



ALLIANCE BLOG

Demographics of US Museum-Goers: A 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Story Update

Posted on Sep 20, 2024



Jessica Strube

This visual Data Story is based on findings from the 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, a national survey of American museum visitors from AAM and Wilkening Consulting. Every year, the survey partners with individual museums to research their audiences and yield insights about their behaviors and preferences, both on an institutional and national level. Interested in joining the 2025 edition on the themes of repeat visitation, social connection, and community trust and responsibility? [Sign up](#) by February 28, 2025, for a special early bird rate.

[Jump to the text version](#)

Upcoming Events



MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2024

Caring for Digital Collections: Taking Steps Now to Ensure Future Access

Presented by:
Ohio Museums Association



Tuesday Talks

This interactive series provides valuable insights and nurtures a vibrant learning community, offering ample opportunities for networking, collaboration, and open discussion.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION:
CULTIVATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSIVE MUSEUM PROGRAMMING

WHEN
Join us every 4th Tuesday
9/24/24
11:00 am - 12:30 pm
virtual



TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

Tuesday Talk: Cultivating Community Engagement and Inclusive Museum Programming

Presented by:
Virginia Association of Museums

MUSEUM VISITATION: DEMOGRAPHICS OF U.S. MUSEUM-GOERS A 2024 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY UPDATE

When we look at visitation gaps among the broader population, there are two big things to consider: incidence and frequency.

When we field the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, the respondents are overwhelmingly frequent museum-goers.



Our simplified definition of these individuals is that they are engaged enough with one (or more) museums to be on a communications list (email, social media, etc.) and then complete a survey on a museum's behalf. We do assess their frequency, and virtually all respondents are what we would define as frequent museum-goers.

When we plot out certain demographic characteristics, we find that who visits museums frequently (and the gaps we discover) can be very different than who visits museums at all (the incidence). That is, the demographic profile of frequent museum-goers is a bit different than the profile of all museum-goers, especially casual and sporadic visitors.



Incidence is a binary yes/no question: has someone been to a museum (of any type) in the past year? We measure incidence by doing broader population sampling among US adults.

Frequency is different, and looks at how often someone has been to museums in a defined time period.



Understanding these gaps (and where gaps don't exist) is important, because it gives us a much more nuanced understanding of who museums are reaching, and how deeply.



There are three demographic factors that we want to examine more completely.



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



Among frequent museum-goers, 83% of respondents have a college degree; that's 2.3x the rate of college



Planning for Collections Storage – Part Two

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 25, 11AM EST (10AM CST)



ERICA HAGUE
Arizona History Center,
Collections Manager



STEPHEN MOTTE
Florence Museum,
Curator of Collections
and Interpretation



GENE REILEY
Patterson-Pope
Museum Specialist



KRISTIN ORMAND
Patterson-Pope
Museum Specialist



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

Planning for Collections Storage- Part Two

Presented by:
The Southeastern Museums Conference

Preservation Plans: An Overview

Friday, September 27
12 - 1:30 PM EST



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2024

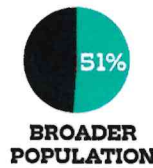
Preservation Plans: An Overview

Presented by:
Museum Association of New York

[VIEW ALL EVENTS](#)

FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS

But when we look at incidence among the broader population, we see a much smaller gap. Among all casual and sporadic museum goers, 51% have a college degree, and 49% do not.



BROADER POPULATION

That does suggest that people with college degrees are more likely to visit museums than those without college degrees. The chart below shows this to be true.

College degree **51%**

Some college/technical school/ associate degree **31%**

High school diploma/GED or less **18%**

Percent of each population segment who visited a museum



RACE AND ETHNICITY



FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS

Among frequent museum-goers, 84% say that they (or a member of their household) identify as white. In contrast, 59% of people living in the United States identify as white (not Hispanic or Latine).



Again, it would be easy to make a big assumption here. But the accurate conclusion from this is that yes, frequent museum-goers are significantly more likely to identify as white than the broader population.



Incidence tells a very different story.

Since 2023, African American and Hispanic or Latine incidence has held steady, while incidence has increased slightly among white

people and Asian or Asian Americans. In fact, for the third year in a row, Asian or Asian Americans have been the most likely racial or ethnic group to have visited a museum.



Percent of each population segment who visited a museum

Responses by other racial and ethnic groups were too small to be stable

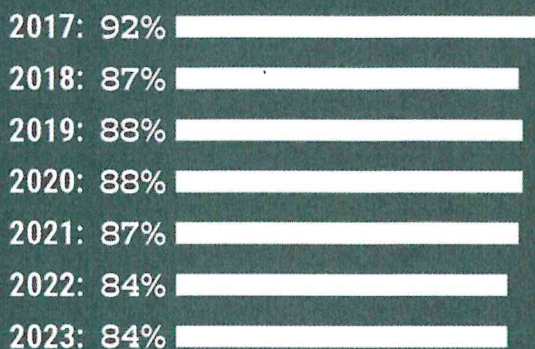


Additionally, and this has been true for the past several years, white people are the most likely to say they “never” visit museums, while people of color are more likely to say they visit museums at least occasionally.

Surprised? We were too when we first saw a closing, and then erasure of the incidence gap a few years ago, and we wondered if it was a fluke. But three years of consistent data? **This is a pattern.**

The frequency gap we see by race and ethnicity is incredibly persistent, but we have some good news here as well. Since 2017, it has been decreasing, albeit slowly.

FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS FROM THE ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS



A victory lap? Not so fast!

Incidence gaps do still persist by museum type and for specific museums.

By museum types, historic sites in particular have persistently high incidence and frequency gaps, with audiences still, overall, skewing disproportionately white.



Additionally, this still varies widely for individual museums. Your museum may still be facing an incidence gap,

2024: 84%

From 2017 to 2022, the white (not Hispanic or Latine) population of the U.S. decreased from 62% to 58%.

and only research specific to your museum can help you understand where your gaps are (or are not).



AGE AND LIFE STAGE

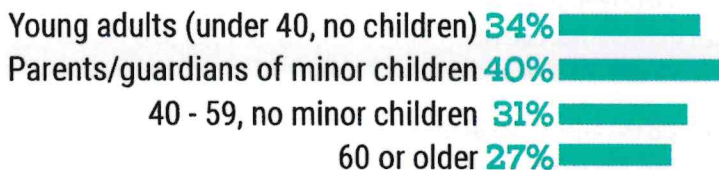
Some museum types deliberately focus on families with minor children (children’s museums and, to a lesser extent, zoos, aquaria, and science centers), and these museums don’t tend to see frequency gaps (or incidence gaps) by age that are of significant concern ... though they often see frequency gaps with young adults without children.



But it is a different story for art museums, history organizations, and botanical gardens. It is incredibly common for the majority of their frequent museum-goers to be over the age of 60.

This, understandably, can cause a great deal of concern for people working in these types of museums. And that’s why looking at incidence is so important. ✓✗

It turns out, adults over 60 are the **least** likely segment of the population to visit museums (a pattern we have seen pretty consistently over the past several years). We actually *underserve* them.



Percent of each population segment who visited a museum



Additionally, those casual and sporadic young adult visitors visit



most museum types, lagging behind the overall average only for children’s museums and zoos/aquaria (largely because, well, they don’t have children; this shifts when some of them start families, of course!).

But overall, at this time, we don’t have significant concerns about the long-term pipeline of future visitors to museums of any type.



Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
• 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 90,178; 202 museums participating
• 2024 Broader Population Sampling, n = 2,154
• 2017 - 2023 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers
U.S. demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau
*Data Stories share research about both frequent museum-goers (typically visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual, sporadic, and non-visitors to museums). See the Purpose and Methodology (Update) Data Story from September 5, 2024 for more information on methodology.
More Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.



Jessica Strube,
lead author



American Alliance of Museums

Wilkening Consulting

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September 12, 2024
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When we look at visitation gaps among the broader population, there are two big things to consider: incidence and frequency.

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Frequency is different, and looks at how often someone has been to museums in a defined time period.

When we field the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, the respondents are overwhelmingly *frequent* museum-goers.

Our simplified definition of these individuals is that they are engaged enough with one (or more) museums to be on a communications list (email, social media, etc.)

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Understanding these gaps (and where gaps don't exist) is important, because it gives us a much more nuanced understanding of who museums are reaching, and how deeply.

There are three demographic factors that we want to examine more completely.

Educational Attainment

Among frequent museum-goers, 83% of respondents have a college degree; that's 2.3x the rate of college degrees among US adults (36%).

But when we look at incidence among the broader population, we see a much smaller gap. Among all casual and sporadic museum goers, 51% have a college degree, and 49% do not.

That does suggest that people with college degrees are more likely to visit museums than those without college degrees. The chart below shows this to be true.

Percent of each population segment who visited a museum:

College degree **51%**

Some college/technical school/ associate degree **31%**

High school diploma/GED or less **18%**

Race and Ethnicity

Among frequent museum-goers, 84% say that they (or a member of their household) identify as white. In contrast, 59% of people living in the United States identify as white (not Hispanic or Latine).

Again, it would be easy to make a big assumption here. But the accurate conclusion from this is that yes, *frequent* museum-goers are significantly more likely to identify as white than the broader population.

Incidence tells a very different story.

Since 2023, African American and Hispanic or Latine incidence has held steady, while incidence has increased slightly among white people and Asian or Asian Americans. In fact, for the third year in a row, Asian or Asian Americans have been the most likely racial or ethnic group to have visited a museum.

Percent of each population segment who visited a museum:

White (not Hispanic or Latine) **35%**

African American or Black **28%**

Hispanic or Latine **31%**

Asian or Asian American **46%**

(Responses by other racial and ethnic groups were too small to be stable.)

Additionally, and this has been true for the past several years, white people are the most likely to say they “never” visit museums, while people of color are more likely to say they visit museums at least occasionally.

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Additionally, this still varies widely for individual museums. Your museum may still be facing an incidence gap, and only research specific to your museum can help you understand where your gaps are (or are not).

The frequency gap we see by race and ethnicity is incredibly persistent, but we have some good news here as well. Since 2017, it has been decreasing, albeit slowly.

Frequent Museum-Goers from the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers:

2017: **92%**

2018: **87%**

2019: **88%**

2020: **88%**

2021: **87%**

2022: **84%**

2023: **84%**

2024: **84%**

(From 2017 to 2022, the white [not Hispanic or Latine] population of the US decreased from 62% to 58%)

Age and Life Stage

Some museum types deliberately focus on families with minor children (children’s museums and, to a lesser extent, zoos, aquaria, and science centers), and these museums don’t tend to see frequency gaps (or incidence gaps) by age that are of significant concern...though they often see frequency gaps with young adults without children.

But it is a different story for art museums, history organizations, and botanical gardens. It is incredibly common for the majority of their *frequent* museum-goers to be over the age of 60.

This, understandably, can cause a great deal of concern for people working in these types of museums. And that’s why looking at *incidence* is so important.

It turns out, adults over 60 are the **least** likely segment of the population to visit museums (a pattern we have seen pretty consistently over the past several years). We actually *underserve* them.

Percent of each population segment who visited a museum:

Young adults (under 40, no children) **34%**

Parents/guardians of minor children **40%**

40 – 59, no minor children **31%**

60 or older **27%**

Additionally, those casual and sporadic young adult visitors visit most museum types, lagging behind the overall average only for children’s museums and zoos/aquaria (largely because, well, they don’t have children; this shifts when some of them start families, of course!).

But overall, at this time, we don’t have significant concerns about the long-term pipeline of future visitors to museums of *any* type.

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