



# Art Museum Director Survey 2025

Museum Strategy and Operations

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ITHAKA S+R

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# Foreword

The inaugural cycle of the Art Museum Director Survey launched in the winter of 2020, immediately before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and an unprecedented moment of uncertainty for museums worldwide. Given its timing, the survey provided a window into how museum leaders approached their roles right before they had to shut their doors. The second cycle of the survey, fielded in 2022, provided insight on how the pandemic, as well as the national racial reckoning that followed the murder of George Floyd, had changed their priorities.

When Ithaka S+R surveyed museum leaders for a third time, in the spring and summer of 2025, museums were once again grappling with uncertainty. The disruption of the pandemic had faded, but the funding models many museums rely on were at risk. Given the recent uncertainty around federal grant support for the arts, and shifting priorities, it is not surprising that museum directors named financial resources as their most significant restraint, or that they are exploring alternative funding opportunities. In this report, the authors were able to track in real time how directors were re-shaping their strategies to meet the moment and sustain their institutions moving forward.

Despite new challenges, art museums remain steadfast in their commitment to the public good.

Despite new challenges, art museums remain steadfast in their commitment to the public good. Nearly all respondents highlighted the importance of serving as trusted sources of information, improving audience outreach, as well as continuing to strive to provide their staff with comparable pay and livable wages.

All three cycles of this study have come at a pivotal moment for art museums. And despite the daunting challenges museum leaders continue to face, the findings emphasize that they are finding ways to adapt while maintaining their commitment to their institutional mission. We thank all of the respondents for their participation and look forward to the opportunities that this research can provide.

We are grateful to the Kress and Mellon Foundations for their continued support of this valuable research.



Christine Anagnos  
Executive Director  
Association of Art Museum Directors



Marilyn Jackson  
President and CEO  
American Alliance of Museums



# Executive summary

In March 2025, Ithaka S+R launched the third iteration of the Art Museum Director Survey, in collaboration with the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), and the association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), with funding from the Mellon Foundation and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

The survey seeks to understand the opportunities, challenges, and strategic issues art museum directors face in their work, particularly in relation to budgeting, public trust and engagement, collections care, and talent management. Ithaka S+R first conducted this attitudinal survey in early 2020, followed by a second cycle in 2022. For the third iteration of this project, we continue to explore how museums are governed, how they serve the public, and what kinds of strategies they develop to respond to complex challenges and added new question items exploring emerging issues around staffing, governance and board relations, climate preparedness, and business models. Below are some of the key findings of the project.

## Key findings

- **Limited financial resources continue to restrict directors' ability to execute their strategic priorities.** For three-quarters of directors, a lack of financial resources is their top constraint, and a majority (55 percent) believe fundraising to be among the most valuable skills they need in their position. Respondents reported spending an average of 23 percent of their time on fundraising, grant writing, or donor engagement.
- **Museum directors are steadfast in prioritizing their museum's role as a trusted source of information.** Nearly all directors rate providing educational programming (96 percent) and serving as a trusted source of information (94 percent) as high priorities.
- **Directors are confident that they can articulate the museum's value proposition, but less confident that they share the same vision as their boards of trustees.** The majority of directors felt that they could confidently articulate their museum's value proposition in alignment with their local communities (82 percent), as well as

in alignment with the goals of their supervisors/board of trustees (86 percent). However, when asked if their boards share the same vision, 14 percent fewer directors indicated strong agreement (72 percent).

- **While museums are developing climate disaster plans, they are less proactive in reducing their climate footprint and do not see it as a priority.** Most institutions have established emergency response protocols (86 percent), yet far fewer have conducted cost analyses for carbon footprint reduction (26 percent) or comprehensive climate impact assessments encompassing facilities (48 percent), storage (29 percent), investments (9 percent), and waste management (24 percent).
- **Audience insight is improving.** Nearly three-quarters of directors indicated that their museums investigate who their museum is serving, as well as who they are not. Among these respondents, 59 percent have implemented strategies to reach missing audiences, up from 38 percent in 2022 and 21 percent in 2020.
- **Comparable pay and livable wages remain top of mind for directors.** Ninety-two percent of directors indicated that one of their top priorities is to provide a livable wage for their staff, and 79 percent of directors indicated that providing comparable pay will be a priority for their museums within the next five years.

## Introduction

Since 2020, Ithaka S+R has tracked the attitudes, strategic priorities, challenges, and opportunities art museum directors face in their work. The first cycle was distributed shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic led museums across the country to close their doors. As such, those findings served as a snapshot of the priorities in the field immediately before the pandemic shut down physical access to cultural spaces. The second cycle of the project, conducted in 2022, highlighted the shifts in perspective resulting from the ongoing pandemic, as well as the sector's response to a variety of global crises, such as the racial reckoning in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, threats from natural disasters, and economic inflation. This cycle, administered in Spring 2025, showcases the perspectives of art museum directors in an increasingly dynamic and

complex environment. In this third iteration of the survey, we gained new insights into how art museum directors have adapted their perspectives and priorities while navigating sociopolitical and technological trends.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our advisors who aided in the development of the survey instrument through a series of interviews and email correspondence, as well as invaluable insights on the final report.

- Asma Naeem, Director, Baltimore Museum of Art
- Brooke Minto, Director and CEO, Columbus Museum of Art
- Carys Kunze, Research and Data Manager, American Alliance of Museums (AAM)
- Edward Hayes Jr., Director, El Paso Museum of Art
- Franklin Sirmans, Director, Perez Museum of Art
- Jay Xu, Former Director and CEO of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco
- Lavita McMath Turner, Chief Diversity Officer, Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Miki Garcia, Director, Arizona State University Art Museum
- Pamela Franks, Director, Williams College Museum of Art
- Raphaela Platow, Former Director, Speed Art Museum
- Vedet Coleman Robinson, President and CEO, Association of African American Museums (AAAM)

We are also grateful to Chris Anagnos, Alison Wade, and Stephanie Yao from AAMD, as well as Marilyn Jackson and Carys Kunze from AAM, for their insight and assistance. We thank the Mellon Foundation, and L. W. Schermerhorn from the Kress Foundation for their support. We also thank the late Julia Alexander, for her invaluable contributions which continue to shape this work.

Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to our colleagues at Ithaka S+R, whose feedback and work on this project has been instrumental: Liam Sweeney, Joanna Dressel, Mark McBride, Kimberly Lutz, Juni Ahari, and Cara Hirsch.

The research and analysis are solely the work of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the project's funders.

# The role of the museum director

The role of a museum director is to serve as the leader of their institution, overseeing both its overall operations and strategic vision.<sup>1</sup> This section focuses on how directors responded to questions relating to their skills and abilities in leading their institutions through various challenges and in navigating their board dynamics.

## Skills, abilities, and competencies

We began the survey focusing on the role of the director. We asked all respondents to select up to three options that best highlight the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies that have been most valuable to them in their role. Fifty-five percent of directors selected “fundraising” as one of the most valuable skills this cycle, compared to 48 percent in 2022. Only 29 percent selected “ability to manage change” as a key skill, a marked drop from the 48 percent who selected this in 2022. The 48 percent in 2022 marked a 15-percentage point increase from 2020. One possible explanation is that directors’ perceived needs shifted during and after the pandemic. However, some portion of the variation may also reflect differences in the composition of the cycles’ samples. Given that respondents are not fully matched across the three cycles due to the anonymous nature of data collection, any differences between the three cycles should be interpreted as repeated cross-sectional shifts in

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of terms used in the report:

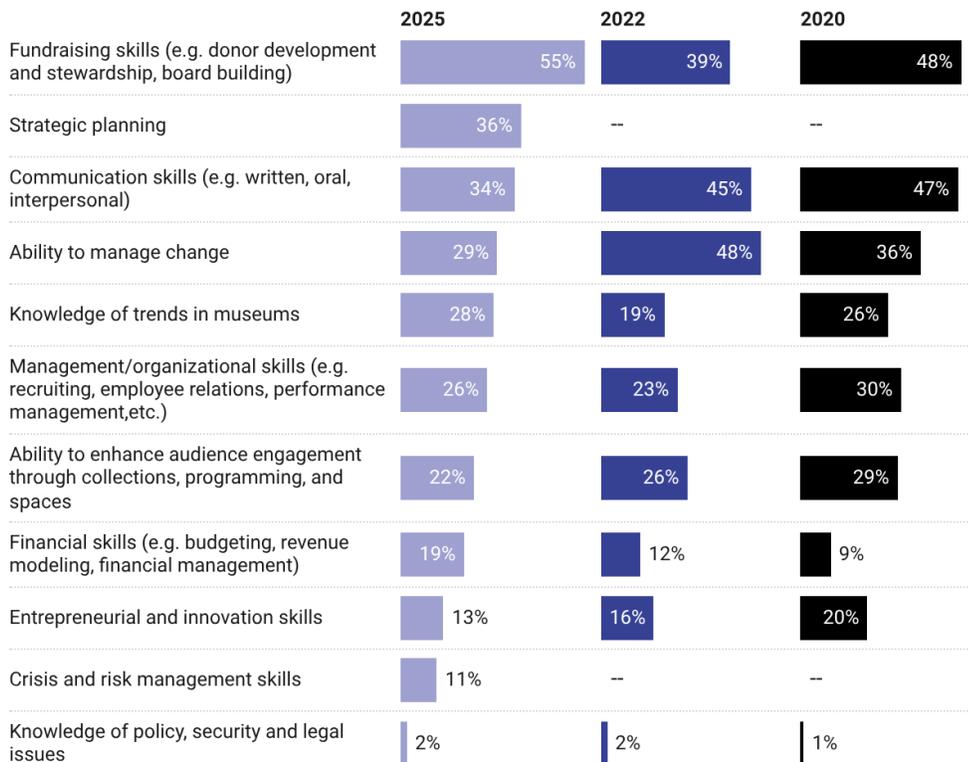
- Academic museums: This refers to all participating museums that are affiliated or part of a college or university.
- Other art museums: This refers to all participating museums that are not academic museums, including government, private, and non-profit museums. In previous iterations of this report, this group was referred to as “municipal museums.”

reported priorities or attitudes, rather than changes among the same institutions or individual respondents. This steep decrease raises questions about whether directors now have additional support, feel less need to manage change, or find it less time-consuming to manage. However, it is also important to note that this shift could also be due to the addition of “strategic planning” as an option this cycle. Thirty-six percent of respondents selected “strategic planning,” a new item this cycle, as a valuable skillset, second only to fundraising. Thirty-four percent selected “communication skills,” 10 percentage points fewer than in 2022.

Over the three cycles, the percentage of directors selecting “knowledge of trends in museums” has fluctuated, from 26 percent in 2020, to 19 percent in 2022, and 28 percent in 2025. The percentage of directors selecting “management/organizational skills” increased by 3 percent this cycle, to 26 percent, but is still down four percentage points from 2020. (Figure 1)

**Figure 1: Which of the following knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies have been most valuable for you in your current position? Please select up to three items.**

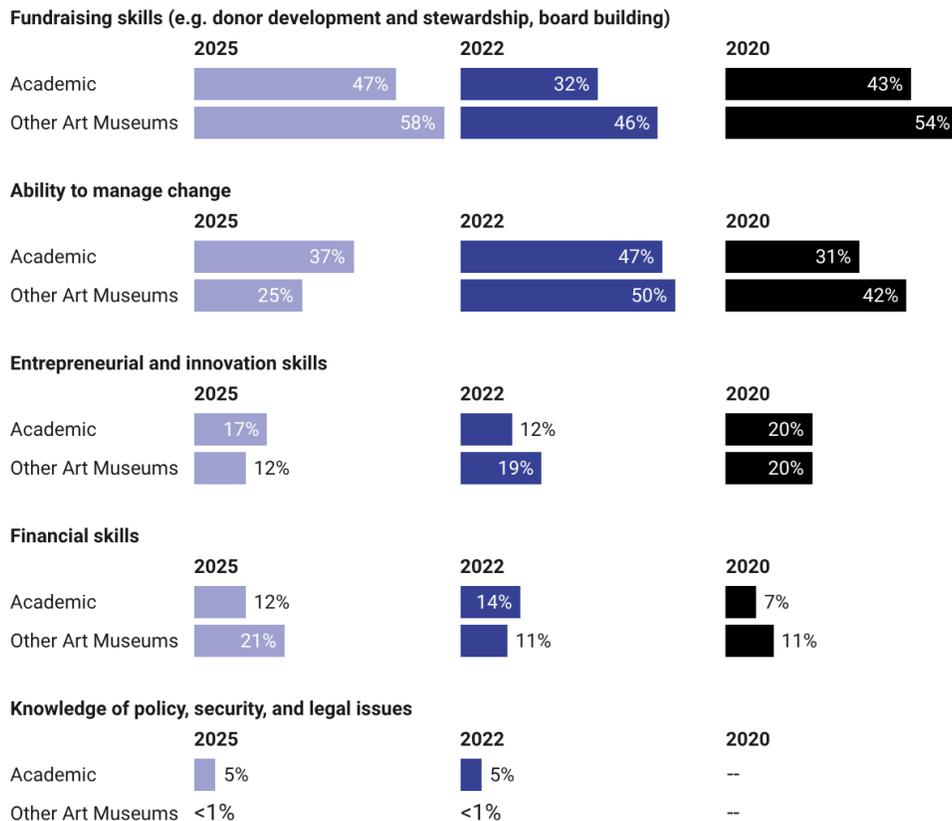
Please select up to three items.



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Across all art museum types, directors generally share the same perspectives when it comes to naming the top three valuable skills and abilities. As shown in **Figure 2**, academic museum directors are less likely to select fundraising skills (47 percent), than the directors of all other art museum types (58 percent). More of these museums selected fundraising skills as a priority in 2025 than in 2022 (58 percent compared to 46 percent), while the percentage of academic museums that selected fundraising skills has remained the same. This may indicate that academic museums receive more substantial funding from their parent institution and have a lower need for fundraising. Academic museum directors were the only respondents who selected “knowledge of policy, security, and legal issues” as a priority (5 percent).

**Figure 2<sup>2</sup>: Which of the following knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies have been most valuable for you in your current position? Please select up to three items. [Top five]**



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<sup>2</sup> Figure 2 only showcases categories where there was a statistically significant difference between academic and other art museums in 2025.

## Constraints

We then asked museum directors to select up to three of the primary constraints on their ability to execute strategy within their institutions. Unsurprisingly, as shown in **Figure 3**, 76 percent see a lack of financial resources as their primary constraint. The second most frequently selected constraint across the board was lack of employee skills and/or changing skills in key areas, at 37 percent overall, followed by challenges in engaging particular communities of interest (19 percent).

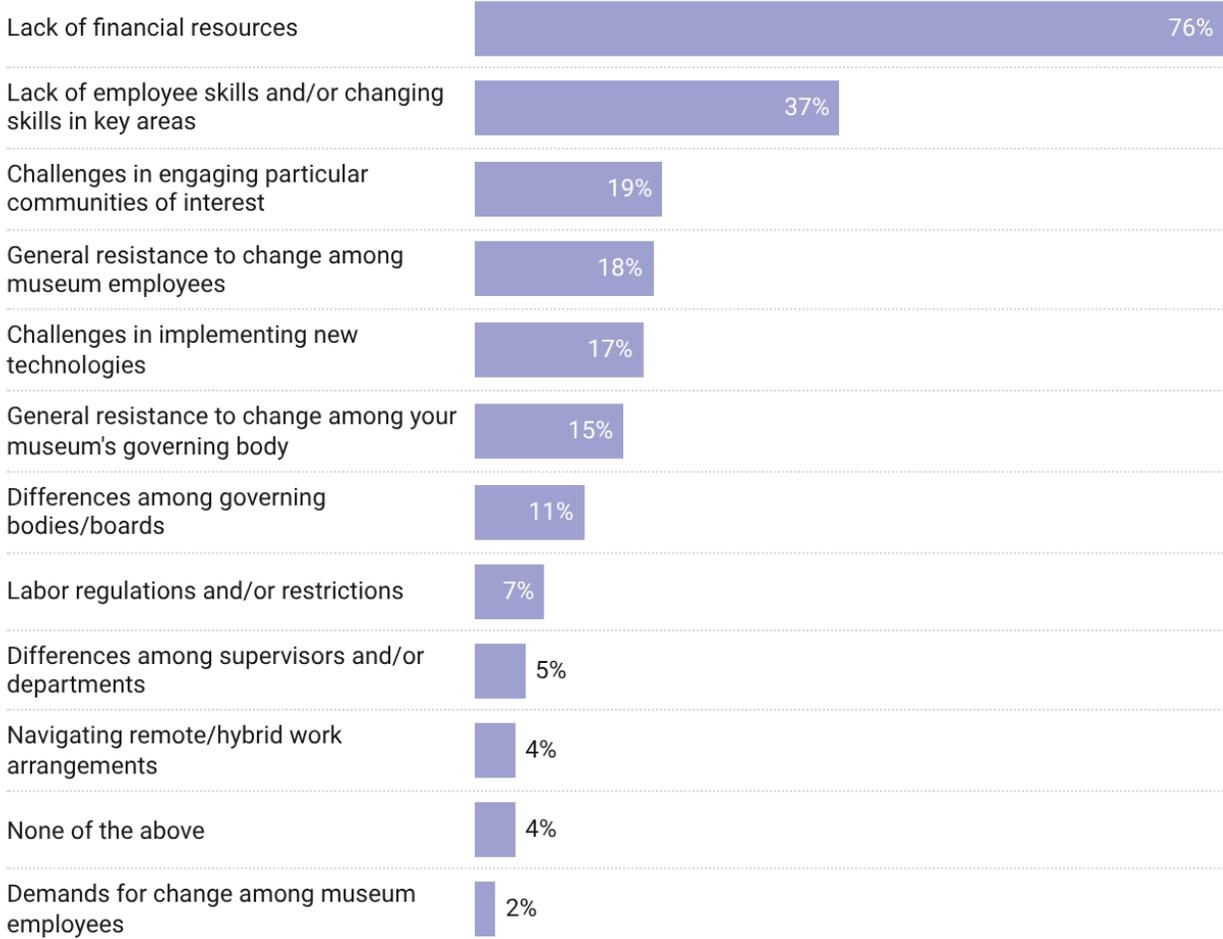
Only 2 percent of directors view employee demands for change as a top constraint. Other studies have found dissatisfaction among museum workers: The 2025 Museums Moving Forward Report, showed that, while 87 percent of museum workers believe they are doing meaningful work, they are more dissatisfied than US workers overall, and 54 percent are considering leaving their jobs or the field in general.<sup>3</sup> This reflects an ongoing trend in the sector—a study on museum workers and students conducted by AAM in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic reported that 20 percent of respondents anticipated they would stop working in the field within the next few years.<sup>4</sup> However, our findings indicate that these employee attitudes are not having a strong impact on directors' strategic decisions.

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<sup>3</sup> "Executive Summary – Workplace Equity and Organizational Culture in US Art Museums – Museums Moving Forward," *Museums Moving Forward*, accessed October 29, 2025, <https://museumsmovingforward.com/data-studies/2024-2025/report/executive-summary>.

<sup>4</sup> "Measuring the Impact of COVID-19 on People in the Museum Field," *American Alliance of Museums*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.aam-us.org/2021/04/13/measuring-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-people-in-the-museum-field/>; Joanna Dressel, Deirdre Harkins, and Liam Sweeney, "Living Wages: Art Museum Leaders Confront Persistent Staff Compensation Challenges," *Ithaka S+R*, June 8, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.319152>.

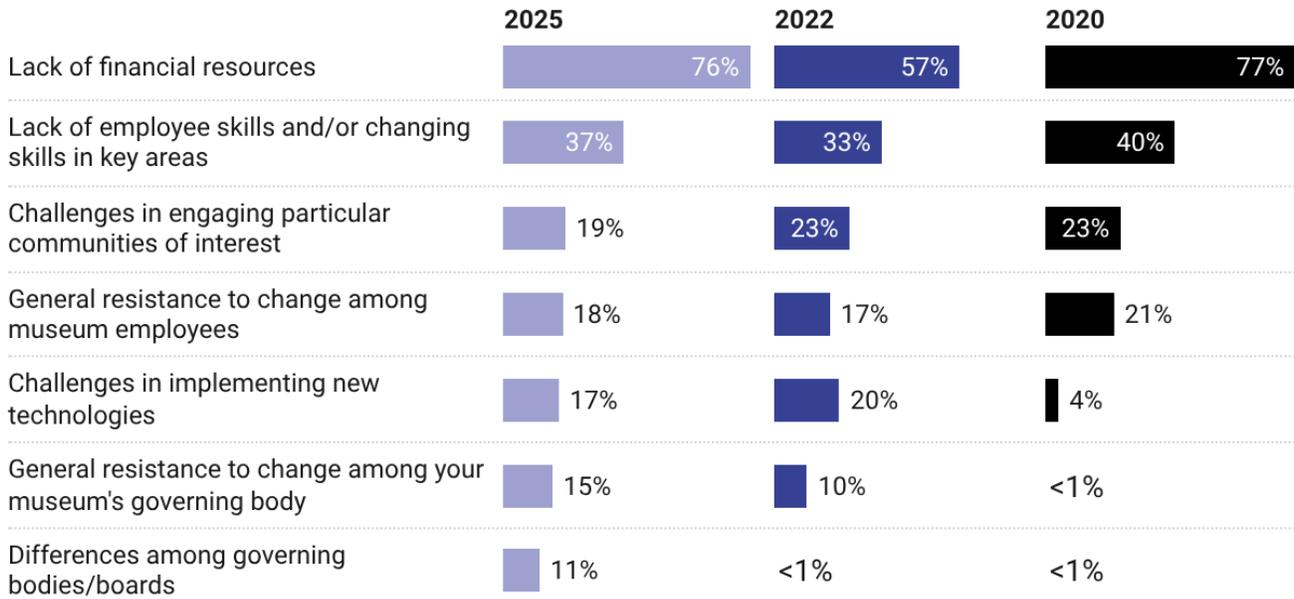
**Figure 3: What are the primary constraints on your ability to execute strategy in your museum? Please select up to three items that have the greatest impact or select “none of the above.”**



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A lack of financial resources has consistently been named as the primary constraint on directors’ abilities to execute strategies in their museums (Figure 4), but the percentages have fluctuated from 77 percent in 2020, to 57 percent in 2022, and 76 percent in 2025.

**Figure 4<sup>5</sup>: What are the primary constraints on your ability to execute strategy in your museum? Please select up to three items that have the greatest impact, or select “none of the above.” [Top 7 by Year]**



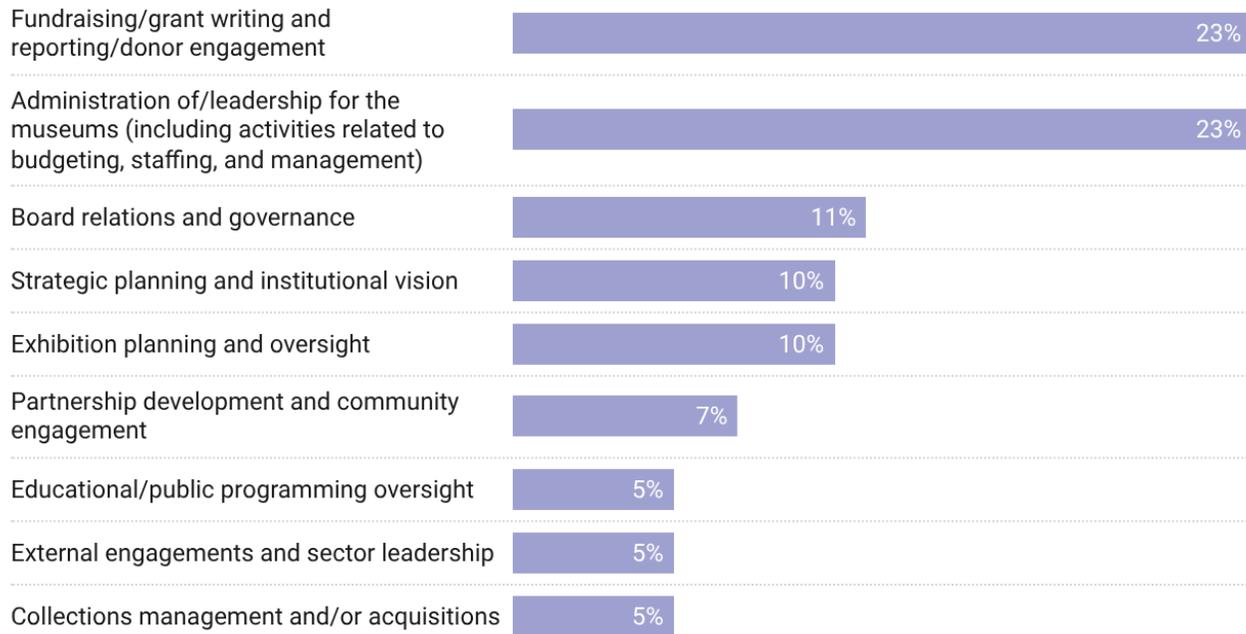
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### Time allocation

We also asked museum directors to tell us approximately how much time they spend across nine different activities (percentages were required to add up to 100 percent), and we report average time reported for these questions. It is interesting to note, as shown in **Figure 5**, that directors spend most of their time on fundraising, grant writing, and donor engagement (23 percent). This is tied with administration/leadership for the museum, with activities relating to budgeting, staffing, and overall management (23 percent). On the other hand, directors report spending the least time on collections management and/or acquisitions, external engagements and sector leadership, as well as educational/public programming oversight (each at 5 percent). Overall, there was not a statistically significant difference when looking at these activities by museum type.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that if there is not a percentage next to a category, that option was not available for that year's cycle.

**Figure 5: In your current role, what percentage of your time do you spend on the following activities?**

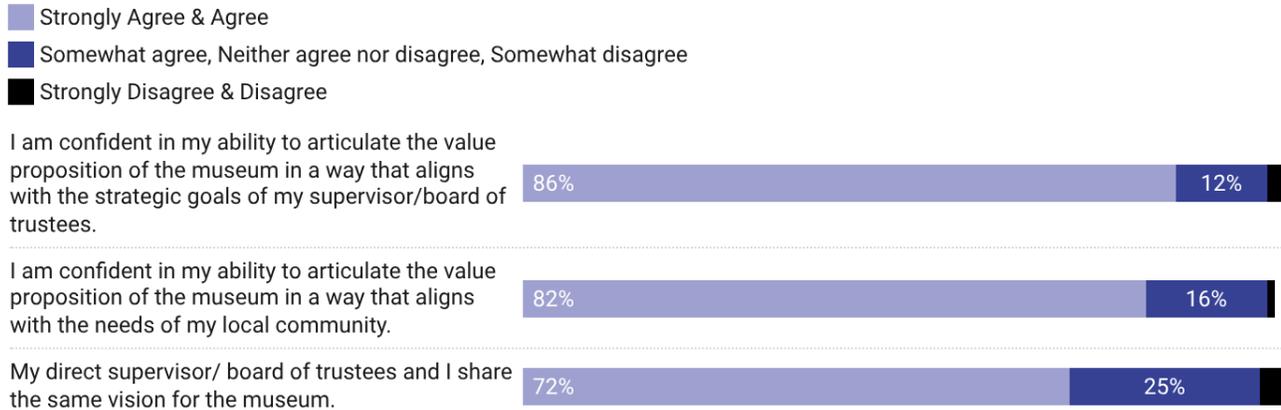


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### **Governance relationship**

While directors may lead their institutions, how they do so dovetails with the relationship they have with their boards, supervisors, and the broader community. We asked directors to indicate how much they agreed with three statements about these relationships. As shown in **Figure 6**, the vast majority of directors felt that they could confidently articulate their museum’s value proposition in alignment with their local communities (82 percent), as well as in alignment with the goals of their supervisors/board of trustees (86 percent). To a slightly lesser degree (72 percent), they also agree or strongly agree that they share the same vision for the museum with their supervisor or board.

**Figure 6: Please read the following statement(s) and indicate the level of your agreement with each.**



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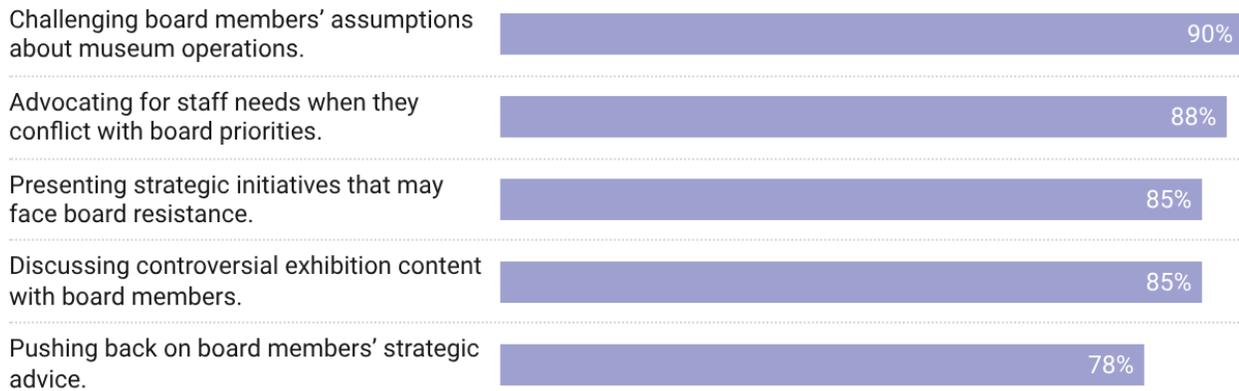
Since academic museum directors tend to report to a dean or provost instead of directly to a board of trustees, we excluded them from a series of new questions specifically about how directors at other types of museums see their roles in relation to their board of trustees. First, we asked them to provide some details on their boards. The majority work with boards with 20 or fewer members (52 percent), while 27 percent of boards have 21–30 trustees, 17 percent have 31–40, and 4 percent have more than 41 members.

Given the range in size and composition of boards, this cycle we introduced a new question focused on whether or not trustees have to fill out annual self-evaluations. The purpose of these board self-evaluations is to help boards effectively lead the museum, evaluate and advance strategic roles and responsibilities, and improve communication and collaboration between the board and directors. Of our sample of museums’ boards, 68 percent of trustees do not conduct an annual self-evaluation.

We then asked respondents to indicate their level of comfort with certain scenarios involving their boards. As **Figure 7** shows, the majority indicated that they are highly comfortable challenging board members’ assumptions about museum operations (90 percent), as well as advocating for museum staff needs when they conflict with board priorities (88 percent). Just under half of respondents also report feeling comfortable discussing controversial exhibition content with board members (85 percent). Eighty-five percent of directors feel comfortable presenting strategic initiatives that may face board resistance, while 78 percent feel comfortable pushing

back on board members' strategic advice. We found that directors' ratings on all five items strongly and positively correlate with each other, meaning that directors' level of comfort on all five items are linked—the higher the level of self-reported comfort with one statement, the higher the level of comfort with other statements (see appendix A). It is also worth noting that 60 percent of respondents strongly agree or agree that the priorities of the board of trustees at their museum are in alignment with the priorities of the community their museum serves.

**Figure 7: How comfortable are you...? (Highly Comfortable includes “Very Comfortable” and “Somewhat Comfortable”) [All Other Museum Types Only]**



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# The role of the museum

## Strategies

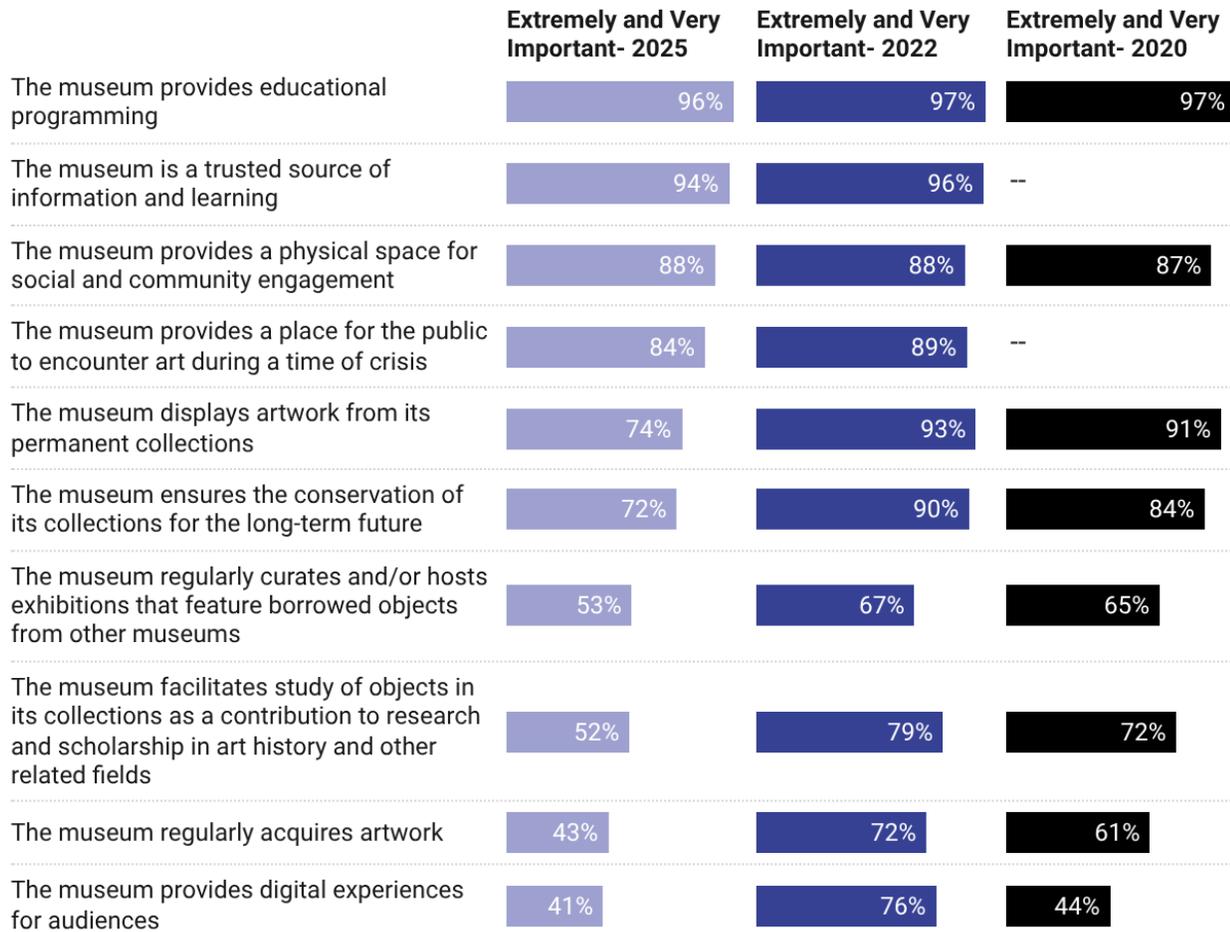
We asked museum directors to indicate how important it was to them that their institution served in several capacities (**Figure 8**). Nearly all directors indicated that it was extremely or very important that it provide educational programming, at an overwhelming 96 percent, consistent with ratings in previous cycles. This was closely followed by museums serving as a trusted source of information and learning (94 percent). This is not surprising, as museums historically have been places that seek to educate the public on a variety of topics, in ways that differ from traditional schooling. Museums have long served as a trustworthy place for the public to supplement their education or learn something new.<sup>6</sup> (**Figure 8**)

Nearly all directors indicated that it was extremely or very important that it provide educational programming, at an overwhelming 96 percent, consistent with ratings in previous cycles.

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<sup>6</sup> "Museums and Trust 2021," *American Alliance of Museums*, September 30, 2021, <https://www.aam-us.org/2021/09/30/museums-and-trust-2021/>.

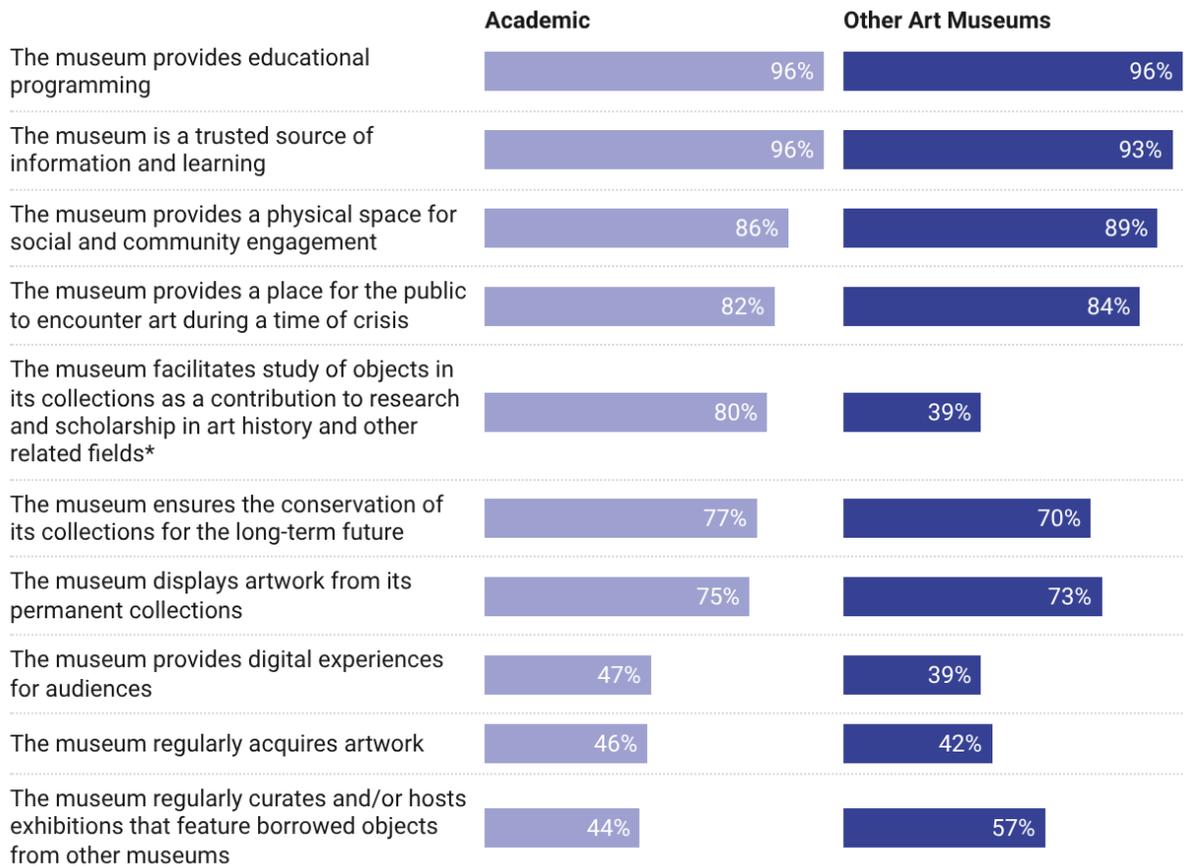
**Figure 8: How important is it to you that your museum currently serves in the capacities listed below? Please select one answer for each item.**



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When breaking the findings down between museum type, the data generally tell the same story. The only statistically significant differences are that academic museum directors are more likely to find it extremely or very important that their institutions facilitate the study of objects in their collections as a contribution to research and scholarship in art history and other related fields (80 percent) in comparison to their counterparts at other museums (39 percent). (Figure 9)

**Figure 97: How important is it to you that your museum currently serves in the capacities listed below? Please select one answer for each item. [Extremely Important and Very Important]**



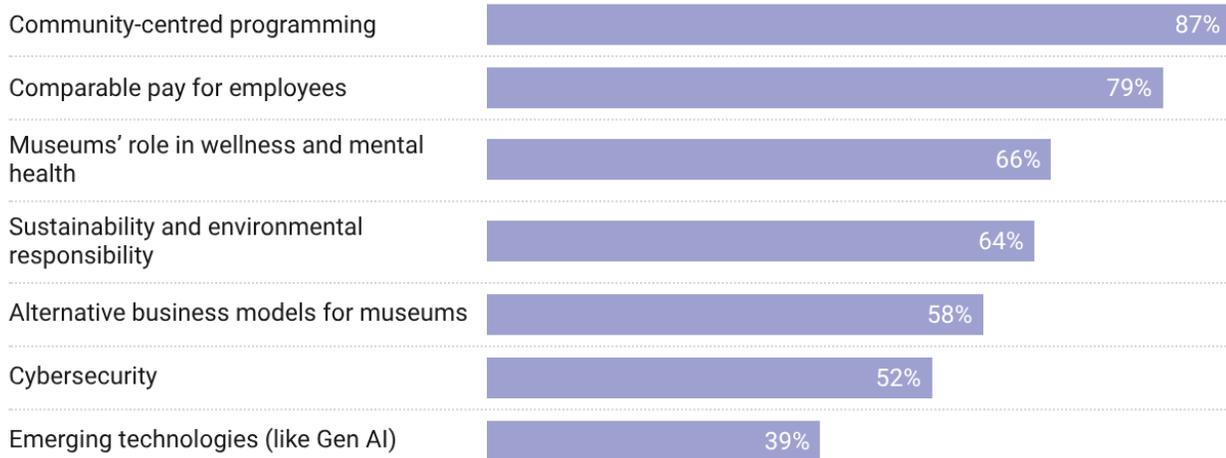
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We also asked directors to forecast what they anticipate the priorities for their museums will be in the next five years. Nearly nine in ten directors agree or strongly agree that community-centered programming will be a priority for their institutions (87 percent). This is followed by paying their employees a comparable wage (79 percent), taking a more active role in wellness and mental health (66 percent), as well as being more environmentally sustainable (64 percent). Fewer than half (39 percent) of respondents anticipate emerging technologies such as generative AI to become a priority for their museum (**Figure 10**). Roughly 8 percent of directors selected “Other” and were given the opportunity to enter their thoughts in a text box. The priorities they listed include accessibility, museum expansion, ethical stewardship and return policies, reorganizing

<sup>7</sup> An asterisk next to a category in a graph indicates that there is a statistically significant difference.

how collections are stored, historic preservation, and supporting art from different cultural backgrounds. The responses were similar across museum types.

**Figure 10: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements: In the next five years, \_\_\_\_\_ will be a priority for my museum. High Priority [Strongly Agree]**



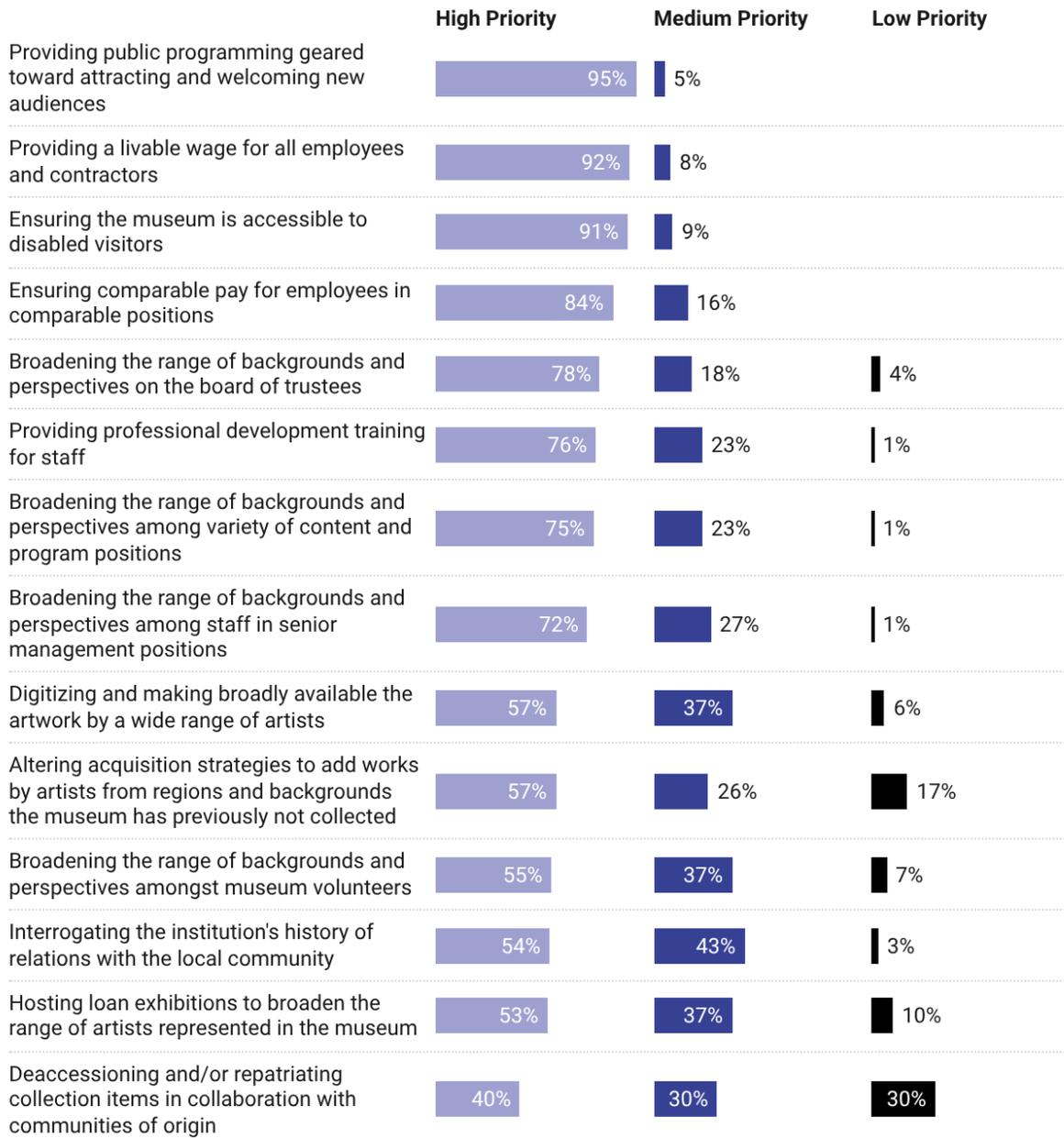
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In continuing with this theme, we also asked directors how they are prioritizing 14 different strategies at their own institution. Providing public programming geared towards attracting and welcoming new audiences was rated as a high priority (extremely important and very important) by 95 percent of directors (**Figure 11**). This was closely followed by providing a livable wage to all employees and contractors at 92 percent, perhaps reflecting the impact of the movement around pay transparency across the museum sector over the last five years.<sup>8</sup> The 2025 AAMD salary survey report found that 76 percent of responding museums have established salary ranges for each position.<sup>9</sup> Ninety-one percent of directors also indicated that ensuring that the museum is accessible to disabled visitors is a priority.

<sup>8</sup> Joanna Dressel, Deirdre Harkins, and Liam Sweeney, "Living Wages: Art Museum Leaders Confront Persistent Staff Compensation Challenges," *Ithaka S+R*, June 8, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.319152>.

<sup>9</sup> "2025 Salary Survey," *Association of Art Museum Directors*, accessed October 29, 2025, <https://aamd.org>.

**Figure 11: How much of a priority is each of the following strategies at your museum?**

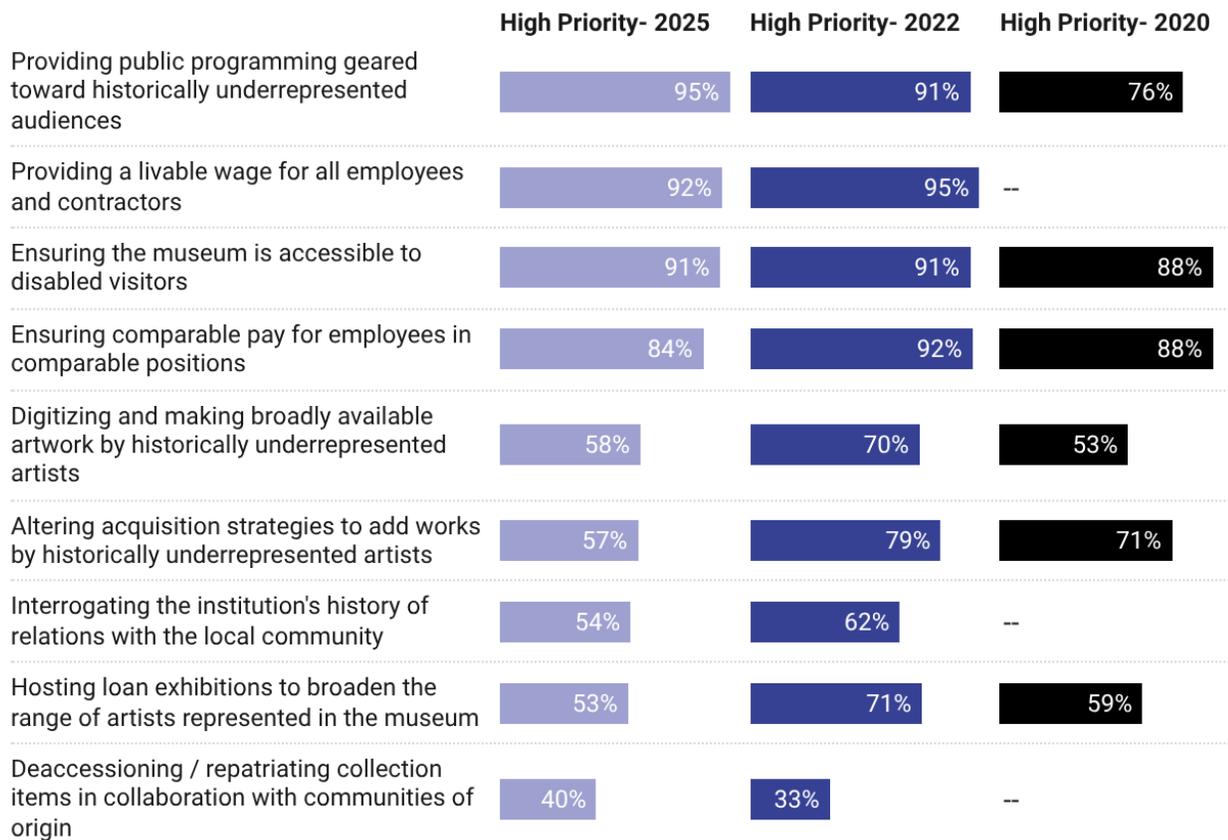


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Some notable changes emerge when looking at which priorities were selected as extremely or very important over the past several years. **(Figure 12)** Altering acquisitions strategies to add works by historically underrepresented artists dropped over 20 percentage points, from 79 percent in 2022 to 57 percent in 2025. Digitizing and making broadly available artwork by historically underrepresented artists saw a similar

decline (70 percent in 2022, to 57 percent in 2025), as did hosting loan exhibitions of works by historically underrepresented artists (71 percent in 2022, to 53 percent in 2025). It is worth noting here that these declines from one cycle to the next do not necessarily reflect a shift in priorities but could be an artifact of the inclusion of more museums in the sample this cycle (see appendix A).

**Figure 12: How much of a priority is each of the following strategies at your museum?**



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### Navigating internal and external pressures

For this cycle, we asked museum directors how confident they are in their museum’s ability to navigate political pressures, safeguard freedom of speech, support a broad range of perspectives among the staff, protect staff wellbeing, secure ongoing funding, engage community stakeholders, and fulfill their educational missions. The majority of directors, as shown in **Figure 13**, reported feeling a high level of confidence about their

museum's ability to perform in each of these categories, with the exception of securing ongoing funding (45 percent).

**Figure 13: How confident are you in your museum's ability to...?**



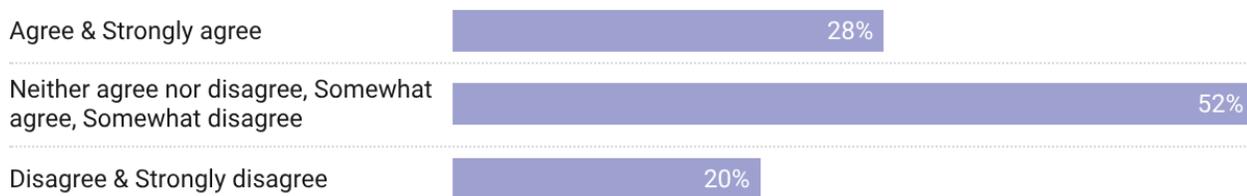
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# Museum budgets

Since the first cycle of this study, we have been tracking directors' priorities when it comes to budget allocations, as well as asking forecasting questions to discern how they expect or would like to allocate their financial resources.

We first asked directors their level of agreement with whether they focus primarily on year-to-year needs, rather than long-term planning when making financial decisions (**Figure 14**). A little over a quarter of directors (28 percent) strongly agree or agree with this statement, while a fifth (20 percent) selected strongly disagree or disagree, suggesting that they focus on long-term needs versus year-to-year needs. These percentages hold steady when stratifying the analysis by museum type. In 2020, 21 percent of directors strongly agreed or agreed that they focus on year-to-year needs rather than longer-term planning. This changed in 2022, likely as a result of the 2020 pandemic, when 37 percent of directors strongly agreed or agreed that they need to focus on year-to-year needs. The data from this cycle signals a return to the longer-term outlook directors shared pre-COVID.

**Figure 14: When making financial decisions, I need to focus primarily on year-to-year needs rather than long-term planning.**



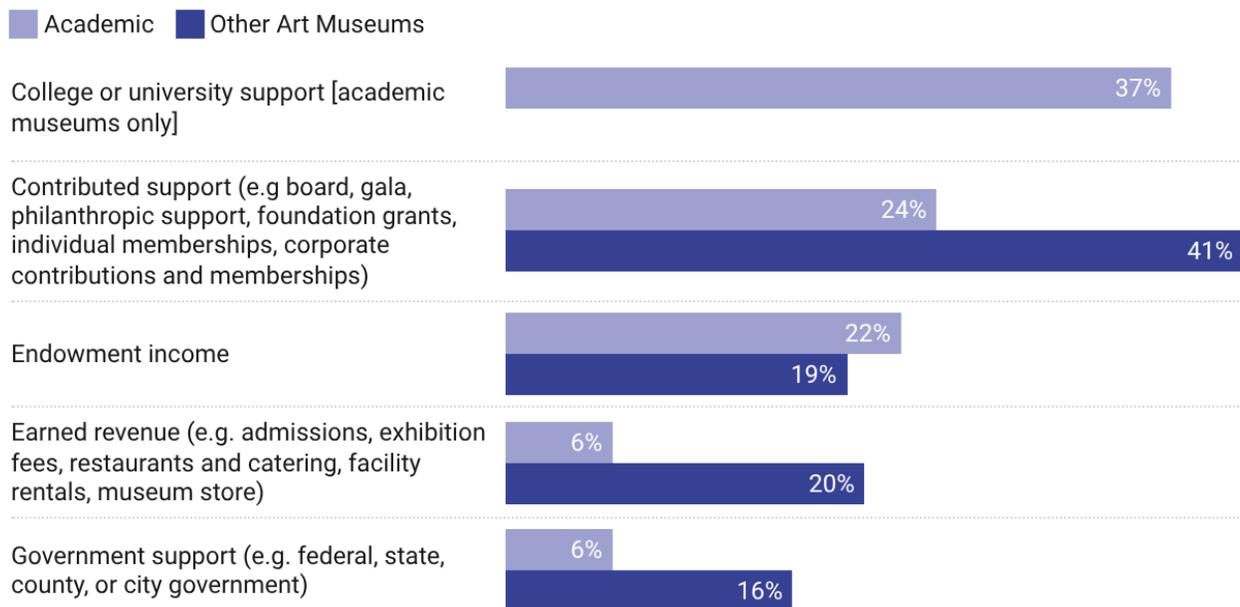
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We then asked directors to indicate what different types of funding streams make up their museum's operating budget (percentage allocations needed to add up to 100 percent). Contributed support came in at the top position at 36 percent, followed by endowment income (20 percent), and then earned revenue (15 percent), a ranking consistent with both 2022 and 2020. However, academic museums indicated that 37 percent of their operating budget comes from college or university support

(down from 44 percent in both 2022 and 2020). Twenty-four percent of the budget of academic museums comes from contributed support, which is nearly 20 percentage points less than that of other art museums. Six percent of academic art museums' budgets comes from earned revenue, compared to 20 percent of other art museums' budgets. It is worth noting that 48 percent of all respondents indicated that non-members pay a set admissions fee at their museum, while 9 percent indicated they ask for a suggested donation, and 43 percent note that admission is free, without a suggested donation. Nineteen percent of academic museums have a set fee, compared to 60 percent of other art museums. Across all museum types, the average admissions fee for non-members is \$16 dollars.

The percentage of academic museum's budgets derived directly from government support is also nearly three times less than the percentage of their counterparts, at 6 percent compared to 16 percent, respectively. **(Figure 15)**. The differences by museum type between the percentages of reported budgets made up from government support, earned revenue, and contributed support are all statistically significant.

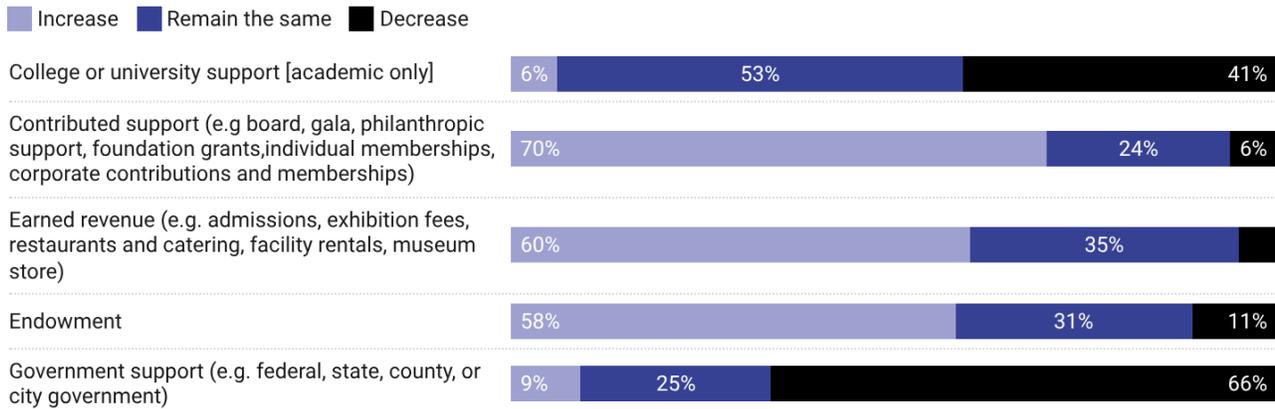
**Figure 15: What percentage of your museum's operating budget is derived from the following sources? Please provide your best estimate.**



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We then asked directors if they anticipate the share of their institution’s revenue from the same funding streams will increase, stay the same, or decrease in five years. Seventy percent of all directors indicated that they anticipate increases in contributed support, 60 percent anticipate increases in earned income, and 58 percent anticipate increases in endowment support, while 66 percent of all directors anticipate a decrease in government support. **(Figure 16)**

**Figure 16: In five years, do you anticipate the share of your institution's revenues from each of the following sources to increase, remain the same, or decrease?**



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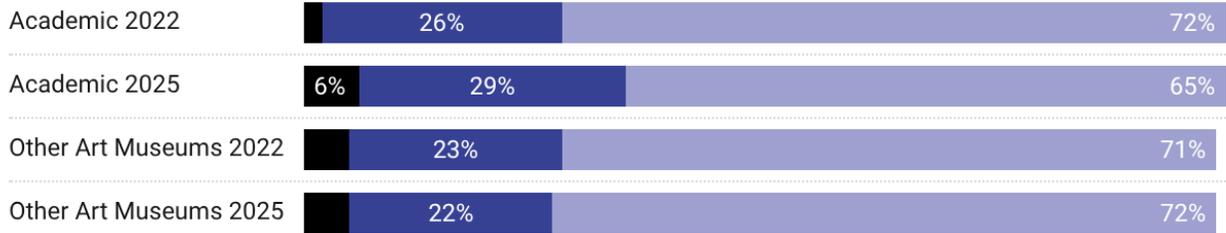
When stratifying the analysis by museum type, we found that 53 percent of academic museum directors anticipate college or university support to remain the same, while 41 percent anticipate it will decrease, with only 6 percent forecasting an increase in support from their parent institution. By comparison, in 2022, 28 percent of directors anticipated a decrease in college or university support, and 22 percent anticipated an increase. Academic museum directors were less likely to anticipate an increase in earned income sources, at 43 percent, compared to directors of other art museums at 65 percent, a statistically significant difference. **(Figure 17)**

As one respondent noted: “The current political changes at the Federal and State levels of some parts of the country are creating major funding challenges for museums. Academic museums in state universities are facing challenges due to the current administration's targeting both higher education and the arts. Add to that state governments that also target academia and the arts—and funding challenges seem untenable at times.”

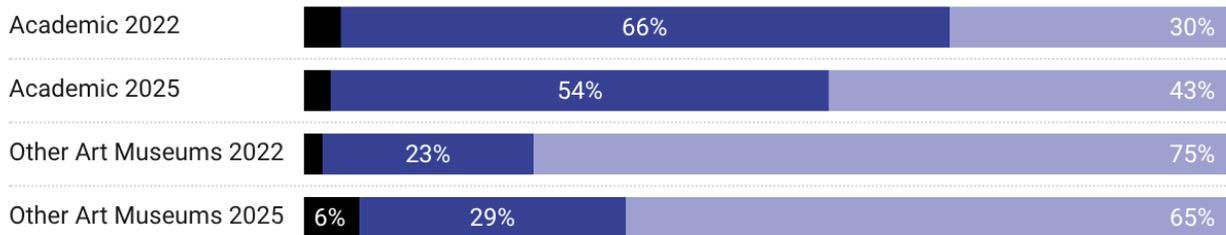
**Figure 17: In five years, do you anticipate the share of your institution's revenues from each of the following sources to increase, remain the same, or decrease?**

■ Increase 
 ■ Remain the same 
 ■ Decrease

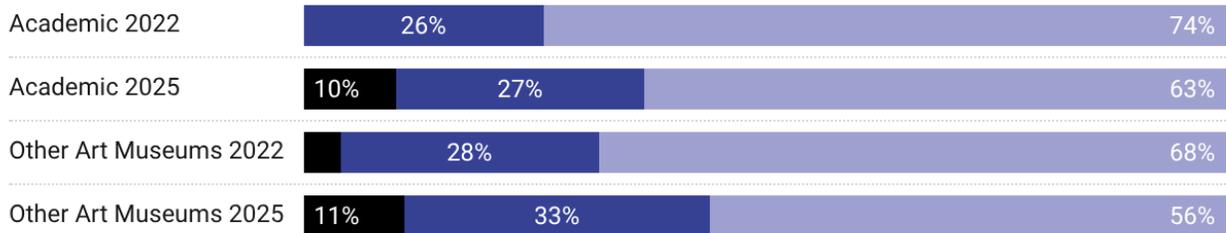
**Private support (e.g. individual and family memberships, corporate memberships, individual and family contributions, corporate)**



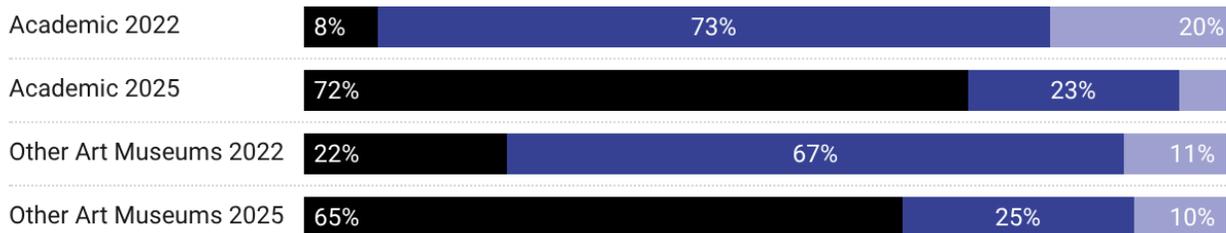
**Earned revenue (e.g. admissions, exhibition fees, restaurants and catering, facility rentals, museum store) \***



**Endowment income**



**Government support (e.g. federal, state, county, or city government)**



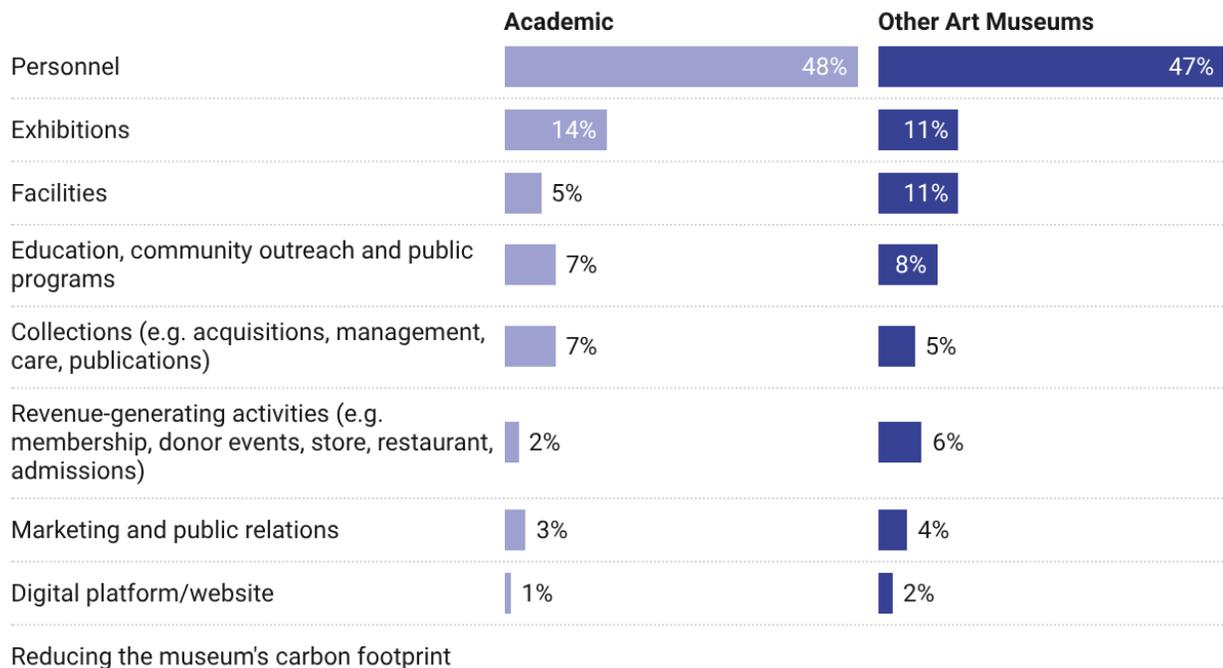
**College or university support**



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We also asked directors to indicate what percentage of their museum’s operating expenses are allocated to specific areas. This cycle, consistent with the previous cycles, respondents indicated that 47 percent of their operating expenses are allocated toward personnel, followed in a distant second place by exhibitions (12 percent, on a steady decline since 2020), and facilities (9 percent, consistent with the previous two cycles). Notably, only 1 percent (each) of budget allocations go to revenue-generating activities and digital platforms/websites, while only a fraction of a percent of museums allocate funds to reduce the museum’s carbon footprint. When stratifying the analysis by museum type, we found that the differences between academic museums and other art museums’ allocations to collections, exhibitions, facilities, revenue-generating activities, and digital platform/websites are all statistically significant. (Figure 18)

**Figure 18: What percentage of your museum’s operating expenses is allocated to the following areas? Please provide your best estimate.**



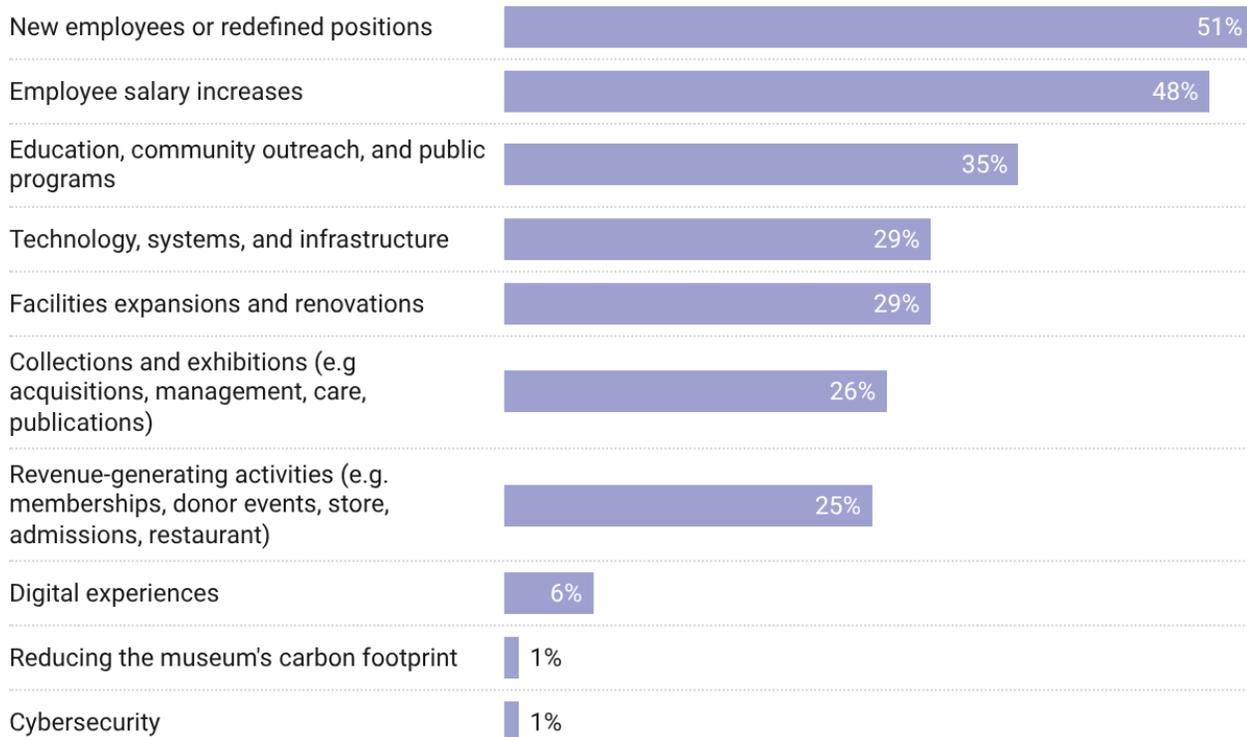
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This cycle, we’ve introduced two new questions asking directors to indicate which areas would be the highest priority for investment if they received a 10 percent budget increase next year, as well as asking them which areas they would most likely allocate fewer funds to should they receive a 10

percent budget reduction next year. Both questions asked directors to select up to three options for either the budget increase or cut. Put together, these questions offer insight into directors' strategic priorities in managing their budgets.

More than half of all directors indicated they would allocate a 10-percent increase to new employees or redefined positions (51 percent), followed closely by employee salary increases (48 percent), and education, community outreach, and public programs (35 percent). On the other hand, the bottom three ranked options for the increase are digital experiences (6 percent), followed by cybersecurity, and reducing the museum's carbon footprint, each at 1 percent. (Figure 19)

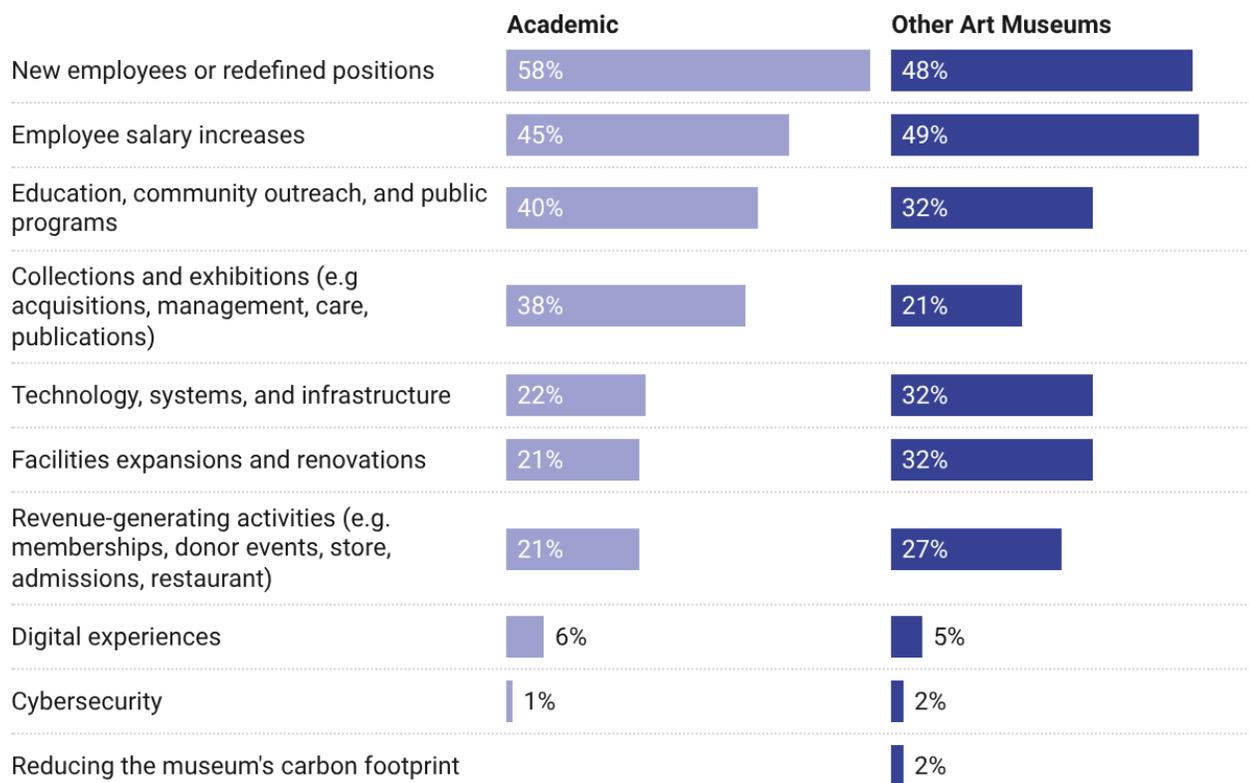
**Figure 19: If you were to receive a 10 percent increase in your museum's budget next year in addition to the funds you already expect to receive, which of the following areas would be your first priority for investment? Please select up to three areas that you would invest in.**



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More academic museum directors allocate a budget increase to new employees or redefined positions than directors at other art museums (58 percent versus 48 percent), or to collections and exhibitions (38 percent versus 21 percent). Fewer of these directors, however, would allocate an increase to technology, systems, and infrastructure (22 percent) compared to directors at other art museums (32 percent), or towards facilities expansions and renovations (21 percent versus 32 percent). (Figure 20)

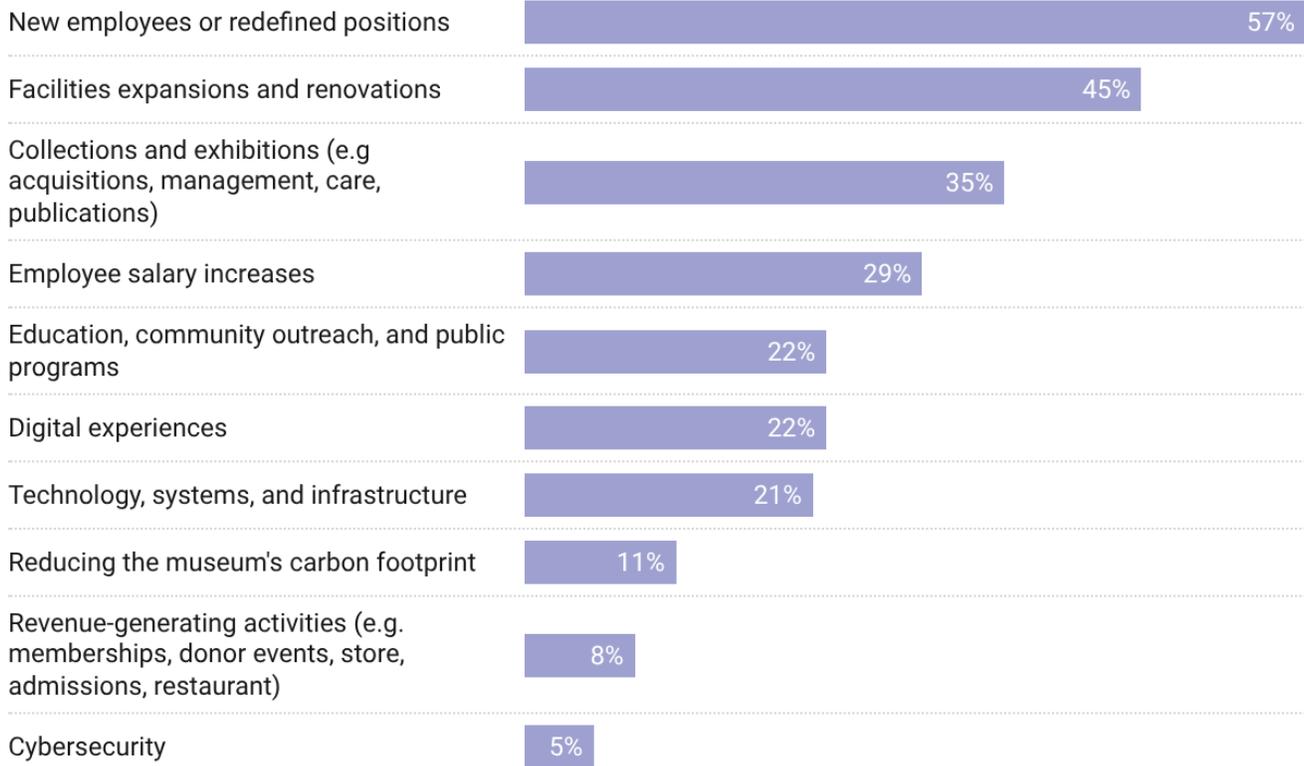
**Figure 20: If you were to receive a 10 percent increase in your museum’s budget next year in addition to the funds you already expect to receive, which of the following areas would be your first priority for investment? Please select up to three areas that you would invest in.**



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Looking at the 10-percentage budget reduction, 57 percent of all directors believe they would apply that cut to new employees or redefined positions, followed by facilities expansions and renovations (45 percent), and collections and exhibitions (35 percent). (Figure 21)

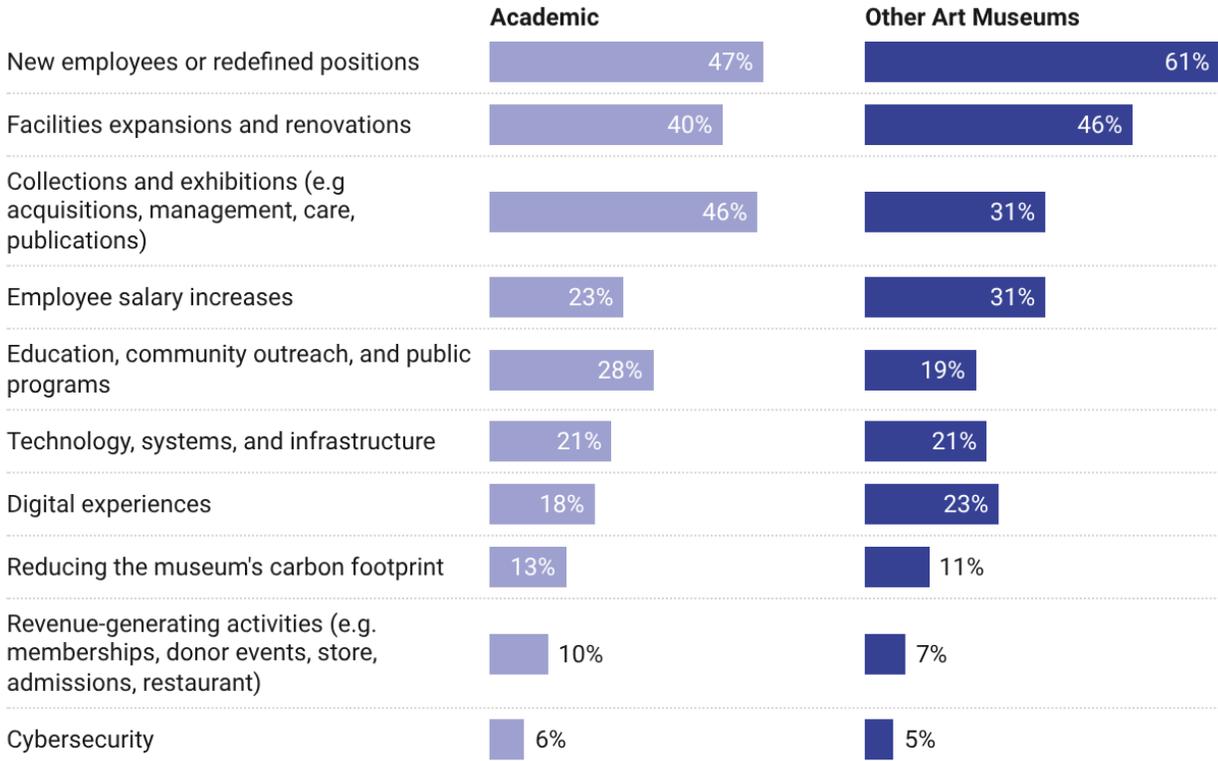
**Figure 21: If you were to receive a 10 percent reduction in your museum’s budget next year, which of the following areas would be most likely to receive a reduction? Please select up to three areas.**



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A higher percentage of academic museum directors than other art museum directors would allocate the cut to collections and exhibitions (46 percent versus 31 percent), but a lower percentage would apply the cut to new employees or redefined positions (47 percent versus 61 percent). (Figure 22)

**Figure 22: If you were to receive a 10 percent reduction in your museum’s budget next year, which of the following areas would be most likely to receive a reduction? Please select up to three areas.**



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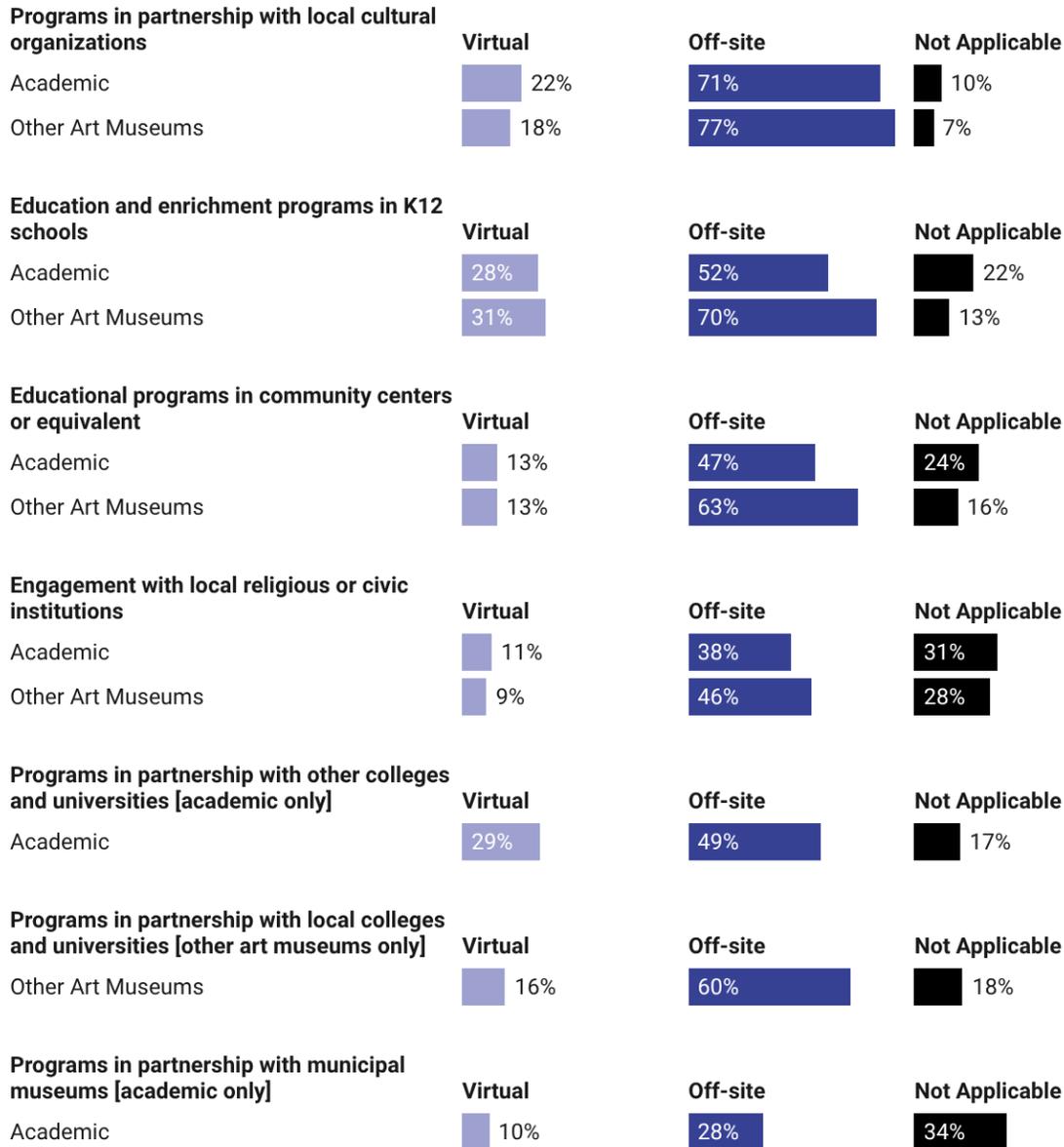
# Public trust and engagement

We next turned to questions on how art museum directors engage with their communities and the public. Specifically, we asked directors about the types of programming they offer, the mediums they use for that programming, and their partnerships with external organizations, as well as their climate-related mitigation strategies and priorities.

We first asked directors what kinds of programming their museums offer, and if they offer the program virtually or off-site. Three-quarters of all directors report offering programs in partnership with local cultural organizations off-site (75 percent), and nearly a fifth also offer these virtually (19 percent). Sixty-four percent of all respondents also indicated that they offer off-site education and enrichment programs in K-12 schools (and 30 percent virtually), 58 percent offer off-site educational programs in community centers (and 13 percent virtually), while 43 percent offer off-site engagement with local religious or civic institutions (but only 10 percent offer such programming virtually). Notably, a third of academic museums (34 percent) indicated that they do not offer programs in partnership with other types of art museums. The vast majority of other art museums (82 percent) indicated that they offer programs in partnership with local colleges and universities. In fact, 60 percent of these museums offer off-site programming in collaboration with universities and colleges. Nearly half of academic museums (49 percent) offer programs in partnership with other colleges and universities. **(Figure 23)**

Three-quarters of all directors report offering programs in partnership with local cultural organizations off-site (75 percent), and nearly a fifth also offer these virtually (19 percent).

**Figure 23: Does your museum currently offer any of the following programming? Please select all that apply.**

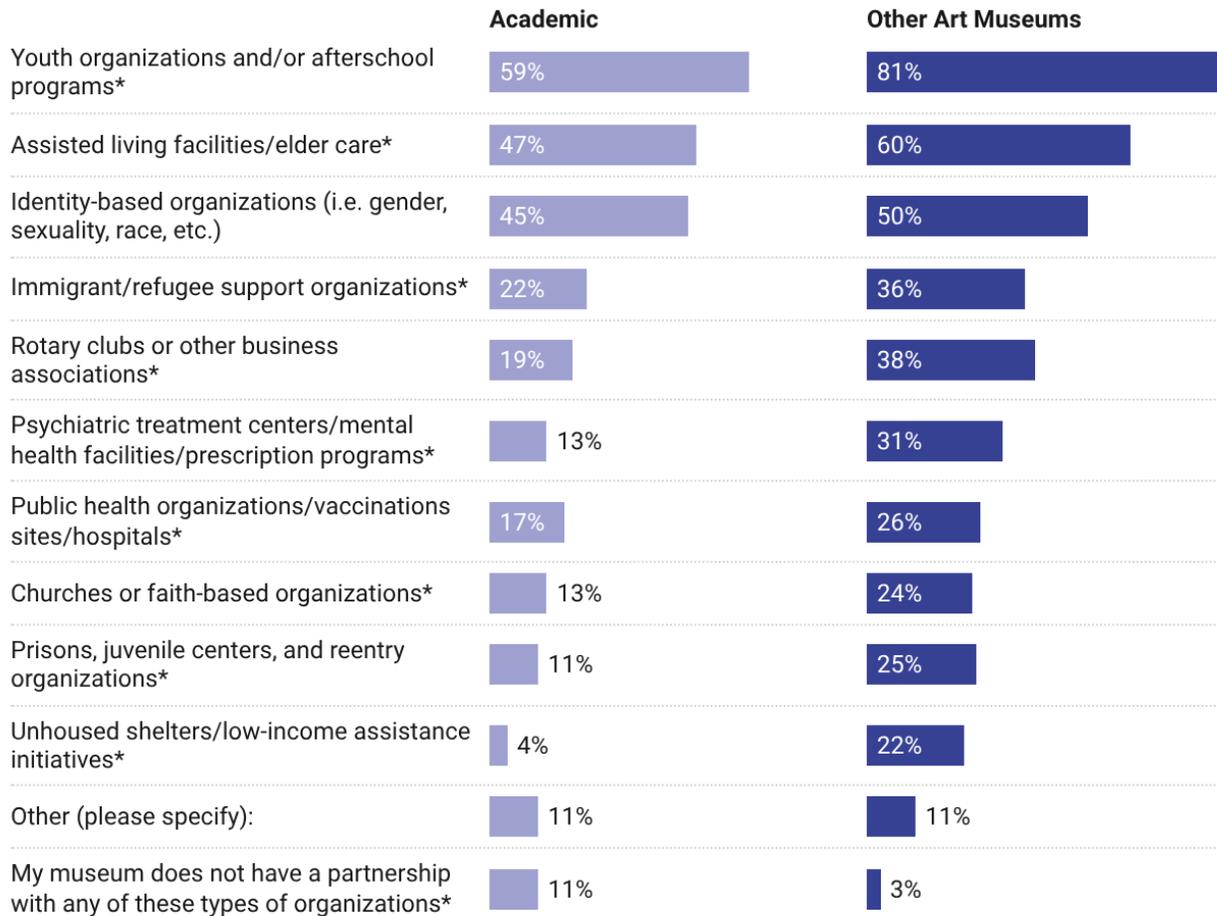


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Three-quarters of respondents (59 percent of academic museums and 81 percent of other art museums) indicated that they partner with youth organizations and after-school programs, followed by partnerships with assistant living facilities/elder care (47 percent of academic museums and 60 percent of other art museums), followed next by identity-based organizations, at 48 percent (45 percent of academic museums and 50 percent of other art museums). As **Figure 24** below illustrates, art museums outside of colleges and universities report having external

partnerships will all types of organizations at a higher percentage than academic museums, and these differences are statistically significant on all items except for identity-based organizations.

**Figure 24: Does your museum have partnerships with any of the following organizations?**

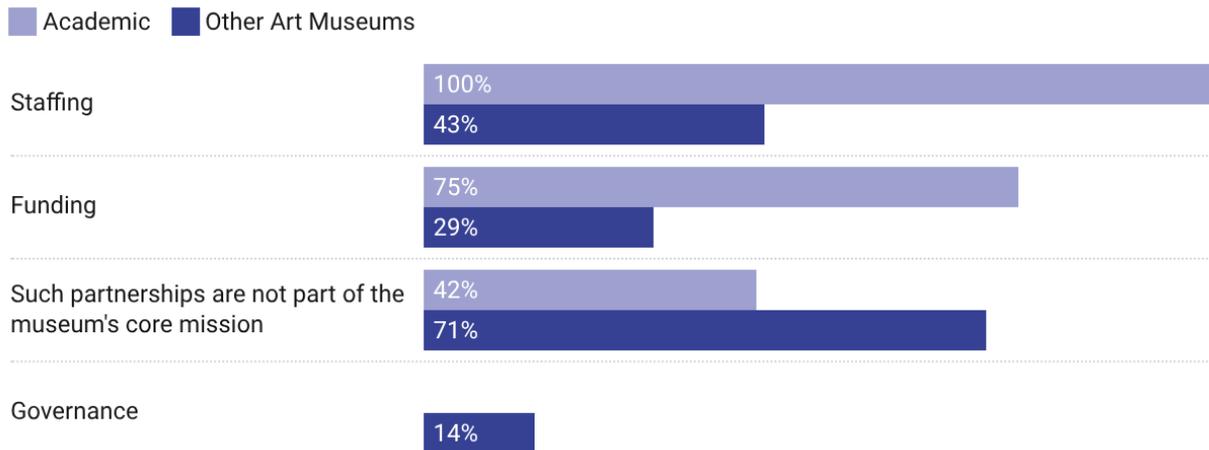


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Notably, in 2022, 28 percent of museums reported not having partnerships with any of these types of organizations, and this year only 5 percent report this. For these museums (11 percent of academic museums and 3 percent of their counterparts), we asked directors what, if any, are the impediments to establishing such partnerships. Seventy-nine percent of these respondents indicated that staffing is a barrier (100 percent of academic museum directors and 43 percent of other art museums), followed by funding at 58 percent (75 percent of academic

museums and 29 percent of other art museums). Fifty-three percent of all respondents indicated that establishing external partnerships is not part of the museum’s core mission, (42 percent of academic museums and 71 percent of other museums). (Figure 25)

**Figure 25: What are the impediments to having partnerships with these organizations? Please select all that apply. [These responses are only from museums that indicated having no such partnerships in Figure 24]**



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We subsequently asked directors if their museum investigates which audiences are not visiting or otherwise engaged with the museum. Nearly three quarters of museums (72 percent), driven by other art museums, investigate which audiences are not engaged with the museum, while 28 percent do not. Sixty-five percent of academic museums and 75 percent of other art museums conduct these types of investigations. Of those who do conduct these analyses, 59 percent strongly agree or agree that their museum has implemented strategies to reach audiences that have never visited or engaged with the museum, on a steady upward trend since the previous two cycles (38 percent in 2022, and 21 percent in 2020). (See Figure 26) In 2025, this trend is driven by museums outside of colleges and universities which report higher percentages of agreement with the statement (63 percent) than academic ones (49 percent), a statistically significant difference.

**Figure 26<sup>10</sup>: My museum has developed and implemented strategies to reach audiences that have never visited or otherwise engaged with the museum. [Strongly Agree and Agree]**

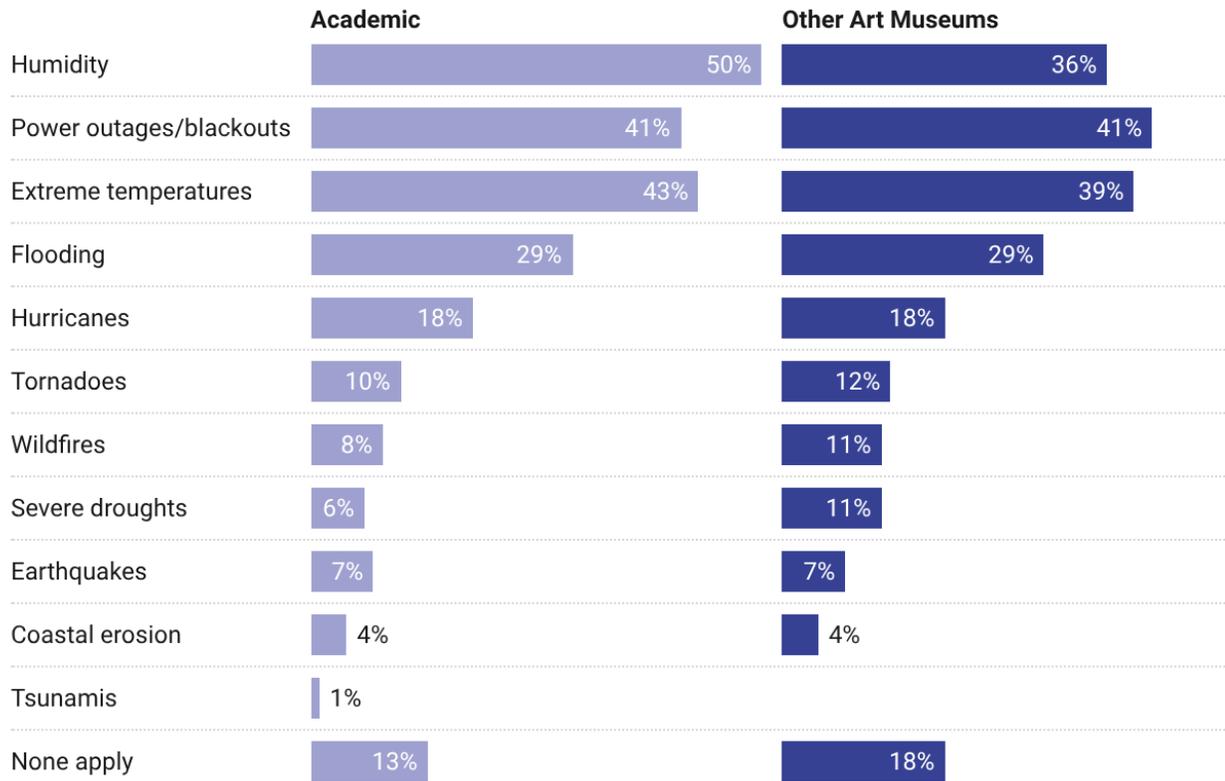


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New to this cycle are several questions regarding how art museum directors see their museum’s work in relation to climate-preparedness. We first asked directors if their museums had directly experienced any climate-related issue within the most recent five years, and 41 percent of them indicated that they had experienced power outages or blackouts, followed closely by issues related to humidity and extreme temperatures (each at 40 percent). Notably, academic museums report having humidity-related issues at a higher percentage than other art museums (50 percent compared to 36 percent). Only 16 percent of all respondents (13 percent of academic museums, and 18 percent of other art museums) indicated that they had not experienced any of the climate-related issues in Figure 27 below.

<sup>10</sup> Only shown to respondents that selected “yes” to investigating which audiences are not visiting or otherwise engaged with the museum.

**Figure 27: Which of the following climate-related issues have directly affected your museum in the past five years?**



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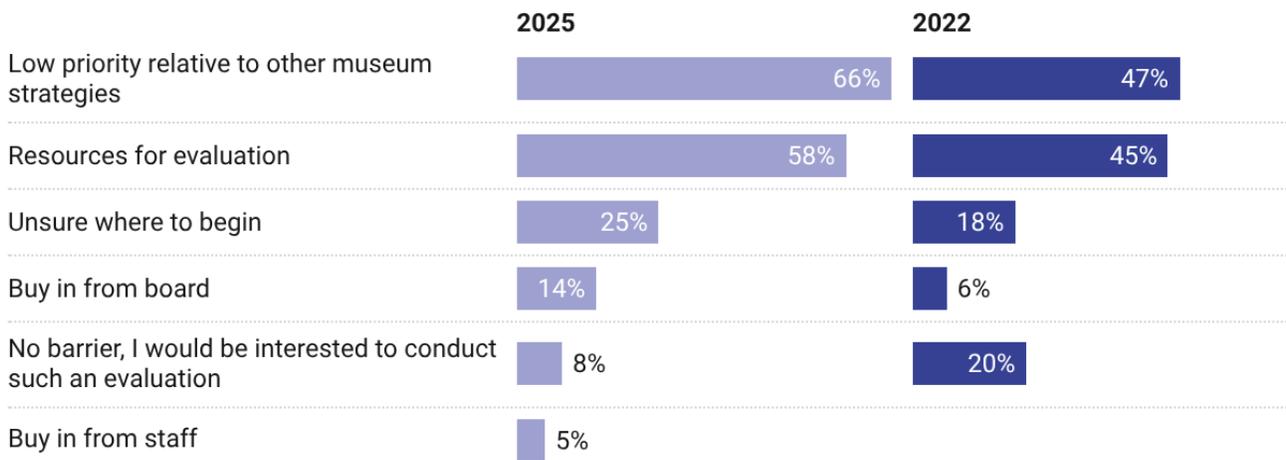
Eighty-six percent of museums indicated that they have an up-to-date emergency operation plan or a related climate disaster emergency response plan, but only 26 percent of all museums have estimated the financial costs of reducing their climate footprint. Here, the difference between academic museums (16 percent), and other art museums (31 percent) is statistically significant. Museums who have also experienced at least one climate event listed in figure 27 above were statistically significantly more likely to have estimated the financial costs of reducing their climate footprint as well.

Forty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they had evaluated the museum’s climate impact with respect to their building operations, collections care and storage (29 percent), and waste management or water usage (24 percent). The difference between academic museums and other art museums who have evaluated their climate impacts when it comes to investments (3 percent versus 11 percent) and waste

management/water usage (13 percent versus 29 percent) are both statistically significant.

Roughly a third (32 percent), however, have not evaluated the museum’s climate impact, up from 27 percent in 2022. Of these respondents, 66 percent indicated that such an evaluation is a low priority relative to other museum strategies, while 58 percent indicated that resources for evaluation are another barrier. A quarter of the respondents also indicated they are unsure where to begin with such an evaluation. (Figure 28)

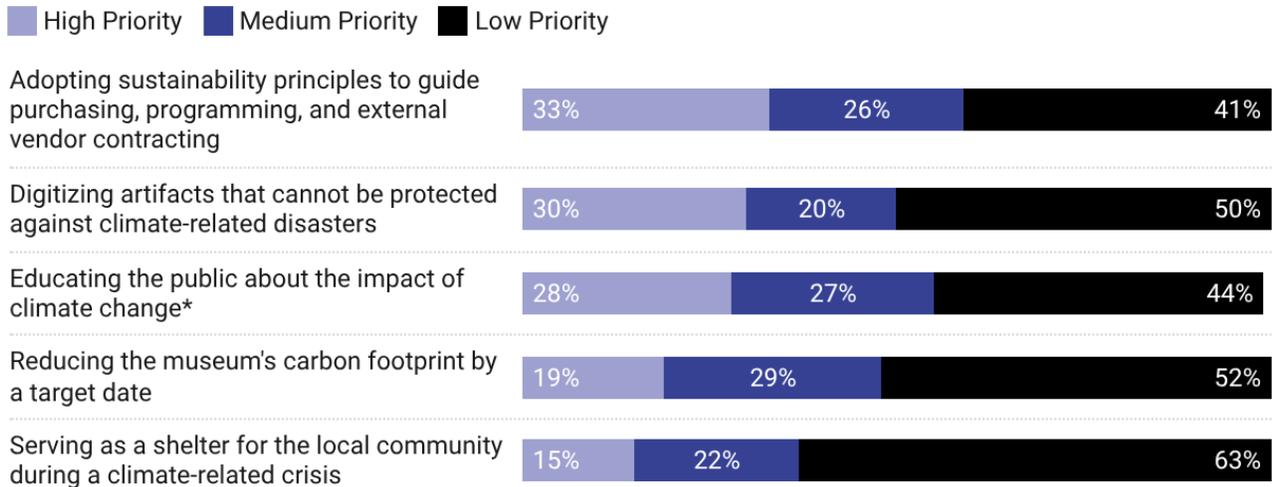
**Figure 28: What are the primary barriers to evaluating climate impact? (This graph only reflects those who have not evaluated the museum’s climate impact.)**



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Sixty percent of all respondents indicated that they have adopted or implemented climate-friendly procedures or protocols related to their building operations, their waste management or water usage (33 percent), as well as to their collections care and storage (28 percent), while 22 percent have not implemented any such procedures. The options considered to be lower priorities or less important amongst respondents, included serving as shelters for the local community during climate-related crises (63 percent) and reducing the museum’s carbon footprint by a target date (52 percent). Nearly a third of respondents indicate adopting sustainability principles to guide purchasing, programming, and external vendor contracting (33 percent) is a high priority, as well as digitizing artifacts that cannot be safeguarded against climate-related disasters (30 percent). (Figure 29)

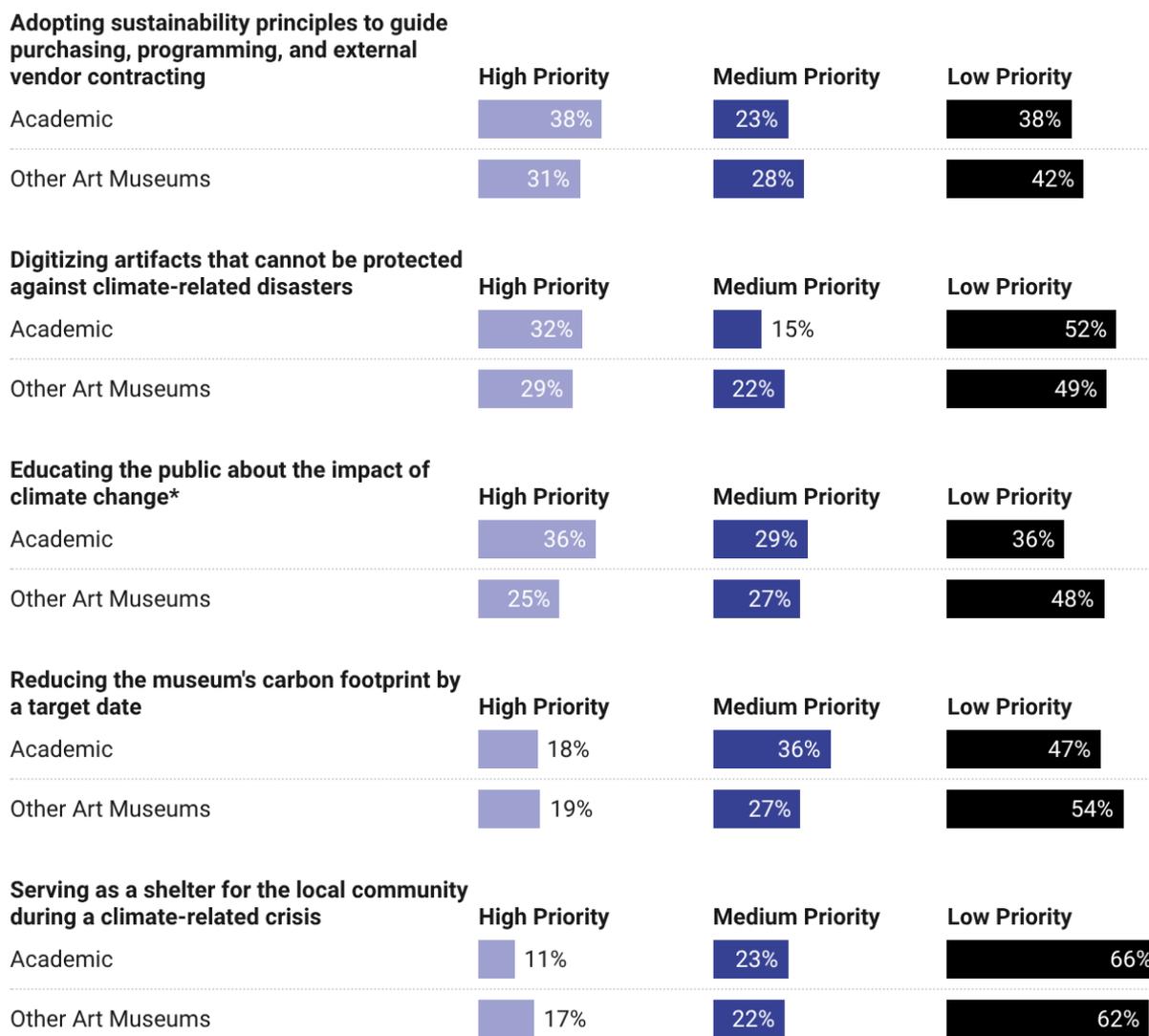
**Figure 29: How much of a priority is each of the following climate-related strategies at your museum?**



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Notably, 36 percent of academic museum directors rated educating the public about the impact of climate as a high priority, and the same percentage rated it as a low priority, while 25 percent of other art museum directors indicated this is a high priority, and 48 percent rated it as a low priority. The difference on this response item between the two museum types is statistically significant. **(Figure 30)** It is worth also noting that differences on these items by museum region are not statistically significant, with the exception of serving as a shelter for the local community during a climate-related crisis. Moreover, experiencing at least one climate-related event statistically significantly correlates with prioritizing serving as a shelter for the community during a climate-related crisis. More broadly, it is worth noting that we found statistically significant positive correlations between all five of the statements. Put another way, indicating any one strategy as important makes respondents statistically significantly more likely to indicate any and all of the other priorities as important as well.

**Figure 30: How much of a priority is each of the following climate-related strategies at your museum? [Academic vs Other Art Museums]**



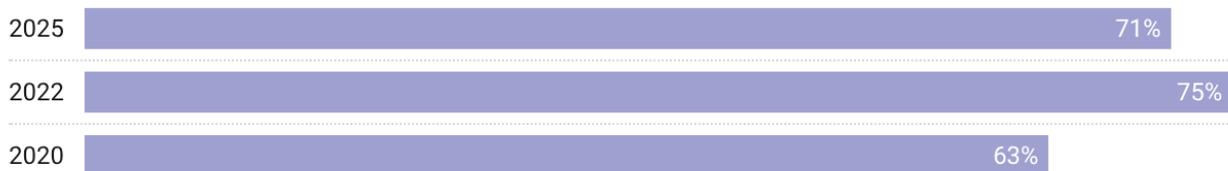
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# Museum collections

Eighty-two percent of respondents indicated that they are at a collecting museum (90 percent of academic directors compared to 78 percent of other art museums). On average, 13 percent of a museum’s collection is currently on view (compared to 12 percent in 2022, and 10 percent in 2020), while an average of 3 percent of a museum’s collection is currently on loan (up from 2 percent in both 2022 and 2020). One respondent noted, “the [museum] is the custodian of many Native American ceremonial objects which, while part of the permanent collection, will never be publicly displayed. This will distort the answers to the questions pertaining to the collections, as these will also never be loaned to other institutions.” Museum directors also indicated that roughly a tenth of the items in their collection (11 percent) are no longer aligned with the museum’s mission and/or curatorial priorities (compared to 8 percent in 2022 and 12 percent in 2020). The majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that regularly changing the artwork displayed in galleries devoted to the museum’s permanent collection promotes audience engagement (71 percent, down from 75 percent in 2022 but up from 63 percent in 2020), driven by academic museums (73 percent, compared to 66 percent for academic ones, see **Figure 31**). Eighty percent of museum directors also show strong confidence that their museum has developed strategies for increasing the representation of the artists and/or subjects in its collections.

**Figure 31: Regularly changing the artwork displayed in galleries devoted to the museum’s permanent collections promotes audience engagement.**

[Strongly Agree and Agree Only]

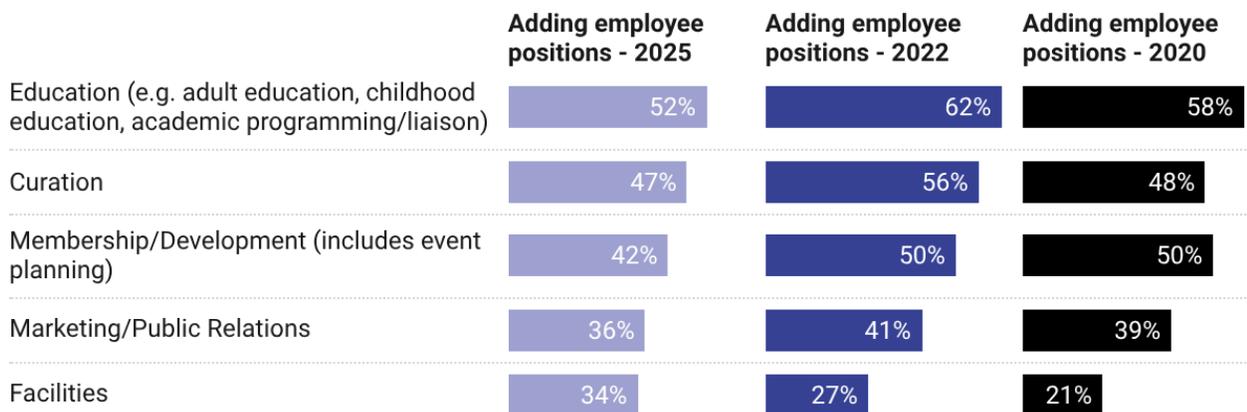


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# Staffing and talent management

The majority of art museum directors do not anticipate that there will be staffing increases or decreases in any position type within the next five years, with the exception of education, learning, and engagement. Here, the majority of directors anticipate adding positions (52 percent), and they also anticipate adding curatorial positions (47 percent), and membership and development positions (42 percent) within the same timeframe. Academic museums anticipate adding positions at lower percentages than other art museum directors in the following areas: education, learning and engagement (47 percent, compared to 54 percent), membership and development (27 percent, compared to 49 percent), curatorial (44 percent compared to 48 percent), facilities and building management (13 percent, compared to 43 percent), and marketing/public relations (32 percent, compared to 38 percent). (Figure 32)

**Figure 32: To the best of your knowledge, will your museum add or reduce employee positions in any of the following areas over the next five years? [Top 5: Adding Positions]**

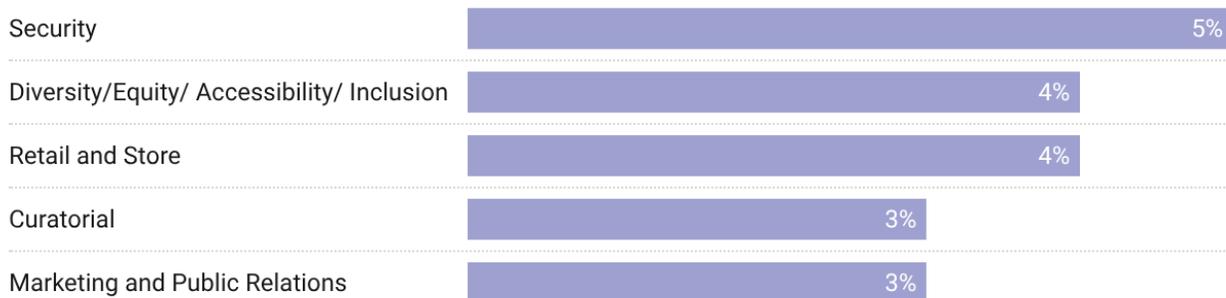


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The job type most likely to see reductions from cycle to cycle, are security positions (5 percent), closely followed by the diversity/equity/accessibility/inclusion roles, tied with retail and store positions (both at 4 percent). Curatorial and marketing/public relations positions are both tied at 3 percent. When looking at these reductions by

museum type, fewer academic museum directors anticipate reducing curatorial staff (2 percent) than their counterparts (4 percent). It is a similar situation for retail and store positions with 4 percent of academic museums anticipating a reduction compared to 5 percent of other art museums, as well as security roles, with 4 percent of academic museums anticipating reducing these positions, compared to 6 percent of other art museums. **(Figure 33)**

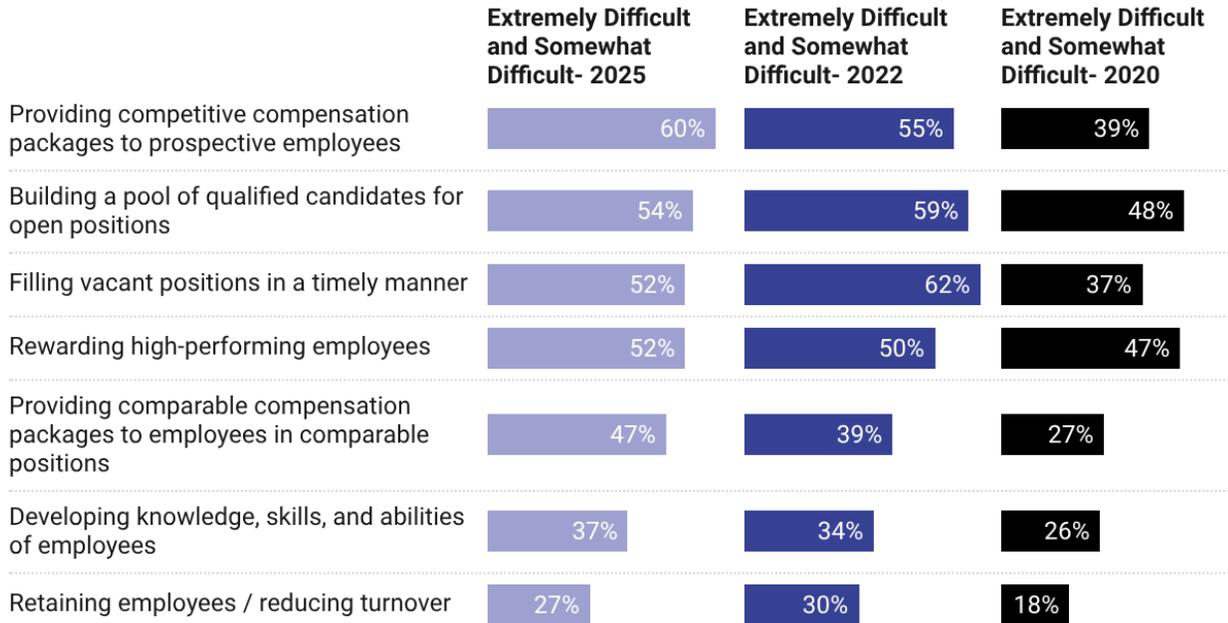
**Figure 33: To the best of your knowledge, will your museum add or reduce employee positions in any of the following areas over the next five years? [Top 5: Reducing Positions in 2025]**



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When it comes to the job market, 60 percent of directors indicate they find providing competitive pay packages to prospective employees extremely or somewhat difficult **(Figure 34)**. The same applies for building a pool of qualified applicants (54 percent), rewarding high-performing employees (52 percent), and filling positions in a timely manner (52 percent). The differences between how academic museum directors and other art museum directors rate the ease of developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of staff (47 percent of academic museums rate this as extremely or somewhat easy, compared to 32 percent of their counterparts) and rewarding high-performing employees (64 percent of academic museums rate this as extremely or somewhat difficult, compared to 47 percent of other art museums ) are statistically significant. One respondent argued that “as a government museum, I found it difficult to answer some of these questions. Particularly questions about staffing and increase/decreases expected are hard to answer as presently we don't know how federal government restructuring will impact our staffing and the potential consolidation of our operations with other federal museums. There is a lot of uncertainty at present, and my responses should be viewed through that lens.”

**Figure 34: Presently, in staffing positions in your museum, how easy or difficult are each of the following?**



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It is worth noting that 81 percent of museums in our sample do not have unionized staff, while 19 percent do. Where unions are present, on average, 48 percent of all staff at these museums are unionized. Academic museums are statistically significantly more likely to have unionized staff (31 percent), compared to 13 percent of other art museums. The differences between museums who have unionized staff and those who do not are also statistically significant when it comes to providing prospective employees with competitive pay packages: 33 percent of museums with unions indicated that they find this extremely easy or somewhat easy compared to 19 percent of those without unions. On the other hand, 46 percent of museums with unions find providing competitive pay extremely difficult or somewhat difficult, compared to 63 percent of museums without unions. Museum directors also indicated that 60 percent of their institutions employ remote work or hybrid policies, and 57 percent employ flexible work schedules.

# Conclusion

The 2025 Art Museum Director Survey provides comprehensive insights into the evolving perspectives of art museum leadership regarding key challenges, opportunities, and emerging trends over the five-year period since the survey's inception. Analysis across all three survey cycles reveals a consistent pattern: art museum directors maintain unwavering commitment to their institutions' public mission while adapting to an increasingly complex environment.

Museums continue to emphasize their role as trusted educational institutions and strategic community partners. Collaborations with youth organizations and elder care facilities have expanded significantly, with substantially fewer museums reporting an absence of external partnerships compared to 2022. Where partnerships remain underdeveloped, insufficient staff capacity and limited funding represent the primary obstacles. Staffing and talent management considerations continue to inform strategic decision making. Directors anticipate growth in education/engagement, curatorial, and development roles; however, many institutions face challenges related to competitive compensation, qualified candidate pipelines, and recruitment timelines. Directors are also facing natural disaster related incidents, most frequently experiencing humidity, extreme temperature events, and power outages, all posing threats to both collection preservation and public access. While most institutions have established emergency response protocols, far fewer have conducted cost analyses for carbon footprint reduction or comprehensive climate impact assessments encompassing facilities, storage, investments, and waste management.

The survey's first cycle in 2020 documented directors' perspectives immediately preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, while the second cycle in 2022 examined institutional responses during the pandemic and its immediate aftermath. The current cycle reflects a distinctly different landscape of financial, workforce, and strategic considerations. Collectively, these findings indicate that the field is transitioning from crisis response to strategic recalibration by refining operational approaches, balancing resource allocation, and adopting longer-term planning horizons.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Methodology

In an explicit goal to reach a broad range of institutions, this cycle we have expanded the sample to include all AAM and AAMD art museums. The sample also includes an additional list of museum directors developed with the help of the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), and the Center for Curatorial Leadership (CCL). The survey opened on March 31, 2025, and remained in the field through May 16, 2025. As many museums are members of multiple organizations, the final sample includes a list of 1,526 unique possible institutions. Of the 1,526 institutions we attempted to contact, 38 invitations failed or bounced, and 57 institutions were ineligible due to a small staff size (fewer than four FTE) bringing the sample down to 1,431.

The initial email message inviting museum directors to participate was sent through Qualtrics on March 31, 2025. For all AAMD members, the invitation message was sent from Executive Director Christine Anagnos; for museums that were AAM members but not AAMD members, the invitation email was from Executive Director Marilyn Jackson. Lastly, for AAAM, AAMC, and CCL museums that were not associated with AAMD nor AAM, the email was sent from Deirdre Harkins, senior analyst at Ithaka S+R. Five targeted reminders were sent throughout the survey period, with the final reminder message sent to all remaining directors who had not yet responded, from project advisor and director of the Pérez Art Museum Miami, Franklin Sirmans. The survey closed on May 16, 2025, and we received 368 eligible responses from museum directors for an overall response rate of 26 percent.

It is worth noting that our sample skews towards other art museums (70 percent), museums that are part of AAM (51 percent), on the East Coast (50 percent), and non-unionized (81 percent). The sample also skews toward smaller museums, with 57 percent of museums having 25 or fewer staff. Seventy-two percent of the directors who responded to the survey are white, 64 percent are female, and 52 percent are 55 and older. Fifty-two percent of these directors hold a master's degree or higher, and 77 percent have been in their current job for 10 years or less.

We analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, and a suite of inferential techniques, including independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVAs with Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons, chi-square tests, and correlation analyses. Throughout the report, we note findings that meet the threshold for statistical significance at  $\alpha < .05$ . For frequency-based figures, we highlight responses at the high end of each scale as an indicator of strong agreement: for 10-point Likert scales, we report the cumulative share of responses 8–10; for 5-, 6-, or 7-point scales, we report the cumulative share of the top two categories. Consistent with previous cycles, we conducted stratified analyses to examine differences across key subgroups. Given the repeated cross-sectional design of the study, institutional or individual respondents are not matched across the three cycles, and as such differences between the three cycles (2020, 2022, 2025) should not be interpreted as within-person changes, but rather shifts in the responding sample attitudes, opinions, and so forth.

Throughout the report we highlight differences by museum type (academic or other art museum(s)). This is a departure from the previous cycles, where we previously used academic in comparison to municipal (2022, 2020). Like the term “municipal,” “other art museum(s)” is used to refer to all museums that are not academic museums, including government, private, and non-profit museums.

As with the previous two cycles, a deidentified version of this survey will be deposited with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research for long-term preservation and free access to a public-use data file.

## Appendix B: Sample response rates for all cycles

### Appendix B: Sample response rates for all cycles

Table 1 – Response rate comparison

Year	Survey Population	Number of Completed Responses	Overall Response Rate	Response Rate by Source
Cycle 1- 2020	303	149	49%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AAMD: 73%</li><li>• AAM: 27%</li></ul>
Cycle 2- 2022	409	181	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AAMD: 72%</li><li>• AAM: 28%</li></ul>
Cycle 3- 2025	1,431	368	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AAMD: 40%<sup>11</sup></li><li>• AAM: 51%</li><li>• Third List: 9%</li></ul>

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<sup>11</sup> Survey participation was voluntary this cycle, whereas in previous cycles participation was mandatory for AAMD member institutions.

## Appendix C: Full participant demographics

Population demographic	2025 Aggregate Percentage	2022 Aggregate Percentage	2020 Aggregate Percentage
<b>Museum Type</b>			
Academic	30%	45%	50%
Other Art Museum	70%	55%	50%
<b>Source</b>			
AAMD	40%	72%	73%
AAM	51%	28%	27%
Third List	9%	-	-
<b>Region</b>			
Mid-Atlantic	18%	21%	21%
Midwest	17%	20%	19%
Mountain Plains	13%	11%	10%
New England	9%	10%	13%
Southeastern	23%	23%	21%
Western	18%	15%	14%
Mexico	<1%	-	-
Canada	2%	-	-
<b>Full Time Staff Size</b>			
4-10	31%	17%	23%
11-25	26%	17%	20%

Population demographic	2025 Aggregate Percentage	2022 Aggregate Percentage	2020 Aggregate Percentage
26-50	17%	22%	22%
51-100	14%	19%	16%
101+	12%	26%	19%
<b>Part Time Staff Size</b>			
0	3%	-	-
1-3	19%	-	-
4-10	26%	-	-
11-25	24%	-	-
26-50	17%	-	-
51-100	7%	-	-
101+	4%	-	-
<b>Unionized Staff</b>			
Unionized	19%	-	-
Non-unionized	81%	-	-
<b>Entrance Fee</b>			
Yes, there is a set fee	48%	46%	45%
There is a suggested donation	9%	6%	9%
No, there is no set fee or suggested donation	43%	49%	46%

Population demographic	2025 Aggregate Percentage	2022 Aggregate Percentage	2020 Aggregate Percentage
<b>Years as Director at Current Institution</b>			
Less than 5 Years	41%	35%	34%
5-10 Years	36%	36%	39%
11-15 Years	11%	18%	15%
16+ Years	12%	8%	13%
<b>Years working in the museum sector</b>			
Less than 10 Years	12%	5%	3%
10-20 Years	30%	27%	26%
21-30 Years	38%	36%	40%
31-40 Years	16%	25%	26%
41+ Years	4%	7%	5%
<b>Highest Degree Earned</b>			
Bachelor's Degree	14%	12%	7%
Master's Degree	52%	48%	50%
Doctorate Degree	29%	40%	41%
Professional Degree beyond a bachelor's degree	4%	1%	1%
<b>Previous Position</b>			
Director at another institution	43%	44%	46%
Deputy or assistant director	11%	16%	17%

Population demographic	2025 Aggregate Percentage	2022 Aggregate Percentage	2020 Aggregate Percentage
Chief Curator (or equivalent) at a museum	15%	17%	18%
Other	30%	23%	18%
<b>Age of Director</b>			
25-34	<1%	<1%	-
35-44	14%	9%	-
45-54	34%	31%	-
55-64	36%	38%	-
65+	16%	21%	-
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	64%	57%	52%
Male	36%	43%	47%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
American Indian or Alaska Native	<1%	<1%	<1%
Asian or Asian American	3%	3%	3%
Black or African American	4%	2%	1%
Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx	8%	7%	8%
Middle Eastern	1%	1%	<1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%
White	74%	83%	84%

Another option not listed	-	4%	3%
Multiracial and/or Multiethnic	9%	-	-