

Museums & Public Opinion

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM NATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION POLLING
AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS



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About this Report

Museums throughout the United States work each day to provide important educational experiences to diverse audiences that make a difference in peoples' lives. Museums enrich communities in tangible and intangible ways, delivering important economic benefits and preserving unique culture and history for all Americans. While there is ample evidence to support these claims, museums must also consider the opinions, impressions, and desires of the public as they judge their impact and seek to better understand how their efforts are appreciated and meaningful to the communities they serve. Policymakers should also take note of the profound depth and breadth of public support for museums.

In 2017, the American Alliance of Museums and Wilkening Consulting began a process to explore the questions outlined in this report. The study focused on a few of the central tenets of museum value that many have reported on over the years. The purpose of the study was to determine whether the American public believes that museums are educational, important economic contributors to their communities, and whether museums are seen as a worthy investment of federal taxpayer dollars.

The results are most remarkable, perhaps, in their consistency. Rarely do we see results that are as uniformly positive in favor of any topic—in this case museums.

It is compelling to consider that in a time when so much polarization exists between cultural and political communities, this study finds that Americans overwhelmingly think museums are important and worth supporting.

We hope that these statistics are helpful as you advocate for your museum at the national level and in your hometown. It has never been more important to have solid and grounded facts at our disposal to dispel myths and convince those who doubt the value of museums. The report is designed to be used as a whole or as individual pages to leave behind with your decision-makers and representatives.

Now is the time to act in support of museums. For more information about how you can best support the museums that are most important to you, please visit the Advocacy section of the AAM website where you will find a variety of facts and toolkits to equip you as you Speak Up for Museums.

Sincerely,



Robert Stein
Executive Vice President and Chief Program Officer
American Alliance of Museums

Museums & Public Opinion

Summary of Findings

The news for museums is excellent. National public opinion polling shows that Americans overwhelmingly appreciate and recognize the work of museums as educational and economic assets to their communities. What's more, Americans broadly support federal funding of museums and approve of lawmakers who take action to support them. The data speaks clearly, whether young or old, conservative or liberal, or a museum-goer or not, Americans value the museums in their communities.

97%

Believe that museums are educational assets for their communities

89%

Believe that museums contribute important economic benefits to their community

96%

Would think positively of their elected officials taking legislative action to support museums

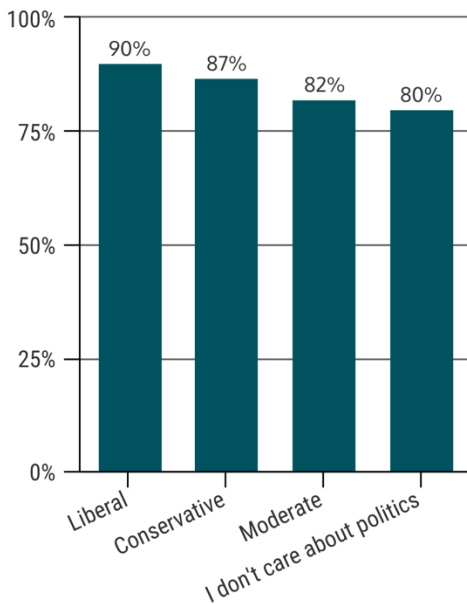
96%

Want federal funding for museums to be maintained or increased

86% of Americans *Consistently* Support the Value of Museums

In diving into the data, one important fact stands out. Americans are overwhelmingly supportive of their museums – even among people who frequently disagree in other areas. Simply put, 86% of respondents *consistently support museums* across all four core questions. That stunning response, when examined across different segments of the population, indicates that supporting museums is a core value of the American public that crosses the political aisle, bridges divides between urban and rural communities, and is even consistent among those who do not regularly visit museums.

Political Persuasion



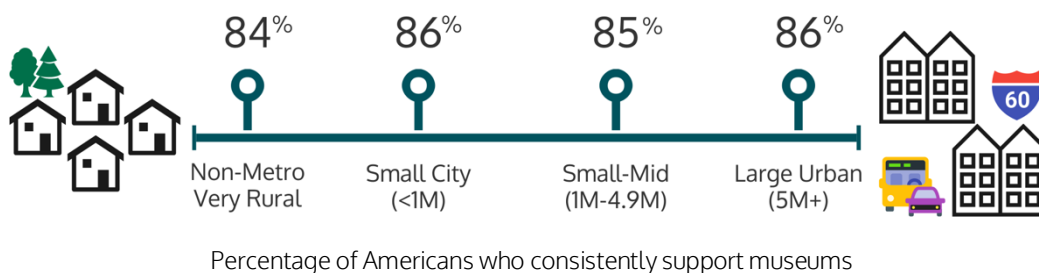
Museum Visitors



Voters in Elections



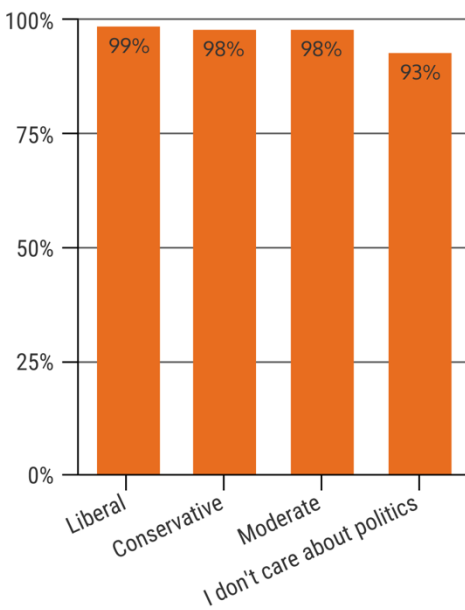
Community Size



Museums Are Seen as Educational Experiences for Everyone

Museums throughout the nation have long endeavored to provide engaging educational experiences to people of all ages and backgrounds. Each year, museums spend more than \$2 billion on education activities and the typical museum devotes three-quarters of its education budget to K-12 students.¹ Our study found nearly all Americans recognize this educational work of museums in their community. Rarely do opinion polls find such universal agreement among respondents.

Political Persuasion



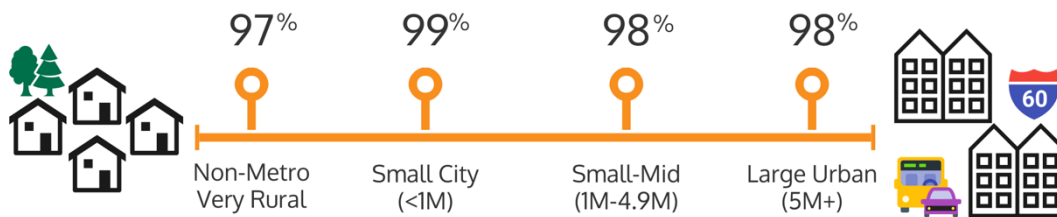
Museum Visitors



Voters in Elections



Community Size



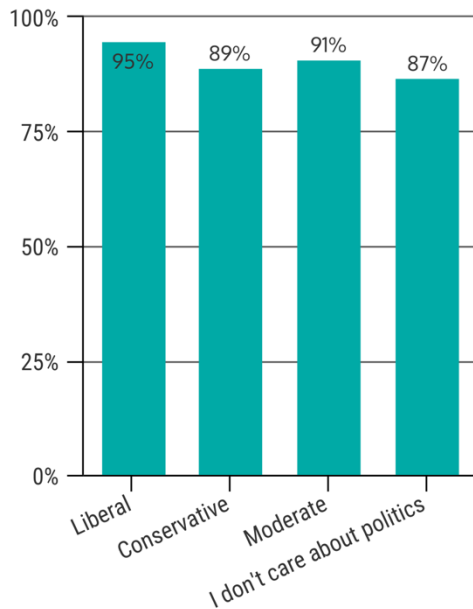
Percentage of Americans who believe that museums are educational

Museums Are Economic Engines in Their Communities

A recent study by AAM and Oxford Economics² offers a detailed breakdown of the contributions of museums to the US economy. Among the key findings of that report, museums add \$50 billion to the US economy each year while also supporting over 726,000 jobs and contributing \$12 billion in federal, state, and local taxes. Americans broadly recognize the economic value of museums in their community.

Respondents from the smallest communities were as likely to agree that their museums were economic engines to their community as those from larger cities. In addition, while museum visitors overwhelmingly recognized museums' economic contributions, 89% of those that do not regularly attend museums agreed with that fact.

Political Persuasion



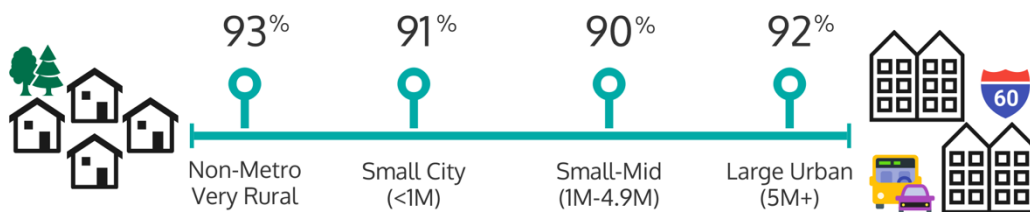
Visitors to Museums



Voters in Elections



Community Size



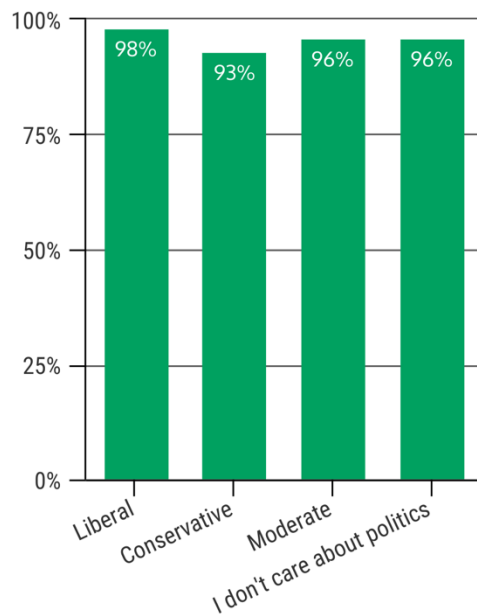
Percentage of Americans who think museums help the economy in their community

Americans Want Their Lawmakers to Act in Support of Museums

Museums are widely valued for their educational and economic contributions, but Americans don't stop there: they expect their legislators to take action to support them. The vast majority of Americans would approve of lawmakers who take legislative action to support museums. This support is clearly a bipartisan consensus with more than 90% of respondents agreeing across all political affiliations. 95% of voters report they would approve if their lawmakers took action to support museums.

Amidst today's contentious political climate, few issues garner such consistent and high approval as the support of American museums.

Political Persuasion



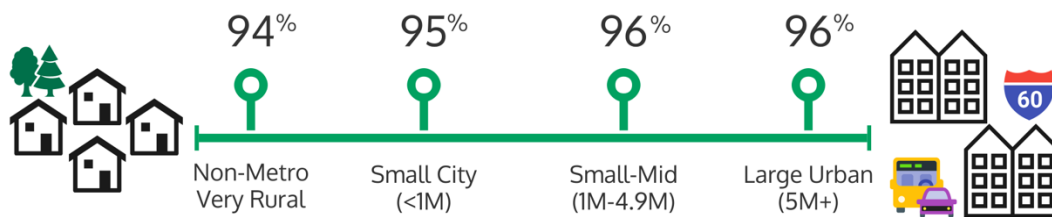
Visitors to Museums



Voters in Elections



Community Size



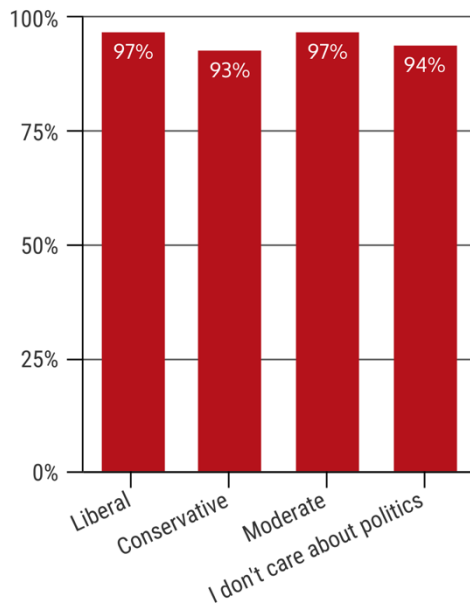
Percentage of Americans who would approve of lawmakers who take action to support museums

Americans Overwhelmingly Support Federal Funding for Museums

Do Americans want their tax dollars used to support museums? The overwhelming answer is yes. An overwhelming majority of Americans support maintaining or expanding federal funding of museums. This holds true for all segments studied in this survey and was among the most strongly held opinions.

At this time, the largest federal program for grants to museums is administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Office of Museum Services. Museums also frequently receive important funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Park Service, National Science Foundation, and other federal agencies.

Political Persuasion



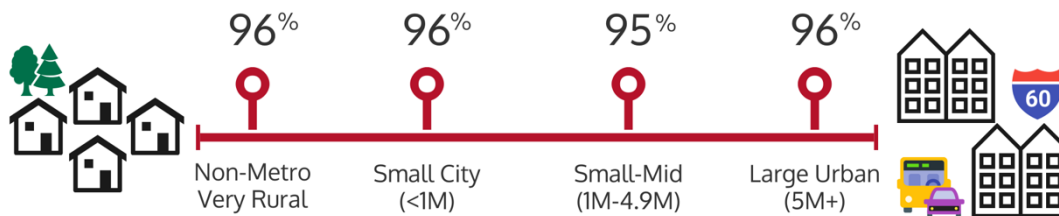
Visitors to Museums



Voters in Elections



Community Size



Percentage of Americans who support federal funding for museums

Methodology

Survey scope, design, and administration

To assess the value Americans place on museums, and how much they want government to support museums, the American Alliance of Museums partnered with Susie Wilkening of Wilkening Consulting to write and test several key questions, analyze survey results, share findings, and to co-author this report.

Data Collection and Sampling

Data from this survey was collected by Ipsos, a well-respected global market and opinion research firm. Survey data collection by Ipsos took place in May 2017, resulting in 2,021 respondents from across the country. Summary tables resulting from the survey were balanced to reflect the demographic composition of the US adult population, including by educational attainment. Given this sample size, the results reported here reflect a margin of error of $\pm 2.2\%$ percentage points at 95% confidence.

Analysis

In addition to reviewing the overall results, Wilkening Consulting provided analysis of the entire data set, including demographic balancing of results. These analyses included cross-tabulation of responses across different segments of the US population, resulting in a highly nuanced understanding of how American adults engage with, perceive, and support museums. Further findings from this data set will be shared with the museum field over the coming months and a download of the raw data will be made available for future study.

Acknowledgements

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- Ben Kershaw, Director, Policy and Legislative Affairs
American Alliance of Museums
- Robert Stein, Executive Vice President and Chief Program Officer
American Alliance of Museums
- Susie Wilkening, Principal
Wilkening Consulting, wilkeningconsulting.com

References

1. *2009 Museum Financial Information Survey*. American Alliance of Museums. 2009.
2. *Museums as Economic Engines: A National Report*. American Alliance of Museums, Oxford Economics, IMPLAN. December, 2017.

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