

MUSEUM VISITATION: FREQUENCY VS INCIDENCE GAPS: A 2022 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

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



FREQUENCY AND INCIDENCE

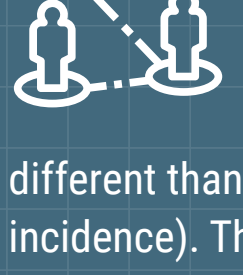


Frequency looks at *how often* someone has been to museums in a defined time period.

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

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.

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



82%

32%

Among frequent museum-goers, 82% of respondents have a college degree; that's 2.6x the rate of college degrees among US adults (32%).



From that, it would be easy to conclude that museum-goers are much more likely to have college degrees than the public. But that's not totally true. A more accurate statement would be that frequent museum-goers are much more likely to have a college degree ... a frequency gap, not an incidence gap.



When we look at incidence, we do find that people with a college degree are more likely to have been to a museum in the past two years than other US adults, but those with some post-secondary education are right on their heels. The true incidence gap is with those with a high school diploma/GED or less.

College degree: 45%

Some college/technical school/associate degree: 40%

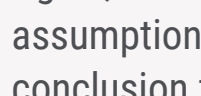
High school diploma/GED or less: 24%

PERCENT OF EACH POPULATION SEGMENT WHO VISITED A MUSEUM

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 Latino).



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.

In 2022, there was no incidence gap between white people and people of color. White people, African Americans, and Hispanics or Latinos all have about the same incidence rate, while Asian Americans are the most likely to have been to a museum.

White (not Hispanic or Latino): 36%

African American or Black: 37%

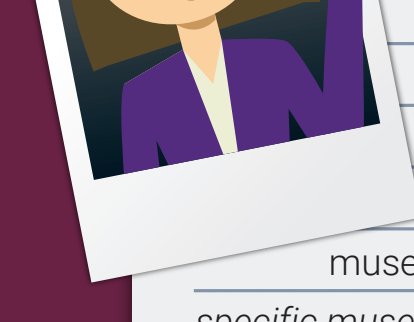
Hispanic or Latino: 38%

Asian or Asian American: 52%

PERCENT OF EACH POPULATION SEGMENT WHO VISITED A MUSEUM

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

Surprised? To some extent, so were we. We've been seeing the incidence gap closing over the past few years, but we didn't necessarily think that 2022 would be the year it would disappear (or that Asians and Asian Americans would be the most likely to visit). We'll be incredibly curious to see what the data says in 2023.



A VICTORY LAP? NOT SO FAST!

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

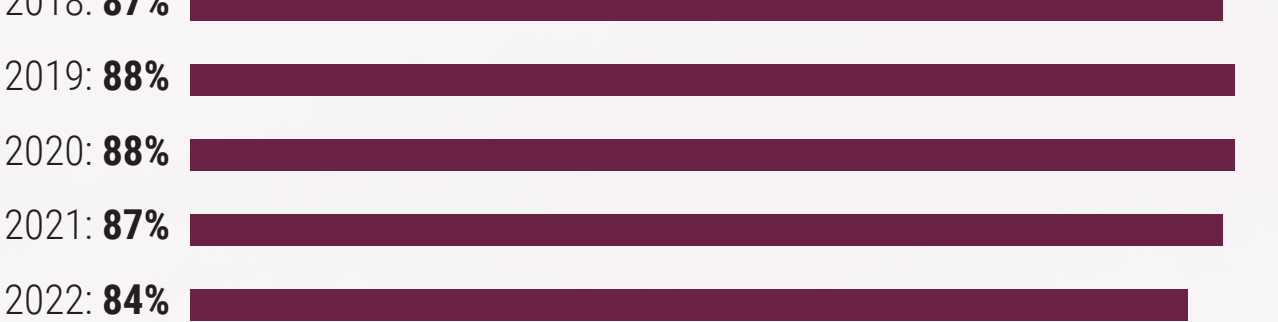
By museum types, historic sites in particular have persistently high incidence and frequency gaps, with audiences still, overall, skewing disproportionately white.

Additionally, this still varies widely for individual museums. Your museum may still be facing an incidence gap, and only on-site research 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

% WHITE RESPONDENTS SINCE 2017



From 2017 to 2021, the population of white (not Hispanic or Latino) population of the U.S. decreased from 62% to 59%.

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, however, 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.

Young adults (under 40, no children): 38%

Parents/guardians of minor children: 48%

40 - 59, no minor children: 27%

60 or older: 21%

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:
 • 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 90,747; 186 museums participating
 • 2022 Broader Population Sampling, n = 1,017
 • 2017 - 2021 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 and non-visitors to museums).

More Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.

