

Wilkening Pottery Museum

2026 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS

Wilkening Consulting + American Alliance of Museums



American
Alliance of
Museums

WilkeningConsulting
audience research | knowledge curation



Annual Survey of Museum Goers: Field-wide Research

The Annual Survey of Museum-Goers typically seeks three types of information from museum-goers:

1

**An understanding
of *who* our audience is**

This includes their attitudes,
values, motivations,
and demographic
characteristics.

2

**Their advice about
what they want from
museums writ large or your
museum specifically**

This can include how
museums are/are not
meeting needs, what exhibits
or programs they are most
interested in, etc.

3

The lay of the land

This can help us understand
how different people may
respond to content or
initiatives that may challenge
them or that, as a society, we
don't have consensus on.
This allows us to evaluate
the best approaches to
sharing that content.



Annual Survey of Museum Goers: Field-wide Research

**Each year,
the Annual
Survey of
Museum-Goers
has three
main parts:**

1

**Key benchmark
questions on
attitudes and
visitation rates**



These tend to stay the same from year to year so that individual museums can track their results over time.

2

**Demographic
questions**



3

**New research
themes**



These are different every year, and address current needs of the museum field.

New research themes for each year are chosen based on multiple sources, including:



- Input from the previous year's Annual Survey participants
- Trends and shifts impacting the museum field
- Questions arising from previous research
- Broader societal trends and events

Aggregate data will be analyzed by Wilkening Consulting and shared with the museum field via *Data Stories* as well as the American Alliance of Museum's publications and website



Participating museums also receive a detailed spreadsheet which provides:



Additional quantitative comparisons, as appropriate



Written-in comments to all questions



Overview of Survey Participants - 2026

186 museums participated

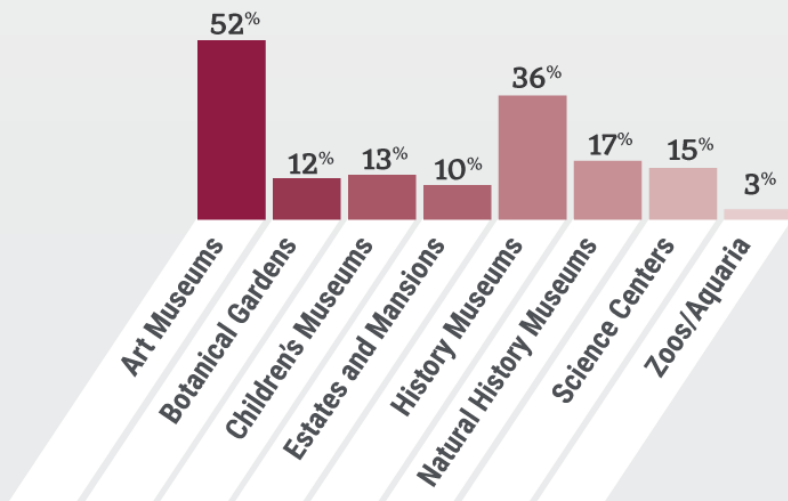


Including art museums, history museums and historic sites, science centers, children's museums, botanical gardens, zoos and aquaria, and special-interest museums

Fielded January 1 –
April 1, 2026



As of April 1, 2026: N = 75,742 respondents



*adds up to >100% as many museums include multiple disciplines

Participating museums disseminated
their survey via:



Email list



Social media



And other methods based on each,
individual museum's goals



Broader Population of US Adults Comparison Sample

A demographically-representative broader population sample of US adults was fielded concurrent with this sampling

The sample of US adults included casual, sporadic, and non-visitors to museums

Results from that sample, when available, are included in this report as “U.S. Adults”

2,045
responses



Note: broader population sampling took place the third week of January



Casual Museum-Goers from Broader Population

Respondents from broader population sampling who indicated they have visited a museum in the past year are considered “casual visitors”

To better understand more about these casual museum visitors, we isolated them in the sample and presented their demographic results as “U.S. Adults – Casual Visitors”





“Occasional Museum Visitors” from Broader Population

“Occasional museum visitors” include respondents from broader population sampling who indicated they visit museums at least every few years (i.e., they did not say they “never” visit).

This large segment of respondents can include both casual and more sporadic visitors.

Some questions were only seen by respondents who were open to visiting museums (and did not say they “never” visit); these results are presented as “U.S. Adults – Occasional Visitors”





In This Deck

Your museum's results are presented and compared to the aggregate, topline results

As appropriate, your museum's results are also compared to peers from your museum genre



Additionally, if your museum has participated in an Annual Survey in the past, your historical results are also provided for the demographic and benchmark questions



Your results spreadsheet may also provide other relevant peer groups or regional comps if enough museums participated to create robust segmentation

HOW DEMOGRAPHIC DATA IS COLLECTED IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER. Data collected on a day-to-day basis at a museum is different than data collected by a survey.



When data is collected on a daily basis at a museum, whether rigorously or observationally, individuals are counted every time they visit. Museums that have high rates of repeat visitation are, essentially, double (or triple, or quadruple ...) counting some of their visitors. This is not necessarily good or bad, so long as it is understood that this is happening! High rates of repeat visitation can be a helpful assessment of depth of engagement, with the understanding that it is affecting how demographic data is being tracked.



Data collected via survey, however, is different, as individuals are only counted once. It can provide a more accurate sense of who is visiting, depending on who is being sampled. That slice of visitors can range from narrow (such as attendees at a specific program), to broad (such as from broader population sampling), and anywhere in between.

The survey data presented here looks at two different groups of people who visit museums: a narrower group of highly engaged visitors (frequent museum-goers) and a broader group of more casual visitors from demographically representative sampling of the broader population. In this work, an individual respondent is only counted *one time*.

FREQUENT MUSEUM-GOERS

- People who are engaged enough with a museum that they are on a museum's communication list, received an invitation to take a survey, and took time to do so; typically visit 3+ museums/year and engage with at least one museum multiple times/year
- This measure will be representative of highly engaged visitors, program attendees, and members for an individual museum
- When aggregated, it is representative of frequent museum-goers to a specific *type* of museum or of frequent museum-goers overall
- Source: museum communications lists
- In this deck: frequent museum-goers are represented in three ways:

**Frequent Museum-Goers
(red bar) – aggregate
data from all
participating museums
in the Annual Survey of
Museum-Goers**

**Results from your
museum (blue bar)**

**Discipline (green bar) –
aggregate data from all
participating museums of
similar type to yours**

CASUAL MUSEUM-GOERS

- Individuals who have visited at least one museum in the past year
- This measure will be representative of the general population of museum-goers in a specific geographic area, such as the entire United States or a more specific state or metro area
- In this deck:

**Casual museum-goers in
the United States are
represented with a grey bar**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR INDIVIDUAL MUSEUMS?

Both measures are helpful! But depending on the museum, frequent museum-goer data can range from fairly representative to rather skewed from day-to-day visitation.

When it comes to daily visitation, consider:

- A museum that attracts a large share of frequent museum-goers will likely have a different demographic makeup than a museum that attracts a large share of casual museum-goers, because the frequent museum-goers will “drown out” the casual visitors.
- A museum that attracts more casual visitors (such as tourists), typically skews younger and more diverse than a museum that sees a larger share of frequent museum-goers.
- Some segments of the population are more likely to be casual museum-goers than frequent museum-goers ... just because they don’t show up in your frequent museum-goer data does not mean they are not visiting.

Most museums typically find that their day-to-day visitation is at least somewhat more diverse than their frequent visitor base. Conducting intercept surveys and broader population sampling in your geographic area can add greater depth to understanding your different audiences by participation rates, from frequent to casual to sporadic.





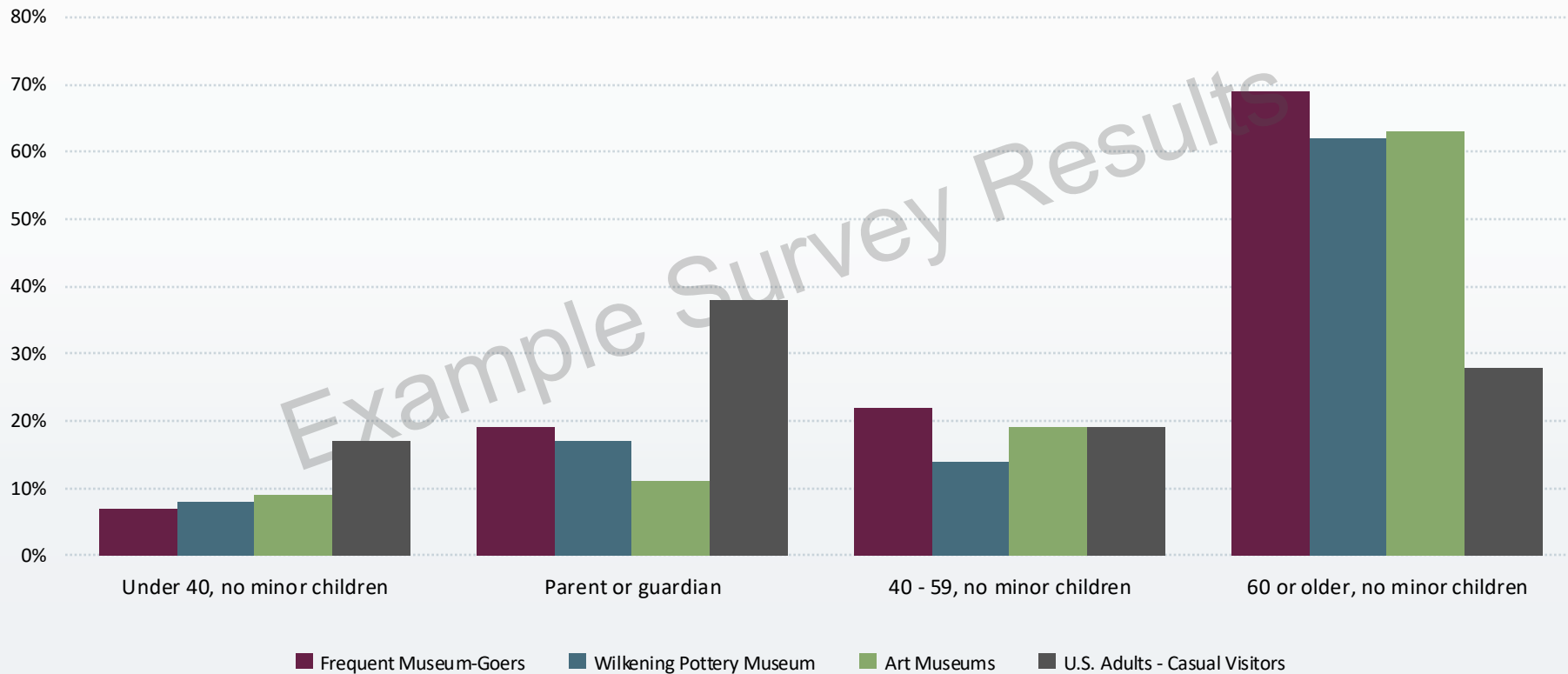
Example Standard Data Chart



Life Stage

Results sorted by parental status, then age

Example Survey Results – For Demonstration Purposes Only



• Throughout the report, we'll use this text area to provide commentary on how your results compare to the overall results (Frequent Museum-Goers), your peer group, and additional data sources (such as U.S. Adults)

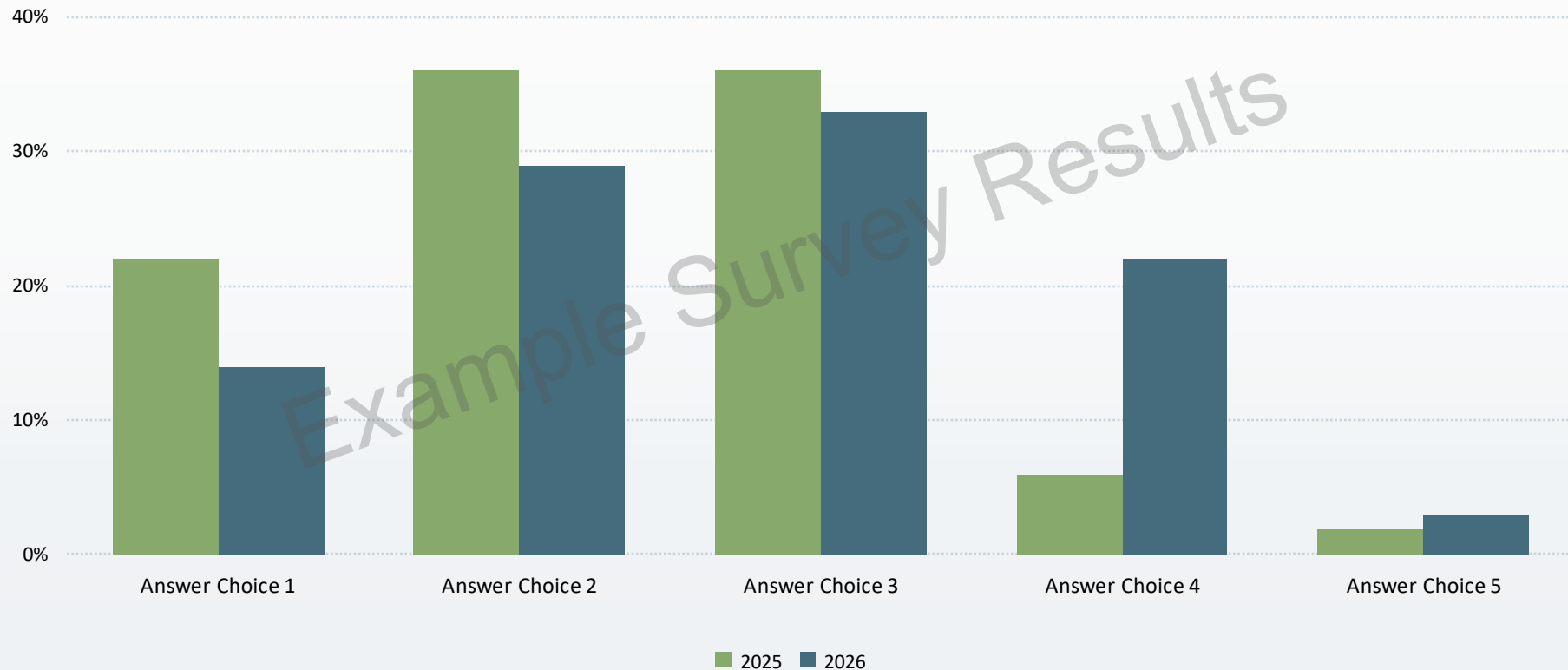


Example Historical Data Chart



Question 2

Example Survey Results – For Demonstration Purposes Only



- For museums who have participated in the Annual Survey previously, you'll receive charts that compare your current year's results to past years' results
- We'll also provide commentary if we notice any significant changes/trends over time

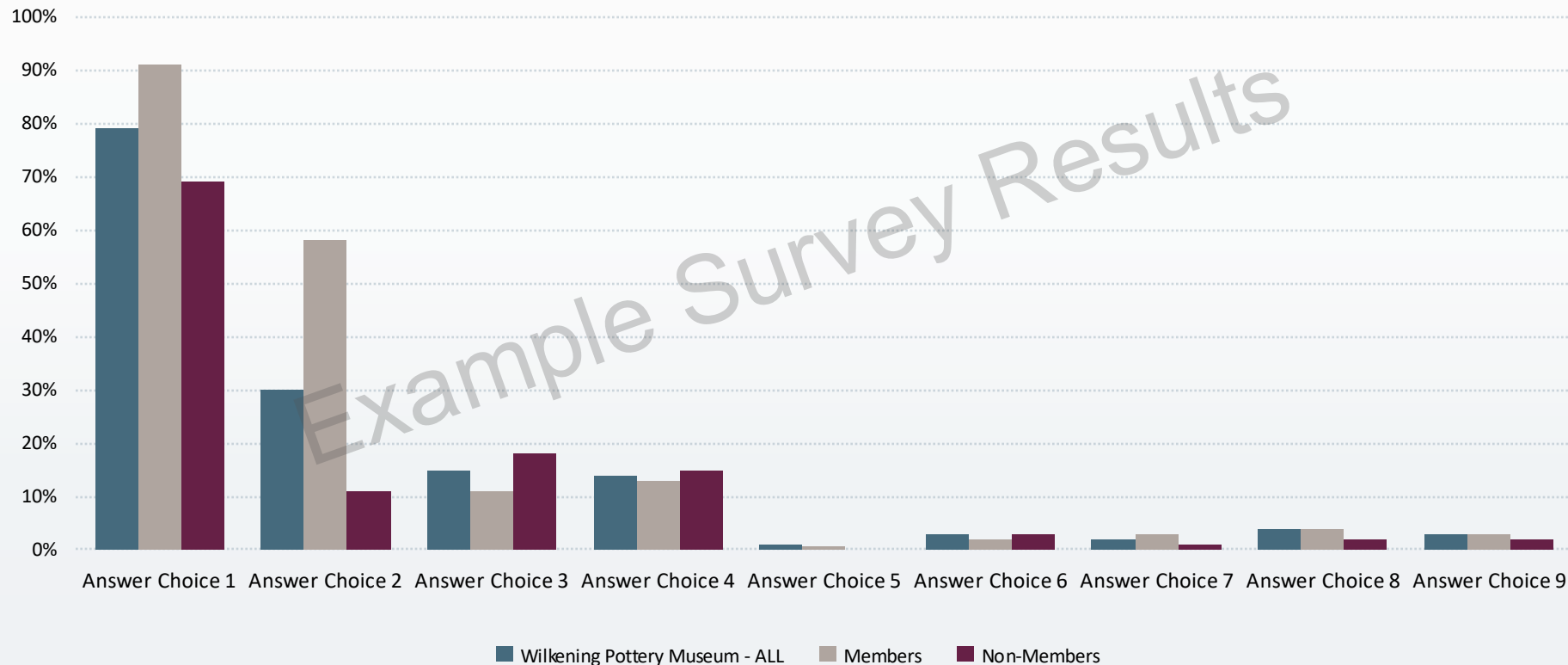


Add-On Example: Expanded Reporting Chart



Question 1

Example Survey Results – For Demonstration Purposes Only



• If you've selected the [Expanded Reporting Add-On](#), you'll receive charts (like this one) that compare your overall results to the audience segments you've identified as wanting to gain deeper insight into

• Note: This builds upon the [Additional Survey Link](#) or [Audience Comparison \(Cross-Tab\)](#) add-ons, so be sure you've selected one or both of those before requesting Expanded Reporting

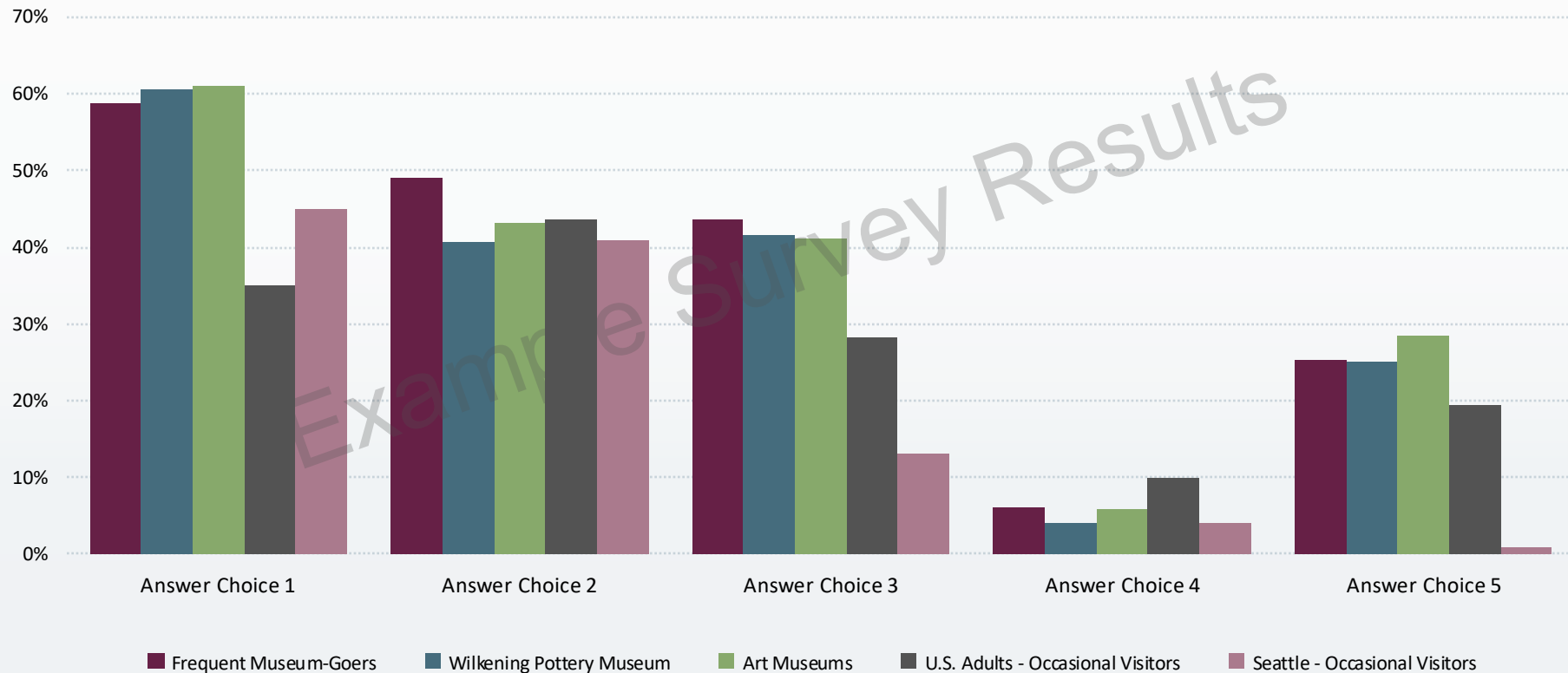


Add-On Example: Local Broader Population Chart



Question 3

Example Survey Results – For Demonstration Purposes Only



- If you've selected the [Local Broader Population Sampling Add-On](#), you'll see an additional bar of data in some of your charts displaying results from that local sample
- Not all charts will have this bar as not all survey questions are comparable between the base Annual Survey and the one we field to those in your geographic area