As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic devastated museum visitation, with virtually all museums witnessing a precipitous drop in attendance. As the pandemic has progressed, some museums have reopened, while others have remained closed.

The 2021 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers is the fifth in a series of surveys that has tracked self-reported visitation rates to museums in the U.S. since the beginning of the pandemic year (through March 2022). The survey asks respondents how many museums they visited in the previous year—before the pandemic—and how many they visited in the first pandemic year. It also will allow us to track self-reported visitation rates to museums in the second pandemic year, as well as pre- and mid-pandemic, and then observe the decline in museum attendance during the third pandemic year (through March 2023).

We're looking at this data, along with other individual museum’s pre- and mid-pandemic museum visitation patterns among frequent museum-goers: each year we are in the field in January and February, pulling survey results on March 15, creating a clean “year one” mid-pandemic sample. And once again, we closed the survey on March 15, creating an exactly the same.

For 2021, we made a very deliberate decision to keep our two visitation questions exactly the same. People who visit museums more than once a year are a limited population, so we felt the need to stick with a consistent methodology. The timing of the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers has helped make a very deliberate decision to keep our two visitation questions exactly the same. People who visit museums more than once a year are a limited population, so we felt the need to stick with a consistent methodology.

We'll keep tracking these visitation patterns to 2022 and beyond in our surveys, and as long as it takes until we return to normal, is important.

We also looked at museum visitation more broadly, asking respondents how many different museums they had visited in person during the previous year.

Looking at this data, along with other individual museum’s pre- and mid-pandemic museum visitation patterns among frequent museum-goers: each year we are in the field in January and February, pulling survey results on March 15, creating a clean “year one” mid-pandemic sample. And once again, we closed the survey on March 15, creating an exactly the same.