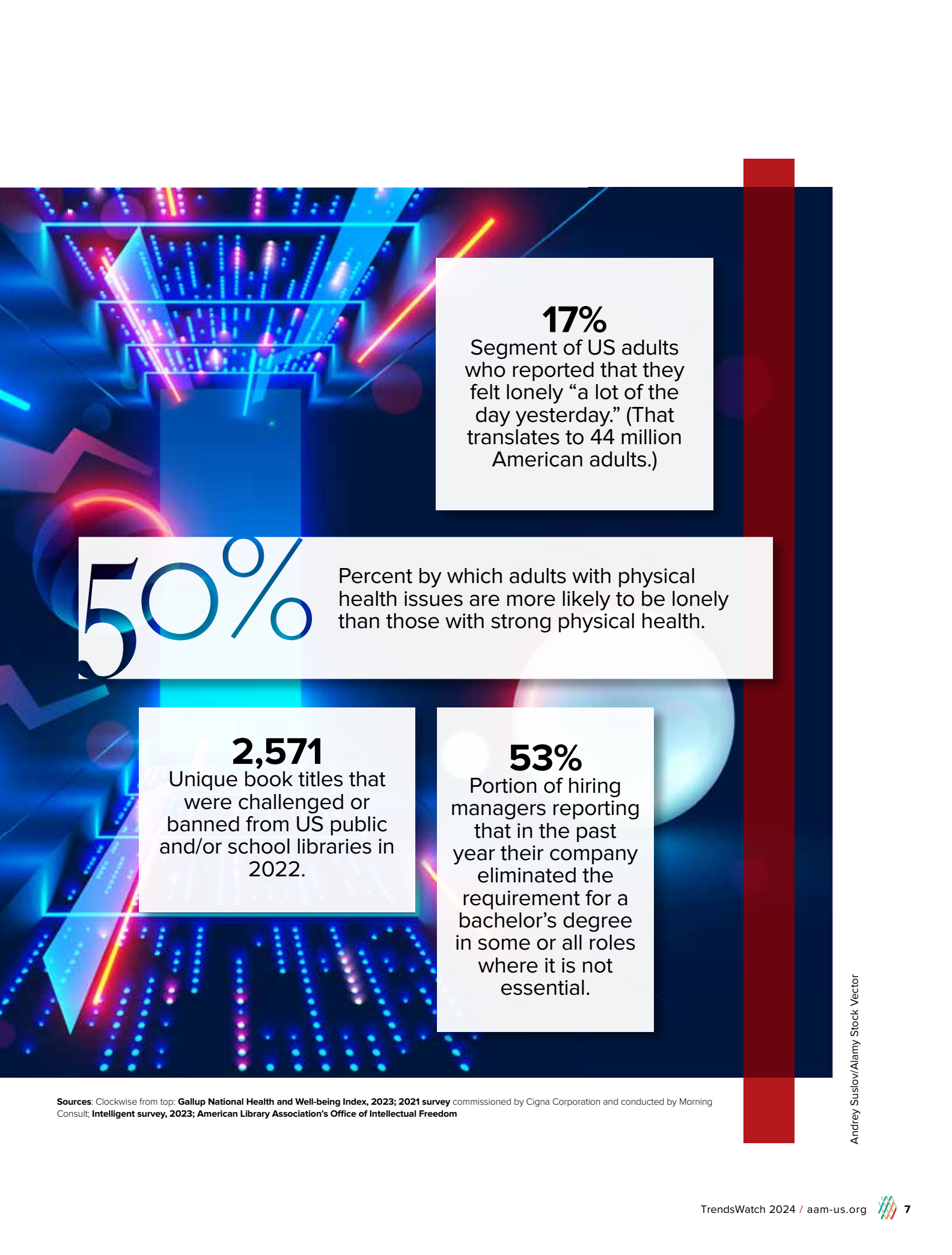
90%

The increase in global
CO₂ emissions since
1970.

3.6 billion

People already
living in areas highly
susceptible to climate
change.

Sources: Clockwise from top: McKinsey Global Institute, *Generative AI and the Future of Work in America*; Goldman Sachs; World Health Organization; Environmental Protection Agency; *Washington Post* analysis of news reports



17%

Segment of US adults who reported that they felt lonely “a lot of the day yesterday.” (That translates to 44 million American adults.)

50%

Percent by which adults with physical health issues are more likely to be lonely than those with strong physical health.

2,571

Unique book titles that were challenged or banned from US public and/or school libraries in 2022.

53%

Portion of hiring managers reporting that in the past year their company eliminated the requirement for a bachelor's degree in some or all roles where it is not essential.

Sources: Clockwise from top: Gallup National Health and Well-being Index, 2023; 2021 survey commissioned by Cigna Corporation and conducted by Morning Consult; Intelligent survey, 2023; American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom

Andrey Suslov/Alamy Stock Vector

WE CANNOT
AFFORD
THE LUXURY
OF EITHER
HOPE
OR
DESPAIR



Welcome to *TrendsWatch*

“Standing still is the fastest way
of moving backwards in a rapidly
changing world.”

—Lauren Bacall



HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Use this edition of *TrendsWatch* as a catalyst for adapting to your museum's rapidly changing environment:

- What choices does your museum face regarding the utility and ethics of artificial intelligence?
- How can your museum reduce its carbon emissions and inspire the public to take action?
- When might your organization be caught up in the current culture wars, and how can you prepare strategies to respond?
- Who is currently excluded by your museum's hiring processes, and could you diversify your applicant pool by dropping unnecessary degree requirements?

Each article includes a list of things museums might do to tackle these issues. Share this report with your students, clients, colleagues, staff, volunteers, and board of trustees to foster discussion about how your organization will cope with a volatile future.

The theme of this year's *TrendsWatch* report is volatility—strategic foresight parlance for the speed of change. That speed has been increasing exponentially in recent decades. Google's **director of engineering** recently predicted that by 2041, we will be experiencing a year of change (by today's standards) in three months, and by 2071, a year of change in 11 days. That's the equivalent of 33 years of change in one year! The past 33 years gave us the World Wide Web, email, personal computers, and smartphones; we mapped the human genome and discovered how to edit individual genes. What will it be like to live through that amount of change in just one year? How can we make plans that can survive such rapid transformations?

On one hand, speed can be exhilarating. Open AI's ChatGPT launched in November 2022; by January 2023 it had 100 million active monthly global users. The user base is projected to grow to **117 million** in the US alone by 2025. The technology is amazing: it empowers anyone to be an artist or a writer. It helps students apply to college, journalists draft stories, and architects model the mechanics of their creations. People hope it will make legal services more affordable, education more effective, and brain surgery more accurate. On the surface, generative AI (GenAI) seems like another example of triumphant progress, promising to improve our lives as profoundly as penicillin.

But volatility has another connotation as well, not just rapid but also unpredictable change, often for the worse. It may be thrilling to go fast, but the prospect of rocketing into the future at warp speed, veering

erratically, bouncing off obstacles, is terrifying. GenAI is already disrupting whole industries, competing with illustrators, writers, and journalists and **displacing** 4,000 jobs a month. Goldman Sachs estimates that globally, 300 million current jobs are at risk of being automated by AI. In October 2023, the head of the Securities and Exchange Commission, testifying before the House Financial Services Committee, warned that, absent regulation, it is “nearly unavoidable” that AI will cause a massive financial crisis in the next decade. But that regulation will be hard to implement since the SEC is designed to oversee individual organizations and brokers, not the underlying systems, including AI algorithms, on which these entities rely. Creating effective guardrails for emerging technologies may require us to fundamentally reshape our regulatory infrastructure.

That's a second, underlying theme of this report: the need to reexamine and reinvent a lot of systems that shape our lives, systems that may have worked more or less well for a couple hundred years but now teeter on the edge of failure. Technology, combined with cultural, environmental, and financial stressors, has widened the partisan divide to the point where approximately **40 percent of all voters**, Republican and Democrat, believe that the other side is so extreme that it would be OK to use violence to prevent them from achieving their goals. The same study found a significant share of respondents expressing doubts about the future of democracy and even the United States as it is currently composed. Will we need to reform our civic infrastructure if democracy is to survive?

Emissions from over 200 years of reliance on fossil fuels have resulted in **temperatures** increasing more in the past 50 years than any 50-year period in the past two millennia. This astounding rate of change challenges our ability to respond: we have been unable to invent, test, and implement solutions fast enough to keep global CO₂ below critical levels. At the same time, we have to deal with the literal volatility of the climate crisis. Last year was the hottest on record, with four months in a row of record-breaking temperatures and the skies blanketed by the smoke of nearly 46 million acres burning across **Canada**—nine times the historical average. While some believe that technology can save us, it's clear that even with the best technologies, we will need to eat less meat, travel less often, and take up less space (in our homes and on the planet) to stick to a strict carbon diet.

Does all this seem intimidating? It does to me. One comforting thought: humans are supremely adaptable to change. Our great grandparents may have been terrified to hurtle down the highway at 75 mph—now we are so blasé about that speed we have to be reminded to keep both hands on the wheel (and thumbs off our phones). So maybe by the time humans reach 33 years of change in one year, this volatility will seem normal.

Another important thing to keep in mind: while some of this acceleration is beyond the control of any one individual, organization, or country, there are

things we can do to apply the brakes. We can take the time to savor the process of putting words on paper rather than using AI to generate our correspondence. We can choose to challenge the supremacy of efficiency and value the benefits of measured, thoughtful collaboration. Museums, as cultural influencers, can offer their communities a place to slow down and decompress. They can ally with the movements promoting slow art, slow tourism, and slow food. And we can remind each other that we don't have to go fast just because we can.

In the face of a volatile future, it's critical to cultivate what Dr. Jane McGonigal, of the Institute for the Future, calls “urgent optimism”: the desire to act immediately to tackle an obstacle, combined with the belief that we have a reasonable hope of success. I hope this report will foster that hope and leave you feeling empowered to make a difference.

Yours from the future,



Elizabeth Merritt

Vice President, Strategic Foresight, and Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums, American Alliance of Museums

WHAT IS **TRENDSWATCH**?

TrendsWatch is the annual forecasting report produced by the Center for the Future of Museums, the American Alliance of Museums' think tank and idea laboratory for the museum field. Each edition is built on a year's worth of scanning and analysis of news, research, and conversations. The report goes out to members and subscribers as the January/February issue of *Museum* magazine, and a PDF version is released on the AAM website at the end of March. You can find dozens of embedded links to original sources for the information referenced in this text in the digital issue of *Museum* and in the PDF.

The text for this report was written by CFM's director, Elizabeth Merritt, with input and advice from many people inside and outside the museum sector. (See page 1 for the list of people who reviewed and commented on the articles.) We encourage you to join this conversation. Please share your thoughts and questions by:

- Joining the Future of Museums Community on AAM's Museum Junction discussion forum.
- **Submitting guest posts** to the **CFM blog**.
- Emailing CFM at emerritt@aam-us.org.

Elizabeth and her colleagues are available to support your work via speaking engagements, workshops, moderating discussions, and consulting. For more information on those services and to request our help, visit the **Alliance Advisory Services and Speakers Bureau** on the AAM website.

"Party With Us: Pride Edition" at the Museum of Us in San Diego, California, featured local drag queens from the Haus of St. James.



Culture Wars 2.0

What choices do museums face in avoiding or engaging with the current conflict?



“The net effect of loud, sensational clamor is to mute more quiet and temperate voices.”

—James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*

Last year *TrendsWatch* examined the growing partisan divide in the US and how museums might help repair our fractured democracy. However, an adjacent trend threatens the sector’s ability to fill this reparative role: museums as battlegrounds in a new wave of culture wars. Some are criticizing museums for embracing progressive values, while others regard museums as conservative vestiges of a colonial past. With alarming frequency, climate activists use museums as stages for protest or vandalism to draw attention to their cause.

Pressure is building along fault lines that segment communities, funders, policymakers, and museums’ own staff, boards, and volunteers. How can museums defuse this tension before it causes more damage? What choices do they face in avoiding or engaging in the current conflict, and how will these choices shape the future of museums and society?

The Challenge

Disagreements about the values that should guide public and private life in America are as old as the republic itself, and these debates periodically erupt into physical violence ranging from insurrection to all-out war. The verbal conflict took center stage at the 1992 Republican National Convention when Patrick Buchanan told the audience that “a cultural war” was taking place, characterizing it as a “struggle for the soul of America.” The issues Buchanan named (abortion, homosexuality, school choice, and “radical”

feminism) continue to be points of contention, but the battlefield has ballooned to include, well, almost everything, from **holiday greetings to beer.**

Thirty years later, the culture wars are heating up again, fueled by the power and reach of social media and the ascent of transparency as a core value. When every public meeting can be livestreamed on Facebook by anyone in the audience, there is scarce opportunity for nuanced discussions that can explore compromise and de-escalate conflict. Social media is now a major source of information for



In January 2023, demonstrators gathered to protest a Drag Story Hour at the Canton branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland.

Americans, and given the decline of professional journalism, it is often the primary platform for people to engage with current events.

The current state of P-12 education dramatizes the damage these conflicts can do to civic infrastructure. Teachers, already stressed by pandemic challenges, are barraged with complaints from parents and students about every detail of their work, including curricula, assignments, classroom decorations, and off-hand remarks. Even minor conflicts can go viral, spiraling into public campaigns calling for educators to be disciplined or fired. This relentless scrutiny has contributed to **record-high levels** of teacher burnout and turnover, to the migration of students from public to **private schools and to homeschooling**, and to the **downsizing and closure** of school libraries.

These skirmishes are egged on, in part, by those that profit from amplifying conflict: politicians courting votes, journalists seeking readers, technology corporations building reach and engagement. But they also reflect real disagreements in society about what theologian John Davison Hunter calls “matters of ultimate moral truth,” things on which one cannot compromise. Many combatants see the issues as threats to their very existence: white nationalists fear they are being replaced by people of color; trans individuals fear erasure of their identities and their lives. Stable democracy requires compromise, but negotiation around existential issues, about what is moral and ethical, seems impossible.

While cultural nonprofits have long been drawn into this fray, they are now being targeted with particular vitriol. America’s public libraries (a

Via Flickr, photo by Stephen Melkisetheian

system built with the largesse of Republican Andrew Carnegie) have become flashpoints for protests and penalties around progressive actions and values. We are seeing a record number of attempts to **ban books, criminal complaints** against and **laws targeting librarians**, and attempts to **defund and close libraries**. The American Library Association itself is now **being attacked**, nominally over the politics and identity of its CEO but more broadly over its support for and defense of its members. (This despite the fact that, as **the ALA points out**, there is strong nonpartisan consensus about the value of libraries and librarians.)

One drawback of using the term “culture wars” is the implication that there are two clear sides arrayed against each other, but that framing is inaccurate and unhelpful. Both liberals and conservatives drastically overestimate the difference between their views and those of the other side while underestimating the difference in views within their own side—a phenomenon dubbed “false polarization.” In fact, **subgroups within political parties** are

complex and varied. (For example, the vast majority of Black voters are Democrats; 61 percent of Democrats believe a person’s gender can differ from the sex identified at birth; only 31 percent of **Black Democrats** agree.) And while there are intransigent differences of opinion, there are also areas of broad agreement: **9 in 10 Americans believe** that protecting free speech is an important part of American democracy, and people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions.

Another problem with framing these conflicts as a war is the implication that there can be a winner. Short of a “**national divorce**,” splitting Democrat- and Republican-leaning states into different countries (an option that is, in fact, supported by 20 percent of US adults), we have to find a way, as a society, to explore these differences openly, honestly, and with respect if we are to maintain a functional democracy. Making people aware of these areas of commonality might be the best hope for reducing false polarization. Perhaps, as the growing bipartisan **civic repair** movement recommends, instead of

POTENTIAL FUTURE BATTLES

Following are some challenges posed to museums by the ongoing culture wars in the coming decade:

Consumers have more choices than ever in how to engage with history, culture, and educational content. Will museums lose out if, as just one choice in this array, they are identified as affiliated with one set of political positions or another?

There are growing disconnects between the expectations of some major foundations and those of local, state, or federal government officials (for example, regarding training and policies supporting DEAI). How will museums navigate these tensions and other partisan issues that may affect funding, whether that support comes from public dollars or individual donors?

There are significant generational divides around many contentious issues today, and around expectations of how organizations should behave. How can museums respond to the concerns of both current and future audiences?

We have recently seen **high-profile boycotts of brands** (Bud Light, Chick-fil-A) and institutions (Walt Disney World) from the left and the right. In the future, might we see partisan boycotts regarding museum attendance and membership?

Will more activists begin to use museums as useful platforms for protest, deploying vandalism against objects, or violence and threats of violence to draw attention to their causes? How would that change operations—design, staffing, procedures—and how might tighter security make some people feel more, or less, safe and welcome?



RESOURCES

Crisis Communications Guide, American Library Association

This brief guide outlines how to put a communication plan in place before a crisis occurs.

ala.org/advocacy/crisis-communications-guide

Marketing Intelligence Hub, Listen First Project

This online resource shares data-driven guidance on how to communicate in a way that fosters interest, hope, and trust from Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs.

listenfirstproject.org/marketing-intelligence-hub

Respecting Visitor Values: Audience Perceptions, 2022 Annual Survey of Museum Goers, Wilkening Consulting

This data story picks apart three main criticisms offered by the small percentage of museum-goers who do not believe that museums respect their personal values. (These categories correlated tightly with political values.)

bit.ly/RespectingVisitorValues

focusing on changing people's views about issues, "we need to change their views about each other."

What This Means for Museums

This isn't the first time museums have been caught up in partisan struggles. Buchanan's speech in 1992 helped define a decade of controversies that included criminal indictments against the **Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center** on obscenity charges stemming from an exhibition of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe; outcry over the Smithsonian's interpretive plans regarding the B-29 Superfortress bomber **Enola Gay** (a resolution passed by the US Senate characterized the exhibit script as "revisionist and offensive to many World War II veterans"); and Mayor Rudy Giuliani threatening to defund and displace **the Brooklyn Museum of Art** because of the "sick stuff" on view in "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection."

These attacks come from the right and the left. Where Culture War 1.0 was fueled by the rise of the Moral Majority and other religious conservative movements, today's culture war engages the

progressive left as well as the conservative right. It includes movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and LGBTQ+ activists—groups that want greater inclusivity and a greater sensitivity to harm, historical trauma, and legacies of exclusion and appropriation.

They also originate from inside *and* outside the organization. One source of tension is the fact that museum staff are **overwhelmingly liberal**, while boards and donors often **skew conservative**. This can complicate decisions around what topics the museum should address and what communities it should serve. In some instances, museum staff have called for their employers to cancel space rentals by conservative groups, distance themselves from objectionable donors, and remove exhibit material they found offensive. With increasing frequency, climate activists are using museums as platforms for protest, throwing paint on or gluing themselves to frames, vitrines, or the plex protecting iconic objects to draw attention to their cause.

Some of the public's strongest reactions are prompted by museums revising their interpretation

MUSEUMS MIGHT ...

- Lead thoughtful, intentional conversations among board, leadership, and staff about their own values and how the museum should choose to engage or not engage on culture war issues.
- Establish frameworks and procedures for evaluating exhibits, programs, and event rentals for potential controversies, and create plans for how these controversies will be managed.
- Evaluate the language used in exhibits, programming, and communications. Identify partisan trigger words, and, when possible, find alternative terminology. (For example, some museums have found it is less controversial to say "our changing climate" rather than "climate change.")
- Train staff on how to have difficult conversations with people who don't share their beliefs and how to facilitate these conversations with others.
- Create policies, procedures, and training that equip staff to deal with angry or confrontational members of the public, and offer support to help them cope with the resulting stress.
- Strive to be "third places," the increasingly rare venues that sociologist Ray Oldenburg has argued are vital to society, democracy, and civil society. By welcoming people of differing backgrounds and beliefs, museums can provide opportunities for them to socialize and get to know each other as individuals.
- Monitor legislation and legal decisions that can affect their operations, even when not directly aimed at museums, and address these issues in their advocacy. (Sign up for **Advocacy Alerts** and attend AAM's annual Advocacy Day to inform this work.)

of history. **Monticello and other historic sites** have been castigated by some visitors and conservative commentators for introducing slave narratives into their interpretations. Texas is embroiled in a messy fight over how to tell the story of the **Alamo**, which has been called the “creation myth of Texas.” Myths, especially when they amplify an inaccurate version of the past, can be toxic: perpetuating those inaccuracies, justifying past actions that caused harm, and over-amplifying the anti-inclusive values of a small (but politically powerful) segment of Americans. But any identity, individual or collective, is grounded in the stories we tell about ourselves. Can America have a unified national identity without shared stories we all buy into? Without that identity, will the country tear itself apart?

Ironically, the very respect accorded to museums, as stewards of culture and trusted sources of information, may amplify these pressures in the future. In the wake of protests over the murder of George Floyd in 2020, at least 200 **Confederate memorials** were removed, renamed, or relocated, and in many cases these monuments were transferred to museums. While the intent may have been a bipartisan solution (caring for the heritage in perpetuity while providing historical context), this approach is sometimes equally offensive to people who feel these objects should be destroyed and to those who object to “revisionist history.” With many schools abandoning controversial topics, museums may pick up the slack, just as they did over a decade ago when public schools largely **abandoned arts education**. But while arts education is generally seen as benign, topics such as race and racism, gender and sexuality, and controversial social and political issues **are not**. Some schools have reached out to museums to teach subjects they feel they can no longer handle. Will the outrage follow?

How can museums stay true to their role and their values without being sidelined by one faction or another? How can they retain bipartisan or nonpartisan credibility and influence while tackling difficult issues? Museums have the potential to foster healing or inflict harm, build bridges or deepen divides depending on how they respond to these challenges, but they face difficult choices. Museums might take

stands on issues that align with their mission and the values of staff and stakeholders. They might declare themselves to be noncombatants, serving as a cultural circuit breaker for the cycle of escalating outrage. They might play the role of peacemaker, helping people find common ground.

Each of these choices comes with potential benefits, and risks. Museums have earned broad, nonpartisan trust from the American public, and they can use that trust to educate and influence the public about important issues. On the other hand, taking a stand on contentious issues may result in a particular museum, or museums as a whole, being tagged as partisan, relegated to the echo chambers of people who already agree with them. The individuals and institutions that benefit from the culture wars thrive on public attention: perhaps sometimes museums might better serve vulnerable individuals, communities, and society as a whole by refusing to engage. But people who feel targeted by these conflicts may expect museums to weigh in with a statement or action that signals solidarity and support. Museums have long aspired to be public “**agora**” where people can come together to discuss important issues without feeling the need to self-censor. To ensure that people of all political identities feel welcome in these conversations, the museum itself might need to be seen as nonpartisan—neither liberal nor conservative—in its words and its actions.

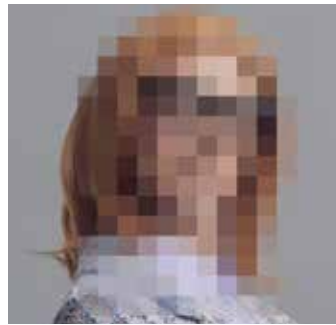
Everyone loses when cultural and educational institutions are damaged by partisan skirmishing. Treating libraries, museums, and schools as active combatants in the culture wars destabilizes our already fragile social infrastructure by threatening some of the few remaining institutions trusted to provide accurate information and common reference points.

In his exploration of the culture wars, Hunter also observed that “the whole point of civil society ... is to provide mediating institutions to stand between the individual and the state, or the individual and the economy. They’re at their best when they are doing just that: They are mediating, they are educating.” By engaging in hard conversations, inside their organizations and with their communities, museums can continue to fill that critical role.



Taking a Stand

In June 2023, the Museum of Us hosted “Party With Us: Pride Edition,” a day of programming featuring San Diego drag queens from the Haus of St. James, in solidarity with LGBTQIA+ communities being inundated with hate and legislative efforts to undo hard-won civil rights protections. Despite the polarizing public debate on drag, the decision to host the event was consonant with the museum’s purpose to be a place for community voice, especially those voices that have been historically marginalized. This was consistent with the museum’s previous visible support of LGBTQIA+ communities. In 2015, immediately following the Supreme Court’s decision on same-sex marriage, the museum displayed an enormous Pride flag from its iconic California Tower to mark the occasion. Since 2022, the museum has also been the site for the city’s annual Pride kick-off, with a week-long display of an even bigger Progress Pride flag from the tower.



Being Noncombatants

By its very nature, successful noncombativity is a nonstory. While this makes it rare to find published examples of museums that have chosen not to “feed the beast,” museum professionals might use the confidentiality afforded at conferences and small gatherings to connect with colleagues who have personal experience to share.



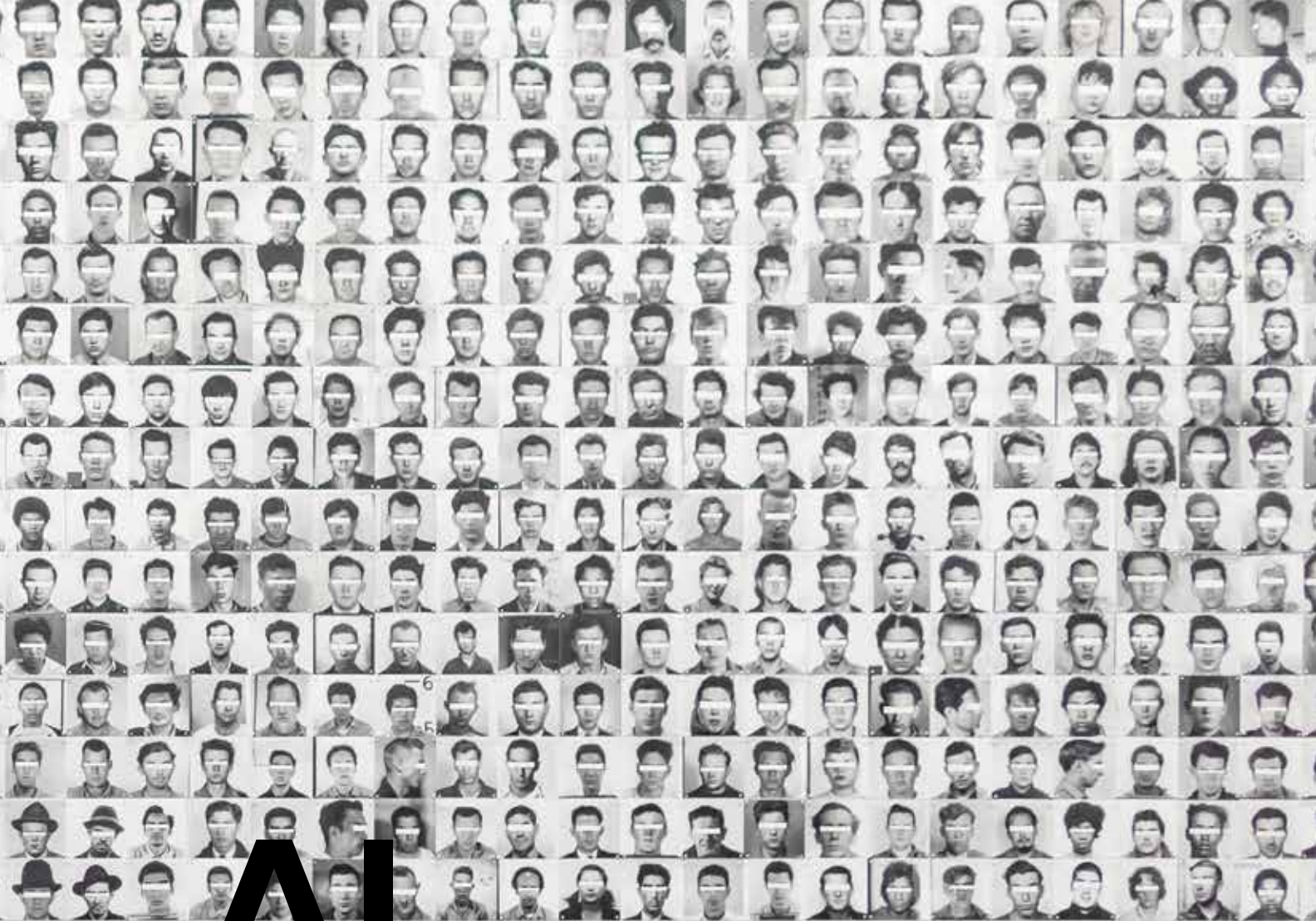
Playing Peacemaker

In 2019, the Frazier History Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, launched “**Let’s Talk: Bridging the Divide**,” creating a flourishing community space for dialogue and questions on challenging topics that often divide us. The program’s name ties to the Frazier’s location on the so-called “9th Street Divide” that historically has separated the city by race. Through dozens of moderated panel discussions, the museum has given the public an opportunity to hear from guests with varying perspectives on wide-ranging and sometimes contentious issues, including mental health, political discourse, voting, racial equity, policing, education, and Native American history. One of the most recent programs was the first community conversation about a newly released report from the US Department of Justice critical of policing in Louisville. This groundbreaking gathering brought together the mayor, the acting police chief, and representatives from the NAACP, Louisville’s Urban League, and the Fraternal Order of Police. The museum staff who facilitate the programs observe, “The dialogue isn’t always easy, and navigating the discussion and audience questions can be tricky, but if you want to bridge divides, there has to be conversation.”



Trevor Paglen's *They Took the Faces from the Accused and the Dead...* (SD18), 2019, from the "Uncanny Valley: Being Human in the Age of AI" exhibition at the de Young Museum in San Francisco, California.





AI Adolescence

What is generative AI, and what are the practical applications and implications for museums?

Photo by Gary Sexton, courtesy of the artist, Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

“Success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history. Unfortunately, it might also be the last, unless we learn how to avoid the risks.”

—Stephen Hawking

In the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) has leapt from the realm of science fiction and tech culture into our everyday lives. Most recently, generative AI is disrupting the work of creators, upending education, and performing key tasks in white-collar work. Some feel AI poses an existential threat to humanity—others forecast that it will quickly retreat into specific, narrow applications.

What is AI, is the hype justified, and how can museums make informed judgments about this or any other emerging technology? What are the practical applications and implications for museums in the short and long term?

The Challenge

Artificial intelligence encompasses a range of technologies that seem to mimic human ability to reason, make decisions, generate predictions, and perform complex tasks. Birthed in the 1950s, when Dartmouth professor John McCarthy coined the term and Alan Turing proposed his commonsense test for machine intelligence, AI literally began toddling in 1966, when the Stanford Research Institute introduced “Shakey,” the first mobile robot capable of interpreting instructions.

When *TrendsWatch* first covered AI in 2017, the major focus was “big data”: mining and analyzing huge datasets to generate business insights (or beat human grandmasters at chess) and using AI conversational skills to interact with users and respond to questions. Now AI is experiencing an adolescent growth spurt, fueled by the ability of generative AI (GenAI) to create original content as text, images, and sound. If chatbots powered by conversational AI might be mistaken for customer service reps, programs like ChatGPT and DALL-E, powered by GenAI, are trying

Students, faculty, and staff at Duke University’s Nasher Museum of Art used OpenAI’s ChatGPT platform to select works and write label copy for “Act as If You Are a Curator: An AI-Generated Exhibition.”



Photo by Cornell Watson

HOW GENERATIVE AI MIGHT HARM THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

By ChatGPT

This essay was written by OpenAI's ChatGPT 3.5 in response to the prompt "Write 500 words on the damage generative artificial intelligence may do to the creative economy." The program returned the following text in less than 10 seconds.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool, capable of producing creative content such as art, music, and literature. While it offers numerous benefits, there is growing concern about the potential damage it may inflict on the creative economy, particularly on artists and writers. This essay explores the multifaceted ways in which generative AI can harm the creative economy.

- 1. Devaluation of creative work.** Generative AI can flood the market with easily produced content, devaluing the work of human artists and writers. As AI-generated art becomes more prevalent, traditional art may lose its uniqueness and value. Consumers may be less willing to pay for original creations when cheaper AI alternatives are available, thereby reducing the income of artists and writers who rely on their work for a livelihood.
- 2. Copyright and plagiarism issues.** AI-generated content can blur the lines of copyright and intellectual property rights. Identifying the origin of a piece of content becomes challenging when AI creates works that closely mimic human creations. This can lead to a surge in plagiarism, where AI-generated work is passed off as original, causing financial and reputational harm to genuine creators.
- 3. Homogenization of creativity.** Generative AI algorithms are often trained on a massive corpus of existing creative works. While this can lead to impressive imitation, it can also result in a homogenization of creativity. The AI may perpetuate existing styles and trends rather than encouraging innovation and the exploration of new artistic frontiers. This stifling of creativity can be detrimental to the vibrant and diverse nature of the creative economy.
- 4. Erosion of skill development.** If AI becomes the primary tool for generating creative content, it could discourage aspiring artists and writers from developing their skills. The sense of accomplishment and personal growth that comes from honing one's craft may diminish, as people may opt for AI shortcuts. This could ultimately lead to a decline in the quality of human-created art and literature.
- 5. Job displacement.** The adoption of generative AI in the creative industry could lead to job displacement. Artists and writers may find themselves competing with AI systems that can produce content more quickly and cost-effectively. This could result in job loss and economic instability for many individuals in the creative sector.
- 6. Loss of emotional connection.** Art and literature often have a profound emotional impact on consumers because they are imbued with the personal experiences and perspectives of the creator. AI-generated content may lack this emotional depth, making it harder for audiences to connect with the work on a meaningful level. This could result in a decline in the overall appreciation of art and literature.
- 7. Ethical concerns.** Generative AI can inadvertently create content that is offensive, harmful, or biased, which can have a negative impact on society and culture. Artists and writers often contribute to important conversations and social change through their work. If AI-generated content lacks ethical considerations, it may contribute to harmful narratives and reinforce existing biases.

In conclusion, while generative AI holds immense promise in the realm of creativity, it also poses significant threats to the creative economy, including artists and writers. To mitigate these risks, there is a need for thoughtful regulation, ethical guidelines, and a recognition of the value of human creativity. Generative AI should be seen as a tool to enhance human creativity rather than a replacement for it. By carefully navigating the integration of AI into the creative process, we can harness its potential while preserving the vitality and diversity of the creative economy.

MUSEUMS MIGHT ...

- Help the public make informed choices, as users and voters, by providing education on AI and attendant issues.
- Explore how AI-generated content could be used to enhance collections, exhibits, education, and visitor interactions.
- Educate staff and the board about the choices the museum faces regarding AI use.
- Create ethical frameworks for decision-making.
- Take an active role in developing policies, guidelines, and regulations around issues such as sourcing of training data, tracking of content provenance, and protecting the rights of creators.
- Identify where AI can be used to help staff do their work while assessing the impact on museum labor overall.

out for the roles of author, artist, and composer.

ChatGPT is just one of a slew of GenAI programs taking the world by storm. A **2023 McKinsey survey** found that over 79 percent of respondents had some exposure to GenAI and nearly a quarter were using it regularly in their work. It is being used by students for **writing assignments**, researchers for **academic papers**, lawyers to produce **legal briefs**, and high school students to generate **college application essays**. In the process, developers of GenAI seem to be obeying Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg's exhortation to "move fast and break things." The growing list of things that, if not broken, at least cracked by generative AI ranges from copyright and intellectual property to both primary and higher education.

Some of the disruptions created by GenAI arise from flaws deeply embedded in the current algorithms. GenAI has a well-documented tendency to "hallucinate" (i.e., make shit up). In 2023, a **Federal District Court judge** threatened to sanction lawyers who used ChatGPT to generate a filing that turned out

to be filled with fake judicial opinions and legal citations, and staff of the research platform **Preprints.org** removed a ChatGPT-written submission that included fictitious references. GenAI also has an unfortunate tendency to amplify bias inherited from its training data. As **Bloomberg** recently reported, to judge by the outputs of the Stable Diffusion image generator, "CEOs are white men; women are rarely doctors, lawyers or judges; men with dark skin commit crimes; and women with dark skin flip burgers."

Any new technology can have a disruptive effect on labor, with the heaviest impact historically falling on blue-collar jobs. AI, and particularly generative AI, may be the first technology to destabilize white-collar work as well. We are already seeing grave threats to whole professions, especially in the **creative class**. Text and image generators are producing **cover art**, writing **news stories**, and producing blog posts and marketing copy. One of the major demands of the Hollywood strike of 2023 was restricting studios' use of AI, both to create **digital likenesses of actors** and to **generate scripts**. While this new technology will create some high-skill, adequately compensated jobs (AI research scientist, AI creative director), they will be outnumbered by **more precarious and stressful gig work**, such as labeling training data and flagging content that contains sexual abuse, hate speech, and violence.

AI's potential to do harm goes beyond its effect on labor. Its power, reach, and plausibility supercharges the dissemination of false information and fake content, including videos, news articles, social media posts, and even **books**. The **chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee** has warned that misinformation generated and promulgated using AI could disrupt the 2024 presidential election. Even when used for good, like improving education, the widespread adoption of GenAI could widen the digital divide. While most of the current wave of AI applications have launched on a **freemium** model, eventually, to be profitable, the companies that create and deploy this technology will have to charge. The more these applications become embedded and necessary tools, the more we risk exacerbating existing inequalities due to disparate levels of access and ability to pay.

This technology is evolving so fast that the sectors impacted by its application, as well as regulators, are



Visitors to The Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, interact with the museum's *Dream Tapestry* digital experience where personal dreams transform into one-of-a-kind art pieces.

struggling to keep up. How should **existing laws** and policies, written before the age of AI, be applied with regard to intellectual property, liability for harm or damage, privacy, bias, and discrimination in employment? What new regulation is needed, and how should we allow, ban, control, or regulate use? What role should GenAI play in P-12 and higher education, hiring, research, or law enforcement?

What's Next?

Will AI continue to accelerate at the current hyper-sonic rate? As with many technologies financed by large companies, the long-term business model is not yet clear. While **OpenAI**, the creator of ChatGPT, projected \$200 million in revenue by the end of 2023, it was spending \$700,000 a day to run the system, leaving it in the red. It remains to be seen whether it can convert enough free users into paid customers to make the product sustainable.

When regulators do catch up with the system, the constraints placed on how data is mined, and used,

may severely crimp the growth of a system that was fueled by exploiting free content (a practice that has already spawned **numerous lawsuits**). Ironically, by displacing human creators, GenAI may have sowed the seeds of its own destruction. GenAI trains on datasets collected from the internet, but when it learns from data produced by other AI, its performance degenerates, resulting in what researchers have dubbed “**model collapse**.” That breaking point may not be far off: the European security center **Europol** predicts that as much as 90 percent of online content might be “synthetically generated” by 2026.

What This Means for Museums

Museums have been experimenting with various flavors of AI for at least two decades, from practical applications (**Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields** using AI to crop digitized images) to playful (the wonderful Send Me SFMOMA, which responded to text prompts with images from the collection). Museums have deployed **AI-powered**

RESOURCES

Generative Artificial Intelligence and Data Privacy: A Primer, Congressional Research Service, 2023

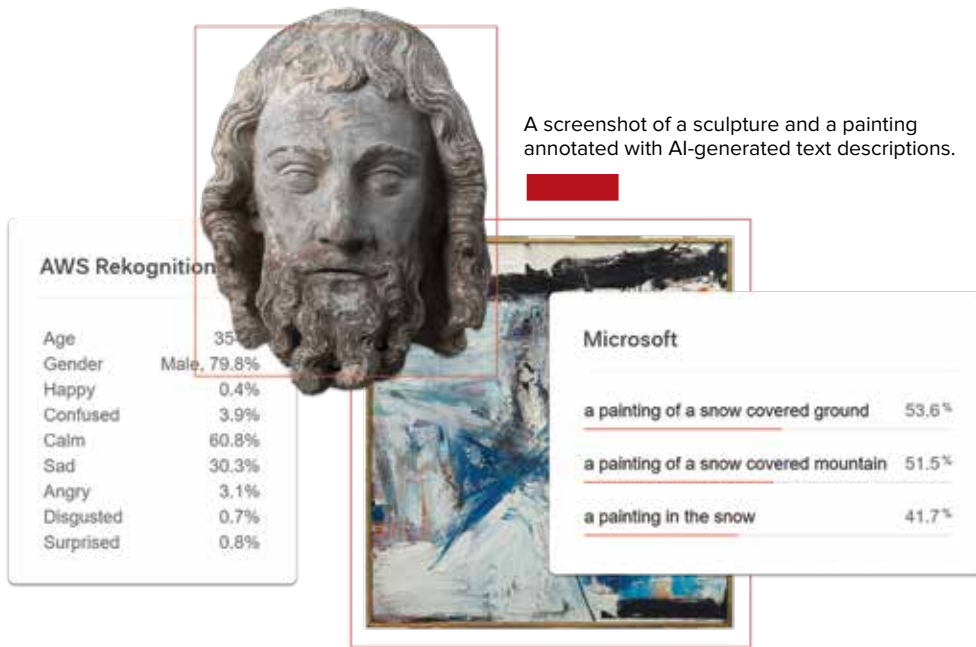
This publication provides an overview of generative AI, an explanation of the underlying data models and data sources, and what happens to data shared with AI models. It also outlines policy considerations with regard to privacy and related laws, and data scraping.

crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47569

Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights: Making Automated Systems Work for the American People, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2022

This document identifies five principles to guide the design, use, and deployment of automated systems to “protect the American public in the age of artificial intelligence,” including the rights to algorithmic discrimination protection and data privacy. The framework is accompanied by a technical handbook for anyone seeking to incorporate these protections into policies and practice.

whitehouse.gov/ostp/ai-bill-of-rights



A screenshot of a sculpture and a painting annotated with AI-generated text descriptions.

metadata associated with their own records follow these digital assets into the AI universe?

GenAI is trained on vast datasets compiled by scraping text and images from the web—without permission from or compensation to the creators of that material. Many artists, educators, and researchers are furious that GenAI harvests their work without consent, acknowledgement, or compensation. Do museums want to encourage the development and use of technology that is based on what many

robots as docents, predictive analytics to **forecast visitation** and **set ticket prices**, cognitive search to enhance **collections metadata**, and **sentiment analysis** to mine visitors' social media posts. At the Museum of Tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the AI-powered chatbot **Iris+** queries visitors about their experience and suggests steps they can take to address their biggest concerns about the future.

It is no surprise that museums have leapt to experiment with GenAI as well. In 2023, Duke University students and faculty used ChatGPT to organize the exhibition “**Act as If You Are a Curator**” at the Nasher Museum of Art, prompting the platform to select works from the collection and write labels. Behind the scenes, some museums are experimenting with text generators to create communications for members and donors, draft reports, and even **write grant applications**. But for all the exciting new possibilities presented by GenAI, it poses profound challenges to museums as well.

A general erosion in trust accelerated by AI-generated misinformation (accidental or deliberate) might impact the long-standing and robust trust the public has in museums, or it may be an opportunity for museums to lean into their reputation as sources of reliable information. What role might museums play in creating systems to verify “**content provenance**”—the source and legitimacy of images, videos, text, and articles? How can museums ensure that data and

feel is ethically, if not yet legally, theft of intellectual property? How might museums help protect creative, educational, and academic communities of practice from harm and advocate for their interests?

AI and GenAI provide opportunities to increase income and reduce costs. Museums need to decide whether, when, and how to adopt this technology—decisions that are both values-based and practical. Some may seem like clear wins: using chatbots to provide personalized experiences for visitors, image recognition to help the public engage with collections, and business applications to forecast attendance. Others may require more thought. How should AI be deployed to help staff with their work? If the use of AI could reduce the number of staff, do museums want to be complicit in this loss? AI depends on **vast computational resources and massive energy use**. How might museums factor AI's environmental impact into their strategies to reduce their carbon impact?

Working through these issues will require museum board members and staff to acquire basic AI literacy to understand its benefits and drawbacks and identify where AI adoption might require expenditures (in technology, training, new staff) or result in savings (through increased productivity or staff reductions). Hardest of all, it will require making some projections about the timeline of development and adoption of AI, a critical issue on which even the experts disagree.



In October 2022, the **Museum of Science, Boston**, opened the permanent exhibition **“Exploring AI: Making the Invisible Visible”** to illuminate how the approaches and data used to train computer systems have often resulted in AI that mirrors human biases, raising questions about unchecked use of these technologies across all aspects of our lives. Complementing the exhibition, a series of in-person and online **programs** dove into topics such as computer vision, large language models, generative AI, and deepfakes to encourage community deliberation about the future of AI technologies. The museum also created a **resource library**—including animated explainers, infographics, videos, and games—that challenges learners to consider how we can ensure that our society creates and uses AI technologies in ways that are ethical, inclusive, and can benefit all people.



In 2022, the **Carnegie Science Center** in Pittsburgh hosted researchers from Carnegie Mellon University’s Human-Computer Interaction Institute to pilot a Novel Research-based Intelligent Lifelong Learning Apparatus (**NoRILLA**) with support from the National Science Foundation. This AI-enhanced interactive science exhibit adds a camera, touchscreen, display, and an AI assistant to a traditional earthquake table or other physical apparatus, such as ramps. NoRILLA—brought to life as a virtual gorilla—helps participants make scientific discoveries through interactive feedback and guidance. Evaluations revealed that children learned significantly more from the AI-enhanced intelligent science exhibit compared to the traditional exhibit, and the dwell time increased by a factor of four. NoRILLA has since deployed at the Children’s Museum of Atlanta, the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia, the Children’s Discovery Museum of San Jose, and the CaixaForum Valencia in Spain. Read more about NoRILLA in the *Journal of the Learning Sciences* at bit.ly/NoRILLAJLS.



Beginning in 2015, the **Illinois Holocaust Museum** has worked with the USC Shoah Foundation to capture Holocaust survivor stories and bring them to life via high-definition, AI-powered holograms paired with voice-recognition technology. The resulting **Survivor Stories Experience** enables the interviewees to tell their deeply moving stories and respond to questions from the audience, inviting visitors to have a personalized, one-on-one “conversation.” The museum’s own research and national studies show that Holocaust survivors’ stories humanize difficult history, helping visitors develop empathy, learn the dangers of indifference, and recognize their responsibility to stand up to hatred and antisemitism. Recent research by the University of Illinois finds that visiting the museum and seeing the holograms empowered and motivated attendees to address injustice in their lives and communities.

Decarbonizing the Future

How can museums reduce their own emissions and inspire the public to take action?





In October 2023, the Climate Museum opened “THE END OF FOSSIL FUEL,” an exhibition that “explores the fossil fuel industry’s history of racism and deception, spotlights the success of the environmental and climate justice movement in resisting and reversing the industry’s harms, and invites visitors to take action in community.”

Sari Goodfriend

“Adults keep saying we owe it to the young people to give them hope, but ... I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. ... I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house was on fire, because it is.”

—Greta Thunberg, who became a climate activist at the age of 15

The climate crisis poses an overwhelming threat to museums and the communities they serve. Museums’ collections constitute a vast seedbank of human civilization, creativity, and accomplishments. Protecting those seeds will entail a commitment to decarbonizing the future—replacing our dependence on fossil fuels with sustainable systems.

How can museums decarbonize their own operations? How can they inspire people to take meaningful action in response to the climate crisis, even as they prepare to live in a profoundly disrupted future?

The Challenge

How we talk about the world shapes how we think about the world: nowhere is this more evident than the evolution in language describing climate change. In 2019, *The Guardian*, Britain's equivalent to *The New York Times*, announced that to more accurately describe the environmental challenges facing the world, it would henceforth refer to the "climate emergency" or "climate crisis" rather than to "climate change." Now we are creating a whole new terminology to describe the impact of this crisis on mental health, grouped under the heading of climate trauma. This taxonomy includes climate anxiety (a sense of impending dread); solastalgia (distress at the changes in one's home environment); and eco-grief (anguish and despair at the deterioration of the places we love).

Scientists around the world are struggling to bracket the best and worst possible outcomes of the current climate trends, but it's clear that even the rosiest credible projections are grim. The **Inevitable Policy Response** consortium concludes that by 2050 the world will likely achieve the **Paris Agreement** goals to limit global warming to an increase of 1.5° C to 2° C above preindustrial levels. This may be unduly optimistic, however, in light of the fact that, as the UN Environment Programme reports, every one of the 196 countries that signed on to the agreement is **falling short of these goals**. At the pessimistic end of the spectrum, Columbia University scientist James Hansen, who briefed the Senate about global heating way back in 1988, predicts we are approaching a "**new climate frontier**" with temperatures higher than at any point in the past million years.

This crisis poses an immediate and deadly threat. Record temperatures are directly responsible for a soaring number of **heat-related deaths** and record-breaking **wildfires, drought, and flooding**. In the near term, these changes threaten economies, ecosystems, and agriculture. We are fast approaching irreversible **tipping points**, including the collapse of ice sheets and ocean circulation, loss of glaciers, and the dieback of coral reefs and rainforests. Warming, combined with habitat destruction and introduction of invasive species, has triggered the sixth **mass extinction** in Earth's history, which may wipe out up to a million species. For humans, a warming world increases

disease, injury, and death rates. It also contributes to a **global crisis in mental health**, with rates of **suicide** rising in step with global temperature, climate disasters triggering acute stress and PTSD, and climate disruptions leading to **long-term depression and anxiety**.

Industrialization has flooded the atmosphere with CO₂, getting us into this mess. Theoretically, we could dig ourselves out by capturing and storing carbon (biologically, geologically, or technologically), but so far, the majority of such projects have either **failed or fallen significantly short** of their goals. Many of the "**carbon credits**" pitched to individuals and corporations as a way to offset emissions are illusory, unverified, or temporary. Gaining control over the climate crisis, the **UN Environment Programme** has declared, will require urgent, system-wide transformation. That includes putting ourselves on a strict carbon diet when it comes to both public infrastructure and individual behavior. This includes, critically, curbing the consumption (for travel, meat, material possessions) that has become synonymous with success. It may require **degrowth**—focusing on sustainable metrics of success such as health, education, and happiness rather than economic profit.

While efforts to tackle this crisis have been slowed by climate skeptics and misinformation, relentless communication by scientists and activists is having an impact. The **Yale Program on Climate Change Communication** reports that public understanding of climate risk has **improved since 2008**, when the group first began tracking public opinion. As of 2013, the Americans who think global warming is happening outnumber those who think it is not by a ratio of nearly 5 to 1, and 60 percent understand it is caused by humans. On the other hand, climate change ranks **17th out of 21 national issues** concerning Americans, trailing far behind the economy, health care costs, terrorism, and the budget deficit. How can we bump up climate action on this list of priorities and increase people's willingness to act?

What This Means for Museums

Of paramount concern is the fact that the climate crisis is harming the communities that museums exist to serve, posing particular risk to the very young and the very old, people with disabilities or chronic medical



Architectural rendering of the southeast view of the Charles and Stacie Mathewson Education and Research Center at the Nevada Museum of Art.

CARBON MANAGEMENT AT THE NEVADA MUSEUM OF ART

By Colin M. Robertson, Charles N. Mathewson Senior Vice President of Education and Research

“We are learning from Indigenous artists and partners to better understand and refine our role as a cultural institution in addressing climate justice, land and water use.”—David B. Walker, CEO, Nevada Museum of Art

As a cultural institution located in Reno, the Nevada Museum of Art has a vested interest in climate action. In 2022, the nonprofit research organization Climate Center named Reno the city with the fastest-warming climate in the United States—since 1970, summer temperatures in our city have risen 10.9 degrees. We are committed to positively impacting our own micro-climate by reducing our carbon emissions and inspiring our community to learn and take further action.

- Nevada’s geography, climate, and hydrogeology are embedded in our museum’s architecture and visual identity.
- Our building, designed by architect Will Bruder, is inspired by a basalt rock formation endemic to the high desert of the Great Basin.
- Our visual identity and branding, designed by Brad Bartlett, are based on geothermal heat maps of Reno, and the thermal data visualized on our website reflects hourly, daily, and seasonal temperature changes.
- Our Center for Art + Environment, launched in 2008, stewards a substantial and growing collection of archives, special collections, and unique publications related to creative interactions between artists and the environment.

To extend the museum’s commitment to art and the environment institutionally, and to align with the Paris Climate Agreement’s imperatives to reduce waste and the world’s carbon emissions, in 2022 we worked with the Ki Futures program—an Amsterdam-based program designed for the cultural sector by the non-profit organization Ki Culture—to produce a Sustainability Action Plan (bit.ly/NVMAActionPlan) addressing climate justice and carbon accounting.

To optimize our museum’s carbon footprint, we use a comprehensive carbon accounting platform developed by nZero Inc. to analyze and ameliorate our direct and indirect emissions. nZero’s dashboard visualizes our energy consumption and emissions data in real time—a sometimes sobering exercise, given the cooling and humidification requirements in a high desert environment.

As new infrastructure comes online during the construction of our 50,000-square-foot Charles and Stacie Mathewson Education and Research Center, we anticipate our carbon footprint will improve despite increasing the overall size of our museum. One goal of our groundbreaking exhibition “Into the Time Horizon” (opening in 2026) is to reduce an exhibition’s carbon footprint by better utilizing permanent collections in combination with signature international loans and commissions.

We would like to thank nZero, the Teiger Foundation, and the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation for their support of the Nevada Museum of Art’s sustainability initiatives.

conditions, people of color, people with low incomes, and Indigenous peoples. More than 90 US coastal communities currently experience **chronic flooding**, and that number is expected to rise to over 170 in the next two decades. By 2100, as many as **13 million people** in the US could be forced by rising sea levels to relocate, stressing the economies, housing, and infrastructure of the cities that receive these displaced populations.

The risks facing museums themselves are clear and comprehensive. To name just a few:

- Over a third of US museums lie within 100 kilometers of the coast—a quarter in zones highly vulnerable to sea level rise and severe storms.
- Sixteen percent of Americans live in areas at **high risk of wildfire**—this will rise to 21 percent in the next three decades as the risk zones for fire expand. US museums, which tend to co-locate with population, face similar exposure.
- Museum buildings and HVAC systems were built for climate conditions that are rapidly becoming out of date. The stress on these systems, and costs of remediation, will only increase with time.
- As **plant hardiness zones shift north**, historic properties and botanic gardens face a future in which their original landscaping and collections cannot survive.
- The increase in the number of **extreme heat days** annually is encroaching on attendance and outdoor space rentals.
- The climate crisis is **making insurance more expensive**. Major insurers have already **stopped writing new policies** in California, Florida, and Louisiana, and this list of “uninsurable” areas is expected to grow.

- Climate risk will put additional pressure on museums racing to document and preserve archaeological sites, habitats, and endangered species.

Museums can respond to these challenges both internally, through how they operate, and externally, through how they work with their communities and influence the public.

The Carbon Inventory Project estimates that the US museum sector annually emits an estimated 4 million metric tons of CO₂e, or carbon dioxide equivalent, which expresses the total greenhouse gases emitted in terms of the equivalent measurement of carbon dioxide. This is equivalent to the emissions of about **83,000 US households**. As the Culture Over Carbon initiative points out, reducing those emissions by 30 percent would be the equivalent of taking three natural-gas-fired power plants offline or 271,000 cars off the road. If the entire sector reduced its annual energy consumption by 50 percent, the related emissions reductions would be equivalent to eliminating five such power plants or 452,000 passenger vehicles (more than all the registered vehicles in Maine).

There is **consensus** among the general public, even stronger among frequent museum-goers, that museums should be working to reduce their carbon footprints and operate in more sustainable ways. These improvements could encompass design, construction, energy use, land management, digital activities, and all other aspects of museum operations. Choices range from moving the museum to a more sustainable site to reducing reliance on travelling exhibits and collection loans. Given the tremendous carbon output tied to **computation and data storage** on “the cloud,” museums may also need to assess the impact

RESOURCES

Culture Over Carbon: Understanding the Impact of Museums’ Energy Use, New Buildings Institute, 2023

This report shares energy data from more than 130 participating institutions, including zoos and aquariums, gardens, historic sites, and five types of museums. The report also includes recommendations for energy saving strategies geared to cultural institutions.

ecprs.org/engagement/culture-over-carbon

Toolkit on Sustainability in the Museum Practice, International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art. Launched in 2021 and updated in 2023, this toolkit offers museums resources, tools, guidelines, and examples to promote sustainable change related to equity, inclusion, diversity, justice, environmental respect, and sustainable economic growth.

bit.ly/46Or2kk

of their digital practices. (Even **removing images from email signatures** has a measurable impact on carbon emissions.)

Some of these changes will require museums to revisit and revise old standards, which can be deeply embedded in intransigent systems. The museum sector is slowly chipping away at **inflexible and unsustainable standards** for climate control, but even as some museums around the globe **adjust their HVAC** systems to allow a greater range of temperature and humidity, many contend with loan agreements that adhere to old conventions.

There is overwhelming, broad-based support for museums of all types to educate the public about climate change. Not just science centers, natural history museums, zoos, and aquariums (as one might expect), but also art museums, history museums, historic sites, and children's museums. No other type of institution in American life is more **trusted** than museums, and when it comes to information on **climate change specifically**, only scientists and researchers rank as more credible. (It's always good news when science wins.)

What message should museums send when teaching about the climate crisis? It may not be as simple as making more people understand, and believe, what is likely to happen. **Research** suggests that if people are confronted with projections that are too depressing and scary, they disengage and are even *less* likely to take action. (Case in point: How did reading the opening of this article make you feel?) Some advocate "**climate optimism**": fostering change by helping people believe they can make a difference, creating a positive feedback loop of action and hope.

Crafting the appropriate message is also complicated by wide uncertainties around what we face. Museums can't assure people "if you do this and support that, all will be well." Even if we take every recommended action, many generations will live in a significantly warmer world. However, museums can help people understand that their actions can help avert the worst-case scenario while simultaneously preparing them to live in a profoundly altered world. Museums can help people think about uncomfortable truths *and* feel empowered to do things that can make things better.

MUSEUMS MIGHT ...

Internally, as organizations and as a sector

- Measure and report on their own carbon emissions as a first step toward reduction; integrate carbon goals into their strategic and operational plans.
- Implement climate-friendly policies and procedures that minimize emissions, such as supporting remote work. (Hybrid employees who work from home two to four days per week **reduce their emissions by 11 to 29 percent** compared to full-time on-site workers.)
- Question the dominant paradigm that success requires growth. What would "degrowth" look like in museums? Might it entail less travel for research, fewer loans, and capping the museum's footprint and attendant energy costs?
- Make thoughtful decisions about funding. Some wealth is tied directly to practices that fuel the climate crisis. When are grants, sponsorships, or donations an appropriate form of reparative practice, and when do they insulate individuals and corporations from the need to make fundamental changes to their business models?
- Work together as a sector to revisit expectations on climate control so that museums are not required or pressured to conform to environmentally unsustainable standards.
- Join initiatives such as **We Are Still In, the Museums & Climate Change Initiative**, the **Climate Heritage Network**, and the **Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice** to foster organizational and collective action.

Externally

- Use their knowledge, perspective, and trusted status to advocate for climate actions by individuals, businesses, and government.
- Motivate members of the public to take action by changing their own lifestyles and advocating for change at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Organize and host constructive community conversations, workshops, speaker series, and programs that resonate across the political spectrum and help people think critically about these issues.
- Help individuals and communities cope with the stress and grief inflicted by climate impact.

MUSEUM EXAMPLES



In 2021, the board of the **Discovery Museum** in Acton, Massachusetts, approved a **five-year Sustainability Plan** that outlines more than two dozen action steps across all areas of its operations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decrease its carbon footprint, reduce water usage, minimize waste generation, invest sustainably, and advocate for climate action. All these steps support the larger goal of inspiring others to climate action. A cornerstone of the plan is the installation of a 326 kWh solar array over a portion of the parking lot that generates more than 100 percent of the museum's electricity on-site, with the excess sold to five other nonprofit organizations at a discount. The solar array, which became operational in summer 2022, represents a CO₂ reduction equal to preserving 317 acres of forest. In June 2022, the museum kicked off a first-of-its-kind carbon offset program for members, staff, and volunteers and in September 2023 provided carbon offsets for all other visitors.



Each spring, the **National Nordic Museum** in Seattle hosts corporate leaders, policymakers, and scholars for its annual Nordic Innovation Summit. Launched in 2018, the summit strengthens ties between the technology and innovation sectors in the Nordic countries and the Pacific Northwest—two regions advancing cleantech solutions. It is now a week-long event that serves over 400 on-site attendees and thousands through a live webcast. The theme of 2023's summit was "Sustaining Sustainability"—the idea that by doing good (through environmental, social, and governance commitments), a company can do well financially. Highlights included Governor Jay Inslee pitching business opportunities in Washington State to Nordic cleantech companies; Henrik Henriksson, CEO of H2 Green Steel, sharing how his company is reducing 95 percent of carbon emissions in the industry; and executives at Volta Truck discussing the US launch of their 16-ton, all-electric commercial vehicle. This program exemplifies how the National Nordic Museum lives its values as a neutral convener for climate-crisis cooperation.



In 2021, the **Peabody Essex Museum** (PEM) in Salem, Massachusetts, launched a Climate + Environment Initiative with the goal of sparking conversation, motivating action, and inspiring creative solutions. Designed to be simultaneously outward-facing and inward-looking, the initiative produces a series of ongoing exhibitions and public programs while implementing institutional protocols to mitigate climate impact, such as creating reusable exhibition design systems, offering sustainable products in the shop, and transitioning to renewable energy sources. A museum-wide staff cohort meets regularly to propose ideas to make PEM a more sustainable and climate-forward institution. PEM also hosts Salem's annual Preservation in a Changing Climate conference with the city and has recently partnered with Mass Audubon to help establish a regional Youth Climate Leaders Club. Through its efforts, PEM seeks to be a community partner and a hub for engagement, empowering other organizations to take similar actions to confront the biggest challenge of our time.

Dropping the Degree

Sixty percent of Americans may find their job search stalling when they hit a “paper ceiling” that ensures that applicants without a four-year college degree advance only so far. This requirement

excludes 70 percent of Black job seekers, 80 percent of Latinos, and three-quarters of American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

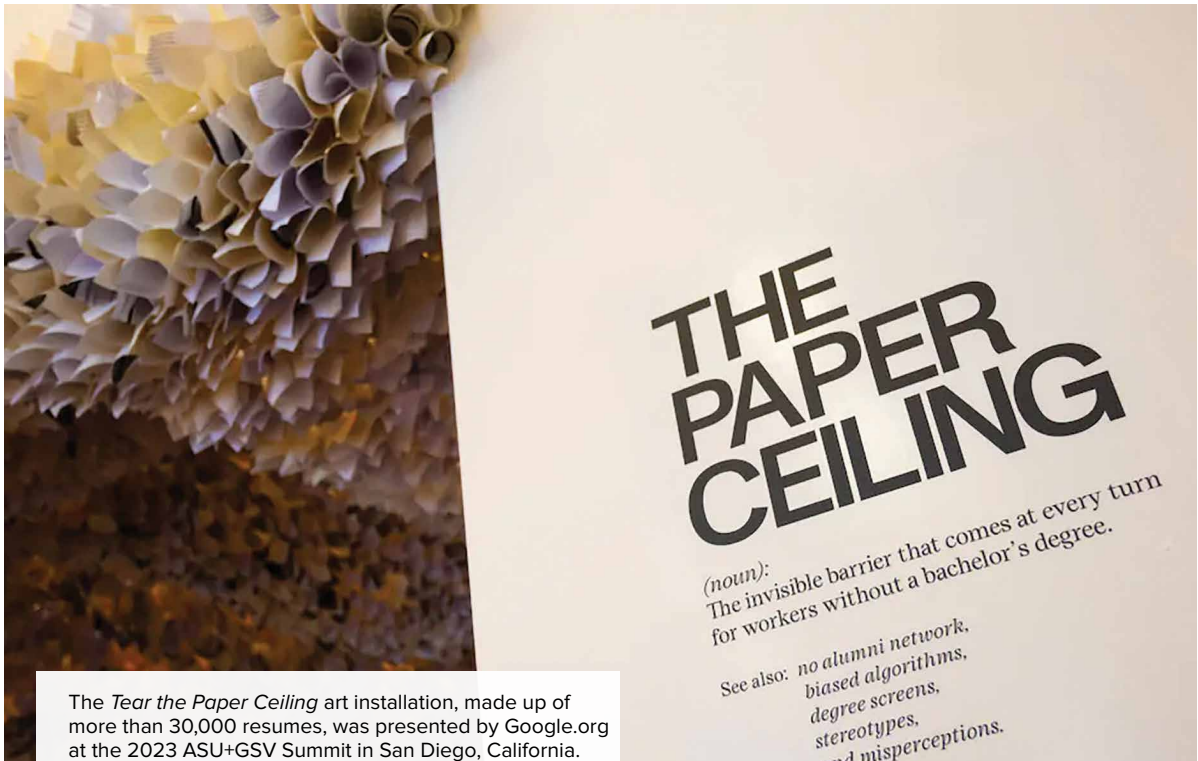
Many of the positions above this ceiling don’t actually require college experience, and many

potential workers have acquired relevant skills through alternative routes, including community college, military service, and on-the-job experience. But requiring a degree has become a common practice in part because it is an

Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site (ESPHS) overhauled its recruitment strategy to hire “returning citizens”—people with lived experience behind prison walls. ESPHS encourages other museums to follow suit and include returning citizens in interpreting and reimagining museums.



Photo by Luis Cruz Duarte, courtesy of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Philadelphia, PA



The *Tear the Paper Ceiling* art installation, made up of more than 30,000 resumes, was presented by Google.org at the 2023 ASU+GSV Summit in San Diego, California.

efficient way to filter a deluge of digital applications.

The paper ceiling doesn't just keep people from getting jobs; it **damages lives** in a host of ways. In the US, people without a four-year degree are less likely to own their own home, are more likely to suffer from depression, and have a life-expectancy eight years shorter than their college-educated peers. While it's difficult to untangle cause and effect, it's clear that barriers to hiring help fuel the social and economic stratification of society.

Museums and the Paper Ceiling

Data suggests museums have succumbed to "over-credentialing" as well. Ninety percent of

museum workers represented in the last **national salary survey, in 2017**, held at least a bachelor's degree, versus 33 percent of the general population. More than 77 percent of technician/preparators (a position described as "typically requiring manual skills related to duties") have a four-year degree or higher. This overshoot may stem in part from the attitudes and behavior of job seekers: for example, highly educated creatives may see museum employment as a desirable way to fund their independent work. However, having a large pool of highly credentialed applicants can normalize museums' expectation that they can, and therefore should, fill these positions with college graduates.

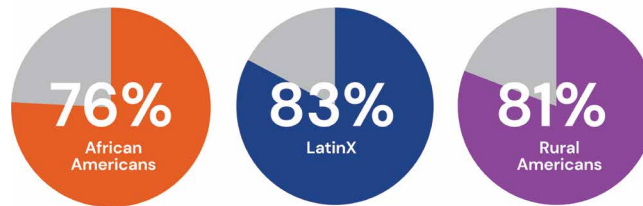
Two challenges are pushing museums to revisit traditional hiring practices, the most recent being the nonprofit labor shortage. As museums recover and restaff following the pandemic, **60 percent of directors** report they are having trouble filling open positions. Another impetus is that many museums are stalling or even losing ground in their efforts to attract and retain a more racially diverse workforce. Facing these challenges, museums might want to rip down the paper ceiling to widen the pool of potential applicants, increase the diversity of their workforce, and contribute to an equitable society.

Other job sectors are already "dropping the degree." In the past year, major companies including Kellogg's, General Motors, and

Bank of America announced they will stop requiring four-year degrees for a wide variety of positions. **Governments** are trying it, too: in 2023 Virginia became the 30th state to review roles and remove unnecessary degree requirements from thousands of public-sector jobs. As a tool to advance diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI), degree reform is systemic and potentially sustainable, in contrast to one-and-done approaches that rely on diversity training seminars or job fairs.

In museums, the degree in question might be a B.A. or B.S., but for some positions it might be a master's or a Ph.D. Expectations regarding advanced degrees are even more exclusionary than undergraduate degrees, with respect to race and socioeconomic background, and often result in people embarking on museum careers burdened by significant student debt. It's worth remembering that museums' focus on advanced academic credentials is a relatively recent development. The ranks of successful, prominent directors without advanced credentials include Julianna Force, who began as a personal secretary and rose to become founding director of the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City in 1930; J. Carter Brown, who held an M.B.A. when he became director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; and Ron Chew, who did not have a bachelor's degree when he became executive director of Seattle's Wing Luke Asian Museum in 1991.

Four-Year Degree Requirements Automatically Screen Out:



If Not Degrees, Then What?

Degrees are often used as proxies for criteria that wouldn't withstand scrutiny. It's well documented that, left to their own devices, people tend to hire applicants they feel comfortable with, people who share their background, interests, experience, and cultural references. That very human tendency is directly at odds with museums' desire to recruit and retain staff who reflect the racial and cultural diversity of their communities. Weaning an organization from over-reliance on credentialing starts with managers taking a hard look at the skills a job really needs. If a position requires time management and social and communications skills, for example, what other ways might applicants demonstrate these abilities?

Some employers are replacing degree-based hiring with "skills-based hiring," assessing applicants' practical knowledge, experience, and demonstrated skills and competencies. These approaches come with their own drawbacks. Some employers have implemented "challenge-based hiring"—requiring applicants to brainstorm ideas, solve a problem, or write an essay. This

imposes a time burden on applicants, and in some cases asks them to donate material of real value (whether or not they get the job). Degrees are binary—an applicant does or doesn't have one. (Granted, degrees from some institutions may be more prestigious than others, but that's a whole other bundle of bias.) Knowledge and experience are more nuanced and harder to assess. How can museums create systems for reviewing applications that are fair and equitable but also don't eat unreasonable amounts of staff time?

Once a museum has recruited a more diverse workforce, managers face another set of challenges: ensuring these new staff members want to stay. Employers may need to provide training in hard or soft skills and examine the organizational culture to ensure it is welcoming for new hires who don't share the background, norms, and experiences represented in the dominant institutional culture.

It may not be a simple solution, or a magic fix, but examining when they might want to drop the degree for particular roles could be a healthy first step for museums to take on the road to effective, fair, and equitable hiring.



Digital Twins and Doom Loops

A brief guide to terms that may be popping up in your news feeds.



Digital twin
of an oil rig.



Digital twins: digital models of objects, systems, or processes (e.g., buildings, machines, distribution systems) that exist or could exist in the real world. These interactive models use real or fictional data input to visualize, simulate, or predict how their real-world

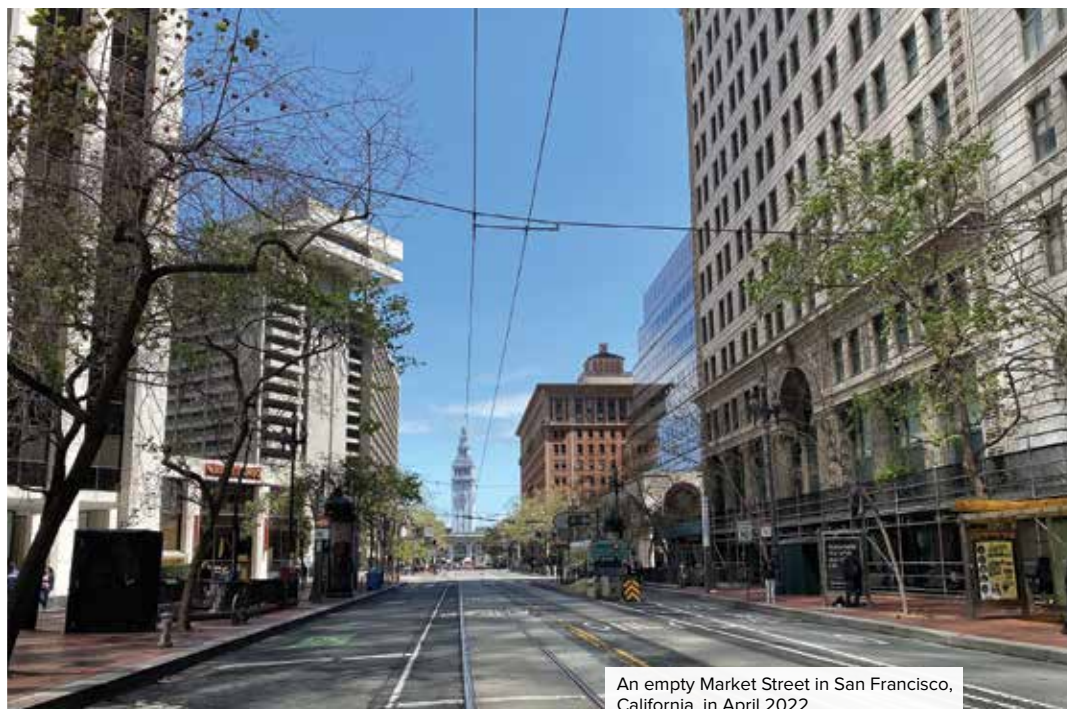
counterparts will respond to various situations and conditions. For example, **Shanghai** has commissioned a digital twin of the whole city that will use data from satellites, drones, and sensors to model 100,000 elements, including waste disposal, traffic, and the potential

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effects of natural disasters. The **Neurotwin** project is creating personalized digital twins of individual human brains to predict the effects of using electromagnets to treat Alzheimer's disease. **The Natural History Museum** in London feeds data, from



An empty Market Street in San Francisco, California, in April 2022.

thousands of sensors that measure everything from temperature and humidity to vibration and light, into a digital model that helps staff reduce energy use, identify threats to collections, and prioritize repairs and improvements.

Doom loops: a negative feedback cycle in which the damaging effects of a disruption spark a downward spiral that is difficult to reverse. Currently, much attention is being given to **urban doom loops** sparked by the pandemic, when remote work emptied office buildings and prompted many people to relocate to

areas with lower costs of living. The resulting lower foot traffic, job loss due to small business closures, and disinvestment in city services resulting from lower tax revenues led to an increase in homelessness and crime, making it less likely that people and businesses will return to former urban cores. Researchers warn that a **climate doom loop** may result from the fact that climate disasters (extreme heat, storms, floods, fires) are diverting money and attention from the efforts needed to curb emissions and reform the systems fueling the climate crisis.

Combating the Loneliness Crisis

In 2019, the temporary
Torro Loneliness Museum
opened in Beijing to help
people "accept and cast
aside their loneliness."



In May 2023, Dr. Vivek Murthy released *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. Such advisories are issued to address “significant health challenges that require the nation’s immediate awareness and action.” The first, in 1964, tackled smoking and tobacco use. Subsequent advisories covered preventing and decreasing overweight and obesity (2001) and using naloxone to prevent opioid overdoses (2022). In this latest report, Murthy calls on the US to make the same investments in addressing social connection that we have made in combating tobacco use, obesity, and the addiction crisis.

What is the extent of this crisis?

About a third of US adults 45 and older suffer from loneliness; that figure rises to nearly 80 percent in young adults 18 to 24. The incidence of loneliness is particularly high among vulnerable older adults, including immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations; minorities; and victims of elder abuse. Economists estimate that loneliness costs the **US economy** \$406 billion a year due to lost work days and adds an estimated \$6.7 billion a year to **Medicare costs** for socially isolated older adults.

Why is loneliness a significant health challenge?

Research shows that **loneliness**

and **isolation** are linked to sleep problems, inflammation, and immune changes in younger adults. In older people, they’re tied to symptoms such as pain, insomnia, depression, anxiety, and shorter life span. In people of all ages, they are associated with higher risks of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, addiction, suicide, self-harm, and dementia.

What are some root causes of this epidemic?

More Americans are living alone. According to **US Census** data, the number of one-person households soared from 8 percent in 1940 to an estimated 29 percent in 2022. Now roughly 13 percent of American adults live alone, from 4 percent of adults 18–24 to 26 percent of those 65 and older.

The decline of organized religion. Churches have traditionally been a critical “third place” where people socialize and connect with their community, but participation in organized religion is at an all-time low, with roughly 3 in 10 adults now **religiously unaffiliated**. Sixty-eight percent of adults report attending religious services a few times a year or less.

The rise of social media. **Teens** spend an average of 4.8 hours a day on social media. While these platforms were initially hailed as a great connector, they have **demonstrably contributed** to the mental health crisis among young people by fostering unrealistic expectations regarding appearance and facilitating cyberbullying.

What can museums do?

The surgeon general’s report makes the following recommendations for how cultural organizations can help combat this epidemic:

- Create opportunities and spaces for inclusive social connection and establish programs that foster positive and safe relationships.
- Embed social connection in internal policies, practices, programs, and evaluations.
- Actively seek and build partnerships with other community institutions...to create a culture of connection in the broader community.
- Advance public education and awareness efforts to introduce and elevate the topic in programs and exhibits.
- Create and provide education, resources, and support programs for community members and key populations: community-wide social events, volunteering, network-building, and professional development.
- Foster a culture of connection in the broader community by highlighting examples of healthy social connection and leading by example.



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Arlington, VA 22202

A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE
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TrendsWatch and other Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) activities are supported by **American Alliance of Museums** member dues and donations. Corporate and foundation support are also welcome. If this report sparked your thinking and you would like to see *TrendsWatch* prosper, please consider supporting the Alliance by joining or making a tax-deductible contribution. For over a decade, CFM has been helping museums explore today's challenges and shape a better tomorrow. We welcome your investment in our shared future.

Support CFM today and help create a better future for museums.
Visit aam-us.org/membership or aam-us.org/donate.

To learn more about foundation support, contact Eileen Goldspiel, Director, Advancement, at egoldspiel@aam-us.org. For information on corporate support, contact Ryan Bourke at rbourke@aam-us.org.



Strategic Foresight Toolkit

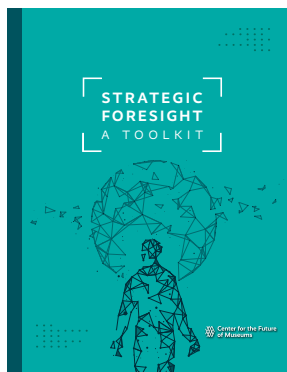
from AAM's Center for the Future of Museums

This new resource is packed with worksheets, games, and exercises, providing a comprehensive introduction to strategic foresight—a vital skill set that enables individuals and organizations to anticipate change, craft effective plans, and shape the future they want to see.

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About the Center for the Future of Museums

The American Alliance of Museums' Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) helps museums explore the cultural, political, and economic challenges facing society and devise strategies to shape a better tomorrow. CFM is a think tank and R&D lab for fostering creativity and helping museums transcend traditional boundaries to serve society in new ways. Find research, reports, blog content, and foresight tools at aam-us.org/programs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/.

About the Author

Elizabeth Merritt is the Vice President for Strategic Foresight and Founding Director of the Center for the Future of Museums at the American Alliance of Museums. She studied ecology and evolution as an undergraduate at Yale and received her master's degree in cell and molecular biology from Duke University. Her museum career has included working in a children's museum as well as natural history and history museums. She is a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute's Museum Management Program and the Foresight Certificate program at the University of Houston. Prior to starting CFM, Elizabeth literally wrote the book on museum standards and best practices as Director of the Alliance's accreditation and excellence programs. She considers this perfect preparation for her current role as agent provocateur—challenging museums to question assumptions about traditional practice and experiment with new ways of doing business.



A 2019 Harley-Davidson FXDRS-114, with an 1868 cc, 8-valve V-twin engine. Also *TrendsWatch* author Elizabeth Merritt.

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In 2018, the exhibition "Carbon Ruins" at Lund University addressed the question "What would a museum of the fossil fuel age look like if we set it in a near future where we successfully transitioned away from fossil fuels?"

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TRENDSWATCH: NAVIGATING A VOLATILE FUTURE

Cover: Our cover image was generated by the artificial intelligence platform Midjourney in response to the prompt "A landscape of modern wind generators and solar panels in the style of Hilma af Klint."



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The Alliance wishes to thank our corporate partner, who has generously supported this year's *TrendsWatch*:



Affinity Nonprofits

"I always look forward to reading CFM's annual TrendsWatch report as it provides a window into the world of what concerns museums most. The highlighted trends often provide a spotlight on current perils and exposures and thus potential helpful clues about how we need to modify risk management techniques to better serve the museum community." —Joe Dunn, President & CEO, Huntington T. Block Insurance Agency, Inc.

Huntington T. Block Insurance manages AAM-recognized insurance programs, offering Museum Collections, Exhibitions & Temporary Loans/Fine Art; Property & Casualty; and Trustees/Directors & Officers Liability insurance. Each unique program strives to provide broad coverage at very competitive premiums with service from a knowledgeable and responsive team of risk professionals.

Aon Affinity Nonprofits is a brand name for the brokerage and program administration operations of Aon Affinity focused on the nonprofit sector. We specialize in developing, marketing, and underwriting customized insurance for nonprofit organizations.

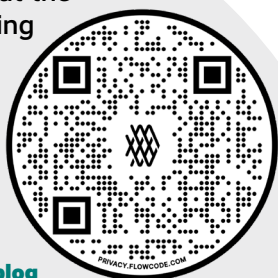
MUSEUM TOOLKIT

Download your **free** digital copy of this resource developed by the Measurement of Museum Social Impact (MOMSI) initiative!

The toolkit—complete with resources, practical tips, templates, and insights from participating museums—offers a reliable framework for measuring a museum's social impact, as demonstrated through outcomes in these **key areas**:

- Continuing learning and engagement
- Enhancing health and well-being
- Valuing diverse communities
- Strengthening relationships

Scan the QR code to learn more about the toolkit and exploring social impact measurement for museums!



Also available by visiting:
bit.ly/social-impact-blog



Stay tuned for more resources from AAM to help you measure your museum's social impact!





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Connect with museum professionals around the world for the second Future of Museums Summit! With this Summit, we take the theoretical framework from our annual forecasting report, *TrendsWatch*, even further. Join this virtual convening to gain tactical strategies and takeaways to plan for a brighter future for you, your museum, and your community. Stay tuned for additional details and registration!

Sign up for updates at summit.aam-us.org to ensure you don't miss a thing.

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JUST RELEASED:

Museum Board Leadership: A National Report **2024**

We are proud to present the findings of a new national report on museum board leadership. This second edition of the report first fielded in 2017 finds noteworthy progress in recent years, as well as challenges to continued improvement in museum governance including board diversity. Each of the three sections—The People, The Work, and The Finances—presents key finding and resources to guide your progress on tasks ranging from diversifying your board to creating the core governing documents that undergird your museum's stability.

Download your free copy today. Visit: bit.ly/2024-board-leadership



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Ahead of Our Time

Welcome to the future, *Museum* readers! This special issue of the magazine is dedicated to the latest edition of our Center for the Future of Museums' annual *TrendsWatch* report, which shares trends emerging on the margins of our field that may become dominant in museum practice over time.

Using the methodology of strategic foresight, the report's author, Elizabeth Merritt, identifies phenomena cropping up in her research, then works with museum experts to anticipate how those trends might impact the field as they develop. Through invaluable context-setting, cutting-edge examples, and incisive recommendations, *TrendsWatch* has for a decade running helped museums stay ahead of changes in society, such as QR codes and the "internet of things" (in the 2013 edition), big data and analytics (2014), and happiness and well-being as metrics of success (2016).

How we imagine the future depends a lot on what's happening in the present, and as this year's featured themes demonstrate, the present feels unstable. A new era of culture wars is unfolding, with cultural and educational institutions like museums caught in the middle, taking heat both for embracing and demurring on progressive stances. Dramatic advances in artificial intelligence technology have made their way to market, trailing with them a morass of questions about misinformation, job security, and intellectual property. Meanwhile, record-breaking wildfires and temperatures have

revealed the extent of the continuing climate crisis, urging us all to contemplate how we can reduce our carbon consumption.

This year's *TrendsWatch* asks how we might emerge from the volatile future these trends present not just intact, but better for it. After all, a future-minded museum is one in touch with its community—and poised to be a true community resource. As the people around us navigate the destabilizing changes of the future, they will need solid information, ethical solutions, and models of resilience. The better we try to stay not just with but ahead of our time, the better we will be able to guide and partner with our communities, actualizing our purpose in society more than ever before.

Consider this issue your invitation to start thinking big about our future, what challenges and opportunities will come with it, and how we can shape it for the better. At the Alliance, we look forward to building it along with you.

10/23/2023



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brooke Leonard".

Brooke Leonard is the Interim CEO & Chief of Staff at the American Alliance of Museums.

Our Volatile World

160

Educators fired
for political
reasons from
2020–2022.

30%

Percentage of hours
worked today that
could be automated by
2030 with the adoption
of generative AI.

300 million

Current jobs that could be eliminated or
diminished, globally, by generative AI.

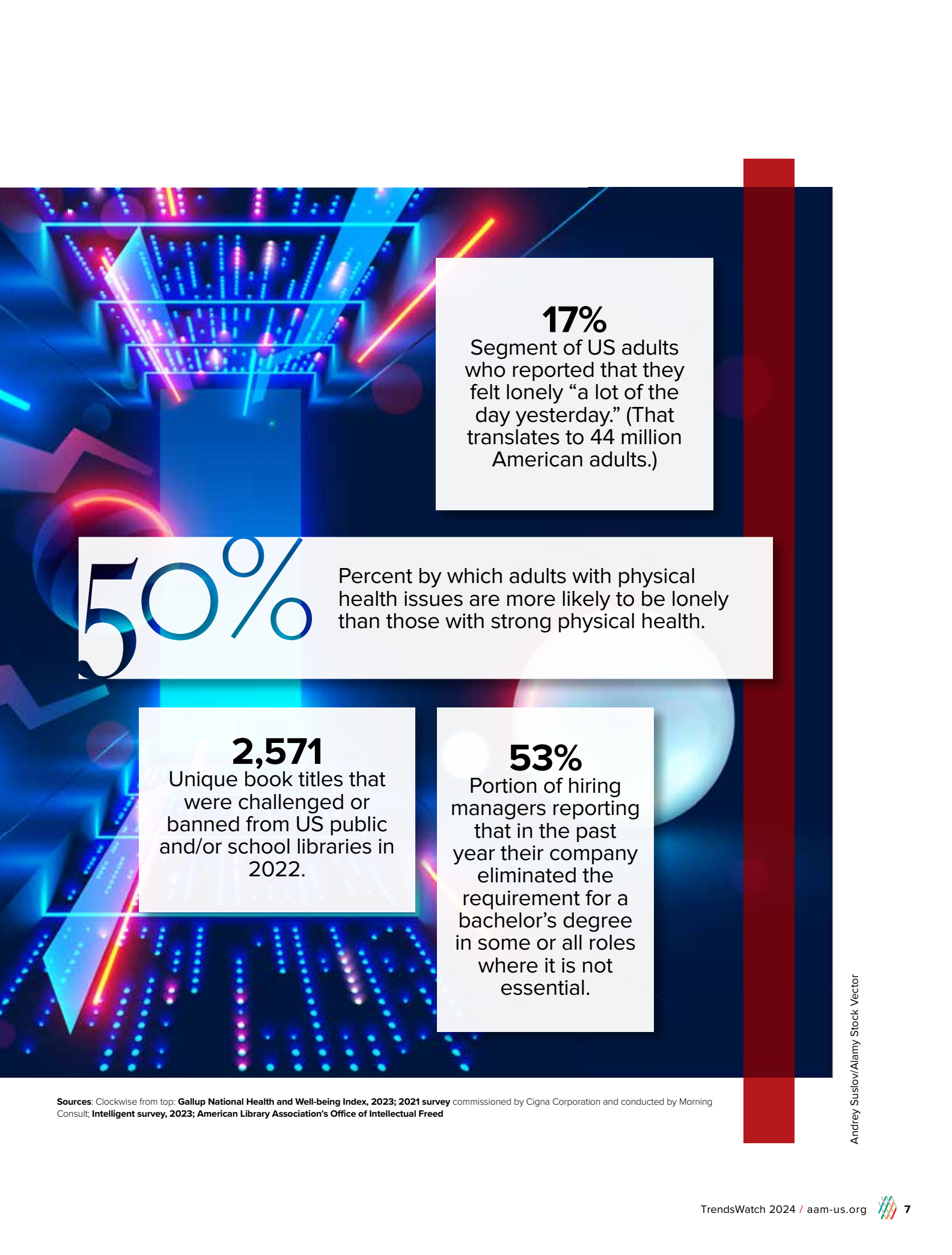
90%

The increase in global
CO₂ emissions since
1970.

3.6 billion

People already
living in areas highly
susceptible to climate
change.

Sources: Clockwise from top: McKinsey Global Institute, *Generative AI and the Future of Work in America*; Goldman Sachs; World Health Organization; Environmental Protection Agency; *Washington Post* analysis of news reports



17%

Segment of US adults who reported that they felt lonely “a lot of the day yesterday.” (That translates to 44 million American adults.)

50%

Percent by which adults with physical health issues are more likely to be lonely than those with strong physical health.

2,571

Unique book titles that were challenged or banned from US public and/or school libraries in 2022.

53%

Portion of hiring managers reporting that in the past year their company eliminated the requirement for a bachelor's degree in some or all roles where it is not essential.

Sources: Clockwise from top: Gallup National Health and Well-being Index, 2023; 2021 survey commissioned by Cigna Corporation and conducted by Morning Consult; Intelligent survey, 2023; American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freed

Andrey Suslov/Alamy Stock Vector



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Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

THE MUSEUMS + AI NETWORK

AI: A Museum Planning Toolkit

Dr Oonagh Murphy
Dr Elena Villaespesa

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INTRODUCTION

The Museums + AI Network was formed in 2019 by Dr Oonagh Murphy, Goldsmiths, University of London and Dr Elena Villaespesa, School of Information, Pratt Institute. The network was funded through the AHRC Research Networking Scheme and so far has brought together 50 leading academics and museum professionals to critically examine current practice, challenges, and near future Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in both the United Kingdom and United States. The network has also engaged with more than 200 members of the public through events at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum (New York) and The Barbican Centre (London).

Through these conversations, workshops, and public events we challenged current practice, engaged with wider critical technology discourse and iteratively developed a series of worksheets with professionals from 15 museums, and 6 universities in both countries. We also engaged with policy makers and funders as a means to situate these development tools within a wider cultural policy context.

This toolkit distils some of these conversations, flags areas for critical engagement, and serves as a practical starting point for museum professionals who are interested in working with technologies that fit within the broad field of Artificial Intelligence. The aim of this toolkit is to support non specialists to better understand the possibilities of these technologies, and empower a wide range of museum professionals to develop - strategically, ethically, and operationally robust project plans.

While developing this toolkit we have been approached by museums who would like support in understanding the possibilities of AI, clarification on key terms and an overview of the key things to consider when thinking about AI. This toolkit seeks to begin to answer those queries. It is designed to start a conversation. Conscious of the fast moving nature of this field we decided against the inclusion of a definitive how to guide, but instead sought to provide space for critical reflection, and in some ways we offer more questions than solutions.

themuseumsai.network

THINKING ABOUT AI

When considering using AI technologies, museums need to think about the potential benefits and challenges such technologies present. This list frames some areas for consideration, however each museum exists within a unique context, and as such this list is intended as a jumping off point, from which to explore projects and partnerships with your wider team before a project has been fully costed, or funding sought for implementation:

Why AI?

The conversation around AI is often over simplified, with many technologies that fall within this conversation falling far short of having sentient intelligence, instead what we see is advanced algorithmic decision making. As such it is important to not only understand the technology you intend to use, but also what data it will require (as input) and what data it will generate as output. As with most 'new technologies' it can be appealing to engage with world leading companies, and become innovators of museum practice. However as previous trends from Apps to 3D printing have shown us, the best technology provides solutions to questions or challenges faced by a museum, rather than existing as an additional layer to a museums core mission. Technology used well helps to further your mission.

Just because it's legal doesn't mean it's ethical

Regulation in the UK and US around technology is somewhat lacking, and as such many technology solutions from facial recognition to algorithmic decision making are legal, but ethically questionable. Museums, as social purpose institutions must reflect upon their professional standards, alongside the law when it comes to developing and implementing AI technologies. Professional standards when it comes to digital practice in museums are perhaps best described as interdisciplinary with many of those working in digital departments coming from computing

backgrounds, rather than museology. As such, engaging with a wide range of professional standards can help to inform nuanced practice that aligns to the mission and values of your museum.

Relevant codes of practice include:

- Museums Association - Code of Ethics for Museums (UK)
- American Alliance of Museums - Code of Ethics for Museums (US)
- Chartered Institute for Archaeologists - Professional Practice Paper: An Introduction to Professional Ethics (UK and International)
- International Council of Museums - Code of Ethics for Museums (International)
- Association for Computer Machinery - Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (International)

Off the shelf tools

A number of AI tools can be used for free, or cheaply (often through a freemium model), these range from IBM Watson a natural language processing tool that allows you to analyse vast amounts of text based data, such as visitor feedback, quickly and cheaply. Or, machine vision tools such as Google Cloud Vision API, or Microsoft Azure which allow you to create metadata tags for images, something that can be useful when it comes to managing vast digitised collections. These 'off the shelf' tools are likely to become more sophisticated in the coming years, and as such more commonly used. However in order for museums to engage with such technologies in a manner that aligns with their mission, they need to be conscious of quality assurance and bias management.

Quality Assurance Process

- Human Augmentation

When using any computational decision making tool it is important to have human quality assurance processes in place. Exploring what this process may

look like, will help you to reflect upon the data created through AI tools, and how that data will be used internally, but also externally. Will the data be visitor facing? What are the implications of creating visitor facing data?

Bias management

Machines much like museums are inherently biased, as such whilst machine learning tools may provide valuable metadata for your online collection it could also create bias squared (museum bias x machine bias). As such understanding the training data used to teach the machine, and the algorithms used to make decisions are crucial to ensure the integrity of any application of these technologies within museums.

Brandwashing

Technology companies are keen to work with museums, particularly large museums with strong national and international brands. This can provide museums with access to cutting edge technology, custom built solutions (which can be much more effective than off the shelf tools), and support in kind from technology professionals. However, museums need to think about such partnerships in the same way that they do fundraising. What are the ethical implications of brand affiliation with a specific tech company? How does that relationship align with the mission of the museum? What are the potential unintended consequences of such a partnership?

Critical Technology Discourse

While some issues raised in this toolkit may sound problematic, these technologies are increasingly being used in wider society. Museums have an opportunity to critically engage with these technologies and the impact they have, by being open and accountable about what technologies they are using, and through public programs and contemporary collecting to develop visitor literacy around AI

and Machine Learning Technologies. The Photographers Gallery in London has a strong critical technology discourse theme across much of its public programming, while the V&A has begun to collect AI technologies and associated art, such Anatomy of an AI System, by Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler (2018). The link between what happens in the digital team, public programs, and collecting could become more reflective and engaged through organisation wide transparency, dialogue and development.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY (US)

Founded in 1869, the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) is the largest natural history museum in the world. The museum is located on the Upper West Side in New York City, and welcomes tourists visiting the city, along with local residents, educators, researchers, and school groups. The museum hosts approximately 5 million visitors annually.

Visitor surveys and comments analysis

The AMNH is reviewed by visitors on a range of different online platforms during and after their visit to the museum, one of the challenges for the museum is analysing these reviews in a timely and cost effective manner. The museum emails a survey two days after a visit (using the contact details provided when the visitor was purchasing an admission ticket). The survey asks a quantitative question 'How likely are you to recommend the American Museum of Natural History?' and visitors are invited to select a numerical value between 1 and 10. The data created in response to this question is straightforward to analyse on mass, however, the follow up question which generates a qualitative response is more challenging: "What is the most important reason for your score?" As a cost-effective way to explore if NLP could provide new insights into visitor feedback, AMNH decided to use an off the shelf Natural Language Processing (NLP) and sentiment analysis service created by a commercial vendor.

IBM Watson is a platform that allows users to identify and analyse a range of concepts, categories, relationships, emotion and sentiment within vast quantities of qualitative data. Its NLP suite of services can be used to generate sentiment analysis reporting on a specific subset of words, or entities. For example,

AMNH used commonly mentioned words in NPS survey comments to more closely examine the sentiment associated with those words.

The above sentiment and entity analysis is a proof of concept, developed with six months of NPS survey comments data. The free tier of IBM Watson's sentiment analysis service was used to analyze these entities and associated sentiment scores.

Google Cloud and TripAdvisor

Google's Cloud Natural Language Processing API provides a similar service to the IBM Watson NLP sentiment services, which AMNH used to analyze reviews shared on the TripAdvisor platform. Tens of thousands of reviews were used as input data to Google's service, and sentiment analysis scores and popular named entities were included in the service output.

A general sentiment score, ranging from -1 (very negative) to +1 (very positive) was generated for the top 7 museums (by attendance) in the USA. With a score of 0.5, the National Air and Space Museum and the Natural Gallery of Art scored highest, followed by museums with a score of 0.4: American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Museum of American History, National Museum of Natural History, and 9/11 Memorial Museum. Additionally, AMNH used Google's NLP service to extract the most popular named entities within TripAdvisor reviews to gain insights into what visitors mentioned most frequently within reviews.

Potential challenges

Whilst AI provides a valuable starting point when it comes to engaging with large amounts of qualitative data, providing appropriate context and

interpretation is still the job of humans. Those working in museums and with visitors can provide a valuable layer of analysis that can add to the validity and operational insights provided by these commercial services.

What can we learn from this case study?

An off the shelf cloud service such as IBM Watson or Google Cloud Natural Language Processing can be a cost-effective way to analyse large amounts of qualitative data and extract focused insights on visitor sentiment and aspects of the visitor experience.

Useful links

<http://www.ibm.com/watson/>

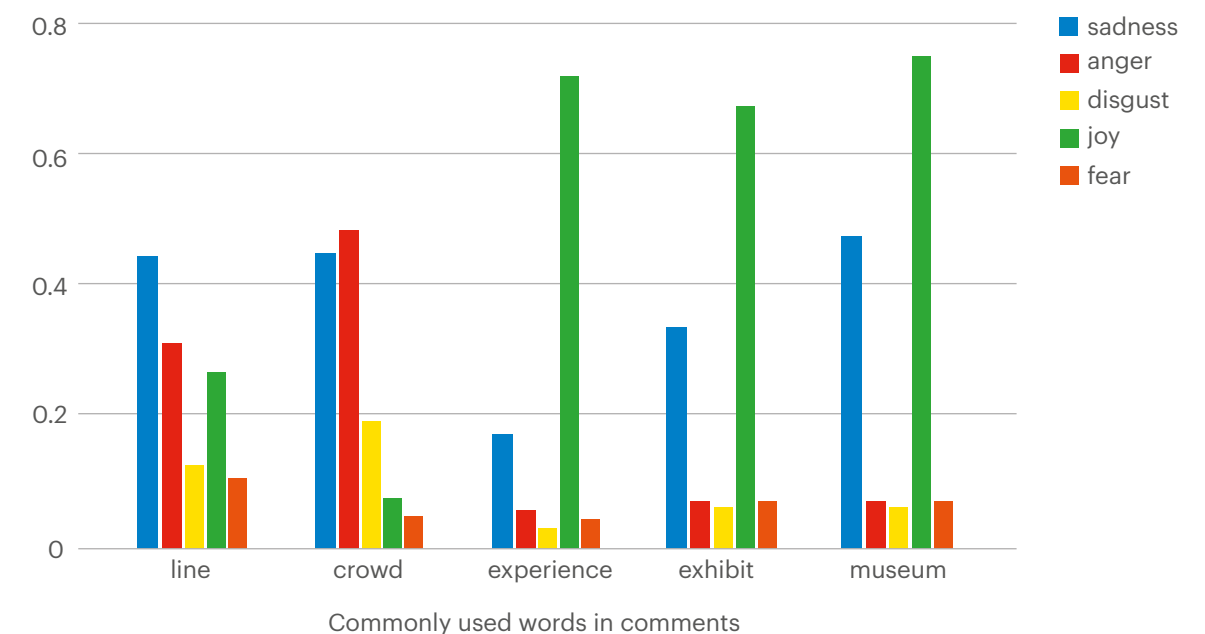
<http://cloud.google.com/natural-language/>

<http://medium.com/@CuriousThirst/on-artificial-intelligence-museums-and-feelings-598b7ba8beb6>

Artificial intelligence featured in this case study: Natural Language Processing (NLP)

Below: This chart shows the insights provided IBM Watson

Sentiment analysis of NPS survey comments (sample)



THE NATIONAL GALLERY (UK)

The National Gallery, London was founded in 1824 and today boasts a collection of over 2,300 paintings, including some of the most important works from the 1300's to 1900. The museum is free to enter, and many galleries are free to visit. One area of the museum does command an entrance fee, namely, temporary exhibitions. The museum has a dynamic temporary exhibition programme which brings together works from its own collection and the finest examples of painting from other leading collections. In 2018, the gallery had 5.7 million visitors, of which 8% attended temporary exhibitions.

Machine learning, forecasting models and visitor data

One of the challenges for The National Gallery is predicting the capacity required by potential demand for temporary exhibitions. This includes the physical capacity of an exhibition space (how many people can comfortably fit within a gallery? And if an exhibition is likely to be popular, is the allocated gallery space enough?), but also resource capacity (how many tickets will be sold for a specific exhibition? what time slots and days will be busy or quiet? and, what type of people will visit the exhibition?) The answers to these questions can help the museum to create a more enjoyable visitor experience and more financially viable exhibition prospect for the museum.

The Data and Insights team at the National Gallery have been developing custom built predictive models as a means to answer some of these questions. These include forecasting potential attendance about 12-18 months before an exhibition opens; and once an exhibition has been open for 3 weeks a daily forecast for overall attendance as well as paid tickets (excluding membership and comp visits)

After initial investigation, it was found that using the following factors as variables allowed a reliable forecasting model to be created:

- Whether an exhibition is thematic or monographic
- Movement and period of the art
- Page views of the artist's Wikipedia page
- The likelihood of the UK public to visit a paid exhibition by this artist (from commissioned YouGov survey)
- Length of exhibition
- Marketing spend on an exhibition
- Visit date (for daily forecast) or time of year (for total attendance forecast)
- Distance through the exhibition's run and sales period (for daily forecast)
- Day of the week (daily forecast)

The forecasting models use training data from over twenty years of exhibition history (less for daily models) and are created using gradient boosted tree based methods. The results are then integrated into an analytics dashboard that provides a detailed picture of ticket sales, attendance patterns, and revenue generation that is available for any employee to access.

Predictive analytics as a provocation

The forecast is then used as a provocation to a range of departments from curatorial to marketing; it becomes a way of reflecting on if the current plans will deliver the intended results. Because the model is trained on historical data from exhibitions with similar artists or themes, it predicts how an exhibition might perform with certain audiences if similar tactics are planned for future exhibitions. These insights are utilised after an exhibition has been commissioned (and as such

have no input into the content of the temporary exhibition programme), but instead are introduced at the exhibition planning stage. Such data can influence ticket prices, exhibition location, exhibition calendar, exhibition run time, and marketing activities. If the data shows that the exhibition is not likely to appeal to a specific market then they can design marketing activities that will help peak interest within the target market. In the future such insights may also be used to influence staffing patterns for exhibitions, or create dynamic ticket pricing to prevent peak times and quiet times and ensure a more consistent visitor experience. The ultimate aim of this activity is to increase the quality of visitor experience (and as such drive repeat visits) and sculpt new audiences by targeting marketing messages to specific groups.

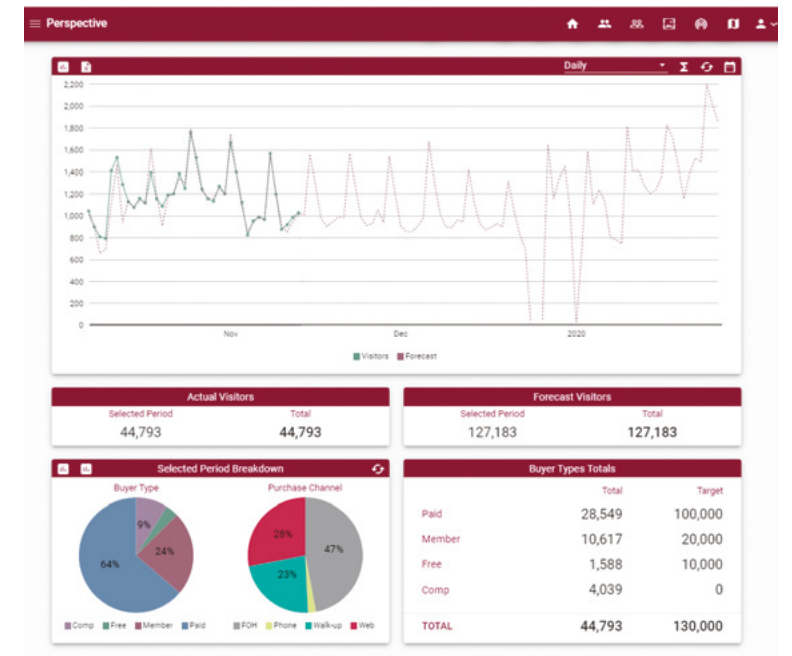
Potential challenges

The insights provided by data must be viewed within the wider mission of the museum as an institution. Whilst busy exhibitions is one metric of a successful exhibition, scholarship, critical thinking and dialogue between cultures and art form are also central to the work of The National Gallery, and as such visitor experience and revenue form only one part of a complex operating context.

What can we learn from this case study?

Quick implementation is possible: the team were able to develop initial working models within a few months, and with access to over ten years of exhibition data, they are able to continually develop their models to be increasingly accurate.

Further, the visibility of such models led other departments within the organisation to find their own uses for forecast data. This has led to success in buy-in and implementation across the Gallery and some Gallery staff have even reported that they feel empowered



Above: Screenshot of the predictive analytics dashboard used by the National Gallery

by the ability to use forecasting data to make data-informed decisions.

Forecasting can serve as a useful provocation to encourage changing organisational behaviours, it provides data driven insights to strategic decision making processes that can ultimately create more successful exhibitions (even when we consider a wide range of success metrics from those defined by curators, to those defined by visitors through to funders).

Artificial intelligence featured in this case study: Machine Learning

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART (US)

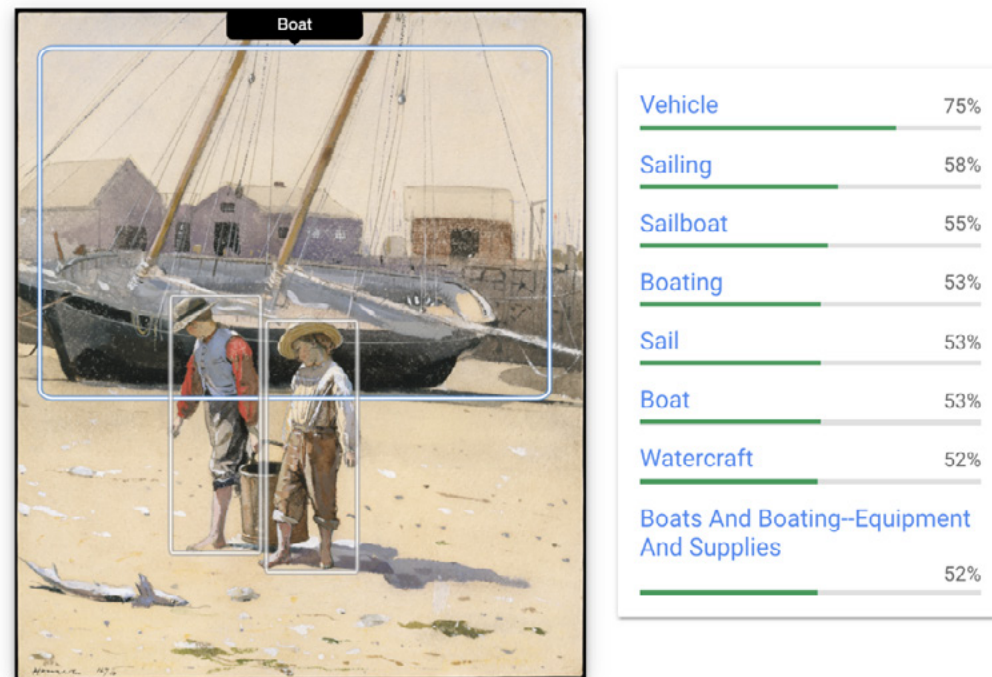
The Metropolitan Museum of Art opened for the first time to the public at its current site on Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street (New York) in 1880. It expanded to The Met Cloister in 1938 and The Met Breuer in 2016. The museum hosts approximately 7 million visitors annually. The museum currently contains more than 450,000 digitized records—and is growing in number with each passing week. Major collections belonging to the museum include American paintings and sculpture, European paintings, Egyptian art, arms and armor, the art of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, ancient Near Eastern art, Asian art, costume, drawings and prints, European sculpture and decorative arts, Greek and Roman art, Islamic art, medieval art, modern and contemporary art, musical instruments, photographs, and the Robert Lehman Collection.

Providing access to the Collection

With such a large and diverse collection, an ongoing challenge faced by staff at The Met is developing new ways to document, and interpret the museum's collection in a way that will allow it to become searchable and browsable

online. Many objects that have been digitised have very little information to support them, which means that whilst a digital image may exist, a lack of metadata or keywords prevent a user from being able to discover these items through search. The museum is working on the generation of tags manually and testing with computer vision. The goals of tagging the museum collection are to increase user engagement, improve search and discovery of the collection, make the collection accessible to the widest possible audience and explore using tags as training data for AI models.

The museum has manually tagged 233,000 objects from the collection working with an outside vendor. There are 1000 unique tags that were added using a single judgment. Moreover, the museum has engaged with different communities including Wikimedia, Kaggle, MIT and others to develop potential usages of this tagging work. The museum has also tested the usage of various computer vision technologies including Google Vision and Microsoft Azure to generate tags automatically.



Above: Screenshot of what the machine saw when it looked at a painting from the collection

Potential challenges

There are significant challenges in the process of developing tags both manually or automatically with computer vision. The first challenge is imperfect training data which produces issues around subjectivity of the tags added, completeness of all the potential objects and items to be tagged, accuracy and relevance. There is not enough data within the collection itself to train the algorithm, as this normally requires thousands of records. In the case of the Met, more than half of the tags have less than 1000 occurrences, as such working with vendors and off the shelf systems has been crucial for this work to develop.

Another significant challenge is the implementation of the tags both into the collection management system and on the website user interface. Developer resources are needed to bring these keywords to the users so they can be searchable and clickable on the online collection.

What can we learn from this case study?

AI has a lot of potential for making art more accessible to the public. Computer vision has come a long way and continues to improve making the enormous task of tagging museum collections a relatively simple process. However, museum collections are inherently biased and there are no right answers for tagging art. Therefore, museums need to offer a way of signifying the user that the tags have been generated by a machine with all the implications that this process brings. While museum datasets are not complete enough to train algorithms potentially museums could work together to produce an algorithm that could be applied in the sector. There is also an opportunity for museums to partner with the data science community to create machine learning models based on smaller datasets specifically for art objects.

Useful links

<http://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2019/met-microsoft-mit-exploring-art-open-access-ai-whats-next>

<http://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2019/wikipedia-art-and-ai>

<http://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2019/artificial-intelligence-machine-learning-art-authorship>

<http://cloud.google.com/blog/products/gcp/when-art-meets-big-data-analyzing-200000-items-from-the-met-collection-in-bigquery>

Artificial intelligence featured in this case study: Machine Vision

AI CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK

An AI project requires resources and skills to gather, train and implement the data results. The goal of this worksheet is to discuss each of the following aspects of the capabilities needed to undertake this AI initiative.

Data

- What is the data that will be used for this AI initiative?
- How should the museum be prepared in terms of data infrastructure and governance?
- Is there an ethics committee in place at the museum to assess and oversee the compliance of this project?

Tools

- What are the AI methods and tools that would be employed?
- Would the museum use any external tools from technology companies?
- Are there open-source tools available for this AI project?

Resources

- What are the required resources? (Human, Financial, External Collaborations, Technological)
- What is the project legacy? What is the technical debt that needs to be considered?

Skills

- What are the skills museum staff need to work on this project?

Organization

- Which museum departments need to be involved?
- What is the ideal workflow and process to implement this AI initiative?
- Is the museum's organizational culture ready for this initiative?

Stakeholders

- What internal and external stakeholders would be invested in this project?
- How do you manage and communicate with the stakeholders?
- How do you foster early concept buy-in?

Project title	Project aim
Data 	Tools 
Resources 	Skills 
Organization 	Stakeholders 

AI ETHICS WORKFLOW

AI brings a set of ethical implications and algorithm biases in each step of the initiative life cycle. The goal of this worksheet is to map the potential ethical issues and challenges that arise in each of the phases of an AI initiative from the data collection to the training, application and evaluation of the results. Here are some questions to guide your discussions:

Data input: Collection & clean up

- Is there bias already in the original dataset? What data is not represented?
- What is the process to clean up the data?
- Has informed consent been gathered for this data?
Is there any personal information?
- What are the museum processes to store and keep this data secure?
Does the museum comply with the legal data privacy requirements?

Data training

- Do museum collections serve as valid training datasets?
- Is there enough data? What data is missing?
- Can we train a machine to see like a curator? What are the benefits and drawbacks of using machines?

Testing/Model development

- What are the potential biases that these algorithms originate?
- What are the ethical implications of using third-party AI platforms to develop our model?
- Is there transparency in the model development process or is it a 'black box'?

Application

- How will the 'black box' alter curatorial practice?
- What are the intended and unintended consequences of the application of this model?

Data output

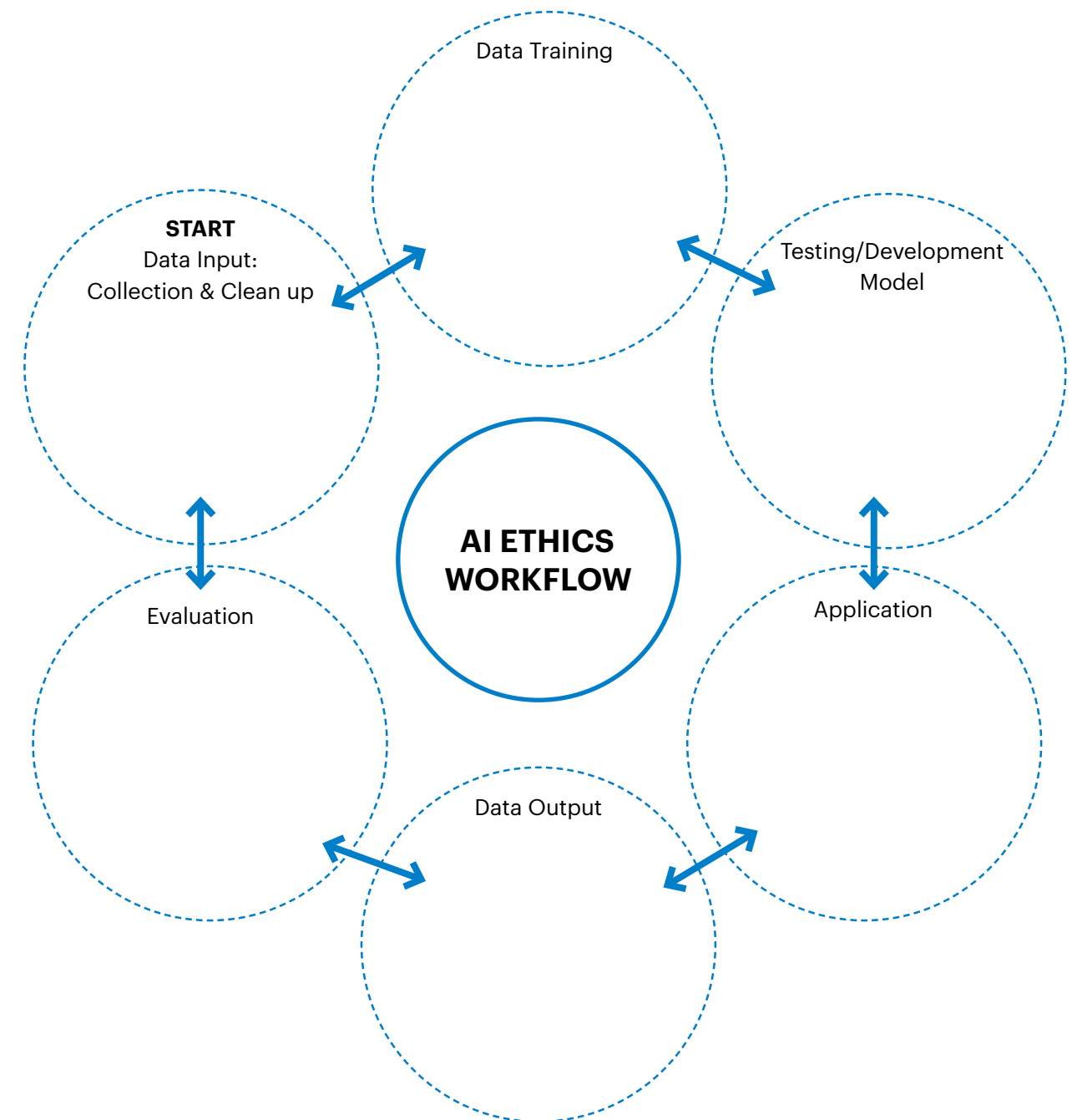
- Is there a potential bias in the data output?
- Can the process be documented and explained to users?
- What are the legacy and future applications of this data?

Evaluation

- How does the museum evaluate the success of this AI initiative?
- What is the impact on the visitor experience?
- How does this work enhance and expand the collection data?
- How do the results of this project comply with the code of ethics of the different museum associations?

Project title

Project goals



STAKEHOLDERS MANAGEMENT

AI projects involve many different partners, and it can be useful to map these partners or stakeholders at the project development stage. The goal of this worksheet is to think about everyone involved, interested and influential for your project. We suggest listing each person on an individual post-it note.

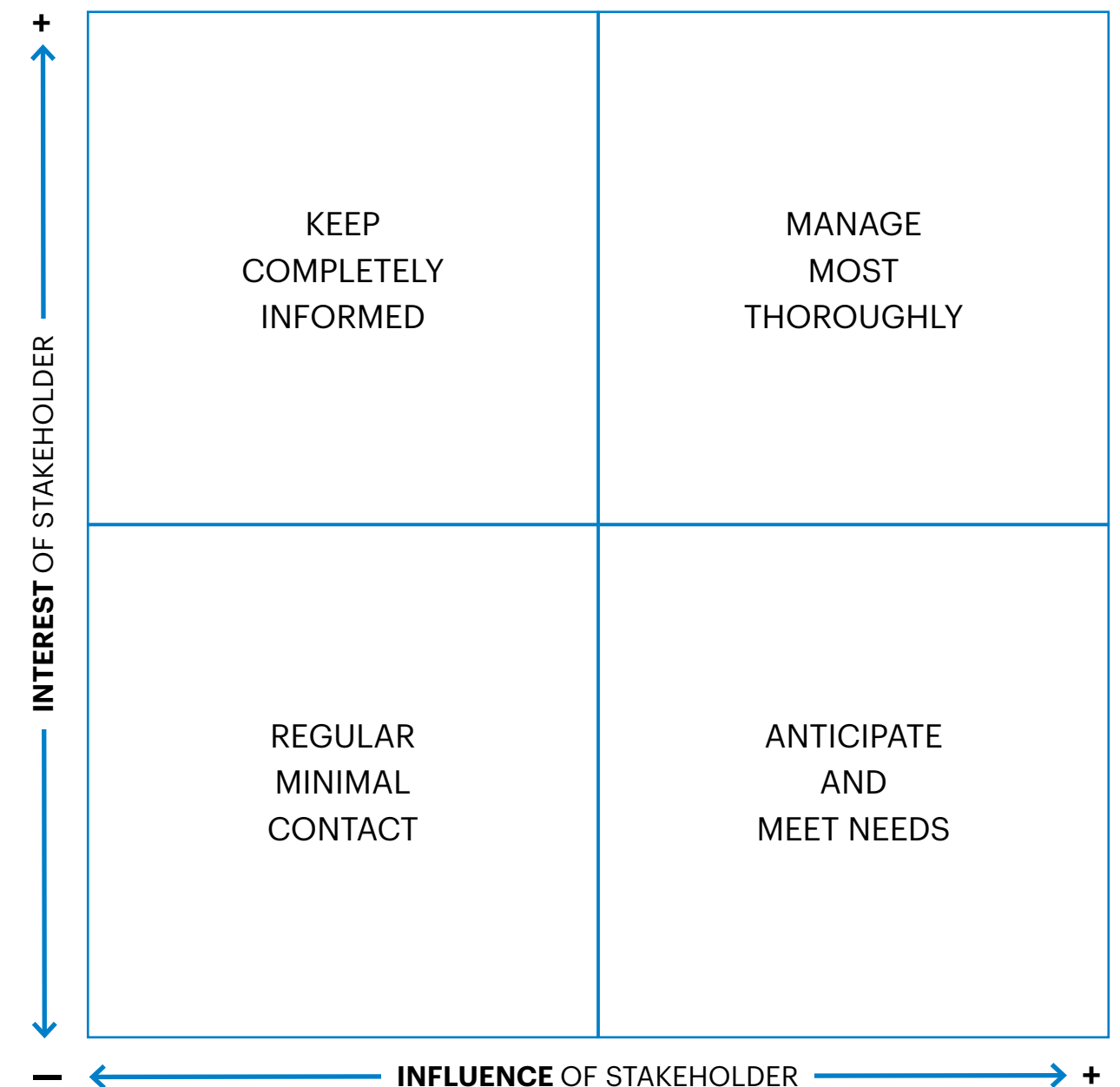
Criteria:

- Who will benefit from this AI initiative?
- Which internal stakeholders will need to support and contribute to the initiative in order to implement it? Are there any specific areas of resistance within the museum?
- Who owns and manages the data that will be used?
- Who in the museum leadership would need to know about this AI initiative?
- Are there any external stakeholders that will participate in this project or where conflict of interest may appear?
- Who would you need to involve to ensure data privacy and ethical practices for this AI initiative?

When you have listed all stakeholders, as a group discuss where they sit within the stakeholder mapping grid, and from there think about when and how you will communicate with each stakeholder.

STAKEHOLDERS MAP: WHO NEEDS WHAT?

Project Title:



Adapted from Mendelow (1991)

GLOSSARY

Algorithm

An algorithm is a series of step by step instructions on how to perform a specific task. In computer science, different types of algorithms are used to recognise objects, translate between languages, recommend products and generate text. In many cases, multiple algorithms are combined to execute some of the more complex tasks. Algorithms are now being used in justice settings to determine prison sentences, and in financial contexts to create mortgage and insurance policies tailored to individuals based on their data footprint.

Algorithmic bias

Algorithmic bias refers to systematic errors in a computer system that create unfair outcomes, for example privileging one group of users over another. Bias can arise due to a number of factors, such as algorithm design, unintended applications or the way data is collected, coded, selected or used to train the algorithm. Impacts of algorithmic bias range from privacy violations to the amplification of social biases of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality, which can lead to systematic and unfair discrimination in a wide variety of situations including prison sentencing, mortgage approval rates and healthcare premium calculations. In a museum context, algorithmic bias can manifest itself through inherent biases in museum collections, datasets and computer software applied to collection research and public engagement. An example of an art project highlighting bias in datasets is Kate Crawford and Trevor Paglen's ImageNet Roulette, which classifies a user's photo according to the popular ImageNet dataset. The resulting classification frequently gives unexpected and problematic results, particularly when used by people from Asia and Africa – groups which may have been underrepresented or labelled unfavourably in the original dataset.

Black box

A black box model is a system whose internal mechanisms are unknown. In machine learning, “black box” refers to a model which cannot be understood from its parameters: data goes in and decisions come out, however the process between input and output is unclear. This is particularly the case for neural network models, where input data can go through many transformations in the multiple layers of the neural network or where complex models can behave in unpredictable ways. The black box nature of many machine learning models is problematic because of their widespread application, giving rise to cases where individuals may be offered higher insurance premiums or denied mortgages based on the decision of the algorithm, which then cannot be explained. In the past couple of years, there have been increased efforts to develop more interpretable machine learning models, where the algorithms provide some justification or explanation for their decisions.

Chatbot

A chatbot is a computer program that is designed to mimic a human interaction in a text based conversation. These can be a useful tool for engaging with visitors on social media when a museum is closed, for example a Facebook Messenger Chatbot can answer simple questions about opening times, ticket prices and parking. Chatbots struggle with complex questions, and, for them to be effective a user needs to ask short, direct, factual questions. Chatbots can provide operational information - for example the Anne Frank House museum uses a chatbot to answer common visitor questions about visiting, but they can also be creative, for example the Field Museum created a chatbot with a sassy personality for the Maximo, their newly installed T-Rex exhibit.

Deep learning

Deep Learning is a subset of machine learning algorithms based on neural networks that use numerous layers, with each layer providing an interpretation of the data it feeds on. The multiple layers are used to progressively extract higher level features from the input data. To give an example from image processing, lower layers may be responsible for detecting edges, while higher layers determine concepts more understandable to a human such as faces, letters or digits. In recent years, deep learning has gained popularity given the huge amounts of data available online from social media, digitalisation efforts and online browsing as well as the availability of increased computation power through GPUs. An example application in a museum context is the use of deep neural networks for indexing the 800 million digital assets at the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, with the aim of categorising its digital history for researchers and reaching a younger generation.

GAN (Generative Adversarial Networks)

A generative adversarial network consists of two neural networks: a generator and a discriminator. A generator creates images based on a dataset and a discriminator determines whether the generated image is real (i.e. it exists in the original dataset) or fake (i.e. generated). The interplay between the two networks enables the generator to create increasingly high-quality images that fool the discriminator. Most systems commonly used nowadays to generate images are a type of GAN. Examples of GAN-based projects includes Gen Studio, a collaboration between MIT, Microsoft and The Met. This project consists of images created using a GAN trained on artworks from The Met's Open Access collection. The generated images enable you to explore and visualise possible artworks between selected pieces from the collections. For example,

you can see what an object between a vase and a goblet could look like.

Machine Vision

Machine vision refers to technologies that extract insight from visual input such as images and videos. It looks at individual pixels and the features that are derived from them, seeking patterns in their variations. They include object and facial recognition.

These techniques can be used to find similarities between works across museum collections – examples range from Google's X Degrees of Separation, a project that links two objects through a series of other artworks, to Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum's website, where visitors can explore collections by colour, to Tate's IK Prize Winner 2016 Recognition, a project that matches contemporary photojournalism to art from the Tate's collection. Moreover, it could be used to analyse visitor responses to an exhibition by using facial recognition to analyse the gallery video feed.

Machine learning

Machine Learning refers to algorithms that learn to generalise from data, observations and interactions with the world, all without being explicitly programmed. This then allows the algorithms to make a prediction about something in the world, or to generate new, data based on what they have seen. Machine learning is frequently used as an umbrella term to describe a variety of algorithms including neural networks and deep learning. In a museum context, it is frequently applied together or as part of machine vision or natural language processing techniques. at National Norwegian Museum is an example of this. Here, machine learning technologies were applied to museum collections in order to give visitors easier access through better metadata and explorative interfaces. Generative machine learning technologies can be

used for interactive installations such as the Dali Lives project from the Dali Museum in Florida, where visitors are greeted by a deepfake (i.e. AI-generated lookalike) of Salvador Dali and can interact and engage with him on various screens throughout their visit.

Natural language processing

Natural language processing (NLP) deals with the interaction between computers and human (natural languages). The main objectives are to read, decipher, understand and generate human languages. Nowadays, most NLP techniques rely on machine learning. Applications of NLP include categorising content, analysing sentiments, translation, converting voice into written text and vice versa. In museum fields, NLP can be used to analyse posts from social media or ratings from tourist websites. An example is the inclusion of two virtual educators, Ada and Grace, at the Museum of Science in Boston, who answered visitor questions, suggested exhibits and explained the technology that made them work – including natural language processing.

Neural networks

Neural networks refer to a type of machine learning algorithm loosely inspired by how neural networks work in the human brain, particularly in terms of processing data and recognising patterns. Neural networks are made up of individual units connected via weights, which are then adjusted as the network is trained. The terms neural networks and deep learning are frequently used interchangeably nowadays, although there are some differences, the main one being the increased number of layers between input and output (hence the “deep”). Neural networks underpin a variety of applications in a museum context, such as being used to generate romantic landscapes in the National Norwegian Museum.

Predictive analytics

Predictive analytics is a branch of data analytics used to make predictions about unknown future events based on historical data. Predictive analytics uses a variety of techniques from data mining, modelling, statistics and machine learning to generate future insights based on data analysis. From a dataset of museum visitors, predictive analytics systems can estimate visitor numbers for an exhibition on a particular future date or assess the likelihood of membership renewal for certain customer groups. For example, National Museum of African American History and Culture used predictive analytics to research attrition, using data collected from e-tickets to predict demand and piloting Walk-Up Wednesdays to test no-pass entry.

Robots

Robots are machines that conduct mechanical, routine tasks automatically. Different types of robots are applied in industry, for grasping and moving objects in preparation for delivery for example. In a museum context, we normally deal with humanoid robots, which resemble human beings and are able to replicate certain functions and movements. Paris’ Musée du quai Branly incorporated Berenson, a robotic art critic made to record people’s reactions to artworks and then develop its own taste. The Smithsonian included the humanoid robot Pepper in the National Museum of African American History and Culture, where it is designed to deal with visitor queries and to tell stories using gesture, voice and an interactive touch screen. Meanwhile, the Van Abbemuseum offers a robot for anyone who cannot visit because of physical disability. These visitors can experience the museum from their own home by controlling the robot and guiding it through the museum themselves.

Supervised learning

Supervised learning is a type of machine learning that learns patterns

entirely from a training dataset, where the data is labelled correctly with the right answer. Based on these patterns, it can predict answers in new data sets by reviewing them. For supervised learning, large labelled datasets are crucial to enable them to effectively generate output data. Incorrect or noisy data labels will reduce the effectiveness of the model. In a museum context, applications of supervised learning include predicting exhibition attendance or automating outreach for donors who may not be planning to renew.

Training Dataset

Datasets are one of the key pillars of machine learning. In supervised learning, a training dataset is a set of examples used to shape the model to ensure that it fits the data and is able to predict future outcomes correctly. The training dataset consists of pairs of input-output examples (e.g. a drawing of cat as input and a photograph of a cat as output), which teach the model how to map the inputs to correct outcomes. Given its importance in fitting a machine learning model, it is crucial to have training datasets which are as representative as possible for the future application of the model, as any incomplete or wrongly labelled data will be amplified further down the line as the trained model is applied on unseen data. To give an example in a museum context, if we are looking to make accurate predictions of cafeteria usage, we would need to make sure that the system is trained on multi-seasonal data. If cafeteria usage is highly seasonal and we only trained the system on the last two months, then it will only know about the current season and will provide less accurate predictions as the seasons change.

Unsupervised learning

Unsupervised learning is a type of machine/deep learning that finds structure where none is defined. It examines data and identifies patterns within it without guidance. It can be applied to find clusters of similar

data, find anomalous data points that look different from everything else. For example in a museum context, unsupervised learning could be used to analyse a dataset of museum visitors and identify clusters of weekends with high visitation (e.g. because of school holidays or certain exhibitions).

Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis is the contextual mining of text which identifies, extracts, quantifies and studies subjective information and affective states in source material. It can be used to determine the overall attitude of a group – positive or negative – towards a product, organisation or topic. For example, this can help museums understand the social sentiment around an exhibition or artwork from online conversations on social media. The British Museum applied sentiment analysis to two years of TripAdvisor reviews to gain insights from visitor reviews on how visitors experienced the various aspects of a museum eg. exhibition, tours, facilities.

Object recognition

Object recognition is a general term to describe a set of computer vision techniques for identifying objects in images or videos. These techniques are used for deciding how to classify objects in an image, for identifying the locations of objects within an image or for both tasks. Object recognition includes a variety of possible applications in the museum field, from uses in research and collection management to identification of artworks and visitor engagement through interactive apps. An example of this is the Headhunt! App from the National Portrait Gallery in Australia, where kids can take pictures of the portrait artworks with an iPad and then access interactive learning experiences. Another example is Google Arts & Culture app Art Selfie, which asked users to take a selfie and then, using facial recognition, found the closest matching portrait artwork.

PROJECT LINKS

Gen Studio

<https://gen.studio/>

Google's X Degrees of Separation:

<https://artsexperiments.withgoogle.com/xdegrees/>

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum:

<https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/>

Tate's IK Prize Winner 2016 Recognition:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/ik-prize-2016-recognition>

Anne Frank House

<https://www.annefrank.org/en/about-us/news-and-press/news/2017/3/21/anne-frank-house-launches-bot-messenger/>

Field Museum

<https://www.fieldmuseum.org/exhibitions/maximo-titanosaur>

National Museum of African American History and Culture

<https://www.slideshare.net/MuseWeb/mw18-presentation-big-data-analytics-in-museum-operations> (p11-17)

Musée du quai Branly

<https://www.widewalls.ch/berenson-the-robot-vidal-gaussier/>

The Smithsonian

<https://www.si.edu/visit/pepper>

Van AbbeMuseum

<https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/mediation/inclusion/museum-visit-with-robot/>

National Portrait Gallery, Australia

<https://catchoom.com/case-studies/headhunt-app-turns-a-museum-visit-into-an-interactive-experience-with-image-recognition/?cn-reloaded=1>

The British Museum

<https://medium.com/mcnx-london/invisible-insights-learning-from-trip-advisor-reviews-b5c825fa4409>

ImageNet Roulette

<https://www.excavating.ai/>

Google Arts & Culture, Art Selfie:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/camera/selfie>

Dali museum

<https://thedali.org/exhibit/dali-lives/>

Principal Components

<https://bengler.no/principalcomponents>

World Holocaust Remembrance Center:

<https://blogs.nvidia.com/blog/2019/05/06/yad-vashem-holocaust-museum-ai-dgx-1/>

Museum of Science:

<http://ict.usc.edu/prototypes/museum-guides/>

All project weblinks active when accessed January 2020

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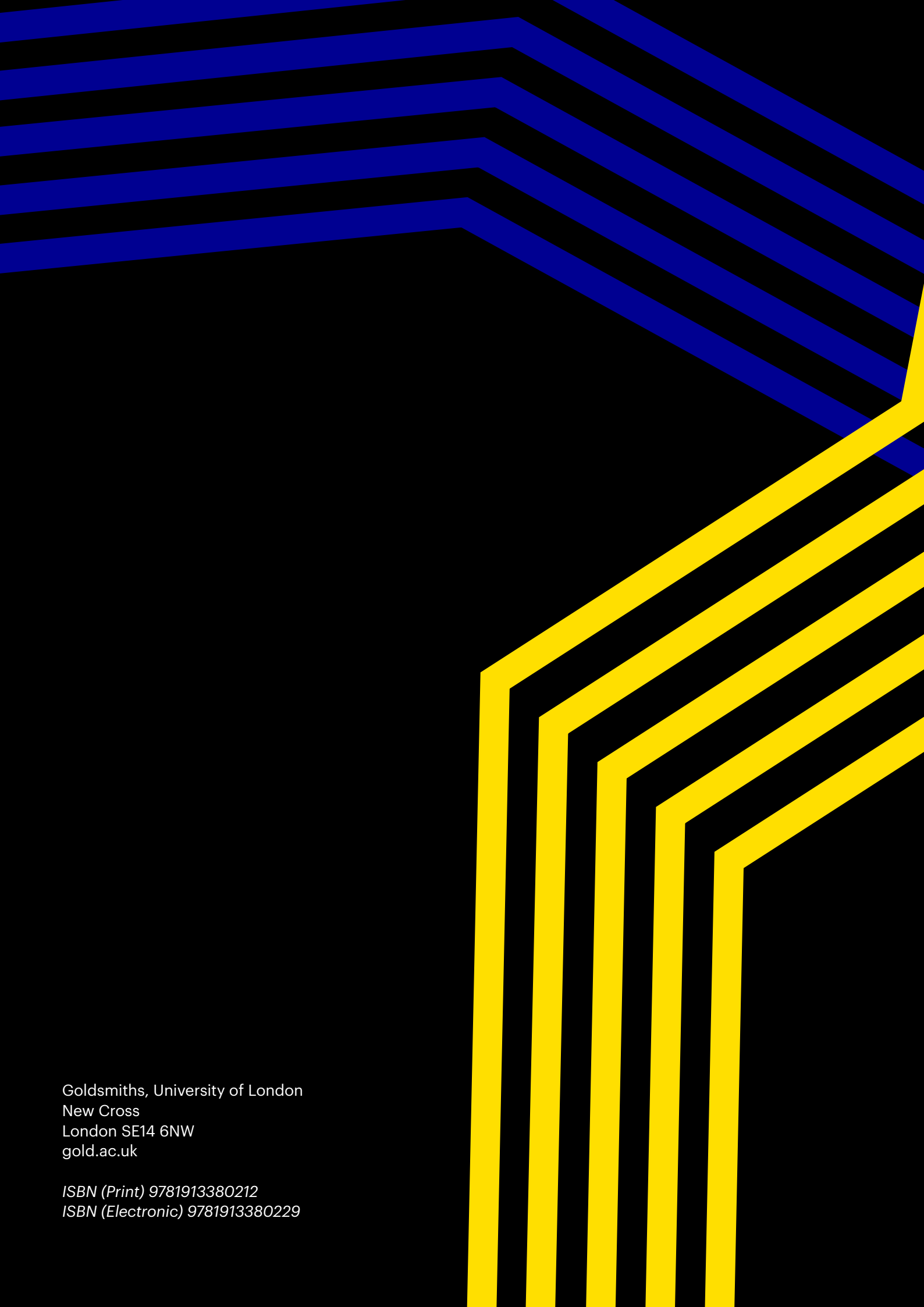
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NOTES



The background of the page is black. In the upper right, there are several parallel blue lines that form a series of nested, right-angled, zig-zagging shapes, creating a sense of depth and movement. In the lower right, there are several parallel yellow lines that form a similar series of nested, right-angled, zig-zagging shapes, also creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines are of uniform thickness and are spaced evenly apart.

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City of Birmingham Interim Guidelines For Using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Purpose

Generative AI is a new technology that uses Large Language Models (LLM) along with some basic machine learning to produce content, based on questions from users. This content can be written or visual. These tools are very sophisticated models that predict what content satisfies the user's questions. **The impact, usefulness, as well as potential risks and dangers, are still the subjects of research by the AI committee. We believe, however, that employees of the City of Birmingham should follow some basic interim guidelines.**

Note: Generative AI is a tool. We are responsible for the outcomes of our tools. For example, if autocorrect unintentionally changes a word, or changes the meaning of something we write, the author is still responsible for the text. Technology enables our work; it does not excuse or substitute for our judgment or our accountability.

These interim guidelines will be replaced with permanent policies, standards, and training. However, we do want to encourage responsible experimentation. We encourage you to try these tools for yourselves to understand their potential. In doing so, we ask that you **use generative AI only as a jumping-off point** to give you general ideas or templates for your work, but not the finished work product.

Guidelines for Using Generative AI

1. Please **fact-check and review** all content generated by AI, especially if it is for public communication or decision-making.
 - Why: While generative AI can rapidly produce clear text or images, the information and content might be inaccurate, outdated, or simply made up. **It is your responsibility to verify that the information is accurate** by independently researching claims made by the AI.
 - What to look for:
 - Inaccurate information including references to events or facts.
 - Bias in the positions or information.
 - Copyrighted material that has been included.
 - Prohibited:
 - The verbatim copy and paste of content produced by generative AI without credit.

- The submittal of unedited work; work must have human interaction before submittal.
 - The use of macros, links, scripts, QR codes, or other potentially dangerous material without the express consent of the IT Department.
2. **Consider limiting the way you use Generative AI.** Some people find it less complicated to only use it for certain functions, for example, specialized searches, data collection, etc., but not to summarize or analyze content. Be aware that you can still get skewed information and need to check it for completeness and accuracy.
- Examples of acceptable use include:
- Idea starters
 - Document outline
 - Changing voice or target of existing work
 - Comparing researched content,
 - Organizing your thoughts or ideas on a subject
 - Generating graphic representation of (fact-checked) data
 - Organizing researched data
3. **We want to make sure that vulnerable populations are not harmed by these technologies.** Think about how racial and ethnic minorities, different genders, people with disabilities or language barriers, or others could be negatively portrayed or impacted by the content.
4. **Disclose that you have used AI to generate the content,** and to what extent. You should also include the version and type of model you used (e.g., Open AI's GPT 3.5 vs Google's Bard). You should include a reference as a footer to the fact that you used generative AI:
- Sample credit line: "Outline was generated by ChatGPT 3.5 and content edited by Eric Brunk"
 - Sample credit line: "This text was summarized using Google Bard"
 - Sample credit line: "Written by Eric Brunk with assistance from Generative AI."
5. We ask that you **do not share sensitive or private information** in the prompts or questions.
- Why: data including prompts used in generative AI might be accessible by others using the LLMs that power these systems. Any information that includes personally identifying information about our residents, other public servants, etc. could inadvertently be shared with others. If you wouldn't share the data with other people or put the data in a public place, avoid sharing the information in the prompt/question

To further support and improve these guidelines, the Information Technology (IT) department is looking into training and workshops that can support users and departments interested in learning more about the technology and how to use it to augment your daily tasks. If you have questions please contact the IT department for more information.

Acknowledgments

The development of these guidelines has benefited from the contributions of generative AI, the Birmingham AI committee, and from reviewing guidelines of the City of Boston.

DATE: October 3, 2024
TO: Museum Board
FROM: Leslie Pielack, Museum Director
SUBJECT: Director Report

Completed Maintenance and Repairs—Allen House—some expected and unexpected repairs::

- The lobby furnace and A/C has been replaced, as well as a smaller unit for the museum's server room upstairs. Our mahogany doors have also been re-varnished for the season.
- The plaster damage in the Allen House living room will be investigated to determine the source of the problem; the roofing and flashing at the chimney have been checked and appear not to have any issues, so the next step is to investigate with an exposure from the inside. The foyer area is planned for repair this year, now that the porch roof has been repaired, but we will wait to see the outcome of the living room issue before proceeding.
- We are pursuing bids to replace the existing picket fencing with a similar picket style. The existing fence was built with short-lived materials that are not holding up, and the plan is to replace with quality materials for a more sustainable historic-style picket.

Update: landscape plan for Phases 1 and 2- We are awaiting a final review/revision between our AEW engineer consultant and our historic landscape architect before seeking bids on installation of two separate chunks of the project. We hope to install a portion of the landscape plan for the street area along Willits (limited funds in this year's budget) and also seek bids for the construction plan for Phase 3 and 4 of the Pond Zone (the boardwalk area along the pond edge, funded with half federal funds, half City funds for this fiscal year).

Birmingham's Sustainability Plan—Has been approved by the City Commission; portions of the plan that coordinate with the museum and/or our site will be considered with our strategic plan process.

Transportation and Transformation Exhibit—Now in place. Visitors have been enjoying the displays on what are sometimes unexpected aspects of how transportation has intersected with people. A notable example is that a group of executives from out of town visited, and engaged with and actively discussed various parts of the exhibit until they had to be hurried on to their evening schedule. We will continue to add additional content over the next year.

Presentations at the Baldwin Library--We're back for in-person presentations at the Baldwin Library for our lecture series, beginning in September. The hybrid programs will be a combination of in-person and virtual presentations, video-recorded by the library, and will be made available on our YouTube channel. Depending on registration, the in-person components will be held in the library's upstairs board room (with limited seats) or the Jean Lloyd Room upstairs.

- October 9 features Justin Koch's final presentation on Birmingham's light rail history. The Detroit United Railway (DUR) ran right down (old) Woodward in Birmingham, and was a part of daily life in Birmingham for more than a generation. This program will give the background and tell some of the stories of how it affected the community.

New Museum Staff—A new Museum Assistant will be joining the team soon (stay tuned!).



Director Report

DATE: November 7, 2024
TO: Museum Board
FROM: Leslie Pielack, Museum Director
SUBJECT: Director Report

(Updates/Addition to October Report)

Museum Assistant—Chelsea Hunter has joined our staff and will be helping us with our ongoing operations as well as new projects. She has a museum visitor services background but also has done work in film and graphics. In addition, she has a B.A. in history and is excited to get involved in our various hands on activities and educational programs. Welcome, Chelsea!

Planned Maintenance—An investigation of the plaster damage in the living room is needed to determine what the source of the problem is. Alex, our historic preservation construction contractor, will work with the City's maintenance staff and building department to do an exposure to determine the status of the issue and help figure out what work is going to be needed before we seek quotes. The foyer ceiling has been stable since repairing the roof last year and we will be getting bids on that work, which is planned in our current budget.

HVAC—During October, the museum's new lobby furnace was installed as well as the HVAC unit for upstairs. These efficient units will help us achieve greater sustainability going forward.

CDBG-funded Pond Phase 3—Update from meeting this week with Engineering, Parks, and the Finance Department for our Pond area project and the process for preparing to issue a RFP.

Aging in Place Committee—Update.

Birmingham Sustainability Plan—Update.

Programs—Donna will be giving a terrific program on our fascinating aviation history here in Birmingham. Don't miss it! Hybrid or in person (register early) on November 14, 7 PM at the Baldwin Library.

Friends of the Museum—A reminder that a requirement of Museum Board membership is to maintain your membership with the Friends. The Friends will be sending out an annual appeal letter in November. You can renew that way, in person at the museum, or electronically at <https://bhamgov.wufoo.com/forms/py6jx4c0rxez2l/>. If renewing electronically, please remember to hit 'submit' at the bottom.