Museums are neutral. Not at all. 54% of Traditional audiences and 5 times more Neoteric audiences believed museums are not neutral.

Museums can take a position on issues that most people would agree with. 94%

Museums can take an evidence-backed, mission-based position. 84%


data stories share research about both museum-goers (who visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:

• 2017 – 2019 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers
• 2020 Online Panel of Museum-Goers
• 2020 Branded-Popper Population Sampling

But within these results lies a rather stark divide.

While the majority of museum-goers say museums can take a position, how we take that position is critical.

Use evidence (and show your work!)

Be clear to distinguish that evidence from conclusions or positions

Make the link to your mission explicit

Explain why neutrality isn't an option

Invite audiences to tell you why they agree or disagree

Use evidence (and show your work!)

To learn more, we asked respondents why they answered as they did.

While most of museum-goers say museums can make up their own minds, they were clear on how they would like museums to navigate this.

"I don't believe museums should be involved in political advocacy, but they should be able to speak on issues that affect them."

"There is no such thing as being really neutral, and there need to be more facts and less opinions."

"This may challenge each of us as we navigate these issues, and I believe that museums should always be neutral, no matter the issue … a rate over 5x higher than more Traditional audiences."