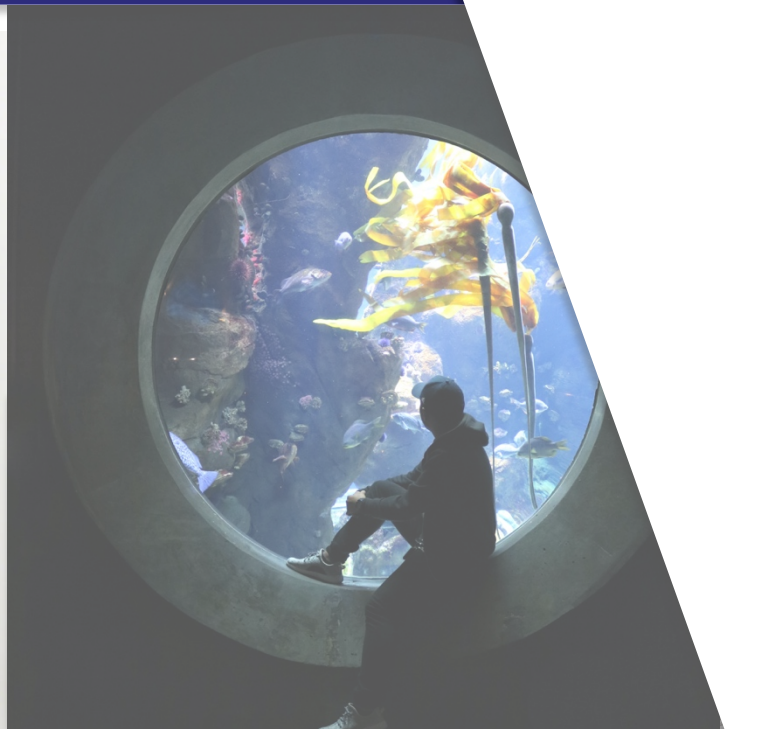


# Market Analysis and Opportunity Assessment Of Museum Capacity Building Programs

March 2021



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### **Institute of Museum & Library Services**

#### ***Core Project Team***

Kathryn Matthew, Ph.D., Former Director, IMLS

Paula Gangopadhyay, Deputy Director for Museum Services

Chris Reich, Chief Administrator, Office of Museum Services

Lisa Frehill, Ph.D., Senior Statistician

#### ***Contributors***

Matt Birnbaum, Ph.D., Senior Evaluation Officer

Jill Connors-Joyner, Senior Program Officer

Mark Isaksen, Supervisory Grants Management Specialist

### **Partners for Public Good**

#### ***Core Project Team***

Samantha Hackney, Consultant

Tim Hausmann, Consultant

#### ***Contributors***

Julie Simpson, Partner & Director, Nonprofit Effectiveness

Naomi Korb Weiss, Sr. Consultant

Charles Gasper, Sr. Consultant

Steven Lawrence, Senior Affiliate Consultant

Erin Britton, Consultant

Rose Konecky, Consultant

Olivia Ensley, Analyst

Catherine Ward, Intern

### **Steering Committee**

Kathy Kelsey Foley, *Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum*

Joanna Haas, *Formerly of Kentucky Science Center*

Joe Heimlich, *COSI's Center for Research and Evaluation*

Burt Logan, *Ohio History Connection*

Deborah Lynn Mack, Ph.D., *Nat. Museum of African Art; Nat. Museum of African American History & Culture*

Ruth Ann Rugg, *Coalition of State Museum Associations*

Michael Shanklin, *kidSTREAM Children's Museum*

Susan B. Spero, Ph.D., *Museum Studies, John F. Kennedy University*

### **Subject Matter Expert Committee**

Seana Hasson, *YMCA of the USA*

Laura Leviton, *Retired from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

Jill Mendelson, *Independent Consultant, formerly of UJA-Federation New York*

### Other Contributors:

Jennifer Alexander	Jen Levy
Marjorie Bequette	Jessica Mancini
Brian J. Carter	Lindsay McClung
Bao-Long Chu	Michelle Moon
Brian Crockett	Jennifer Ortiz
Deborah Cullen-Morales	Jean K. Ries
Celeste DeWald	Mort Sajadian
John Dichtl	Gary Smith
Cindy Foley	Regina R. Smith
Kerri Forrest	Debbi Stone
Stacey Halfmoon	Sally Tallant
Ben Garcia	Dimitra Tasiouras
Bruce Harkey	Bert Vescolani
Laura Huerta Migus	Christie Weininger
Kathayoon Khalil	Rick West
Kim Kiehl	Karen Wilkinson
Tomoko Kuta	Zinnia Willits



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#### **About Partners for Public Good**

Partners for Public Good (PPG) conducts and supports activities that facilitate and promote an effective charitable sector. Through the provision of educational initiatives, technical assistance, and strategic planning and guidance, PPG works to strengthen the governance mechanisms of nonprofit organizations and foster collaboration and inclusive impact programming across and within the sector. For more information about PPG, the charitable affiliate of [TCC Group](#), please visit [www.partnersforpublicgood.org](http://www.partnersforpublicgood.org) or contact [info@partnersforpublicgood.org](mailto:info@partnersforpublicgood.org).



## Executive Summary

In the summer of 2019, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and Partners for Public Good (PPG) engaged in a cooperative agreement to conduct a “Market Analysis and Opportunity Assessment of Museum Capacity Building Programs.” This study aimed to understand the scope of existing museum capacity building opportunities, identify potential gaps in the suite of current capacity building offerings, and determine new opportunities and areas of growth for both IMLS and other funders.

PPG engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, with a focus on small- and medium-sized museums, to capture perspectives on capacity building in the sector. Through interviews and focus groups, we gathered qualitative data from museum leaders, funders, capacity builders, and museum associations. Museum leaders also participated in an online survey. A Steering Committee of museum experts and a Subject Matter Expert Committee provided guidance throughout this process, and all data collection was formally approved by the Office of Management and Budget.

Our research yielded six major findings on the current state of capacity building in the museum sector:

- **Capacity strengthening must link directly to audience responsiveness or it can hinder a museum’s impact.** Museums are often tempted to build capacities to enhance their collections and encourage short-term financial stability. While both are important for museum success, if the capacities are not responding to and serving audience needs, they can impede a museum’s ability to have long-term impact by draining resources and weakening connections with audiences.
- **Capacity building is driven by those with power.** Funders, museum boards, and museum leaders often determine which capacities are valued and built within museums. Their decisions are critical to the health of the museum sector and must reflect changing museum and audience needs and be guided by diverse perspectives.
- **Successful capacity building requires a holistic change management approach and commitment from leadership and staff.** Organizational strengthening is complex and requires change, both in individual behavior and organizational systems. Effective change management, buy-in from leadership and staff, and a commitment to institutionalizing new practices are required for capacity building adoption and sustainability.
- **Museums experience different barriers to participating in capacity building.** Participation in capacity building across the museum sector is not equal. Availability of funding and amount of staff time are among the factors that determine whether museums engage in capacity building. These contributors to capacity building readiness are often especially limited for small museums.
- **A perception of museum uniqueness may be a barrier to the application of capacity building best practices.** Every museum is unique, with its own important history, mission, local context, and audience relationship. While these factors shape what capacity success looks like for each museum, the overall capacities required for each museum’s sustainability and impact are quite consistent across museums, as well as the larger nonprofit sector. Yet, at present, museums do not appear to be drawing upon the capacity building resources and best practices of other sectors.
- **The current capacity building infrastructure within the museum sector is insufficient to build museums’ adaptive and relational capacities and address diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) issues.** Museum sector stakeholders consistently lifted up the need for museums to develop their abilities to adapt to the changing landscape (including evolving audience needs), work in relationship with others, and address DEAI

issues. Yet, the current state of capacity building in the sector (e.g., availability of resources, level of museum engagement, types of activity engaged in, etc.) is not sufficient to support these needs.

An enhanced focus on and investment in capacity building is required to support museums in strengthening their capacities. Based on findings from our research, we offer the following recommendations for how funders, museum associations, and museums can focus their capacity building efforts.

#### **FUNDERS: Redistribute capacity building power.**

- **Rethink museum readiness** and question your implicit biases on what it means for a museum to be “ready” for funding.
- **Apply an equity lens** to your decision-making processes to ensure you are not perpetuating inequities within the museum sector.
- **Solicit diverse perspectives** to understand a wider array of museum needs and encourage investment that does not inadvertently exclude certain types of museums and communities.
- **Acknowledge success looks different for different museums** and consider adding customization or flexibility in your policies to allow for those differences.
- **Invest in associations.** Associations, which are often intimately connected to emerging needs, can ensure funder investment is timely and contextualized.

#### **FUNDERS: Invest in the museum sector’s most pressing and unmet capacity needs.**

- **Fund museums' most pressing needs** to strengthen their ability to respond to the changing environment (i.e., adaptive capacity), ability to work in relation and collaborate with others (i.e., relational capacity), and ability to address systemic inequities.
- **Fund cross-cutting approaches** and initiatives that create learning opportunities connecting the museum sector with the broader nonprofit sector.
- **Fund small museums to build their capacity**, as they typically have limited staff and resources to invest in a formal or informal capacity building initiative. Also, consider increasing opportunities for capacity building that is “right sized.”
- **Convene and collaborate with other funders** to ensure museums can access an array of opportunities and are fully supported in their capacity development.

#### **ASSOCIATIONS: Normalize organization-wide capacity building within your membership that builds on best practices.**

- **Advocate for organization-wide capacity strengthening** by expanding the scope of current offerings to be more museum-wide and encouraging the institutionalization of strengthened capacity.
- **Curate capacity building resources from outside your museum sub-sector and other parts of the nonprofit sector** so your members can benefit from and build on others’ learnings.
- **Share capacity successes** to raise awareness of the benefits of capacity building and motivate museum leaders to participate.

**MUSEUMS: Embrace that your museum will never be the same again—in fact, it shouldn't be.**

- **Ensure you have clearly articulated your target audience(s)**, especially those stakeholders it is essential for the museum to reach if it wants to achieve its mission.
- **Leverage your target audience(s) as experts** by asking their opinions, seeking their advice, soliciting their feedback, and using them to double-check your work. This engagement can take many different forms depending on how your audience prefers to engage.
- **Intentionally shape and be shaped by relationships in your environment** so you can appreciate and own your museum's role in your community (e.g., educational institution, convening space, cultural hub, etc.) and adapt in relation to others' roles.
- **Embed equity into your adaptation.** Your museum has power, and with that power comes a responsibility for advancing equity, including building power for those who are oppressed and not in positions of power.
- **Be realistic, but ambitious** about your museum's adaptation. It should be ambitious enough to match the identified need, but also make sense for your institution.
- **Institutionalize your adaptation** with intentional change management so it is successfully adopted and sustained.

## Introduction

Museums have long been recognized as cultural hubs in our society which provide spaces for artistic connection, immersion in historical settings, appreciation for the natural world, exploration of scientific phenomena, reconnection to one's heritage, and opportunities to learn of others' heritage. They are portals through which audiences encounter objects, ideas, and emotions they would not typically experience in their day-to-day lives.

A museum is typically thought of by the public in terms of the type of collection it shares (e.g., a contemporary art museum) and/or with whom it shares that collection (e.g., a children's museum). This can create a perception that each museum is operating with a unique set of opportunities and challenges that are unlike those of most other museums and entirely distinct from other types of nonprofit organizations. Yet, there is much more in common behind the scenes that determines a museum's sustained success. A museum, just like every other nonprofit organization, must have capacity—i.e., the skills, knowledge, and systems to adapt to changes in the environment, operate efficiently, and remain relevant to its stakeholders.

### Defining Capacity Building

For the purpose of this examination, we are defining capacity building as the generation of resources or support intended to help an institution enhance its ability to fulfill its mission or purpose (i.e., any activity or support that is focused on the health and sustainability of the museum rather than on specific exhibitions or programs).

Museum capacity is not static. Capacity must consistently be monitored, refined, and strengthened for a museum to adapt and respond successfully to the shifting environment in which it operates. A small museum that has recently opened may initially thrive based solely on its founder's artistic vision and executive leadership skills. As the museum progresses through its lifecycle, however, it will most likely require a broader array of competencies, such as effective staff management, board governance, fundraising skills, etc. It is important to note museum lifecycles are not linear, as museums rarely grow in an orderly fashion. Growth and lifecycle stages are not solely defined by indicators such as budget size, number of visitors, years in business, and number of staff. It is also about where the museum is on its development path—refining core programs, building and sustaining infrastructure, or expanding its impact beyond its core programs. Regardless of lifecycle stage, building sustainable and impactful museums requires the investment of time, energy, and resources to adapt to shifting visitor and community needs.

Similar to the nonprofit sector overall, capacity building activities in the museum sector can take many forms, including organizational assessments, coaching, cohort learning, self-driven communities of practice, the accessing of self-serve resources, workshops, and technical assistance. Facilitation of these capacity building efforts can be provided by a variety of parties. For example, museum leadership may coordinate a half-day retreat to build trust and unity among staff, while undertaking a strategic planning process or capital campaign may not be possible without external expertise.

When external investment is required for museums' capacity building efforts, potential sources of support may include associations, grantmakers, individual donors, or others, often depending on the scope and nature of the targeted capacity. For example, museum associations often offer both formal and informal capacity building opportunities to help museums adopt best practices and strengthen their organizations. Funders may support capacity building activities such as strategic planning, board development, and addressing diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) by providing resources directly to museums to hire consultants or by retaining consultants to work with these organizations at no charge.



While more and more public and private grantmakers have been investing in museum capacity in recent years, many funders continue to focus their investments on programs, collections, and exhibitions over organizational health.<sup>1</sup> As Jenny Hodgson at the Global Fund for Community Foundations and proponent of capacity building states, “some grantmakers hesitate to fund capacity building because they see it as paying for basic institutional infrastructure needs, and that’s not what they want to invest in. It’s like how people understand the need for traffic lights and roads, but they don’t want to pay for that. They want to pay for their luxury car.”<sup>2</sup>

This report presents our findings from our research to understand participation levels of museums in capacity building programs, museums’ perceived organizational strengths and challenges, gaps in capacity building service offerings, perceived drivers and barriers to participation, types of capacity building initiatives in which participants have engaged, and perceived levels of success in adopting and sustaining increased capacity building initiatives. The findings and recommendations in this report provide IMLS, other funders, and the museum sector with large with ideas on how they may most effectively invest in today’s rapidly changing museum sector through capacity building offerings.

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<sup>1</sup> PPG Interviews, *Market Analysis and Opportunity Assessment of Museum Capacity Building Programs*.

<sup>2</sup> *Supporting Grantee Capacity*. (Rep.). (2015). Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://grantcraft.org/content/guides/supporting-grantee-capacity/>

## The Role of IMLS

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) recognizes that a museum's impact is dependent not only on its ability to provide exemplary stewardship of collections and present high-quality exhibits and educational programs but also on its overall organizational health. IMLS has invested in multiple programs designed to support museum capacity building. Since 1981, the Museum Assessment Program (MAP)—administered by the American Alliance of Museums—has provided organizational assessments to help over 5,000 small and mid-sized museums become more sustainable, build capacity, and meet professional standards. In cooperation with the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation, the Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) program is helping small and mid-sized museums assess their collections, buildings, and related policies. IMLS support for MAP and CAP reflect a long-term, sustained commitment to technical assessment programs to meet the unique needs of small and mid-sized museums.

IMLS funding programs, like the National Leadership Grants for Museums and the former 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum Professionals program, have supported numerous capacity building and professional development projects benefiting multiple institutions and individuals. IMLS provided grant support to assist the Association for State and Local History with the creation and nationwide launch of the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs) program—a self-paced assessment program designed specifically for small and mid-sized history organizations. Small, largely volunteer museums in the Midwest region participated in Hands-On Experiential Learning Project (HELP) funded in part by IMLS through the Mid-America Arts Alliance. The Cultural Competency Learning Institute, a project made possible in part with IMLS funding, provides a process and set of resources designed to help museums increase their organizational capacity around diversity, inclusion, and culture. Additionally, IMLS has partnered with other organizations to offer a variety of leadership, organizational development, and networking programs across the museum, library, and archival fields.

In keeping with the evolving needs of the museum sector, IMLS has continued to offer new capacity building grant programs, such as Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff, designed to generate systemic change within a museum, and the Inspire! Grants for Small Museums program. IMLS has also engaged in several targeted cooperative agreements, such as Museums for Digital Learning, to increase the digital capacity of museums; and Digital Empowerment of Small Museums, to enhance digital skill building in small museums in the wake of the pandemic. All of the agency's funding programs continue to contribute to the ability of museums to achieve goals and objectives in service to communities.

## Our Inquiry

In 2019, IMLS engaged in a cooperative agreement with Partners for Public Good (PPG) to conduct a “Market Analysis and Opportunity Assessment of Museum Capacity Building Programs” to understand the full scope of existing capacity building opportunities in the museum sector. Through focused research and analysis, the study aims to:

- Provide a holistic view of the museum “market” and need for capacity building support;
- Identify potential gaps in the suite of current offerings; and
- Identify new opportunities and areas for growth.

This work builds upon existing studies conducted by IMLS and other organizations that examine the capacity of museums to play a role in improving community social wellbeing and quality of life. Such studies include IMLS’ report *Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts*,<sup>3</sup> American Alliance of Museum’s (AAM’s) *Museums & Public Opinion*,<sup>4</sup> and IMLS’ current research initiative, “Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impacts of the Nation’s Libraries and Museums.”

This research also builds on PPG’s capacity building insights from almost forty years working with nonprofits to maximize their impact through capacity assessment, strategic planning, organizational and board development, and evaluation. The first of our insights informing this research is that no two organizations have the exact same capacity strengths and needs. Having administered over 7,000 nonprofit capacity assessments,<sup>5</sup> we know each nonprofit’s capacity needs are unique and vary based on a multitude of factors, including, but not limited to, sector, size, and revenue structure.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, a nonprofit’s capacity needs evolve as the organization progresses through its lifecycle.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, capacity building efforts must be adapted continually to address those unique needs. Through this research, we test the assumption that museums’ needs also vary based on their organizational characteristics.

### PPG often breaks down nonprofit capacity into seven categories:

1. **Adaptive Capacity:** The ability of a nonprofit to monitor, assess, respond to, and create internal and external changes.
2. **Leadership Capacity:** The ability of all organizational leaders to create and sustain the vision, inspire, model, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate, in an effort to achieve the mission.
3. **Management Capacity:** The ability of a nonprofit to ensure the effective and efficient use of organizational resources.
4. **Technical Capacity:** The ability of a nonprofit to implement all of the key organizational and programmatic functions.
5. **Relational Capacity:** A nonprofit’s ability to understand its positioning within its ecosystem and build and activate relationships with others in and across sectors.
6. **Equity:** A nonprofit’s ability to execute its capacities in an equitable, accessible, and inclusive manner; and the extent to which the organization reflects the demographics of its community. In the museum sector this is often referred to as DEAI (diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion).
7. **Organizational Culture:** A nonprofit organization’s context – unique history, language, structures, and values – that will affect its ability to achieve its mission.

<sup>3</sup> Norton, M. H., & Dowdall, E. (2016). *Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts* (Rep.). Washington D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services.

<sup>4</sup> *Museums & Public Opinion (Summary of findings from National Public Opinion Polling)* (Rep.). (2018). American Alliance of Museums.

<sup>5</sup> How Does the CCAT Work? (2020, July 09). Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://www.tccgrp.com/insights-resources/insights-perspectives/how-does-the-ccat-work/>

<sup>6</sup> Connolly, P. (2006). *Navigating the organizational lifecycle: A capacity-building guide for nonprofit leaders*. Washington, D.C.: BoardSource.

<sup>7</sup> How Does the CCAT Work? (2020, July 09).

A second insight informing our research is that, while nonprofit leaders are often in tune with the general capacity challenges their organizations face (e.g., marketing expertise, technology, etc.), third-party assessment can help leaders to clarify and prioritize those needs so leaders can implement capacity building efforts that lead to real change. For example, when we ask nonprofit leaders to identify their most pressing capacity challenge, many single out fundraising skills. Yet, after diving more deeply into their organizations' capacities through formal assessment and exploratory conversations, leaders often realize their most pressing capacity need is to articulate their organization's impact through robust evaluation and a better understand of audience and community needs. Without the ability to articulate the impact, an investment in fundraising skills (e.g., a new development director, donor database, etc.) may not only fail to attract new donors but may unintentionally squander resources. This assumption is explored further in our research to better understand the relationship between what museum leaders want, and what they need.

The third insight that informs this research is that increased capacity is often difficult to sustain. Nonprofits are comprised of individuals organized into complex structures with disparate priorities, personal values, and perspectives on how the organization should be run. Any effort to disrupt the organizational stasis will inevitably be met with resisting forces, be it human or systemic.<sup>8</sup> At times this resistance manifests as a lack of staff adherence to a newly instituted policy. At others, it is the unsuccessful transfer from an individual's learning to an organization-wide, or "institutionalized," increase in knowledge. For this reason, capacity building must be strategically designed to encourage holistic organizational change, if the increased capacity is to be sustained. In our research, we examine the extent to which increased capacity is sustained within museums, and the organizational components that impact a museum's ability to successfully adopt change.

We embarked upon this partnership with IMLS in 2019. In the midst of our data collection in 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States began. The cascading impact of the pandemic struck museums across the country, requiring many to temporarily halt their operations, close their doors to ticket buyers, and cancel (or drastically rethink) fundraisers crucial to their financial sustainability. Many were faced with the difficult decision to furlough or lay off employees. Some, unable to survive the financial hardship, were forced to close permanently. A recent study predicts up to 30% of museums may go out of business as a result of the pandemic and the resulting global economic downturn.<sup>9</sup>

Concurrent with the pandemic and connected through the evidence of racial disparities, large-scale protests and uprisings across the country have demanded an end to police brutality and systemic anti-Black racism and racial injustice. This racial reckoning has sparked a country-wide conversation on how all institutions must be centering their work to advance racial justice.

Data was collected by PPG for this study both before and during the onset of the pandemic and racial reckoning. Interestingly, these societal events did not change what we heard from informants—i.e., that adaptability, innovation, and financial sustainability have been top priorities for museums both before and during the pandemic; and racial justice was already a critical priority for museums before the racial reckoning. In fact, these societal events served to reinforce for museums the importance of addressing the crucial capacity challenges that will enable museums to achieve these priorities.

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8 Smith, S., & \*, N. (n.d.). Harnessing Superhero Effort to Make Change Happen in Nonprofits. Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://socialimpactarchitects.com/nonprofit-change-management/>

9 American Alliance of Museums. (2020, November 17). A Snapshot of US Museums' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (June 2020). Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://www.aam-us.org/2020/07/22/a-snapshot-of-us-museums-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

## Research Questions

The following research questions drove our initial inquiry:

- **Market profile and penetration:** What capacity building programs are currently being used by museums? What types of museums have not participated in organizational capacity building?
- **Drivers of participation:** What factors determine whether or not a museum participates in capacity building? Who are the decision-makers? What characterizes a museum that has become “ready?” What are the barriers to participation?
- **Growth opportunity:** What are the critical needs in the museum field that are not being met by the current capacity building offerings from IMLS or other entities? Given these critical needs, who is the target market(s)?
- **Distinctiveness:** How do IMLS’ capacity building investments compare with other assessments or similar capacity building programs offered by associations, collaboratives, or consultants? How can IMLS offer a unique program?
- **Adoption and sustainability:** How do capacity building programs successfully result in adoption of recommendations and institutionalization of improved practices? What are the barriers to adopting and sustaining change?
- **Ongoing monitoring and evaluation:** What variables are most important to integrate into the design of capacity building offerings that would allow museums to clearly monitor their progress towards goals and generate valid data for decision-making? What data could IMLS collect to assess a museum’s progress in implementing recommendations? What data could IMLS collect to measure the impact of its capacity building programs?

This study employed a mixed methods approach, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from stakeholders such as museum leaders, funders, capacity builders, and representatives from museum associations. PPG’s mixed methods approach included the following: a survey of museum representatives, twenty interviews, two virtual focus groups, and secondary research. To ensure the perspectives of small- and medium-sized museum leaders were captured in this study, PPG’s survey sample included museums with annual incomes under \$5,000,000. Survey responses were received from representatives from 356 museums, a response rate of approximately twelve percent. According to our analysis of the response rates for each sub-type (number of respondents out of number invited), there were no major differences between these groups’ responsiveness to the survey. Additional details about the survey instrument, focus group and interview design, and the analytical methodologies can be found in the appendix.

## Findings

Ensuring a strong and relevant museum sector requires investment in museums' adaptive and relational capacities as well as their abilities to address racial inequity, all so they can effectively engage new audiences and sustain meaningful relationships with existing audiences. These abilities have become especially imperative in the context of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and national racial reckoning, which have required museums to reevaluate their relationships to audiences and how they connect with and respond to their diversifying communities. Ultimately, our findings indicate that an emphasis on building museums' technical capacity (e.g., collections management, marketing, fundraising, etc.) over recent decades has not provided the foundation needed for nurturing sustained engagement with audiences, especially during these rapidly evolving times.

The economic, social, and cultural disparities highlighted by the twin crises of COVID-19 and racism are not new to this country or its museums. Growing immigrant and minority populations have been shifting the demographics of the U.S. population for decades. As a result, the group that has historically constituted museums' core audience, non-Hispanic whites, is in decline.<sup>10</sup>

While there have been culturally specific museums and exhibitions to showcase varied histories and traditions, the museum sector as a whole has not successfully bridged these divisions to engage diverse audiences or create spaces for cultural exchange and conversation. In fact, "the preponderance of evidence points to significant disparities in museums' participation by different racial and ethnic groups." This includes notably lower rates of museum attendance among Black and Latinx populations. These measurable differences in participation came in large part due to historical discrimination and subtle forms of exclusion.<sup>11</sup>

Building the museum sector for the future will entail devising new methods of engagement beyond the traditional and institutional formats, as well as connecting with the public through authentic partnerships and avenues with both communities and other institutions. This new future is best imagined as one where museums are fully integrated into communities and leading the charge on social change, including acting as educational settings, creating a greener climate, advancing health and wellness, and centering conversations on restorative justice.<sup>12</sup> While this vision is aspirational, the pandemic and racial reckoning present an opportunity for museums to revise their role in shaping our future.

### 1. Capacity strengthening must link directly to audience responsiveness or it can hinder a museum's impact.

We have heard countless stories of organizations investing in capacity building reactively and later regretting the wasted investment. When we dug a little deeper into capacity investment prioritization, we heard a new story: capacity investments that are not directly tied to mission-driven priorities or audience responsiveness can actually hinder a museum's impact, not only with the opportunity cost (i.e., the resources could have been spent elsewhere), but also the misguided investments may, over time, contribute to museum growth and evolution that is divergent from audience needs.

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<sup>10</sup> B. F., & Medvedeva, M. (2000). *Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums* (Rep. No. ISBN 978-1-933253-21-321-3). Washington D.C.: American Association of Museums.

<sup>11</sup> B. F., & Medvedeva, M. (2000). *Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums*.

<sup>12</sup> 2040. (2018). *Museum. A Benefit of Membership in the American Alliance of Museums*.

In our research, we see museums tempted to build capacity like a bodybuilder—prioritizing capacities that enable the museum to expand programming, increase attendance, and acquire additional capital. These capacities may help the museum grow bigger, but they do not necessarily lead to increased impact. Instead, museums must build capacities like an athlete—investing in the mission-driven knowledge, skills, and systems that build resilience, efficiency, and impact. These skills will enable museums to be responsive and build sustained engagement with diverse audiences.

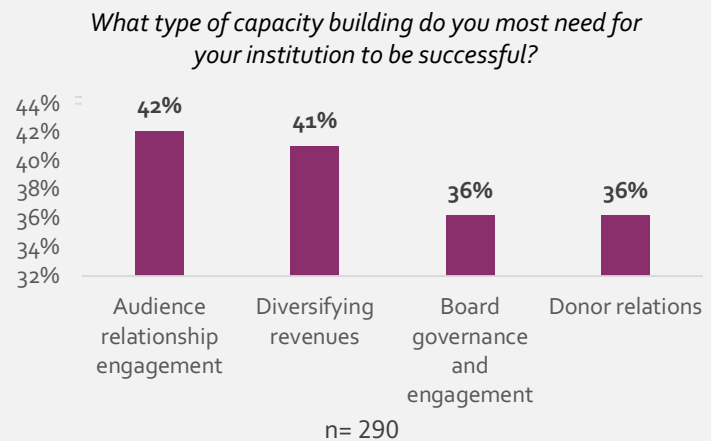
We heard from museum leaders two specific ways this trade-off between capacity building toward expansion versus agility and responsiveness to audiences shows up in their decision-making processes:

- Prioritizing financial sustainability or adapting to audience needs.** While the two are not mutually exclusive, we hear from stakeholders that financial sustainability is often regarded by funders and decision-makers (e.g., board, museum leadership) as a priority over building systems for learning from and adapting to audience needs. An opportunity for new revenue, such as a gift shop or cafe, may be an enticing capacity investment for a museum board, as it will most likely reap a relatively quick return on investment and contribute to financial stability. Presented at the same board meeting, a study to understand which accessibility improvements would enable visitors to more deeply engage with collections may seem less enticing, as the return on investment would most likely be longer term. And yet, depending on how tied to a museum’s mission priorities a new gift shop or cafe is, the visitor research is most likely more directly tied to mission, audience connection, and impact.

This is not to say museum leadership should ignore financial sustainability and opportunities for new revenue and only invest in audience engagement. Instead, investments in financial sustainability should drive long-term audience engagement. Although it may be tempting to invest in a predictably lucrative offering, if the offering itself does not advance mission priorities, a museum runs the risk of slowly morphing into a money-making operation that happens to be a museum, rather than a museum focused on impact that is financially sustainable.

### Museum Capacity Priorities

Our research shows new revenue streams and audience connection are both salient capacity issues for museum leadership, as survey respondents identified “audience relationship/engagement” and “diversifying revenues” as their top capacity building needs. This finding highlights the need to examine the tension between the two and determine how revenue diversification can be in service of audience relations.



- Collection quality, volume, and prestige versus connection to audience.** Again, these two are not mutually exclusive, as high-quality, well-maintained collections can be essential for rich audience experiences. However, collections must be physically, intellectually, and culturally accessible; they must reflect and resonate with a museum’s target audience(s). As Bao-Long Chu of Houston Endowment puts it: “If museums want to be true community centers and less noble cathedrals, they must validate our existence.” Absent this validation, museums run the risk of becoming obsolete to its intended audience. According to Stacey Halfmoon, Senior Director for the Choctaw Nation Cultural Center, museum leaders can choose to alter their course. “It is extremely important for museums to be valued in the communities where the museum lives and in the communities represented in the collections and exhibitions. That value grows organically through trust,

meaningful connections, and relationships. Museum leaders can gain community value by opening doors, being transparent, and not only caring for the items behind the glass but tending to vital community relationships.”

**Relationship of Budget Size and Adaptive Capacity**

Our intention is not to conflate “bulk” with museum size. In fact, our survey shows a statistically significant correlation between museums with larger budgets and those who express greater confidence in their adaptive capacities. This is not surprising, as museums with larger budgets most likely have more resources to invest in adaptive activities, such as audience research, program evaluation, and strategic planning.



\* Response values reflect a five-point Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate more positive findings.

**Ohio History Connection: A Place for Engagement and Authentic Connection**

In 2014, in an effort to engage new audiences and imbed equity into its mission, the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio rebranded to become the Ohio History Connection (OHC). Led by Executive Director and CEO Burt Logan, the museum wanted to be a place for connection—with the past, present, and future. It sought to dispel historical societies’ antiquated reputation as stuffy institutions where elite seniors review newspaper clippings with monocles and brandy in hand. Instead, “we start by embracing the present. We have to meet people where they are. If we can help them embrace the present, then we believe we have a better avenue to help them understand the past and transform the future.” This shift in the museum went well beyond branding. Audience connection is infused throughout OHC’s current strategic plan with sustainability, equity, and relationship-building as its three strategic priorities. Logan also emphasizes how crucial it is for museum leadership to “walk the walk.” Leadership must approach change authentically and demonstrate through their actions—not just words—how committed they are to connecting with audiences.



## Museums Respond to COVID-19 and the National Racial Reckoning

Facing months of closures due to the pandemic and the national racial reckoning, museums are being tested as to whether they have developed themselves as “bodybuilders” or “athletes.” While some museums have focused on developing participatory programming with communities of color, others found themselves taking a public stance for the first time. In a New York Times Op-Ed one writer accurately captured this moment: “Our big art museums, still in lockdown, have offered the awkward spectacle of suddenly woke institutions competitively jostling to assert their “solidarity” with Black Lives Matter. And the gestures have felt both self-aggrandizing and too little too late. There have been impassioned we-must-do-more statements on institutional home pages, though very little mention of what, precisely, the more might be.” Some museums, such as the Queens Museum in Queens, NY, put together a collaborative action plan to address historic racial inequities, which was well-received by its audiences and communities. Additionally, throughout 2020, the Queens Museum has collaborated with community organizations to address emerging and intensified needs involving food insecurity, immigration, and public health. For example, the museum was able to leverage its strong existing relationships with local nonprofits to quickly develop and house a weekly food pantry for community residents, a program the museum is committed to offering through June 2021.

Experts predict two factors will contribute to a museum’s ability to navigate and survive these turbulent times. The first is low overhead expense. This logic is pretty straight forward: it will be difficult to cover high overhead with less earned income. Those with less overhead may have a fighting chance of staying in the black. The second is high adaptive capacity. Museums that have previously developed the adaptive capacity to evolve and respond to the changing world around them, including audience needs, are most likely already established as community hubs, have committed bases, and have a developed muscle for innovation. Therefore, they will be most likely to retain their audience base and continue to successfully adapt. This is not to say museums should avoid investing in capacities that will result in increased overhead and change direction each time they hear a new need from audiences. Instead, to avoid becoming a bodybuilder in an athletic competition, museum leaders must continually weigh the extent to which investments are directly tied to audience responsiveness—“is this what our audiences want? Or just something we think we need to remain solvent?” These questions are particularly important as the American audiences are becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. According to American Alliance of Museums (AAM), if museums do not adapt to be more responsive and receptive to larger, more diverse audiences, museums will only be serving an audience that is radically less diverse than the American public.

Jen Alexander, Founder, Executive, & Creative Director of Kidcity Children’s Museum in Middletown, CT uses this logic to not only drive future investments, but also applies it to pare down on existing capacities that are no longer serving her visitors: “Our rule is: we only do what makes people want to come here and play. The customer is right. You have to remember what you are really in the business of doing. We always have a ‘stop doing’ list—things that are just getting in the way.” The decision-making process for streamlining or sunseting museum capacities, whether electively or out of necessity, often gets less attention than that for building capacity. Throughout the pandemic, however, many museums have had to make the difficult decisions as to how they can pare down and minimize expenses to stay afloat. Just as with capacity building decisions, museum leadership should leverage their mission statement and strategic priorities as decision-making frameworks. One common solution for museums has been to furlough or lay off staff—in many cases the front-line staff. This decision is understandable, as museums at limited capacity due to pandemic restrictions most likely require less front-line staff. And yet, front-line staff are often members of the surrounding community and typically reflect a more diverse population than museum leadership.

## 2. Capacity building is driven by those with power.

Throughout our research, stakeholders cited issues around who holds decision-making power in the context of capacity building. Specifically, those in positions of power drive capacity building agendas and determine which capacities should be prioritized yet may not always have the perspective needed to make well-informed decisions. For the three primary stakeholders in capacity building decision-making (funders, boards, and executive leadership) concerns include:

- **Funders** (i.e., foundations, government entities, and other grantmaking organizations) drive capacity building both through monetary support, such as funding strategic planning, technology enhancements, etc. and other capacity building offerings, such as workshops, cohort-based learning, etc. Funders also shape capacity building in the museum sector by defining what organizational success looks like. Although at times unintentional, funders convey standards of capacity success in their funding decision-making processes by determining which types of museums with which capacities are deemed worthy of investment—either through their application processes or required organizational assessments.

While stakeholders in our research acknowledge the importance of funder leadership and investment, they also describe frustration with the idea that museums are often *required to have capacity to build capacity*. In other words, funders set capacity thresholds which must be met before they are willing to invest. Stakeholders also raise concerns that by only focusing on the capacities funders prioritize, it does not allow for museum contextualization – i.e., not all museums strive, nor should they strive, for the same capacities in the same way at the same time. For example, effective board leadership, an essential capacity for all museums, not only looks different across museums, it also looks different based on where that museum is within its lifecycle. Instead, museums' capacity priorities should be based on their unique missions, lifecycle stages, and audience needs.

- **Museum boards** play a key role in prioritizing capacity investments for their institutions. Ideally, the board is composed of individuals with diverse perspectives (including representatives of the museum's community), prioritizes based on strategic direction, and has an informed understanding of current museum capacity. However, stakeholders describe many museum boards as falling short in at least one of these areas.

Lack of board diversity is a major concern, with museum boards skewing whiter, older, and more male than the broader nonprofit sector.<sup>13</sup> In fact according to a 2017 survey conducted by AAM 89.3% of museum board members in the U.S. are white.<sup>14</sup> Capacity decisions, then, are made without diversity of lived experience. For some boards, it's an issue of engagement, with board members making decisions without a thorough understanding of the organization's current capacity status. And finally, as discussed previously, decision-making processes that are not based on mission-driven priorities, particularly those that consistently value financial solvency over impact, can lead to mission drift and eventually develop the museum into what looks more like a for-profit business than a mission-driven organization.

- **Museum leaders** (executive directors, CEOs, curatorial leadership, etc.) heavily shape a museum's capacity building—as well they should. Museum leaders have the vantage point of both organization-wide direction as well as museum operations. Power concerns at this level are less about the fact that the leaders are the ones making decisions, and more about the extent to which museum leaders are crowd-sourcing ideas

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<sup>13</sup> *Museum Board Leadership (A National Report)* (Rep.). (2017). Retrieved <https://www.aam-us.org/2018/01/19/museum-board-leadership-2017-a-national-report/>

<sup>14</sup> *Museum Board Leadership (A National Report)*.

(e.g., capacity needs, solutions, etc.) from staff and including staff in capacity building design and implementation.

Staff inclusion at all levels ensures capacity building efforts take into account concrete, day-to-day capacity challenges, and that real change comes from the investment (more later on how staff inclusion leads to successful capacity building adoption and sustainability). And although leadership in the museum sector is becoming more and more racially and ethnically diverse, museum staff are still more diverse and more likely to provide a community-focused perspective than museum leaders, thus providing input that can ensure capacity building is more equitable and centered on community issues.

### **The Power of Individual Donors**

Individual donors less often are thought of as influencing capacity building priorities, but their voice(s), either individual or collective, can be powerful. Major donors who provide sizable contributions often have the ears of museum board and executive leadership. The donor's personal capacity priorities for the museum (e.g., a new exhibition, program, capital investment, etc.) are, at times, fast-tracked to board agendas because they already have (at least partial) funding. Larger groups of individual donors, although not contributing as large of gifts, can influence a museum's capacity priorities, both due to the size of their collective contribution, but also because they represent a large group of stakeholders that museum leadership hopes to keep happy, engaged, and giving. While listening to and responding to the wants and needs of individual donors is a great way to engage a broad array of stakeholders, it is important for museum leadership to ensure they are also considering the wants and needs of stakeholders who are not able to contribute regularly so the museum doesn't evolve into an institution tailored for affluent visitors and inadvertently exclude audiences who are not able to contribute regularly.

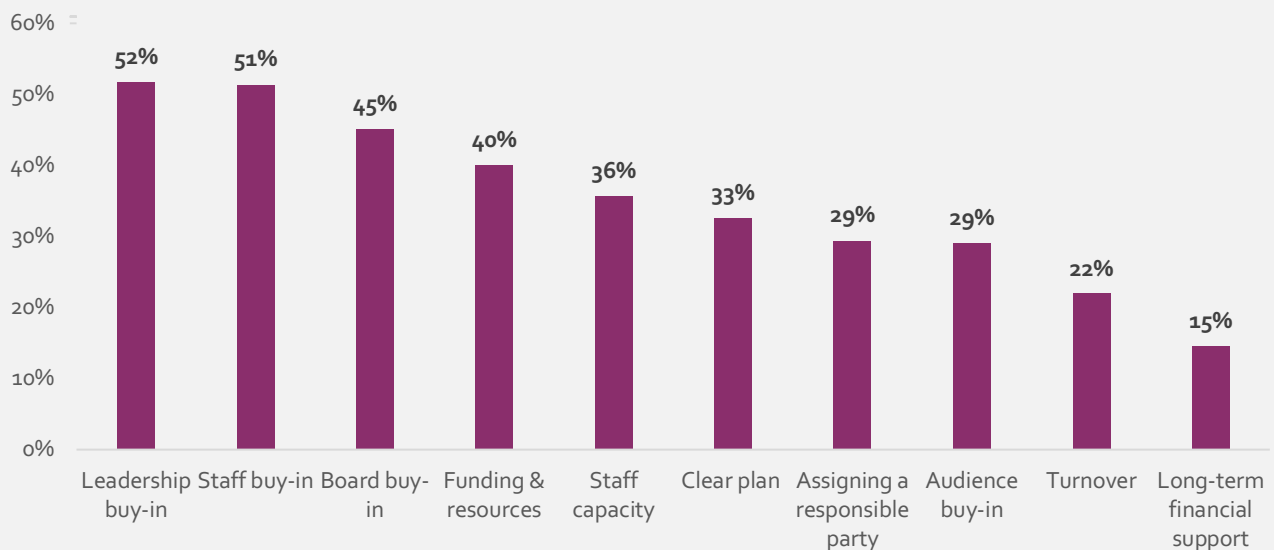
### 3. Successful capacity building requires a holistic change management approach and commitment from leadership and staff.

The perennial question for funders and museums alike is how to ensure increased capacity is adopted and sustained, and how to evaluate whether the increased capacity is indeed leading to real change. As part of our research, we examined the factors that drive or hinder capacity building success including:

- **Change Management.** Capacity building is a change management process. Increased capacity often requires shifts in the ways individuals do their work, the knowledge and skills they apply to their tasks, the policies that structure their work, and the systems they utilize on a day-to-day basis. Just because a museum determines certain shifts are needed doesn't mean these shifts will occur without resistance. From the very inception of the capacity building activity, it is essential museums anticipate and develop a plan for change management that centers on transparent communication, leadership and staff ownership, trust, and accountability. While change management is often thought of as processes internal to a museum, there are times capacity building processes, such as rebranding, capital investments, and mission re-alignment, also require a change management plan that includes external stakeholders.

#### *Respondents identify organization-wide buy-in and support as the most critical drivers of capacity building success.*

*Which of the following contributed to the success of your capacity building engagement(s)?*



n= 255

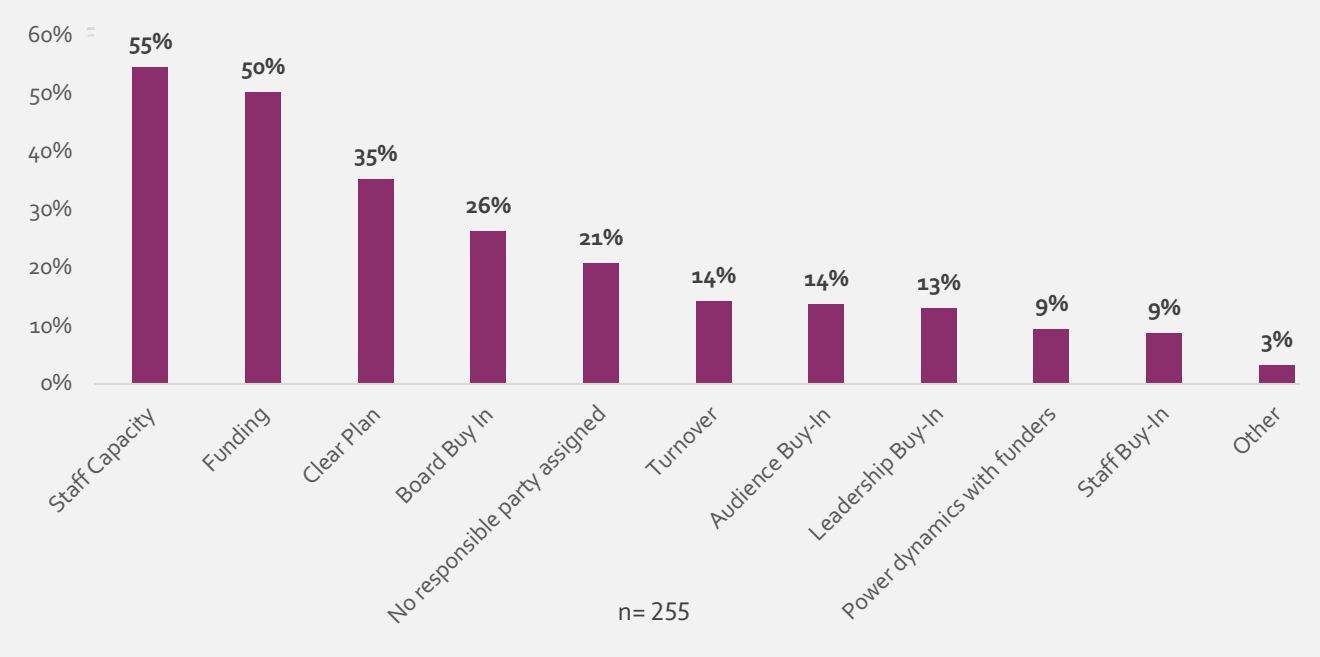
- **Leadership Buy-in and Support.** Support from museum leadership (board, executive director, etc.) is paramount to capacity building success, all the way from ideation through implementation. As stewards of the organization, leaders have the power to steer organizational direction, including whether to prioritize or deprioritize capacity building. As mentioned during one of our focus groups, "If they [leadership] don't want to prioritize [capacity strengthening], it's dead in the water."

Leaders also play a crucial role in ensuring increased capacity is sustained. They must adhere to accountability structures, celebrate and communicate small wins to relevant stakeholders, and model the behavior change. Again, change is difficult; if leadership does not hold the organization accountable for the success of the capacity building initiative, people will often revert back to the former systems and processes.

- **Staff Buy-in and Support.** Museum staff often drive capacity building implementation. While there are some capacity building efforts that only involve the board and museum leadership, most impact staff in some manner. For that reason, staff must be brought into the process from the very beginning. And this inclusion cannot merely be symbolic. We heard from our interviews and focus groups capacity building is most successful when leadership communicates transparently the focus and reason for investment, creates spaces for staff to shape the process through feedback and meaningful participation, builds staff trust and confidence, and ensures staff have the support and resources to implement the change.

*Lack of time and money were the most frequently reported barriers to capacity building success.*

Which of the following hindered the success of your capacity building engagement(s)?



- **Institutionalizing Change.** Interview and focus group participants cited frustration in the inability to share increased knowledge and skills organization-wide—to institutionalize the strengthened capacity. This is sometimes due to lack of knowledge sharing at the individual level, with leadership or staff with newly increased capacity not sufficiently sharing or cross-training other individuals—an issue that is exacerbated when a museum experiences a lot of staff turnover. Other times it’s because, although capacity was built on the part of individuals, it was not reflected accordingly by revising organizational policies and procedures.

Finally, and as part of the change management process, institutionalization often requires dedicated individuals who will champion the change to ensure it is adopted at an organization-wide level. One focus group participant hit on all three of these challenges, as she described a substantial capacity building investment in a new management approach at her former organization. Although the new system was adopted and saw short-term success, as soon as she left the organization, and without her there to champion the system for long-term institutionalization, it completely dissolved.

- **Museum Readiness.** Something we know from the nonprofit sector is that it takes capacity to build capacity. This “chicken or the egg” conundrum exists because capacity building often requires a baseline of leadership and staff capacity (meaning time and funding) to implement change. In our research, museum leaders confirm this is also true for the museum sector, citing lack of staff time, knowledge, skills, etc. and sustained funding often hinder capacity building success. This points to an issue of organizational readiness—if museums don’t have the time and resources to adopt and sustain capacity enhancements, it could be the effort ends up being a drain of resources, which is frustrating to all involved and may prevent museums from engaging in capacity building in the future. Throughout our research, we heard the importance of making sure capacity building activities are tailored to a museum’s pre-existing capacity. For example, museums with limited staff bandwidth and resources often benefit from “bite-sized” efforts; simple enhancements that help the museum see real change, albeit small.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation.** Evaluating the impact capacity building is in many respects “the holy grail”.<sup>15</sup> In fact, throughout our research, interview and focus group participants were able to offer very few best practices employed in the museum sector. Determining the impact of capacity building can be extremely difficult as change is often incremental and takes time. Additionally, there are many factors that determine the success of a program or museum outside of one capacity building grant or initiative. Often the change the museum is seeking is connected to other aspects of organizational development. For example, successful investment in a new financial management system also requires training for staff and most likely changes how the organization develops reports for board, staff, and donors. With so many variables, how can a museum know if the investment is having the intended impact?

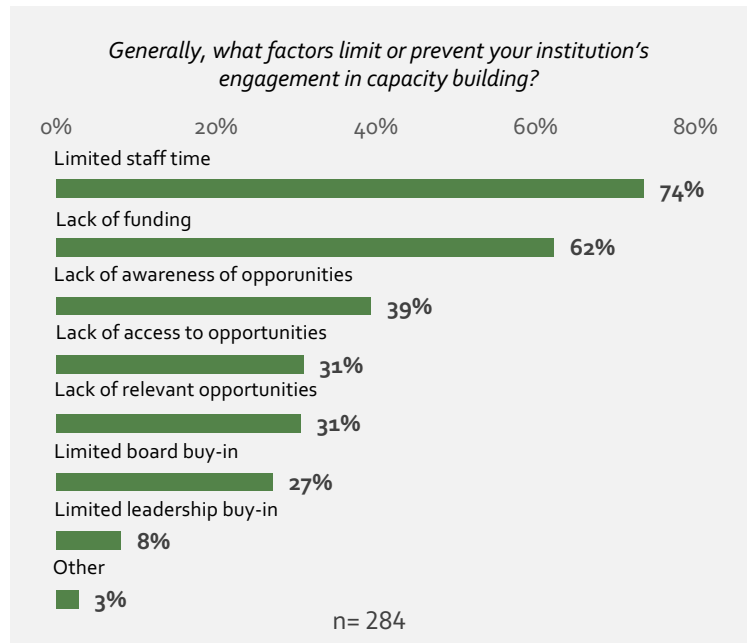
One way to monitor complex organizational change is by weaving in evaluation from the beginning of the initiative. With an effective evaluation framework, leadership can monitor change, celebrate progress, and course correct, if needed. Tools such as theories of change and logic models can provide valuable starting points for aligning leadership on success outcomes and developing appropriate capacity building evaluation plans.

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<sup>15</sup> *Supporting Grantee Capacity*. (Rep.). (2015). Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://grantcraft.org/content/guides/supporting-grantee-capacity/>

#### 4. Museums experience different barriers to participating in capacity building.

Participation in capacity building across the museum sector is not equal, but it remains unclear exactly how and why. To explore current museum participation, we examined barriers to and drivers of participation. As alluded to in our discussion of museum readiness, our survey uncovers the two primary barriers to capacity building are lack of staff time and availability (74%) and lack of funding (62%), and the data show this is relatively consistent regardless of discipline, budget, region, and place type. This aligns with what we've heard from museum leaders, who describe museum staff as overworked, underpaid, and wearing "many hats." Conversely, and not surprisingly, the most frequently reported drivers of participation are leadership/staff seeking out opportunities (67%) and funding opportunities (62%).



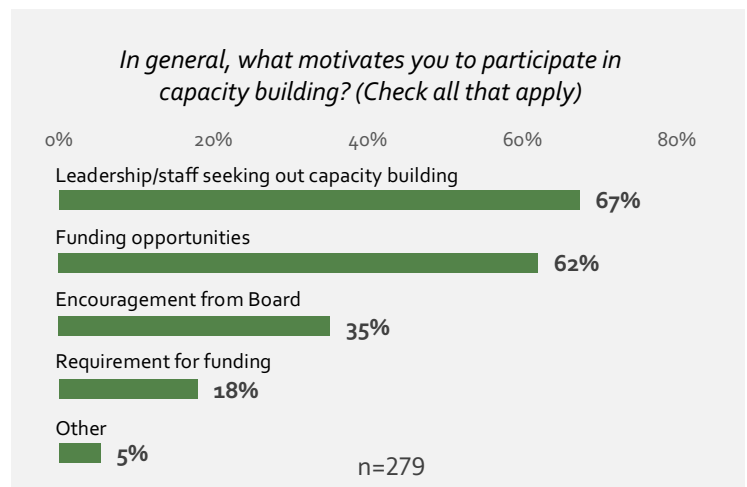
#### Participation Barriers for Small Museums

According to our interviews and focus groups, small museums encounter barriers to participation related to lack of available time and money and issues of readiness:

- **Time and Money.** First, as small museums professionals know all too well, time and money are the most precious resources.

Working with limited budgets and staff small museum professionals know how to stretch budgets and play many roles including marketing guru, collections manager, and visitor greeter. Furthermore, investing precious resources into a consultant to engage in a strategic planning process or hiring a social media manager is often not feasible for a small museum. Many leaders struggle to find time to engage in professional development to attend conferences and meet with peers to learn best practices. Secondly, museum leaders, particularly at smaller institutions, are often passionate content and collections experts, but not experienced executive leaders. Therefore, small museum leaders may be less aware of relevant opportunities and lack the connections to engage in capacity building in the first place.

- **Small Museum Readiness.** As previously discussed, museums need capacity to build capacity. This presents a barrier to participation for many small museums, as they often have limited capacity coming into a capacity building activity and, thus, are unable to engage at all. Brian J. Carter, Executive Director of 4Culture and the former Board President of the Association of African-American Museums stated, "capacity building is always a hot button topic. I think what funders forget is that capacity building can be a luxury for small museums. Capacity building is only possible when museums are properly capitalized, and this can be hard when you are scrambling to shore up your operations, and you do not have time for capacity building." In short, he says, "kids



can't learn if they are hungry and you cannot build capacity if organizations are starving." To build capacity museums must first have enough capacity before they are ready to allocate precious dollars and time to plan for the next stage of growth and development.

While small museums may struggle with financial sustainability, and therefore do not have the time to engage in capacity building, they still often have the foundational capacities required to be successful institutions. In fact, many small museums have stronger adaptive and relational capacities than their larger institutional counterparts. For small museums to be effective, they must have strong adaptive skills. Many small museums are often more closely tied to the communities and audiences they serve, as they have fewer staff and thus have more regular contact with visitors. They also are operating with smaller budgets, are often nimbler, and are potentially more willing to take risks and try new things. Finally, working with small budgets requires collaboration and support to be effective, and therefore these institutions might be more willing and able to develop their relational capacity to work with other community-based organizations. These valuable skills present a unique opportunity for small museums to share their experiences with large museums who are looking to enhance their relational and adaptive capacities.

## **5. A perception of museum uniqueness may be a barrier to the application of capacity building best practices.**

A major theme that emerged from our research is that museums often perceive themselves as so inherently different from other nonprofits, and even other museums, that best practices in capacity building do not resonate as applicable. Experts offer a few reasons this perception exists.

The first is that museum leaders often conflate programmatic variables with capacity variables. While there is no doubt each museum's mission, strategic priorities, target audience(s), and collections result in a unique organization, capacity assessment and strengthening focuses more on the undercurrent beneath these unique variables. For example, regardless of a museum's specific mission statement, it is important for museum leaders to be able to inspire and motivate stakeholders—both internal to the museum and external—to support that mission. Every museum needs this leadership skill to be successful.

Second, and particularly for smaller museums, many museum leaders find themselves in their positions because of their curatorial expertise and less so because of their executive leadership experience. While many museums have great success with content experts at the helm (in fact, they often naturally possess the ability to inspire and motivate stakeholders), without prior experience managing and strengthening people and systems, it may be difficult for them to appreciate the organizational parallels that exist between museums and other nonprofits.

Finally, the museum sector is a vibrant, tightly knit network of active associations, thought leaders, and practitioners. The sector's strength can undoubtedly be attributed to its ability to set itself apart from others in the social sector, including performing arts, libraries, etc. And yet, it's possible the intentional distinction has also contributed to the perception that museums are completely unlike other nonprofits and, thus, unable to apply best practices in capacity building. While we do see a few museums and associations accessing capacity building resources from outside the sector, many do not.

This is not to say that capacity building does not need to be tailored, or that what works for one nonprofit (or one museum) will work for every museum. But there is an opportunity to leverage and build on what has worked for others—both nonprofits outside the museum sector and other seemingly dissimilar museums—so they don't have to waste valuable resources starting their capacity building journeys from the ground up.

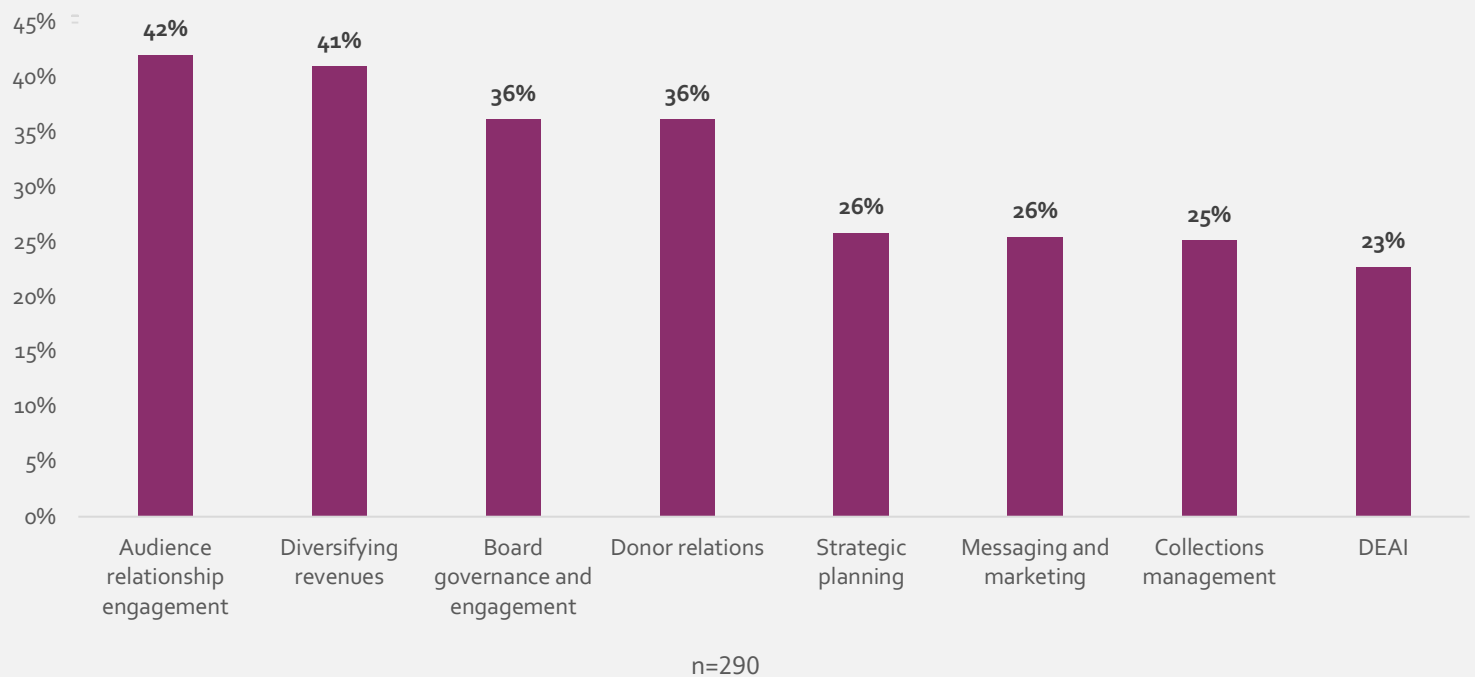


## Museum Capacity Needs Reflect Broader Nonprofit Needs

### Capacities Needed for Museum Success

In our survey, museum leaders identified audience relationships/engagement, diversifying revenues, board governance and engagement, donor relations, strategic planning, collections management, and DEAI as the most important capacities for their institutions to be successful.

*What type of capacity building do you most need for your institution to be successful?*



Through the survey's capacity assessment section, and our interviews and focus groups, stakeholders consistently identified leadership sustainability and staff capacity as essential for museums to be successful. With the exception of museum collections management, a capacity unique to the museums, these capacities mirror the needs of the broader nonprofit sector.

### Most Frequently Identified Museum Needs

- Board governance and engagement
- Community and/or visitor relationship building and engagement
- Diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion
- Donor relations/fundraising skills
- Leadership sustainability
- Museum collections management
- Revenue diversification
- Staff capacity
- Strategic planning

One notable observation from our data analysis is that museums with budgets of \$100,000 to \$4,999,999 (which we consider “medium” for this analysis) tend to be more confident in their capacities overall than museums with budgets under \$100,000 (which we consider “small” for this analysis) (see table below). This is not surprising, as museums with larger budgets are likely better equipped to invest in the skills, knowledge, and systems required to support the museum’s infrastructure and carry out its essential functions. Museums with smaller budgets most likely have fewer staff and volunteers—some of which may have multiple responsibilities, spanning collections management, fundraising, marketing, financial management, and visitor engagement—and thus do not have the time or funds to support sophisticated capacity functions.

	Small Museums Budget of \$0 \$99,999 N 151		Medium Museums Budget of \$100,000+ N 188		All Museums* N 350	
	Mean	Std. dev	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Adaptive capacity	3.0	0.62	3.3	0.61	3.2	0.62
Leadership capacity	3.5	0.54	3.6	0.57	3.5	0.55
Management capacity	3.5	0.60	3.8	0.58	3.7	0.60
Technical capacity	2.8	0.77	3.0	0.74	3.0	0.75
Organizational culture	3.2	0.73	3.4	0.68	3.3	0.70

\*Including those with no budget specified

*NB: Response values reflect a five-point Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Questions were derived from TCC Group’s Core Capacity Assessment Tool, a statistically validated tool designed to measure an organization’s capacity. These five capacities are composite scores calculated from a pool of 54 survey items in the capacity assessment portion of the survey. Higher scores indicate more positive findings.*

## The Role of Associations

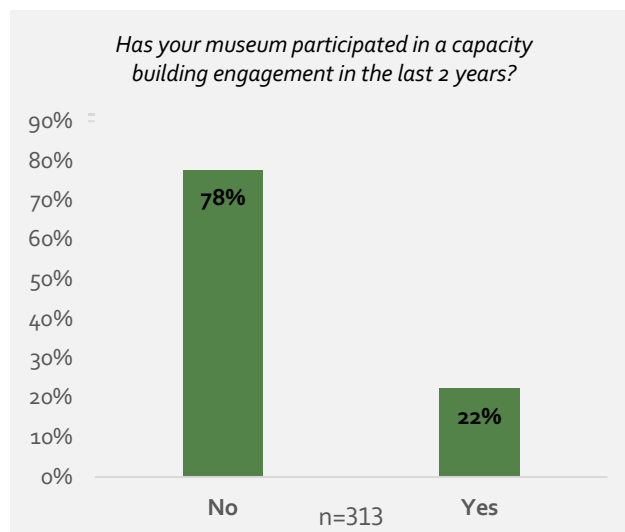
Many associations play a pivotal role in addressing the uniqueness (both real and perceived) of their members. For example, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums offers specific capacity building programs focused on animal welfare, conservation, and supporting the accreditation process. Similarly, many regional associations and the Small Museum Association work with their members to design relevant engagements to address specific capacity building challenges. This is particularly helpful for small and rural museums and those focused on communities of color, as these museums have traditionally been less connected to museum networks and may possibly have less time and resources to invest in capacity building.

## 6. The current capacity building infrastructure within the museum sector is insufficient to build museums' adaptive and relational capacities and address DEAI issues.

We set out to understand the state of capacity building in the museum sector—who is investing in capacity building efforts, what types of resources they are accessing, what types of capacities they are focusing on, etc. According to our survey, only 22% of small- and medium-sized museum leaders report having engaged in capacity building in the last two years. And although this number may seem alarmingly low, it is important to note three major themes that emerged through our research that may cloud this finding:

- **Lack of Clarity** The sector lacks a common definition, understanding, or set of terminology surrounding capacity building. While some professionals equate capacity building with professional development, others consider capacity building to be defined by working with a professional consultant on a select engagement. This is most likely due to the minimal amount of research that has been conducted on museum capacity. In our conversations with field experts and in our literature review, we found museum research to date focuses more on art history, curatorial studies, etc. than on capacity or organizational development within museums.

- **Informality.** Much of the capacity building activity in the museum sector is informal, with museums often strengthening their capacities through organic means on their own through networking with peers, learning at conferences, and accessing self-serve resources. And the lines between formal and informal capacity building often get blurred. This spectrum of informal and formal capacity building, along with the uneven understanding of capacity building within the sector may lead to many museums who have indeed engaged in (what we would define as) capacity building to report otherwise.



In examining recent association conferences and in our conversations, we found most resources and conference programming heavily focused on collections and programs. With the exception of DEAI, a capacity concern that is front of mind for many in the sector, content focused less on fundamental skills and competencies such as board governance, staff management, diversification of revenue, and evaluation.

- **Insularity.** When discussing the state of capacity building, interview and focus group participants highlighted the insular nature of the museum sector, with many capacity discussions focusing only on best practices internal to a discipline, region, or museum sub-sector. And while these focused capacity conversations are undoubtedly helpful for museums to consider how they may strengthen themselves, they may also benefit from outside perspectives. Bert Vescolani, Denver Zoo, summarized it saying, “a consistent theme with [discipline specific] associations is they exist to serve their members. Therefore, the thinking can be very insular, especially as many do not bring in outside ideas or leaders.” Having worked across disciplines while at the Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), Vescolani has seen great success in sharing best

practices across disciplines, which has given museum leaders a fresh perspective on how they may approach organizational strengthening.

### Accessing Cross-Sector Expertise

BoardSource, a national organization working to strengthen nonprofit board leadership, recently collaborated with AAM to produce specific content including webinars and surveys on strengthening board governance in the museum sector. Organizations like AAM, museum networks and associations, and funders can play a pivotal role in increasing capacity building awareness, developing common capacity building language, and connecting museums with resources from outside the museum sector to strengthen their core capacities.

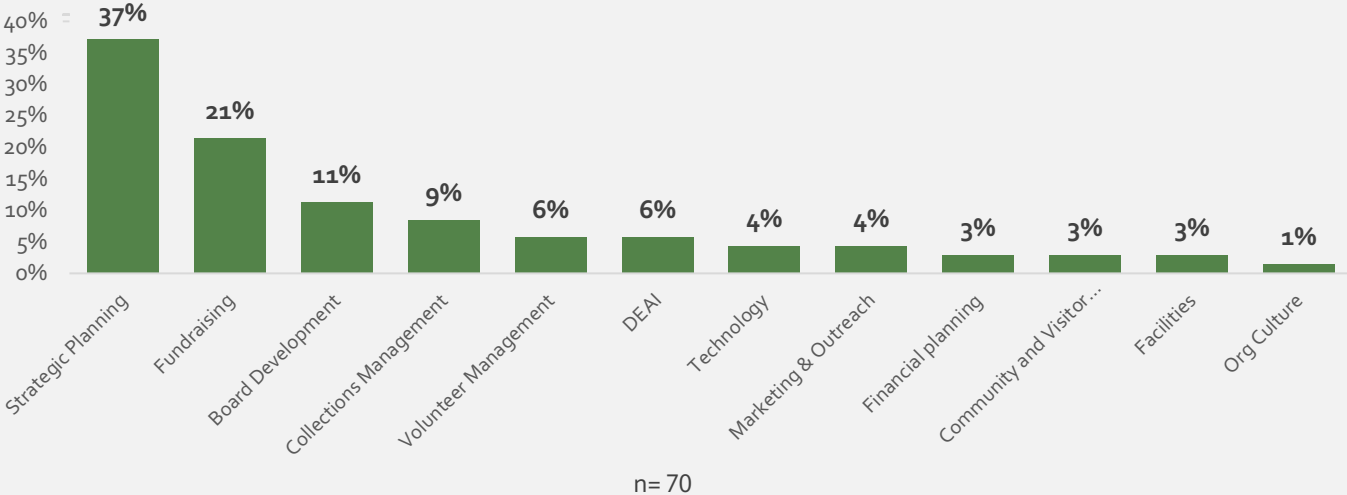
Of the museums who participated in capacity building, the majority focused on strategic planning (37%) and fundraising (21%), which are among the most frequently cited capacity building needs. While these activities strengthen museum’s sustainability through intentional planning and diversification of revenue, there appears to be less attention to building capacity to work in relation to others, engage audiences, and address DEAI issues.

In fact, of the survey respondents that reported having engaged in capacity building within the last two years, only 6% focused on DEAI and only 3% focused on audience engagement. There is ample opportunity and need for funders, associations, and other capacity builders to design and connect museums with new offerings that empower museums to continue to adapt, work in relation to others, engage audiences, and address issues of equity.

### Addressing the Capacity Building Needs of the Museum Sector

In our exploration, we found that while capacity building resources available to museums are generally aligned with the capacities they feel they need to sustain their missions and grow their impact, additional investment in museums’ adaptive and relational capacities is needed for museums to continue evolving along with their audiences and external environments.

What was the primary focus of the capacity building engagement?



## Profiling Exciting Interventions

Success for museums in the future will depend on embracing organizational change to meaningfully connect with new and diverse audiences. **The Cultural Competence Learning Institute (CCLI)** imagines a world in which museums transform themselves to recognize and respond to different values and needs through curating experiences and collections that touch the lives of a diversity of audiences. CCLI is a cohort-capacity building model comprising a process and set of resources designed to help museums increase their organizational capacity around diversity, inclusion, and culture. CCLI builds capacity for institutions to maximize the benefits of diversity within their workforce and improve the services offered to people from different cultural backgrounds. CCLI's Cohort Program includes a comprehensive staff survey, coaching for development/implementation of a year-long strategic initiative, a two-day in-person workshop, monthly webinars, access to a network of peer museums, resources and tools, unique staff development opportunities, and cross-departmental team engagements.

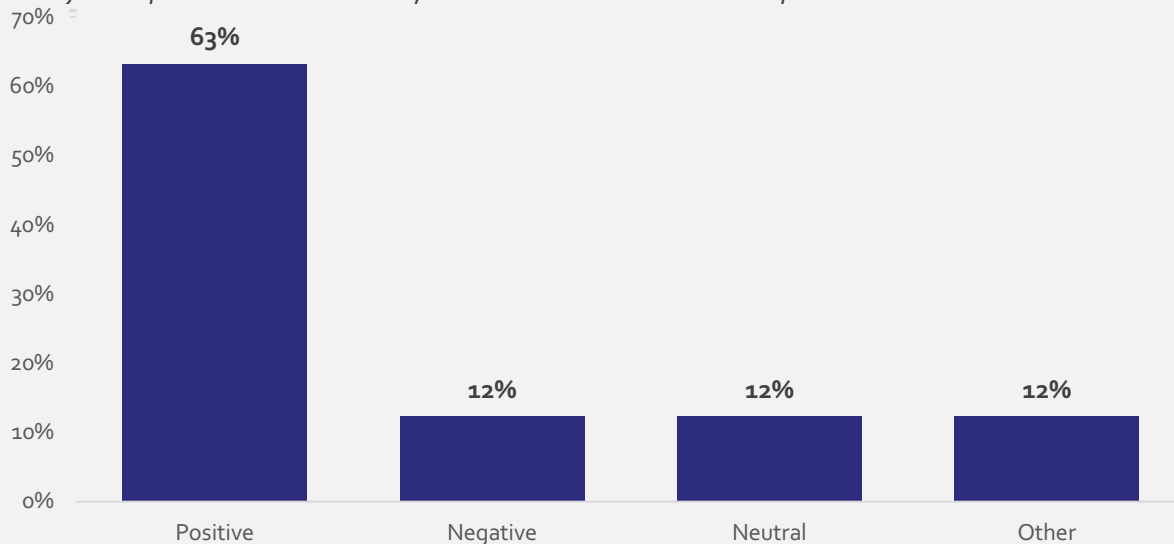
The **Peer Consult Program from the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA)** involves an intensive two-day site visit from a small team of experts, chosen for their familiarity with the nature center's particular challenges. All experts are ANCA members, and many are current or former members of the ANCA board. At the culmination of the visit, the team presents a report with a review of the organization, recommendations, and resources to specifically address the issue. The program requires minimal investment of \$3,250 fee plus the direct costs for the team members' travel, lodging, food, and relevant incidental expenses. ANCA also offers financial aid for qualifying organizations.

## Deep Dive on Assessments

Assessments are an important tool to help museums prioritize and determine what type of capacity building will best sustain its mission. Funders often use assessments tools to collect data on the organizational context of any organization to help the nonprofit prioritize how to invest its resources. Effective capacity building requires museums to be transparent about their strengths and challenges—a process that can be very tricky as it opens the doors for criticism from the funder. As one nonprofit leader stated, “it’s hard for any leader to say, ‘these are our deficits.’ To share that internally is hard; to share that with someone who’s not in the family is painful.”<sup>1</sup> Assessments allow museums to “diagnose” their needs without opening them up to criticism or jeopardize future funding opportunities.

One example is IMLS’ Museum Assessment Program (MAP), a one-year process of self-assessment, institutional activities, and consultative peer review with a site visit and recommendations. MAP offers five different assessments to choose from including Organizational Collections, Stewardship, Education & Interpretation, Community & Audience Engagement, and Board Leadership. In our survey we asked participants to share their experiences with MAP. While only 22% of survey respondents had utilized the MAP program, their experience was mostly positive (63%). Suggestions for improvement included many themes we hear for other assessments, such as difficulty in implementing and sustaining the recommendations, accountability, and support to build a clear action plan. Additionally, a frequent criticism we heard in both the survey, interviews, and focus groups is that assessments are not useful tools for small and micro-museums. With few or no staff, it can be impossible to find additional time to undertake a time intensive process such as an assessment. “The program was too large and cumbersome to be a good fit for our small organization. The time investment in the paperwork was not worth the benefits.” Museum leaders at these institutions asked for unrestricted funding to invest in their capacity building and build enough capacity to undertake an assessment.

*What was your experience with MAP like, and how could it have been improved?*



n=57

## Recommendations

The museum sector is in crisis. With the COVID-19 pandemic, national racial reckoning, and decades of focus on blockbuster exhibits and capital expansion over investing in organizational strengthening, the nation's museums are desperately in need of support that enables them to examine and invest in their adaptive and relational capacities, and to address issues of inequity within our society.

The following recommendations are organized around three major museum “players”—funders, museum associations, and museums—and are based on our research, data collection and analysis, and previous experience working with capacity building in the social sector.

### Recommendation #1 for Funders: Redistribute power in capacity building.

Funders will play a crucial role in rebuilding museum capacity in a post-pandemic world. Before discussing how they may invest in this rebuilding through capacity-focused funding, it's important to first acknowledge the most important dynamic that shapes the relationship between funders and museums: power. Put simply, funders have resources, and museums need those resources to survive. These resources have not been distributed equitably for decades within either the museum sector or the nonprofit sector more broadly. As a result, a subset of associations and museums (mostly large, traditional, white institutions) and audiences (again mostly white) have benefited from capacity investments more than others. So how can this power be redistributed?

Recommendations for redistributing power in capacity building include:

**Rethink museum readiness.** It's important for funders to check their implicit biases on what it means for a museum to be “ready” for funding. Below are some tips for revisiting readiness in your grantmaking:

- *Expand beyond conventional methods for assessment.* Re-think conventional methods/standards which may perpetuate exclusionary practices and omit essential voices or a diverse array of perspectives (e.g., large/small museums, well-established/new museums, traditionally “at the table”/marginalized audiences).
- *Meet museums where they are.* Engage museums “warts and all” instead of considering readiness to be binary (i.e., either a museum is ready or not).
- *Re-think expectations.* Account for each grantees' unique characteristics (e.g., size, level of establishment, strengths, and challenges, etc.) when determining grantee expectations (e.g., outputs/outcomes, capacities to engage, technical assistance, etc.)
- *Trust nonprofit leaders' perceptions of readiness.* Solicit and value museum leaders' perspectives on organizational readiness to build trust and relationships.

- *Share power with grantees.* Funders have historically driven the capacity building agenda. It's time to bring museums to the decision-making table in a more meaningful way. Explore participatory grantmaking, which invites grantees to weigh in and shape funding decisions.<sup>16</sup> This collaborative process can start capacity building off on the right foot by encouraging transparency, trust, and equity—tenets essential to successful capacity building implementation. Flexible, long-term funding is another way to give some of the power back to the grantee, as it empowers grantees to be at the helm of their success and to take the time necessary to see real change and navigate challenges as they emerge.

**Participatory grantmaking** is a method used in philanthropy to shift power in the grantmaking process from the foundation staff to the people most effected by the issues—a way to democratize philanthropy. According to a 2018 GrantCraft (now Candid) report, participatory grantmaking is defined as ceding “decision-making power about funding—including the strategy and criteria behind those decisions—to the very communities that funders aim to serve.”

**Apply an equity lens.** Consider how to integrate equity into your existing capacity building framework and adopt DEAI as a core tenet of your grantmaking. Applying an equity lens can help you identify implicit biases that may have seeped into your decision-making processes. To do this, take stock of each step of your grantmaking process—from start to finish—and determine the equity implications. Ask yourself, who does this step build power for? Who does it cut out of the process? The application of an equity lens may also include prioritizing potential grantees who have been historically under-resourced (e.g., smaller museums and those either led by or specifically centered on people of color).

**Solicit diverse perspectives.** Diverse perspectives bring new ways of thinking to capacity building that are representative of the intersections of different disciplines, experience levels, and lived experience. Traditional methods of soliciting grant proposals can cut out diverse perspectives and inadvertently narrow a funder's capacity building investment. Consider conducting virtual listening tours, where museums are invited to meet with funders and discuss their capacity challenges.

**Acknowledge success looks different for different museums.** While all museums may have similar fundamental capacity needs, the delivery and process of capacity building should look different for each museum. Capacity building is a change management process, which can be messy and difficult. Funders need to remain flexible and adaptable in their approaches to ensure each museum is set up for success.

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<sup>16</sup> *Deciding Together (Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking)*. (2018). Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://grantcraft.org/content/guides/deciding-together/>



**Invest in associations.** In our findings, we shared how capacity building priorities tend to be set by and driven by funders, boards, and executive leadership. Yet, those closer to the museums (associations and regional/place-based funders) often better understand the capacity building needs of museums and are better positioned to devise relevant capacity building resources and initiatives to help build the adaptive, relational, and DEAI capacities of museums. Funders can shift power by investing in associations through re-granting (i.e., a funder gives grant to association to then re-grant to a museum), co-granting (i.e., a funder and association work together to determine who receives funding), or simply giving the grants directly to association to build their capacity.

### **For more on Power & Equity**

Many of our colleagues at organizations such as Race Forward, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance (AORTA), Building Movements Project, Western States Center, and the Management Center have developed excellent resources and tools to help address issues of power and equity in philanthropy and within organizations. We suggest all funders take time to grapple with these important questions, re-examine their own role in maintaining current power structures, and consider how to change internal systems to achieve more equitable outcomes for all stakeholders.

### **Recommendation #2 for Funders: Invest in the most pressing and unmet capacity needs of the museum sector.**

Foundations, government entities, and corporations will play a pivotal role in shifting the capacity building landscape by providing valuable resources and support to museums, shaping the sector's grantmaking trends, funding research, and ultimately contributing to building a stronger, resilient, and more vibrant museum sector. The museum sector is in crisis with approximately one-third of museums projected to close and many museums unreflective of the needs and interests of the national population. It is critical that funders focus their efforts on the most pressing and unmet capacity needs in the museum sector.

Recommendations for focused capacity building investment include:

**Fund museums' most pressing needs.** As discussed in our findings, the three most pressing capacity needs of museums are their ability to respond to the changing environment (i.e., adaptive capacity), ability to work in relation and collaborate with others (i.e., relational capacity), and the ability to address systemic inequities. These capacities are critical to help museums be in better conversation with their audiences and surrounding communities—to keep their fingers on the pulse of the ever-changing needs around them and respond accordingly.

**Fund cross-cutting approaches.** As the museum sector is insular, you have an opportunity to fund innovative initiatives that create learning opportunities that connecting institutions with others in the museum sector and with the broader nonprofit sector. This effort includes valuing what each stakeholder is bringing to the partnership and funding their ability to remain in conversation with one another. Capacity building should be relational.

**Fund small museums to build their capacity.** It takes capacity to build capacity. Small museums typically have limited staff and resources to invest in a formal or informal capacity building initiative. These museums require an infusion of capital before they are ready to engage in an assessment such as IMLS' Museum Assessment Program (MAP) or Collections Assessment Program (CAP), let alone a capacity building initiative such as a strategic planning process.

Additionally, as discussed, much of capacity building in the museums sector is informal through conferences and peer-to-peer connections. These smaller engagements are vital for small museums to learn best practices and innovations in the museum sector in being more adaptive, relational, and equitable. Yet, even informal capacity building has an associated opportunity cost as it requires time, travel, and/or resources to attend. Offering money for scholarships and/or a stipend to cover travel and opportunity costs will better enable small museums to participate in and benefit from capacity building opportunities. As many small museums have stronger adaptive and relational capacities than their larger institutional counterparts, these museums know how to invest in their institutions, they simply need resources to invest.

- *Increase opportunities for "right-sized" capacity building.* Many museums, especially small museums, do not have the resources and time to engage in an intensive and immersive capacity building initiatives. As funders, you can increase access to smaller, "right-sized" capacity building engagements for museums with limited staff bandwidth and resources.

**IMLS' Inspire! Grants for Small Museums** was launched in 2019 to help small museums compete more successfully for IMLS grants that help them implement projects that address priorities identified in their strategic plans. As a result of increased Congressional appropriations, IMLS was able to fund 50% more small museums in 2020.

**Convene and collaborate with other funders.** The traditional museum sector is insular, staying within its own "black box", which has deprived museums, associations, and funders of meaningful interactions with other nonprofits and each other. To foster collaboration and partnerships, there is a need for greater leadership to bring other funders to the table. There is an opportunity for IMLS or another similarly positioned funder to convene other organizations and individuals to:

- *Develop a shared vision.* Develop a shared understanding of core values, definitions, and central purpose of capacity building.
- *Convene the right people.* Bring together all those needed to tackle the challenge at hand; include a diverse cross-section of museums, associations, and funders. Apply the lenses of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion to make sure to authentically engage organizations and individuals traditionally left out of efforts to date.
- *Build buy-in and trust.* Trust isn't something you feel, it is something you do. Proactively build the foundation of relationships.
- *Encourage cohesion.* Share best practices, pool resources, and eliminate duplications of efforts.
- *Support collaboration.* Take action on opportunities where greater impact can be achieved by working together rather than by working alone.

## **For Associations: Normalize organization-wide capacity building within your membership that builds on best practices.**

Museum associations are integral to the museum sector. They serve museums as advocates, conveners, networkers, trainers, thought leaders, and capacity builders. They are also experts in the needs of their membership, often defined by museum discipline, geography, or size. Each association serves their membership in distinct ways through offering a menu of conferences, networking opportunities, training, online resources, and consultation. Throughout our research we heard stakeholders, including association leaders, describe their role as intermediary— acting as a conduit to connect their members, including funders and national organizations, to opportunities and trends in the broader museum sector.

Associations, as intermediaries, are well positioned to break down barriers between museums and normalize organization-wide capacity building for their members that builds on best practices. And although it is clear many associations are already well on their way to doing so, there is an opportunity for more associations to join the cause and build the infrastructure needed to support effective capacity building.

Recommendations for encouraging organization-wide capacity building include:

**Advocate for organization-wide capacity strengthening.** You most likely serve as a capacity builder in some regard— either formally or informally, connecting museums and museum professionals to resources, offering trainings, and encouraging peer-to-peer connections. If you're like most associations, the focus of your capacity building is more on developing museum leaders than on organization-wide change. The good news is, you're halfway there. You've already developed your association's capacity building muscle, so you just have to expand your focus. Here are three tips for evolving your capacity building to include organization-wide trainings:

- *Continue to offer capacity building for individuals but incorporate ways to institutionalize capacity building.* Even within conferences and peer-to-peer connections, include in your programming a section that is dedicated to skill sharing when participants return to their museums. Consider encouraging individuals to report back after a few weeks on how they shared their knowledge and implemented the change with others.
- *Encourage multiple individuals to attend capacity building trainings.* One of the easiest ways for individual knowledge and skills to be shared more broadly at an organization is to train more than one person in the first place. For many museums (especially small museums) lack of staff capacity and budget may be a barrier for multiple people to attend, so consider offering discounts for additional individuals (e.g., "buy one, get one free" program fees).
- *Educate individuals on organization-wide capacities.* While you may not be able to strengthen a museum's board policies through a 2-hour online course, you can educate individuals on the importance of having strong board policies and offer tips as to how they may approach board governance work at their museum. There are plenty of capacity-specific experts (some possibly even within your membership) that can lead an effective training for your members. This education, paired with an offering of self-serve resources, can go a long way.

**Curate capacity building resources from outside your sub-sector.** You are an expert in your members' needs. And while your members may feel they are completely unique and best practices in executive leadership, board governance, audience engagement, etc. aren't applicable to their museum, you know that with a little bit of tailoring, they could benefit greatly. Continue to have your ear to the ground to understand your members' evolving needs, seek out best

practices from the nonprofit sector, customize them in a way that makes them approachable and relatable for your members, and then share on your existing platforms (e.g., conferences, online resources, etc.). This includes inviting fellow association leaders and other museum leaders to share best practices to promote cross-association learning. Remember, best practices are rarely “one-size-fits-all” and almost always need to be contextualized for each organization. So, instead of customizing to fit one organization, you’re customizing to be accessible to a group of organizations.

**Share capacity successes.** One of the easiest ways to normalize and encourage capacity building is to show how it has led to real change for others. Seek out capacity building success stories and share them – both among your membership and with others outside of your membership. Identify the capacity building activity (e.g., two-month engagement with a consultant, staff retreat, etc.), the focus of that activity (e.g., strategic planning, organizational culture, etc.), and how that activity has strengthened the museum’s ability to achieve its mission. This also helps create a shared language of capacity building within your membership and the museum sector more broadly.

## Building on Best Practices from Outside the Museum Sector

### The Wiregrass Foundation Case Study: Committed to Realizing Authentic Change

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The Wiregrass Foundation in Dothan, Alabama aims to make significant, measurable impact on the health, education and quality of life of its local community residents. Through its CapCONNECT program, the Foundation offers regular peer-learning workshops, technical assistance and training, capacity assessments, and individual coaching to a cohort of 25 local nonprofits. The Foundation has intentionally designed this program to provide contextual, continuous, and collective capacity building support.

- **Contextual:** Capacity building must be tailored to each individual organization's needs. Using the Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT), Wiregrass grantees are able to diagnose and prioritize their most pressing capacity needs, and, through one-on-one coaching with capacity building consultants, strengthen their organizations in ways that lead to actual change. The Foundation also offers ongoing peer-learning workshops and technical training to address those capacity areas considered challenges by the majority of cohort members (e.g., board governance, fundraising, etc.).
- **Continuous:** The Foundation recognizes capacity building is both incremental and takes time. For that reason, it provides multiple opportunities for the nonprofits to connect with their peers and their consulting coaches consistently throughout the year. The Foundation is also deeply committed to investing on a long-term basis with its CapCONNECT participants so grantees can fully realize the benefits of their difficult organizational strengthening work.
- **Collective:** The Foundation also recognizes nonprofits can only build their capacity successfully when individuals from all levels of the organization are involved. CapCONNECT activities engage nonprofit leadership, as well as other key staff and board members, and focus on ways these individuals might leverage their learnings to achieve organization-wide change.

## Healthcare Georgia Foundation: Centering Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion

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Since its inception, the Healthcare Georgia Foundation (HGF) has prioritized building effective nonprofit health providers and advocates with the capacity to develop, deliver, and sustain high-impact health programs and services. Over the past few years, HGF has rigorously examined the way it operates, changing whom it supports and how it supports them. HGF launched *EmpowerHealth* to assess the organizational effectiveness of local healthcare nonprofits and invest critical resources into building their capacity. Following the completion of a multiyear *EmpowerHealth* pilot program with two cohorts, listening sessions with grantees, and a comprehensive impact evaluation, HGF recalibrated its program to build a collaborative, equitable, strong, and resilient nonprofit sector in Georgia.

The newly revised *EmpowerHealth* program centers relational capacity, community engagement, and diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Specifically, HGF applied an Anti-Oppression Lens<sup>17</sup> and Choice Points<sup>18</sup> to its application and selection process, and to all capacity building workshops and content. This novel collaborative approach resulted in the participation of a more diverse set of nonprofits in terms of race, ethnicity, geography, type of service provision, size, and health equity focus. It also removed many traditional barriers to capacity building engagement for smaller organizations by providing more culturally- and size-appropriate assessments and offering financial support to staff and board members wishing to participate.

Additionally, the program embraced a grantee-centric approach by establishing a Community Advisory Council to ensure decision-making power is distributed across program participants, as part of the HGF's focus on DEAI and health equity. The Community Advisory Council members include public health experts, community members, consultants, and former grantees. Finally, HGF enhanced its support for peer connectivity through peer-learning workshops and the establishment of a peer network, so organizations can tap each other for support as they pursue their capacity building journeys.

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<sup>17</sup> Keleher, T., (2014). *An Introduction To Racial Equity Assessment Tools*. Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://racc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/An-Introduction-to-Racial-Equity-Assessment-Tools.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> The Anti-Oppression Network. (2011). *What Is Anti-Oppression?*. Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/what-is-anti-oppression/>

## **For Museums: Embrace that your museum will never be the same again – in fact, it shouldn't be.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered our country and its museums—forcing us to react to the ever-evolving restrictions and policies, scrambling to cut expenses and preserve assets, and making us desperate to return to a sense of normalcy. And while this reaction is completely understandable and, to some extent, unavoidable, it's important for museums (and funders and associations) to lean into the changing world around them. Accept that when your museum is back up on its feet, if things feel “back to the way they were,” then you did it wrong.

Whether you realize it or not, your museum has been adapting throughout its lifecycle. When audiences showed enthusiasm for an exhibition, you probably found a way to replicate that enthusiasm in the future. When you lost a major source of funding, you either scaled back programming or found an alternate source. Some of these adaptations were meaningful, but relatively small: extension of a successful exhibition, sunsetting of an unpopular program, additional restrooms to meet visitor needs, etc. Some were large and transformed your museum's identity—a renovation that included a new wing for local artists, a new mission and rebranding that better reflects your community and diverse audiences.

### **Re-Shaping Power Through Relationships**

Deborah Lynn Mack, Associate Director for the Office of Strategic Partnerships at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and Interim Director at the National Museum of African Art, sees relationships as central to a museum's work – so it can respond to audience needs, but also to dismantle the inequitable policies that have shaped the museum sector for hundreds of years.

“Audiences are very clear on what they need,” Mack says, yet too often “museums try to tell audiences what they need.” Instead, museum leadership must make an intentional investment in relationships – with audiences, museums, and other organizations serving the same audiences – to learn and adapt. “There is cultural value in sitting down and talking with people. We go to them because they are serving a constituency we need to know more about.” Only then can museums become essential to their communities, otherwise they end up being “just nice-to-haves.”

Museums also have the responsibility to combat systemic inequity by rethinking traditional relationships and collaborations—many of which are rooted in systemic racism which has historically overvalued credentials and degrees and created strict boundaries around whom museums exist to serve. Mack sees an opportunity for museum leadership “to set our own rules.” Through relationships, museums can tap into excellence that has been traditionally overlooked. “We need to find different perspectives and different talents. . . Excellence is everywhere.” Mack acknowledges the need for museums to deliberately wield their resources to empower others. Regarding partnerships with smaller institutions, Mack emphasizes, “It's important you go to them, not make them come to you. It signals to people that they have value – and other funders will recognize [that value].”

While it is tempting to protect your identity and the resources you had coming into 2020, if you solely cling to your institution's former self, you may re-emerge in a post-pandemic world slightly out of touch with and less relevant to your stakeholders. Your energy is better spent looking forward; building a plan adapting your identity and cultivating the resources your museum will need in 2021 and beyond. Here are some tips on how your museum can successfully transform to re-emerge as the proverbial phoenix from the ashes: a museum that has evolved along with its stakeholders to remain relevant and essential to its community.

Recommendations for adapting to change include:

**Ensure you have clearly articulated your target audience(s).** Museums must consistently re-examine their target audience(s)—those stakeholders it is essential for the museum to reach if it wants to achieve its mission. Target audience(s) can be expressed by many different demographic variables, including age, socioeconomic status, geography (e.g., the museum’s local community), race/ethnicity, gender, interests (e.g., bird enthusiasts), etc. Keep in mind, when determining or re-examining your target audience(s), do not assume the demographic breakdown of your current visitors is your intended target audience(s). Although in an ideal world your target audience(s) will match your visitor demographics, if you don’t think beyond your current visitors, you may be ignoring large groups of individuals who are essential to your museum’s mission.

**Leverage your target audience(s) as expert opinions.** Think of your target audience(s) as experts in your museum’s ability to fulfill its mission and engage it as such—ask their opinion, seek their advice, solicit feedback, utilize them to double-check your work. This engagement can take many different forms (e.g., online survey, focus group, suggestion box, etc.) depending on how your audiences prefer to engage, but it’s important to keep four things in mind:

- *Your outreach must be authentic.* Focus on better understanding their wants and needs—remember, they’re the expert! Audiences are smart and can tell the difference between an honest inquiry and a marketing ploy.
- *Engage your entire target audience(s), not just those who will give you positive feedback—or money.* You will not grow if you only hear positive feedback. And if you only listen to those with resources, you are most likely cutting out a large portion of your audience.
- *Be prepared to follow through.* It’s one thing to ask for advice, but if your museum doesn’t ever actually implement real change based on what you’re hearing, your audience will lose faith. And make sure they know about it. Since your adaptation is based on their expert feedback, they’ll be excited to hear it.
- *Ask again.* Build the muscle of regularly asking about our audience’s wants and needs. This will build trust and ensure your museum continues to evolve and remain relevant.



## Queens Museum: Centering Artists, Community, and Young Audiences

In recent years, the Queens Museum has moved beyond the walls of its galleries to address issues in surrounding neighborhoods, ranging from health care and public space access, to neighborhood identity, immigrant rights, and language access. For several years the museum has been engaged in long-term, socially collaborative art projects in Queens, including the development and programming of Corona Plaza, a public space in the heart of Corona, Queens, and the Immigrant Movement International Corona (IMI Corona), an offsite storefront immigrant education, arts, and activism center. The museum also partnered with Queens College's Art Department to launch Social Practice Queens, a graduate program focused on socially engaged art, as well as with ArtBuilt Mobile Studios, to house arts residencies in custom-built, eco-friendly mobile art studios in public parks and plazas.

Despite its deep commitment to community, the museum felt it could do more. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization embarked on an ambitious 5-year strategic plan to determine the museum's role in the diverse community. Some of these questions included:

- To whom are they accountable?
- How do can they learn from "audiences"
- What does it mean to be hyper-local and global?

The Queens museum knew it was vital to begin with audiences and communities, rather than programs and collections. According to President & Executive Director Sally Tallant, this "programs last not programs first" approach required the museum to fully enmesh itself in its community and radically rethink its core mission and purpose. "We cannot presume to know what people need and what they care about. We have to start with the people to fulfill our mission." Once the museum centered itself in community, it identified its organizational values, physical spaces for effective operation, and the services/programs they were best positioned to deliver. The museum also restructured its commitment to staff by providing a paid day a week for professional development, paying a livable wage, and offering full benefits. This restructuring includes board leadership as well, with the museum revisiting the composition of its Board of Trustees. Acknowledging the current "give-get" policy may stand as barrier to participation for artists and young people – perspectives that are crucial for the museum's success. To minimize this barrier, the museum is encouraging donors to fund board positions (with full voting power) for these under-represented stakeholders.

**Intentionally shape and be shaped by relationships in your environment.** Your museum is a part of a community of organizations—nonprofits, for-profit businesses, faith-based organizations, government entities, etc.—each of which plays a role in the health and vibrancy of your community. It's important to engage in relationships with other organizations so you can understand your museum's role in this community (e.g., educational institution, convening space, cultural hub, etc.), take ownership of that role, and adapt in relation to others' roles. Consider what only your museum can provide; what essential need you serve that no other organization can; and the relationships and collaborations that will be important for you and others to best work alongside each other to ensure a healthy and vibrant community.

## Oregon Historical Society and Oregon Black Pioneers Commitment to Building Capacity Through Intentional Partnership

When Brian J. Carter signed on as the Museum Director at the Oregon Historical Society (OHS), the museum was looking to evolve its traditional approach to cultural exhibitions. In the past, OHS would partner with the Oregon Black Pioneers, Oregon's only historical society dedicated to preserving and presenting the experiences of African Americans statewide, to compose a month-long exhibit showcasing the contributions of Black Oregonians. Upon his arrival, Carter saw an opportunity to expand this relationship and formalized the museum's connection with Black Pioneers through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which granted the Pioneers multi-year gallery space, peer-learning exchanges to increase their collections expertise, and began conversations about use of OHS climate-controlled storage space for the Oregon Black Pioneer's collection. The MOU also provided OHS with an opportunity to build authentic community engagement connections and move the needle on correcting historic inequities. Critical to the success of this partnership was trust and commitment. "Large organizations have historically received the lion's share of the dollars, support, and attention. As a society, we have extracted from black, brown, and indigenous communities and overlooked these stories and collections. Reinvestment in these communities requires an investment in building and preserving these collections and histories." Carter and OHS worked to establish an equitable partnership, including Brian's attendance at Pioneer Board meetings. Carter emphasizes the importance of formalizing and memorializing key museum relationships to ensure they are more than a "handshake agreement between two individuals." Moreover, these partnerships should utilize an asset-based approach, articulating the value of the partnership for each organization to ensure alignment on expectations and fully leverage each organization's unique strengths to maximize the partnership's impact.

**Embed equity into your adaptation.** Your museum has power, and with that power comes the responsibility of making equitable decisions—building power for others that are oppressed and not in positions of power. Throughout your adaptation, consider the decisions—both big and small—that you are making and ask yourself: who does this decision build power for? Who does it cut out or deplete power for? How can we encourage equity with this decision? Remember, your museum's adaptation will either perpetuate inequities in your community or it will actively move the needle on their dismantling.

**Be realistic, but ambitious.** Your museum's adaptation, based on target audience(s) needs, shaped by your role relative to others in your community, and guided by equity, must also be right for your institution. Your museum's history, mission, and current capacities must be considered for your adaptation to be sustainable. For some museums, changes will be minimal—more accessible exhibitions, a revamped membership pay structure, new strategic partnerships, etc. For some museums, adaptation will be transformational—mission revision, rebranding, or, in some cases, merging with another institution. Whatever the adaptation is, it should be ambitious enough to match the identified need, but also make sense for your institution.

**Institutionalize your adaptation.** Just as with any capacity building implementation, organization wide buy-in and change management (e.g., trust, communication, on-going support, etc.) are crucial to the success and sustainability of your organization. Be intentional with how you manage change within your museum, so it is successfully adopted and sustained.

**Celebrate your adaptation with your donors.** There is no doubt your museum’s evolution will be a bit scary—but because it’s steeped in audience feedback, shaped by relationships, and thoughtfully tied to your museum’s capacity to evolve, it should be exciting also! Celebrate this excitement with your donors. And remember, there is power in transparency. Focus on what’s going well, but also share the challenges you have encountered.

## Change Management Tips

### Buy-In

- Communicate early and often about the purpose of the capacity building. Model transparency and humility, while avoiding defensiveness and blame, to give everyone a chance to learn and grow.
- Articulate how your capacity building goals advance your long-term mission-related work.
- Ask for input and questions from staff along the way. And be open to hearing it.
- Follow up to ensure continual engagement throughout the process.

### Trust

- The change management team should set aside time during regular process check-ins to point out individual progress, achievements, and contributions.
- Establish open channels of communication and feedback mechanisms to build mutual trust and true partnership between leadership and staff.
- Within a month of beginning the change management process, bring together the team/relevant staff to discuss implementation, lessons learned so far, and how to incorporate lessons into ongoing efforts.
- In your public presentations, speak specifically about your staff and their accomplishments.

### Power Dynamics and Equity

- Be aware of how your own implicit bias may affect how you relate to different partners or individuals. Examine how you may unknowingly gravitate toward certain people or perspectives over others.
- Examine your internal decision-making process: Who is included? Is the process transparent? Are there opportunities to make changes to the process?
- Solicit input and feedback from traditionally underrepresented groups. Lift up this voice in decision-making processes.

### Resourcing & Support

- Consider and develop a plan for providing the technology the change team will need to ensure successful implementation.
- Determine if any additional funding is needed for successful implementation. Include this funding in your museum’s budgeting process. Share funding needs with donors and other stakeholders.
- Determine staff capacity needed for successful implementation. How might you invest in and support staff throughout implementation?

## Conclusion

Organizational strengthening within the museum sector is more important than ever. Museum's must build the capacities needed to continually evolve, operate efficiently, and serve their communities. Due to the impact of the COVID pandemic and nation-wide racial reckoning, museums urgently need to strengthen their abilities to adapt to changes in their environment (adaptive capacity), work in relation to others (relational capacity), and address racial inequities. To support museums in their strengthening, the museum sector must work together to enhance the capacity building infrastructure, leveraging both the past capacity building within the sector as well as best practices from outside the sector. This support will require funders to address power imbalances and strategically focus their capacity investments, associations to leverage their role in providing their members with customized resources, and museums to engage their communities to inform their institutional evolution so they can be resilient, relevant organizations that continue to serve their audiences' needs for years to come.

## APPENDIX A: Methodology

### Steering and Subject Matter Expert (SME) Committees

IMLS and Partners for Public Good (PPG) enlisted and engaged with two key committees in this project. They engaged with a Subject Matter Expert (SME) Committee, which brought expertise in capacity building, and a Steering Committee representing museum sector leadership (e.g., individuals in key positions at museums, museum associations, and other similar institutions). These individuals and groups were brought in to ensure the data collection and reporting take into account best practices and current trends in effective capacity building and the professional perspective of key stakeholders.

The Steering Committee, composed of eight key stakeholders representing museum sector leadership, served as PPG's planning partners throughout the process. We shared its hypotheses and findings from data synthesis/analysis with the Steering Committee to draw on their professional perspective and expertise. We also engaged with the Steering Committee to provide input on our data collection tools, sampling, the drafting of briefs, and the final report and recommendations. Please note, IMLS representatives, although in attendance at Steering Committee meetings, did not weigh in heavily on the data synthesis/analysis, but did provide support for meetings, such as reviewing agendas, co-facilitating conversations, and taking notes.

#### Steering Committee Members

Kathy Kelsey Foley, *Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum*

Joanna Haas, *Formerly of Kentucky Science Center*

Joe Heimlich, *COSI's Center for Research and Evaluation*

Burt Logan, *Ohio History Connection*

Deborah Lynn Mack, Ph.D., *Nat. Museum of African Art; Nat. Museum of African American History & Culture*

Ruth Ann Rugg, *Coalition of State Museum Associations*

Michael Shanklin, *kidSTREAM Children's Museum*

Susan B. Spero, Ph.D., *Museum Studies, John F. Kennedy University*

The Subject Matter Expert (SME) Committee played an integral role in ensuring PPG's research and final product took into account best practices and current trends in effective capacity building in the nonprofit sector at large. The SME Committee consisted of three capacity building experts with whom PPG consulted three times throughout the research and report construction process.

#### SME Committee Members

Seana Hasson, *YMCA of the USA*

Laura Leviton, *Retired from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

Jill Mendelson, *Independent Consultant, formerly of UJA-Federation New York*

### Data Collection Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods approach, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from stakeholders such as museum leaders, funders, capacity builders, and representatives from museum associations. PPG's mixed methods approach included the following: a survey of museum representatives, interviews, virtual focus groups, and secondary research.

## Museum Survey Design

TCC worked with IMLS to design a museum survey that would answer key capacity building questions. The goal of the survey was to gather data on museum engagement in capacity building. Specifically, the following information was of interest:

- the type of capacity building initiatives museums engaged in;
- perceived organizational strengths and challenges;
- perceived drivers and barriers to participation in capacity building;
- perceived levels of success in adopting and sustaining increased capacity; and
- gaps in capacity-building service offerings.

PPG applied best practices in social science survey design<sup>19</sup> in order to reduce respondent burden and increase the likelihood of survey completion.

- **Length of survey** – PPG and IMLS designed the survey with a goal of reducing the length of time respondents needed to devote to answering questions. Capacity questions in the survey were based on a longer survey – the Core Capacity Assessment Tool.<sup>20</sup> Those items were then pared down so the IMLS survey only included questions that were most critical in assessing museum capacity. After the survey closed, PPG analyzed the average time it took for respondents to complete the survey. Excluding those who took it over multiple days, the time was 26 minutes, and the median duration of time was 16 minutes. The average of 26 minutes turned out to be slightly greater than the goal at the outset of survey design, which was 20 minutes.
- **Relevancy to survey takers** – Questions were ordered so that similar items were grouped within thematic categories throughout the survey to encourage respondent engagement and allow respondents to focus their thoughts.
- **Survey features** – The survey utilized various features that had the potential of reducing burden on respondents. Skip logic was used when appropriate to ensure survey takers were only exposed to necessary and relevant questions. Response options like “I don’t know” or “not applicable” further reduced cognitive burden of the survey.

Several questionnaire items were directly taken from other IMLS surveys, therefore, respondents will most likely be familiar with the response profiles, including those for different types and sizes of cultural institutions, and be able to respond quickly.

The survey was designed and tested in multiple ways to determine that its questions were actually measuring what it set out to assess. Measures within the Organizational Capacity Assessment section were designed based on TCC Group’s Core Capacity Assessment Tool, which is a statistically validated questionnaire that has been taken over 6,000 times by nonprofits to learn about their organizational capacity.<sup>21</sup>

The drafted survey instrument was reviewed by the project Steering Committee to ensure the utility of survey questions and clarity of framing. It was pre-tested with Steering Committee members to identify potentially confusing questions or other issues that could impact the reliability and validity of the data. As a result of this pre-testing, the

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<sup>19</sup> Amany Saleh, Krishna Bista, *Examining Factors Impacting Online Survey Response Rates in Educational Research: Perceptions of Graduate Students*, Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> TCC Group. n.d. TCC Group's CCAT® - TCC Group. <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/ccat/>.

<sup>21</sup> TCC Group. n.d. TCC Group's CCAT® - TCC Group. <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/ccat/>.

survey was streamlined to include only necessary items and minimize the number of open-ended questions, relying primarily on closed-ended questions.

## Museum Survey Sampling

Prior to launching the survey, IMLS provided PPG with access to the IMLS Museum Data Files, which consisted of representatives from 28,557 small- and medium-sized museums across the United States. In order to reduce the number of individuals taking the survey and thus reduce total burden, a random sample of 3,000 museum representatives was drawn from that larger universe. Each prospective respondent represented one institution. The sample was representative of all disciplines and subject matters included in the initial conceptualization of museums, including art, history, natural history, science, and many others. It also included representatives from institutions of varying size, regions of the country, and neighborhood or place type. Table 4 on page 48 lays out the representation of each subcategory of museum among the sample group of 3,000.

## Museum Survey Administration

The survey was launched to 3,000 respondents via email and remained open from August 11, 2020 to September 18, 2020. The survey deadline, initially determined to be September 11, was extended by one additional week to increase survey participation. Between September 11 and the close of the survey an additional 63 respondents completed the survey, representing a two-percent increase in the response rate as a result of the deadline extension.

Prior to launch, PPG developed a communication schedule intended to maximize response rates. Survey respondents first received an introductory email from PPG, informing them of the upcoming survey. This introduction was followed by a second email with a unique link to the SoGoSurvey platform. This platform allowed for response tracking so PPG could know who had completed the survey and who had not. While the survey was being administered, the following prompts and reminders were sent:

**Table 1: Survey Reminder Outreach**

Outreach Type	Outreach Target	Description
<b>Association/Network Reminder Prompts</b>	Museum associations/network contact lists	IMLS and PPG prompted museum associations/network organizations to encourage their members to respond to the survey.
<b>Reminder Emails</b>	All individuals who had not yet completed the survey	PPG sent five email reminders about the survey over the span of the five weeks the survey was open.
<b>Reminder Phone Calls</b>	Individuals of underrepresented museum types who had not yet completed the survey	To bolster participation of various museum types, PPG reached out to non-responders via telephone to encourage participation.

PPG fielded questions from respondents during the time the survey was active, including general questions about how to access the survey and how the data would be used after analysis was conducted.

## Response Rate

Responses were received from representatives from 356 museums, a response rate of approximately 12 percent. While a higher response rate would have been preferable, a 12 percent response rate is in line with a general trend in declining online survey response rates in recent years.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, according to recent research, even a response rate below 10 percent is not uncommon for web surveys.<sup>23</sup> The reason for a response rate of 12 percent may be that many of the targeted museums are small and have limited staff capacity. Additionally, the survey was administered in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which we hypothesize impacted survey response rates. As discussed in our report, the pandemic has dramatically altered the museum sector, leading to a great deal of instability in the industry. Museums are currently facing crises of revenue, staffing, and sustainability. The resultant stress and anxiety for museum leadership likely has led to them deprioritizing responding to this survey.

At the outset of analysis, four primary variables were selected as the focus for sampling. That is, it was the hypothesis of IMLS and PPG that these four variables were key in defining museums nationwide and thus, museums of all types within these variables should be represented in survey data. These variables were annual revenue (as a proxy for museum size), geographic region, museum discipline, and place type.

**Table 2: Key Variables**

Variable Type	Categories	Source
<b>Annual Revenue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small (less than \$250,000 in annual revenue)</li> <li>• Medium (\$250,000 - \$4,999,999 in annual revenue)</li> </ul>	Derived and adapted from IMLS' Museum Data Files
<b>Region</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New England and Mid-Atlantic</li> <li>• Southeast</li> <li>• Midwest</li> <li>• Mountain Plains and West<sup>24</sup></li> </ul>	Derived and adapted from IMLS' Museum Data Files
<b>Discipline</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art, History, Natural History/Anthropology</li> <li>• Botanical Gardens, Aquariums, and Zoos</li> <li>• Children's Museums and Science Centers</li> <li>• Other</li> <li>• Historical Societies</li> </ul>	Derived from IMLS' Museum Data Files
<b>Place Type</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban</li> <li>• Suburban</li> <li>• Rural<sup>25</sup></li> </ul>	Based on National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Urban-Centric Locale Codes classifications

Table 3 on page 47 displays the initial museum universe stratified by the key variables. Table 4 on page 48 displays the number of museums within each cell that were selected to total a sample of 3,000 museums. The purpose of the stratification is to ensure the survey is administered to a representative sample of museums in the universe.

<sup>22</sup> National Research Council. (2013). *Nonresponse in Social Science Surveys: A Research Agenda*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

<sup>23</sup> Peytchev, Andy & Conrad, Fred & Couper, Mick & Tourangeau, Roger. (2010). *Increasing Respondents' Use of Definitions in Web Surveys*. *Journal of official statistics*. 26. 633-650.

<sup>24</sup> New England and Mid-Atlantic: CT, DC, DE, MD, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT; Southeast: AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV; Midwest: IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI; Mountain Plains and West: AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, KS, MT, ND, NE, NM, NV, OK, OR, SD, TX, UT, WA, WY.

<sup>25</sup> Rural includes towns, both of which are defined relative to distance from urban areas.



Table 3. Museum Universe

Art, History, and Natural History Museums	Size	New England and Mid Atlantic			Southeast			Midwest			Mountain Plains and West			Total
		City	Suburb	Rural	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	169	231	211	238	134	359	179	111	297	411	196	555	3,091
	Medium	51	44	55	83	30	38	63	17	34	126	34	101	676
Botanic Gardens, Aquariums, and Zoos, and Nature Centers	Size	New England and Mid Atlantic			Southeast			Midwest			Mountain Plains and West			Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	64	79	87	72	57	114	62	46	127	136	61	172	1,077
	Medium	15	24	16	20	12	12	20	6	29	42	12	43	251
	Size	New England and Mid Atlantic			Southeast			Midwest			Mountain Plains and West			Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	64	68	65	81	49	86	57	28	63	148	50	164	923
	Medium	19	23	7	58	9	7	35	8	7	51	10	10	244
	Size							Midwest						Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	479	526	468	494	294	728	341	285	712	826	361	1,327	6841
	Medium	91	61	65	68	33	56	71	24	64	150	36	87	806
	Size							Midwest						Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	494	1,488	1,860	578	498	1,368	457	809	2,210	863	639	2,154	13,418
	Medium	136	167	127	113	39	71	104	49	99	143	38	144	1,230
		1,582	2,711	2,961	1,805	1,155	2,839	1,389	1,383	3,642	2,896	1,437	4,757	2,8557

\*Rural includes towns, both of which are defined relative to distance from urban areas.

Table 4. Simple Stratified Random Sample

Art, History, and Natural History	Size	New England and Mid Atlantic			Southeast			Midwest			Mountain Plains and West			Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	18	24	22	25	14	38	19	12	31	43	21	58	325
Medium	5	5	6	9	3	4	7	2	4	13	4	11	71	
Botanic gardens, Aquariums, and Zoos	Size	New England and Mid Atlantic			Southeast			Midwest			Mountain Plains and West			Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	7	8	9	8	6	12	7	5	13	14	6	18	113
Medium	2	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	4	1	5	26	
	Size	New England and Mid Atlantic			Southeast			Midwest			Mountain Plains and West			Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	7	7	7	9	5	9	6	3	7	16	5	17	97
Medium	2	2	1	6	1	1	4	1	1	5	1	1	26	
	Size	New England and Mid Atlantic			Southeast									Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	50	55	49	52	31	76	36	30	75	87	38	139	719
Medium	10	6	7	7	3	6	7	3	7	16	4	9	85	
	Size													Total
		City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	City	Suburb	Rural*	
	Small	52	156	195	61	52	144	48	85	232	91	67	226	1,410
Medium	14	18	13	12	4	7	11	5	10	15	4	15	129	

\*Rural includes towns, both of which are defined relative to distance from urban areas.

## Respondent Representativeness

PPG also analyzed the responsiveness of individuals based on their museum's four stratification variables described above. According to our analysis of the response rates for each sub-type (number of respondents out of number invited), there were no major differences between these groups' responsiveness to the survey. Most response rates were near 11-12 percent. Some sub-types had slightly higher response rates. For example, children's museums and science centers had the highest response rate at 20%. Medium museums had an 18% response rate, whereas small museums had an 11% response rate (consistent with other IMLS research).<sup>26</sup>

In addition to reviewing the response rates, it is also important to analyze the raw number of respondents. The only raw number of respondents that was concerning was the number representatives from zoos, botanical gardens, and aquariums. The low number may indicate less than ideal representation from that type of museum discipline. The number may be explained by some open-ended data we received through the survey and our expert interviews. That information indicated that although IMLS considers botanic gardens, zoos, and aquariums to be museums, representatives from the botanic gardens, zoos, and aquariums often do not think of their institutions as museums. This could account for the lower response rate from this category of museums, as some individuals may have not completed the survey because they assumed they received it in error.

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<sup>26</sup> The Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2019). *Protecting America's Collections: Results from the Heritage Health Information Survey*. Washington, DC: The Institute.

**Table 5: Respondent Representativeness**

		Response N	Response Rate
Regions	Northeast and Mid-Atlantic	79	10%
	Southeast	69	11%
	Midwest	86	13%
	Mountain Plains and West	122	13%
Place Type	Urban	73	12%
	Suburban	64	11%
	Rural	145	12%
Annual Revenue	Less than \$250,000 or missing (or "small")	294	11%
	\$250,000 to \$4,999,999 (or "medium")	62	18%
Discipline	Art, History, and Natural History	59	15%
	Botanic gardens, Aquariums, and Zoos	15	11%
	Children's Museums and Science Centers	25	20%
	Other Museums	92	11%
	Historical Societies	165	11%

## Interviews

Based on conversations with IMLS and secondary research, twenty individuals were selected for interviews. PPG conducted twenty individual interviews with museum leaders, foundation staff, museum association staff, and capacity builders (including consultants and capacity building practitioners at museums associations). The interviewee roster was intentionally curated to include perspectives across various geographic regions, museum budget sizes, museum disciplines, place types, ages, and races/ethnicities. Interviews were 45 – 60 minutes in duration and were conducted virtually via Zoom. Interviews gathered specific data on grantmaking strategies, capacity support offered, structures of engagement, and specific capacities addressed, as well as the process by which museums are invited to, or prevented from, participating in capacity-building offerings.

Interviewee Category	N
Museum Leader	4
Foundation Staff	9
Museum Association Staff/Capacity Builders	7

## Virtual Focus Groups with Museum Leadership and Staff

PPG conducted two virtual focus groups with museum leadership and staff from a variety of museum budget sizes and types to vet preliminary hypotheses and findings. Each focus group session lasted 90 minutes. Six individuals attended one focus group, eight attended the other. Guiding questions directed at focus group participants were informed by prior data analysis.

Focus groups aimed to understand museum leadership and staff perspectives on how, if at all, the findings resonated with their experiences and ways in which the findings might be amended to gain a more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences with capacity building.

The documented advantages of focus groups as opposed to structured interviews include building on group dynamics to explore key questions in-depth and without imposing a conceptual framework. In this case, engaging directors and staff from different types of museums in a facilitated conversation about the survey findings explored participants' motivations and barriers that drive participation in capacity building, as well as a more nuanced understanding of capacity building participants' ability to adopt, sustain, and evaluate their capacity building initiatives.

## Secondary Research

PPG conducted a systematic literature review of how museums are accessing capacity building and to understand the state of the nonprofit sector. Additional research was conducted as needed to understand the museum sector landscape, existing capacity building resources, funding opportunities, and innovations in capacity building.

## Analytical Approach

A variety of analyses were conducted to understand trends in the data and potential drivers of museums' capacity building engagement.

- **Descriptive statistics** – PPG summarized survey data by reviewing descriptive statistics, which are organized and presented in Appendix B.
- **Reliability analysis** – In order to determine whether various items in the survey were measuring organizational capacity, reliability analysis testing was done on all capacity measures. Cronbach's Alpha values of the individual capacity measures were high enough to indicate they were well-designed for the purpose of this assessment.
- **Inferential analysis** – Inferential analysis was conducted primarily to determine if there were significant relationships between four variables of interest and various measures of organizational capacity. These analyses included crosstabs where Pearson Chi-Square was reviewed to determine if the relationship of these variables was strong and significant as well as ANOVA analyses which also assessed the significance and strength of the variables' relationships.
- **Qualitative analysis** – Qualitative data from the survey, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed, coded for themes and incorporated throughout the report to provide context for analysis.

## APPENDIX B: Survey Tool & Response Data

The following tables lay out the summary of responses for all quantitative questions in the museum leader survey. Response percentages are reported in valid percent, meaning nonrespondents were removed from the denominator. The valid N, or total number of valid responses, is included for each survey item reporting valid percent. Qualitative responses were coded and analyzed; analysis is incorporated in the narrative report.

### Section 1: Organizational Characteristics

#### 1. Role or title of lead person completing or coordinating survey: (Select one option)

Response Category	Valid N	349	N	Valid Percent
Board Member (e.g. President, Trustee, Member)			46	13%
CEO/ President/ Executive Director			188	54%
Senior Leadership (e.g. Chief Financial Officer (CFO)/Director of Finance, Chief Operating Officer (COO)/Director of Operations, Chief Program Officer/ Program Director, etc.)			60	17%
Staff responsible for Capacity Building/Training Activities			23	7%
Staff Member, Other			19	5%
Volunteer			10	3%
Other			3	1%

#### 2. Which of the following most closely describes your type of institution? (If your institution has a parent institution or organization, please answer only for your institution.) (Select one option)

Response Category	Valid N	350	N	Valid Percent
Art, History, or Natural History			148	42%
Botanic Garden, Aquarium, Zoo, and Nature Center			10	3%
Children's Museum, Science Center, Science & Technology Museum and Planetarium			25	7%
Historical Society and Historic Preservation Organization			156	45%
Other (Please specify):			11	3%

3. What is the total annual operating budget of your institution for the most recently completed fiscal year? If your institution has a parent institution or organization, please provide only the operating budget for your institution. (Select one option)

Response Category	Valid N	339	N	Valid Percent
\$1 to \$9,999			26	8%
\$10,000 to \$24,999			37	11%
\$25,000 to \$99,999			88	26%
\$100,000 to \$499,999			120	35%
\$500,000 to \$999,999			30	9%
\$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999			38	11%

4. How many staff currently work at your institution, both paid and unpaid? If you have no staff in a category, indicate zero ("0").

a. Number of full-time paid staff

Response Category	Valid N	321	N	Valid Percent
0			106	32%
1			71	22%
2 - 5			88	27%
6 - 10			31	10%
11 - 29			21	7%
30 - 49			4	1%

b. Number of part-time paid staff

Response Category	Valid N	308	N	Valid Percent
0			88	29%
1			50	16%
2 - 5			115	37%
6 - 10			30	10%
11 - 29			21	7%



30 - 49	1	<1%
50 or more	3	1%

**c. Number of full-time volunteers/unpaid staff (not including Board)**

Response Category	Valid N	228	N	Valid Percent
0			184	81%
1			18	8%
2 - 5			16	7%
6 - 10			7	3%
11 - 29			2	1%
30 - 49			1	<1%
50 or more			0	0%

**d. Number of part-time volunteers/unpaid staff (not including Board)**

Response Category	Valid N	312	N	Valid Percent
0			49	16%
1			8	3%
2 - 5			80	26%
6 - 10			48	15%
11 - 29			53	17%
30 - 49			26	8%
50 or more			48	15%

5. How many on-site visitors or users did you serve last year? (Please select one category.)

Response Category	Valid N	348	N	Valid Percent
Fewer than 100 visitors			22	6%
100 – 499 visitors			46	13%
500 – 999 visitors			36	10%
1,000 – 9,999 visitors			126	36%
10,000 – 49,999 visitors			82	24%
50,000 or more visitors			36	10%

6. In which region is your institution located? (Select one option)

Response Category	Valid N	350	N	Valid Percent
Mid-Atlantic (DC, DE, MD, NJ, NY, PA)			43	12%
Midwest (IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI)			84	24%
Mountain Plains (CO, KS, MT, ND, NE, NM, OK, SD, TX, WY)			61	17%
New England (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)			36	10%
Southeast (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV)			65	19%
West (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, UT, WA)			61	17%

7. How would you describe the area where your institution is located? (Select one option)

Response Category	Valid N	350	N	Valid Percent
Rural			157	45%
Suburban			90	26%
Urban			103	29%

8. Which of the following most closely describes your institution? (Select one option)

Response Category	Valid N	348	N	Valid Percent
College, university, or other academic entity			26	7%
Federal government entity			2	1%
For-profit entity			1	<1%
Local (county or municipal) government entity			33	9%
Nonprofit, non-governmental organization or foundation (not a college, university, or other academic entity)			267	77%
State government entity			11	3%
Tribal government entity			1	<1%
Other			7	2%

## Section 2: Organizational Capacity Assessment

This organizational capacity assessment section was adapted from TCC Group’s Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT)<sup>27</sup>, a statistically validated self-assessment tool that measures nonprofit organizational capacity. The CCAT measures four core capacities (Adaptive, Leadership, Management, Technical), organizational culture, and their subcapacities.

All mean response values in this section were created by averaging responses on a five-point scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate more positive findings. The subcapacity corresponding with each measure has been included in bold typeface.

9. **Adaptive Capacity** is a museum’s ability to monitor, assess, respond to, and create internal and external changes. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Statement	N 350	Mean
<b>Decision-Making Tools</b> - Our museum has a written strategic plan that includes a clear, specific, and measurable set of goals and objectives that will ensure success.		3.5
<b>Decision-Making Tools</b> - When appropriate, decisions made by museum leaders are guided by program evaluation data and organizational assessment data.		3.6
<b>Decision-Making Tools</b> - When appropriate, decisions made by museum leaders are guided by visitors/community needs assessments.		3.7
<b>Environmental Learning</b> - Our museum keeps informed of national / regional / local trends that may affect our visitors, services/programs, collections, or funding.		4.0
<b>Environmental Learning</b> - Our programs, services, and collections have changed over time in order to meet new or emerging needs and interests of our visitors/community.		4.0
<b>Organizational Learning</b> - Our museum formally shares progress on the strategic plan’s goals and objectives with appropriate staff members on a regular basis (mark “strongly disagree” if your museum does not have a strategic plan).		3.1
<b>Resource Sustainability</b> - Our funding streams are diversified.		3.1
<b>Program Resource Adaptability</b> - Our museum needs to hire more people or engage more volunteers so that current workloads are more manageable. (The response values for this question have been reverse-coded so that higher values equate to more positive findings.)		2.1
<b>Programmatic Learning</b> - Our museum conducts frequent and regular assessments of our visitors’ needs and interests.		3.1
<b>Programmatic Learning</b> - Our museum has a clear set of agreed upon criteria and specific measurement tools to determine whether our programs, services, and collections are effective.		2.9

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.tccgrp.com/resource/ccat/>

**10. Leadership Capacity** is the ability of all organizational leaders to create and sustain the vision, inspire, model, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate, in an effort to achieve the mission. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Statement	N	Mean
<b>Internal Leadership</b> - Our museum has a clear mission and vision.	350	4.3
<b>Internal Leadership</b> - Staff members are appropriately involved in organizational decision-making.		4.1
<b>Internal Leadership</b> - Museum leaders and staff have regular interaction and a strong working relationship.		4.3
<b>Internal Leadership</b> - Museum leaders are willing to make major changes if what they are currently doing is not working.		4.1
<b>Internal Leadership</b> - Organizational decisions are reflective of the mission and vision of the museum.		4.2
<b>Leader Vision</b> - Museum leaders (e.g., Executive Director, CEO, COO, etc.) are able to motivate others to achieve the vision.		4.0
<b>Leader Influence</b> - When necessary, organizational leaders have been able to effectively persuade stakeholders including board members, partners, visitors, and staff to change their attitudes and behavior.		3.7
<b>Leadership Sustainability</b> - Our museum has a clearly articulated plan for replacing leaders when they leave the museum.		2.7
<b>Leadership Sustainability</b> - There's one leader at our museum who, if she/he left, would temporarily slow down our progress towards achieving its mission. (The response values for this question have been reverse-coded so that higher values equate to more positive findings.)		2.2
<b>Board Leadership</b> - Board members show up for meetings and events and follow through on helping the museum as much as possible.		3.7
<b>Board Leadership</b> - Board members have the knowledge they need about the museum and current issues relevant to our museum to make effective decisions.		3.7
<b>Board Leadership</b> - The board fully meets its role and responsibilities, including planning, assessing the CEO, fiduciary oversight, giving/getting money, etc.		3.4
<b>Board Leadership</b> - Many of our board members are effective at getting others in the community to invest time, money and/or other resources in our museum.		3.0

**11. Management Capacity** is a museum's ability to ensure the effective and efficient use of organizational resources. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Statement	N 350	Mean
<b>Assessing Performance</b> - We have a clear set of benchmarks from which to evaluate staff performance.		3.2
<b>Conveying Staff Value</b> - Staff are consistently given positive feedback on a regular basis.		3.8
<b>Manager Communication</b> - Museum leaders and managers are generally open to negative feedback from staff.		3.9
<b>Manager Communication</b> - Policies and written documents are regularly updated to reflect changes in the museum.		3.5
<b>Managing Finances</b> - Our museum does a good job of managing its finances (i.e., balanced books, on-time accounts payable).		4.3
<b>Setting Role Expectations</b> - Managers have realistic expectations for employees (e.g., time, resources, workload).		3.9
<b>Managing Program Staff</b> - Program staff have the required knowledge, experience and skills to implement our programs/services in a manner that will achieve the greatest impact.		3.9
<b>Program Staffing</b> - Our museum eliminates staff members who do not consistently perform their roles and responsibilities in a manner that contributes to the success of the museum.		3.2
<b>Problem Solving</b> - Managers appropriately address interpersonal conflicts in a sensitive and timely fashion.		3.7
<b>Staff Development</b> - Managers consistently do an effective job of coaching, mentoring and facilitating employees' learning.		3.7
<b>Resourcing Staff</b> - Staff are given the resources they need they need to effectively carry out their job (e.g., professional development, supplies, administrative assistance, technology, direction).		3.7
<b>Resourcing Staff</b> - Staff have the necessary tools, systems, manuals, technology they need to do their job consistently, efficiently, and effectively.		3.6
<b>Volunteer Management</b> - Our museum effectively recruits and retains volunteers.		3.1

**12. Technical Capacity** is a museum's ability to implement all of the key organizational and programmatic functions. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Statement	N 350	Mean
<b>Facilities</b> - Our museum has the right facilities for our services (space, equipment, etc.).		3.0
<b>Facilities Management Skills</b> - We have enough people with the ability to manage and maintain all of our collections (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		2.5
<b>Facilities Management Skills</b> - We have enough people with the ability to manage and maintain all of our facilities and equipment (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		2.7
<b>Financial Management Skills</b> - We have enough people with excellent financial management knowledge, experience and skills (e.g., staff, board members, consultants, partners, volunteers).		3.4
<b>Fundraising Skills</b> - We have enough people with the ability to raise funds from individuals (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		2.4
<b>Fundraising Skills</b> - We have enough people with the ability to raise funds from corporations, foundations and/or the government (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		2.3
<b>Legal Skills</b> - We have enough people who have the legal expertise our museum needs (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		3.0
<b>Marketing Skills</b> - We have enough people with marketing knowledge, skills and experience (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		2.9
<b>Outreach Skills</b> - We have enough people who have the skills, knowledge and experience to conduct public outreach, organizing, and/or advocacy efforts (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		3.0
<b>Program Evaluation Skills</b> - We have enough people with the ability to conduct high quality program evaluations (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		2.8
<b>Service Delivery Skills</b> - We have enough staff with appropriate knowledge related to service delivery for our programs.		3.2
<b>Technology</b> - Our museum has the technology to run efficiently and effectively (e.g., ability to track and store all important information, to analyze financials).		3.1
<b>Technology Skills</b> - We have enough people who are excellent at running and managing our technology systems (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		2.9
<b>Technology Skills</b> - We have enough people with the ability to use the types of communication software (e.g., word processing, presentation software, web development software, Internet, e-mail) that our museum needs (e.g., staff, board, consultants, partners, volunteers).		3.2

13. **Organizational Culture** is nonprofit organization’s context – unique history, language, structures, and values – that will affect its ability to achieve its mission. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Statement	N 350	Mean
<b>Empowering</b> - Our museum takes time to acknowledge staff's personal triumphs.		4.0
<b>Empowering</b> - We support a culture of learning through regular feedback, professional development, etc.		3.8
<b>Re-Energizing</b> - Our museum has staff retreats or time set aside for reflection and planning.		2.7
<b>Unification</b> - There's often information and/or knowledge that should be shared that some staff keep to themselves. (The response values for this question have been reverse-coded so that higher values equate to more positive findings.)		3.3



### Section 3: Organizational Capacity Building

**9. Has your museum participated in a capacity building engagement in the last 2 years?**

Response Category	Valid N	313	N	Valid Percent
No			243	78%
Yes			70	22%

**10. What was the primary capacity building activity? For the purpose of this study, we are loosely defining “technical assistance” as the provision of any specialized service or skill that a museum does not possess within the organization, but which it may need in order to operate more effectively.**

Response Category	Valid N	70	N	Valid Percent
Coaching by an external consultant			23	33%
Coaching/mentoring by a peer organization			2	3%
Cohort-based learning			4	6%
Organizational assessment or board assessment			8	11%
Participation in a self-driven community of practice			1	1%
Retreat			8	11%
Technical assistance			7	10%
Workshops/trainings (not including professional development)			10	14%
Other			7	10%

**11. What was the primary focus of the capacity building engagement? (e.g. board development, collections management, strategic planning, etc.)**

*(Open-ended questions analyzed separately)*

## 12. Funding Source

Response Category	Valid N	67	N	Valid Percent
Board member contributions			5	7%
Civic organization support (e.g. faith-based organizations, social clubs, etc.)			2	3%
Corporate/business support			2	3%
Earned revenue			11	16%
Endowment funding			1	1%
Foundation support			10	15%
Government support			13	19%
Individual donation(s)			8	12%
Other			7	10%
Pro bono support			8	12%

## 13. Primary Facilitator

Response Category	Valid N	67	N	Valid Percent
Businesses			3	4%
Consultants (independents, consulting firms, etc.)			37	55%
Foundations			3	4%
Management support organizations (including associations, networks, etc.)			5	7%
Peer organizations			5	7%
Other			14	21%

#### 14. Length of Engagement

Response Category	Valid N	67	N	Valid Percent
1 day			14	21%
A few days			7	10%
1 week			2	3%
1 month			3	4%
2 – 5 months			14	21%
6 – 11 months			10	15%
1 to 2 years			11	16%
Longer than 2 years			6	9%

#### 15. Project Budget

Response Category	Valid N	67	N	Valid Percent
\$0 - \$999			28	42%
\$1,000 - \$9,999			19	28%
\$10,000 - \$24,999			6	9%
\$25,000 - \$49,999			3	4%
\$50,000 - \$99,999			3	4%
\$100,000 - \$249,999			2	3%
\$250,000 - \$499,999			5	7%
Over \$500,000			1	1%

**16. In general, what motivates you to participate in capacity building? (Check all that apply)**

Response Category	Number of respondents	279	Number of Responses	Percent (Responses/ Respondents)
Leadership/staff seeking out capacity building support			188	67%
Suggestions and encouragement from Board			98	35%
Funding opportunities			173	62%
Requirement as a prerequisite for funding			50	18%
Other			15	5%

**17. On average, how successfully has your organization adopted and sustained the learnings from capacity building investments over the last five years?**

Response Category	Valid N	273	N	Valid Percent
Very unsuccessfully			37	14%
Somewhat unsuccessfully			63	23%
Somewhat successfully			156	57%
Very successfully			17	6%

**18. Which of the following contributed to the success of your capacity building engagement(s)? (Check all that apply)**

Response Category	Number of respondents	255	Number of Responses	Percent (Responses/ Respondents)
Leadership buy-in and support			132	52%
Leadership and/or staff transitions			56	22%
Board buy-in and support			115	45%
Staff buy-in and support			131	51%
Assigning a responsible party to oversee the capacity engagement			75	29%

Having a clear and detailed plan to achieve capacity building goal	83	33%
Having the staff and/or volunteers with the skills, knowledge and resources to achieve our capacity building goal	91	36%
Funding and resources available to implement goal	102	40%
Visitor, audience, and/or member buy-in and support	74	29%
Non-financial support from funders	24	9%
Long-term financial support	37	15%
Other	11	4%

**19. Which of the following hindered the success of your capacity building engagement(s)?  
(Check all that apply)**

Response Category	Number of respondents	255	Number of Responses	Percent (Responses/ Respondents)
Lack of leadership buy-in and support			33	13%
Leadership and/or staff transitions			36	14%
Lack of board buy-in and support			67	26%
Lack of staff buy-in and support			22	9%
Failure to assign a responsible party to oversee the capacity engagement			53	21%
Lack of a clear and detailed plan to achieve capacity building goal			90	35%
Insufficient staff and/or volunteers with the skills, knowledge and resources to achieve capacity building goal			139	55%
Lack of visitor, audience, and/or member buy-in and support			35	14%
Difficult power dynamics with funders			24	9%
Lack of long-term financial support			128	50%
Other			8	3%

**20. Generally, what factors limit or prevent your institution’s engagement in capacity building?  
(Check all that apply)**

Response Category	Number of respondents	284	Number of Responses	Percent (Responses/ Respondents)
Lack of access to capacity building opportunities			87	31%
Lack of awareness of opportunities for capacity building support			112	38%
Limited staff time and availability			209	74%
Limited board buy-in			77	27%
Limited leadership buy-in			23	8%
Lack of funding			177	62%
Lack of relevant opportunities for our organization			88	31%
Other			8	3%

**21. What type of capacity building do you most need for your institution to be successful?  
(Please select at most 5 options.)**

Response Category	Number of respondents	290	Number of Responses	Percent (Responses/ Respondents)
Board governance and engagement			105	36%
Collections management			73	25%
Community and/or visitor relationship building and engagement			122	42%
Connecting and collaborating with peers and thought leaders			18	6%
Diversifying revenues			119	41%
Diversity, equity and inclusion			66	23%
Donor relations			105	36%
Executive coaching			19	7%
Facilities management			41	14%

Financial management	21	7%
Internal communications	8	3%
Leadership succession planning	66	23%
Legal	16	6%
Messaging and marketing	74	26%
Organizational chart, reporting, and role delineation	12	4%
Program evaluation	55	19%
Remaining informed of national / regional / local trends and best practices	14	5%
Staff management systems training	12	4%
Staff performance review systems	13	4%
Strategic planning	75	26%
Technology (e.g. website, social media, CRM systems, knowledge management software)	67	23%
Vision and mission refinement	32	11%
Volunteer management	67	23%
Other	8	3%

**22. Have you participated in the Museum Assessment Program (MAP)?**

Response Category	Valid N	314	N	Valid Percent
Yes			70	22%
No			191	61%
I don't know			53	17%

**23. What was your experience like, and how could it have been improved?**

*(Open-ended questions analyzed separately)*

**24. Have you participated in the Collections Assessment Program (CAP)?**

Response Category	Valid N	318	N	Valid Percent
Yes			62	19%
No			202	64%
I don't know			54	17%

**25. What was your experience like, and how could it have been improved?**

*(Open-ended questions analyzed separately)*

**26. If interested, please share names of other capacity building programs your institution has participated in.**

*(Open-ended questions analyzed separately)*





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