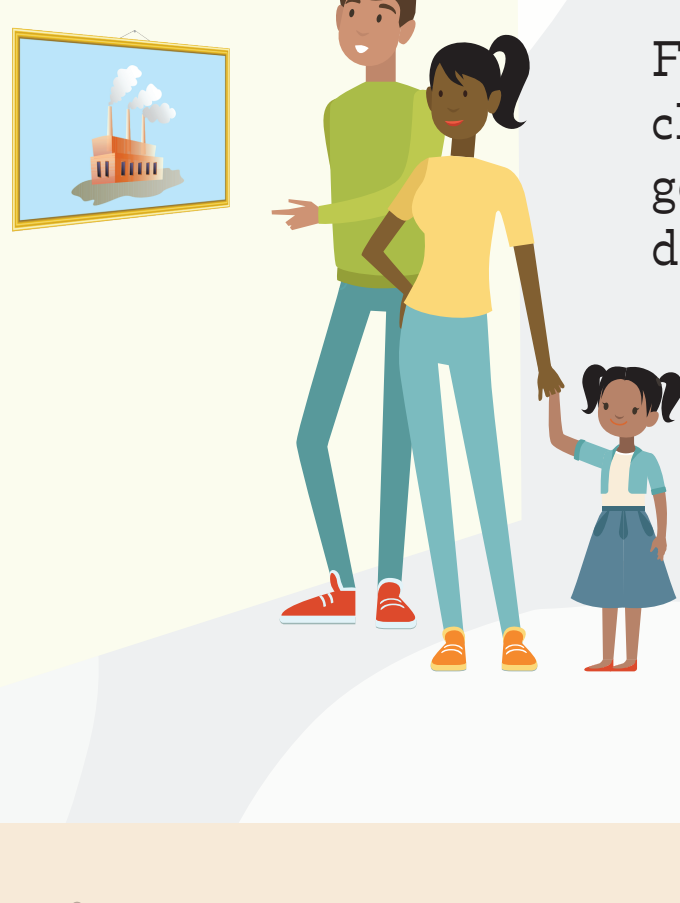


MUSEUMS, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND CREDIBILITY:

A 2022 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY



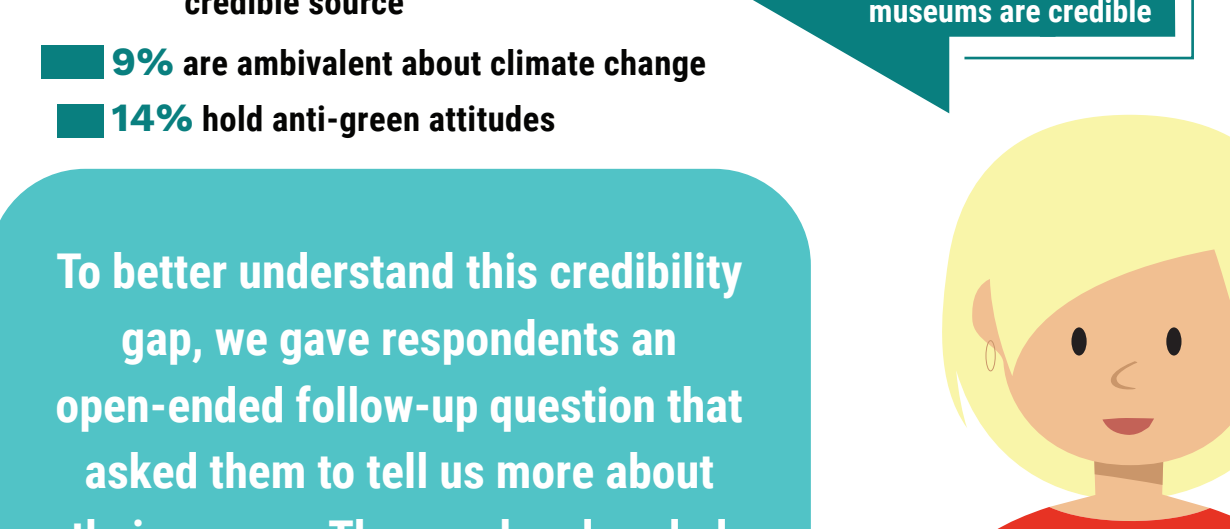
For most museum goers, climate change is a fact of life, and they generally support museums displaying content about it.



For others, including some people who think climate change is real and will affect us all, there is more skepticism about whether museums are the most credible or accurate sources.

We wanted to understand their concerns, especially concerns that museums can strategically address. So, in the 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, we dug deeper, starting with asking respondents what climate change sources they do find credible.

PERCENTAGE OF MUSEUM-GOERS THAT THINK MUSEUMS ARE CREDIBLE



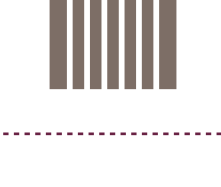
To better understand this credibility gap, we gave respondents an open-ended follow-up question that asked them to tell us more about their answer. Then we hand-coded their responses.



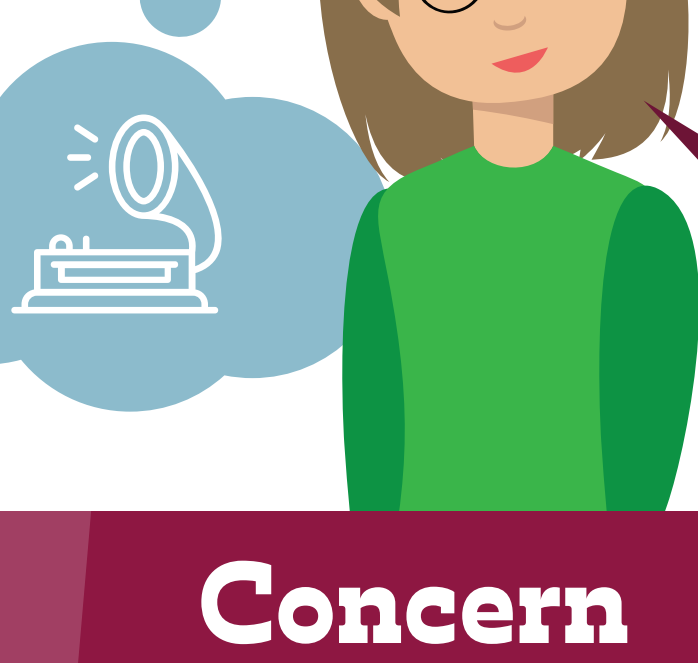
Concern #1

Museums are too slow/ too focused on the past to be credible

"I believe museums are to educate on the past through collections of objects. Museums in any context are where people go to learn - not be influenced by the trending social or political movement of the moment."



This reflects an assumption that museums are focused on history and the past. In other words, current events, perspectives, and ideas should have no bearing on what museums present.

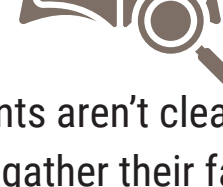


Some responses suggested that museum exhibits take time to develop/change, meaning that information might go out of date very quickly, causing skepticism and doubt in exhibit content relevance and efficacy.

Concern #2

Bias might impact exhibit content

"Museum exhibits have often been in place for years. If I saw an exhibit on climate change, I would probably assume the information was already outdated."



Respondents aren't clear where museums gather their facts from. This opacity makes bias feel more likely, as it becomes harder for a visitor to assess if the content being shared is accurate and evidence-based. And when it comes to potentially controversial topics, that opacity winds up feeding the distrust of those who disagree with what is being shared.



"Climate change is a hot topic for driving social agendas currently rampant in the political arena. I don't think it's a topic that museums should be putting all their energy and money into unless it's part of a larger educational and scientific study."

Concern #3

Museums don't conduct climate research themselves

"I don't look to Museums for that. I believe it should be left up to the scientists."

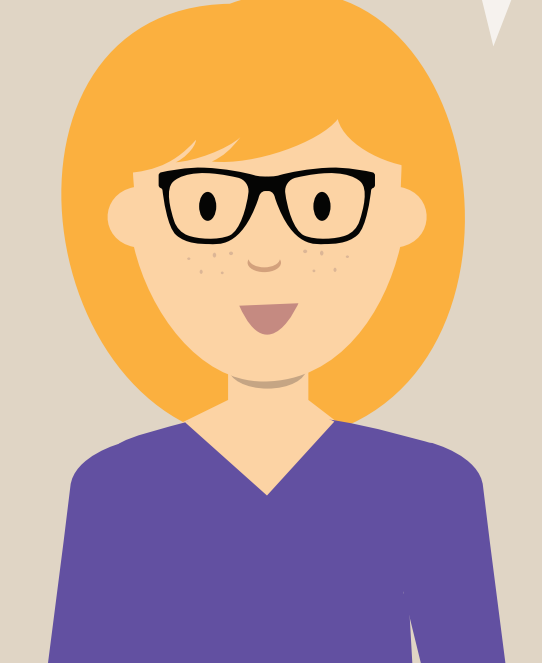


While most people view museums as trusted sources of information, climate change is a scientific topic that requires reliable research, investigation, and evidence. Respondents expressed they would trust people with first-hand experience with these data, but not necessarily museum curators or educators imagined to have gathered "data" on the internet.

How can we address the doubts some of our visitors might have about climate change credibility . . . or any other content we present? How do we build trust?

"Art can offer unique perspectives and insights on this subject that can perhaps open hearts and minds in alternate ways that purely scientific research and data and media sometimes cannot."

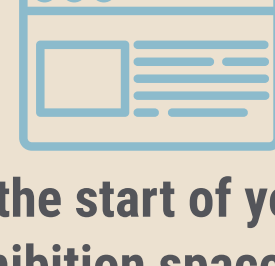
Anchor your content in your mission, especially if you are an art or history museum. By doing so, you overcome a dissonance barrier, helping visitors connect what you do with this larger issue.



Bring in an expert to co-create with you

If your museum lacks in-house expertise in the presented topic, identify a subject matter expert who can contribute to the content. And make sure your visitors know how these experts helped!

"Museums don't usually have experts on climate change on their staff. Better to invite 'the real thing' - climate scientists - in for lectures and panels."



At the start of your exhibition space and on your web page promoting your

exhibition, share your institution's values statement (or create a values statement) on this topic. The statement can address your museum's position on the issue if you have one.

For permanent exhibits, or those that will be up for a long duration, make portions of your exhibits easy to change as new data becomes available. Date your updates so visitors can assess how current your content is as well. Climate change is ongoing, and our approach will also continue to evolve—let your updates tell the story of that change.

And as always, in everything you do, be transparent

Cite your sources—tell visitors where you got your information. Footnote your exhibitions and provide a QR code that links to the academic and well-researched resources you used to create your content. Then your visitors may read more at their own pace, to further satisfy their curiosity and questions.

Climate change isn't going away, and it will impact all of us. Understanding the credibility concerns, and addressing them, will go far to help more visitors to trust this content from museums ... and perhaps to grow to care about this topic as well.

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.