

# CLIMATE CHANGE IN MUSEUMS, PART 1: CONTENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

A 2022 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

Climate change is all around us. Extreme weather is becoming a new norm, with scorching heat, wildfires and smoke, flooding, and storms increasing.



hoax ? ? ?

existential crisis ?

not concerned

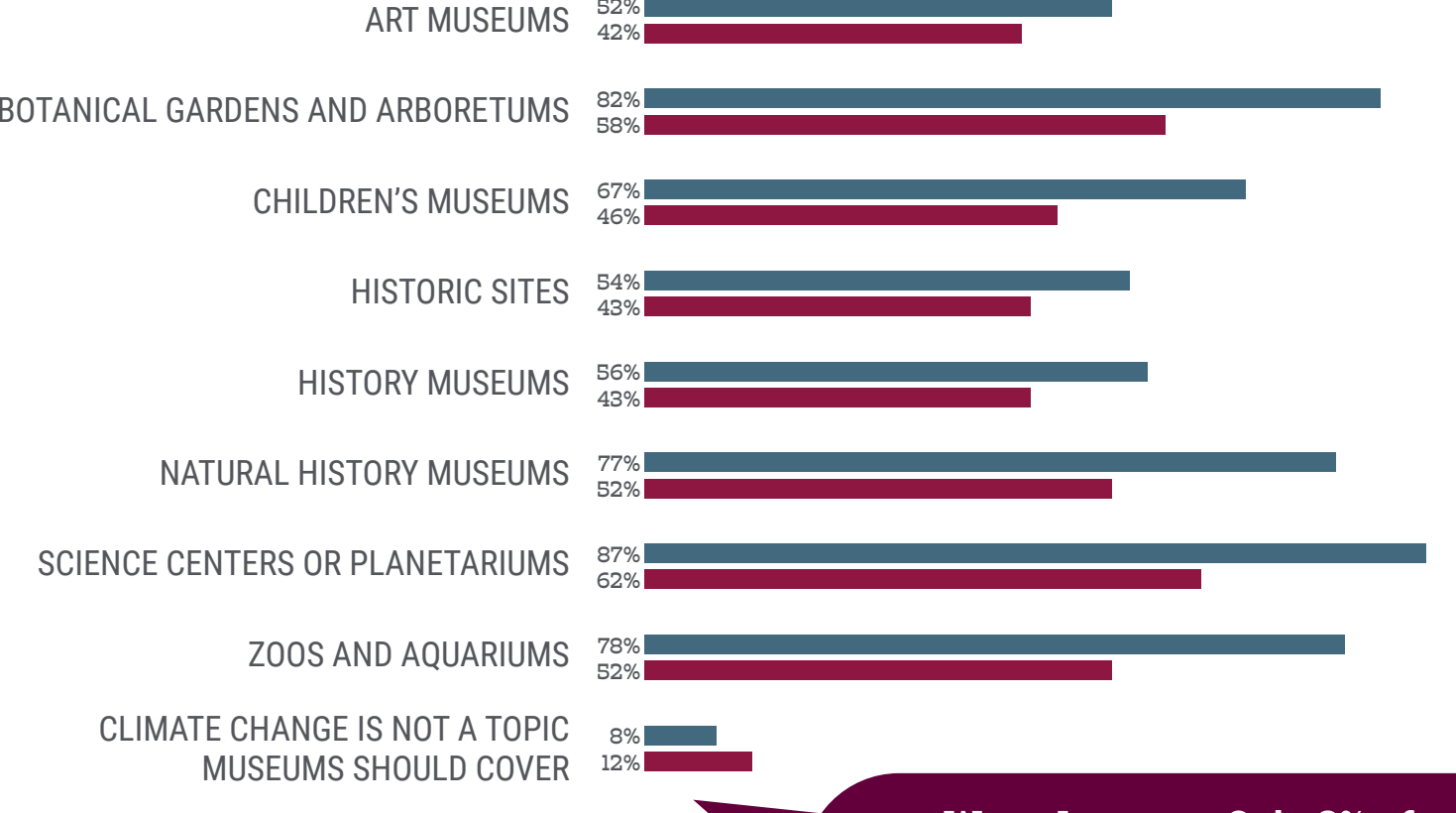
This threat to our planet will only get worse, and assessing how audiences feel about climate change content in museums is crucial for ensuring we can be most effective in our role as informal educators in our communities. Who still thinks climate change is a hoax? Who thinks it is an existential crisis? And who thinks it is happening, but isn't that concerned?

To help us understand individual attitudes, climate change was a primary line of inquiry in the 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and comparison Broader Population Sampling of US Adults.

For this first Climate Change Data Story, we're going to focus in on just two of the questions we asked, both of which make distinctions about what types of museums should be talking about climate change and/or operating more sustainably.



## What types of museums should be educating the public about climate change?



Wow. Just wow. Only 8% of frequent museum-goers, and only 12% of US adults from the broader population, said museums should **not** cover climate change.

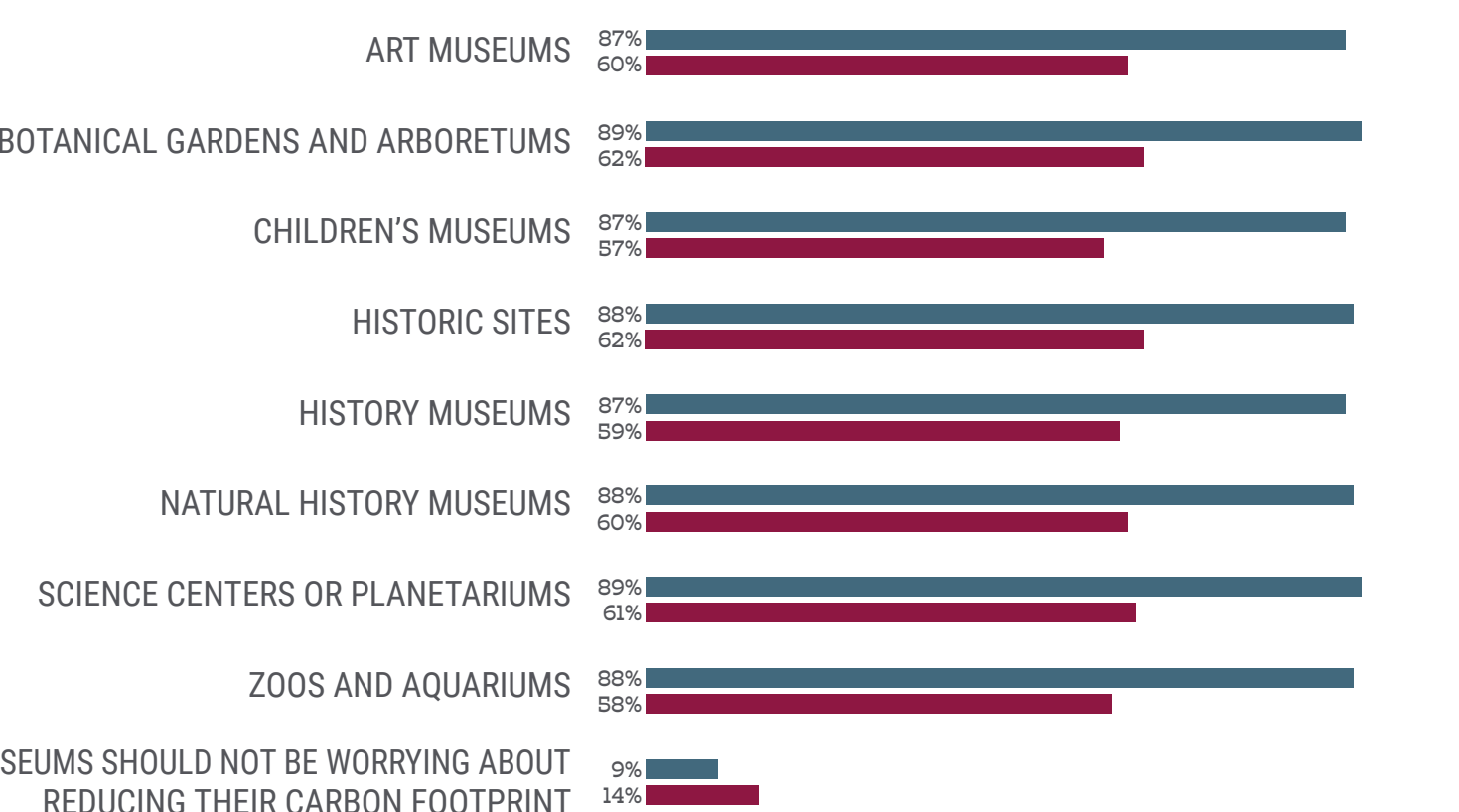
Indeed, the overwhelming majority of respondents said **yes**, at least some museums should be talking about this important topic. In fact, half of frequent museum-goers said museums of ALL types should be talking about climate change.

"Climate change is the largest existential crisis facing humanity and we need to have trustworthy institutions providing unbiased information that gives everyone a clear understanding of what is happening and how it is connected to our daily lives and the larger shared experience of society."



When we look more closely at the results, we do see that there is *some* picking and choosing by type of museum. In short, when a connection to the mission was obvious to respondents, they were more likely to say that type of museum should talk about it (primarily science and/or nature-based missions). A substantial number of respondents found a disconnect between climate change and art and/or history museums ... a finding we'll talk about more in a future Data Story.

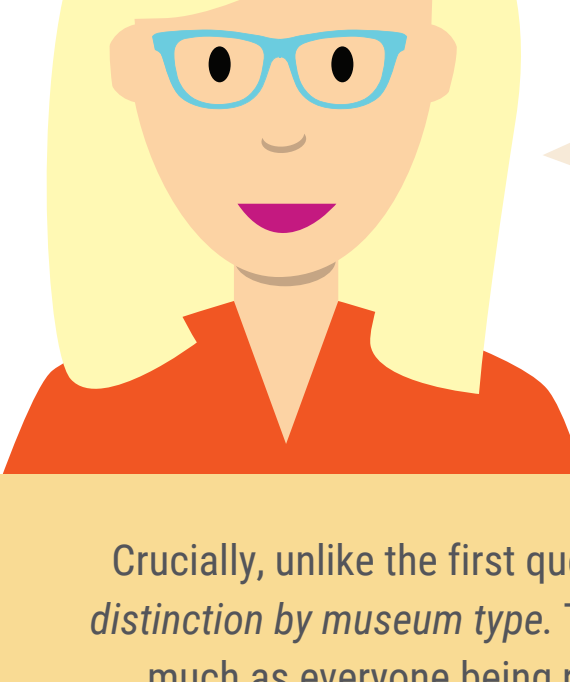
## What types of museums should be working to reduce their carbon footprint and operate in more sustainable ways?



ONCE AGAIN, the results overwhelmingly show that the vast majority of respondents think museums should be working to be more sustainable. Less than 10% of frequent museum-goers, and only 14% or US adults, said museums should not worry about this.

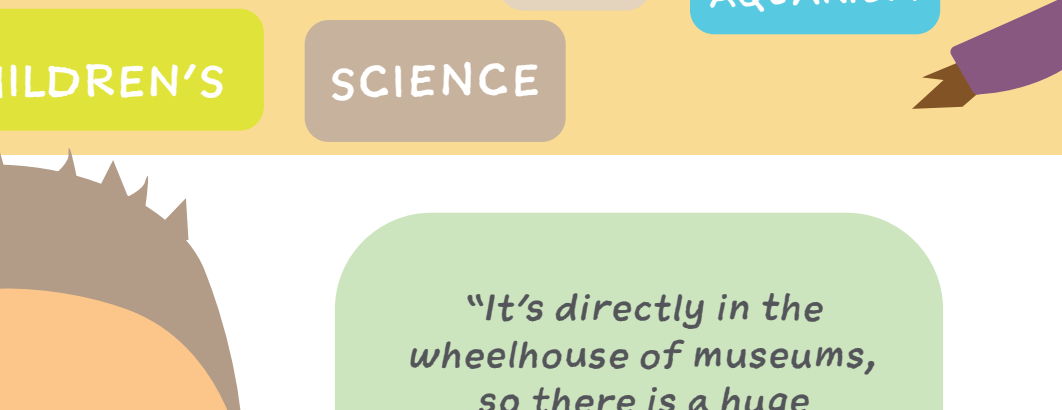


And a whopping 86% of frequent museum-goers flat-out said ALL museums should be more sustainable. **The public is expecting this of us.**



"... what any museum is doing in terms of carbon footprint can and should be featured in info about lighting, water fountains, etc."

Crucially, unlike the first question, respondents made *no distinction by museum type*. This isn't about the mission so much as everyone being responsible ... and that's on **museums of all types**.



"It's directly in the wheelhouse of museums, so there is a huge institutional responsibility. But also we ALL have a direct responsibility to be at the forefront of this fight. None of us get to check out."

## So what are the two main takeaways here?

- 1 The public overwhelmingly thinks climate change is real, and that museums should be educating the public about it.
- 2 At a minimum, we all need to be taking action to reduce our impact on the environment, and sharing how we do so. Not only is that good for the earth, but it also is good modeling of sustainable behaviors. It's easy and not controversial.



This doesn't mean, however, that there won't be pushback for museums taking climate action. That small sliver of respondents who said museums should not address climate change is very much real, and they tend to be vocal. While we don't want to over-amplify their responses, we'll share more about them, as well as those that are more supportive of this work, in upcoming Data Stories.

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include: 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 90,747; 186 museums participating; 2022 Broader Population Sampling, n = 1,017; 2017 - 2021 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

\*Data Stories share research about both frequent museum-goers (typically visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums). See the Purpose and Methodology (Update) Data Story from September 13, 2022 for more information on methodology.

More Data Stories can be found at [wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories](http://wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories).



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