

Wilkening Pottery Museum

2026 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS QUALITATIVE CODING REPORT

Wilkening Consulting + American Alliance of Museums



American
Alliance of
Museums

WilkeningConsulting
audience research | knowledge curation



Coding Open-Ended Comments

We collected **open-ended responses** from the “**other, please specify**” answer choices and from **open-ended questions**. We read through all comments and code them to see what themes emerge. The results are shared here.



The Annual Survey *always* includes about three open-ended questions. From the overall responses, we create a coding sample that ensures we are hearing from significant numbers of randomly selected museum-goers that represent different ages and life stages, genders, races and ethnicities, and more. But **for individual museums, we read and code *all* written responses to create an understanding of qualitative responses specific to your museum.**



By reading and analyzing individual responses, we get to know museum audiences much more intimately, including how different segments of museum visitors use language and think differently. This is an extremely powerful insight into the minds of museum-goers, and it makes a dramatic difference to the quality of our work.



OVERAMPLIFICATION



When reading your written responses, you will find some of them are negative, or express anti-inclusive views. Remember these comments tend to be representative of individual voices and concerns rather than trends, and should not be over-amplified.



Over-amplifying occurs when we take a critical minority opinion and amplify it beyond what is appropriate. This can be when the complaint is about an issue that has since been resolved, or when it represents a viewpoint that is harmful to others (and often a viewpoint the majority of people would disagree with). Sometimes these comments are threatening, which elevates our emotional response (and our tendency to over-amplify).

The nay-sayers tend to suck the oxygen out of the room. And that can be problematic, even dangerous, because it can make us:

- Erroneously extend the attitude to a far larger percentage of people than it really represents (this can lead to *pluralistic ignorance*—a topic we covered in a [2023 Data Story](#));
- And then we stop doing the *right* thing (especially when the right thing is supported by the majority of people).



OVERAMPLIFICATION

This doesn't mean you can necessarily disregard the negative feedback you receive. Instead, we want to turn your thinking to a more productive path: **consider the calibration that is necessary to bring more people along with you (rather than set up their defense mechanisms).**



Some advice for you when you are reviewing critical comments:



- Label a critical comment as a critical comment. This step of identification will help you take your own emotions out of it and read the comment more clinically (and even consider if there is anything of merit).



- Keep track of the numbers. Contextualize. Is this comment an outlier, or a pervasive theme?



Example Qualitative Coding Slide



Question 5 – 48 comments

Example Survey Results – For Demonstration Purposes Only

CODING CATEGORY/THEME

Here, we'll share a short, narrative summary of our qualitative analysis about a specific topic, along with a few representative comments from your respondents

"Coffee...we always appreciate the cute coffee cart in the lobby."

"Getting some much needed screen-free time!!"

"Me and my wife use it as our date night spot a couple times a month. Just walking through the rooms and spending time together is enough for us"

- If you've selected the [Qualitative Coding Report Add-On](#), you'll receive slides (like this one) where we hand-code and categorize open-ended comments to questions in your survey
- Comments are in response to a quantitative/closed-ended question that provided an "other, please specify" response choice or in response to an open-ended question
- In this separate report, you'll receive our full coding results, along with commentary and key takeaways