

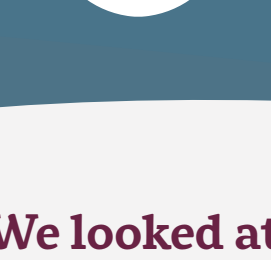
# COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND THE PANDEMIC

## A 2021 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY



We all know the COVID-19 pandemic has affected our communities in profound ways, leading to concerns for how our communities will thrive in the short and long-term.

Our communities matter to us, and understanding those concerns, as well as how museums, culture, and learning contribute, helps us to consider how we can serve our communities more effectively.



First, let's think about short-term concerns. We asked both frequent museum-goers and a broader population sample to share with us their primary concerns for their community coming out of the pandemic (aside from public health).

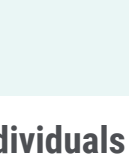
### We looked at the results by three segments of the population:



**Frequent museum-goers** (those who responded to a museum's request to complete the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers)

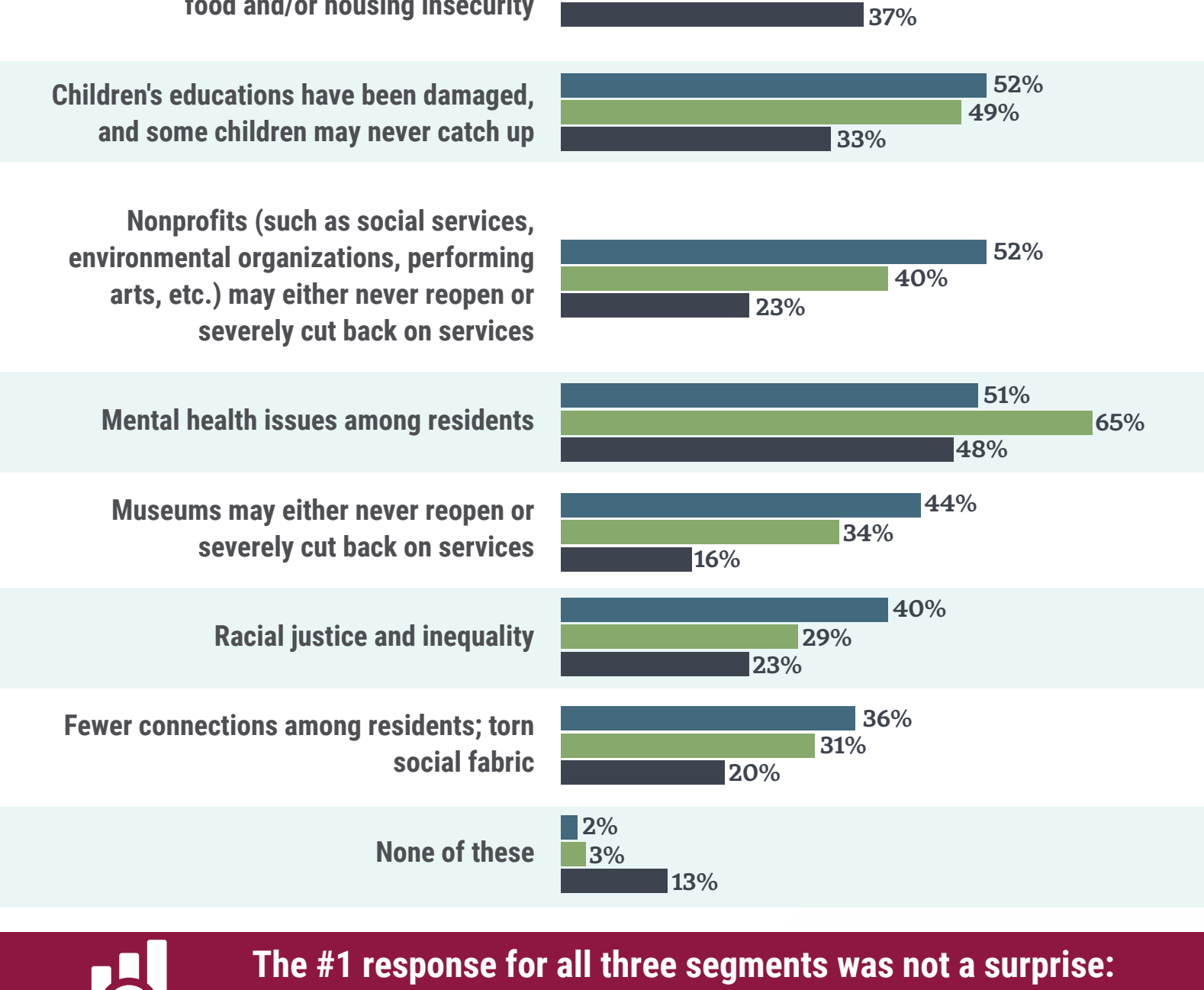


**Casual museum-goers** (from broader population sampling, those who said they had been to a museum at least once in the past two years)



**Non-visitors to museums** (from broader population sampling, those who had not been to a museum in over two years)

### Here's what they said:



### The #1 response for all three segments was not a surprise: employment and economic health.

But what is most interesting to us isn't the ranking so much as the breadth of concerns. As you can see, community concerns increase with frequency of museum-going:

#### AVERAGE # OF CONCERNS CITED PER RESPONDENT



This is a pattern we've seen for years, with museum-goers consistently showing higher levels of engagement with, and concerns about, their community than non-visitors.

Similarly, the more that people go to museums, the more concerns they had about museums surviving the pandemic: frequent museum-goers were nearly 3x more likely to be concerned about museums than non-visitors.



To assess long-term concerns, we asked frequent museum-goers to envision their community in five years, and to then share what they hoped for their community. We then coded their open-ended responses to understand what their long-term hopes were. While many concerns were identified (and coded for), these were the top three:

## 1

### Repairing of torn social fabric

This was fascinating. While the torn social fabric ranked eighth (out of eight choices) for immediate community concerns among frequent museum-goers, when respondents thought longer-term, addressing relationships with others was the thing they most hoped would change. Respondents expressed a desire for people to be kinder, more civil, more empathetic, and less partisan.

*"It might sound trite, Pollyanna, or entirely unrealistic, but: a more unified, kind community."*

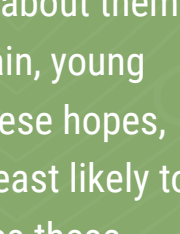
*"Social fabric needs to be repaired just as much as people need work again."*

*"I would like to see more understanding, acceptance, and compassion for our differences."*

Of those that talked about our torn social fabric, there were two patterns in the responses that were intriguing:

- Young adults (under 40, no children) were the most likely segment of museum-goers to express concern about the social fabric; they were 50% more likely to mention this than adults 60 or older (parents and middle-aged adults without children were in between).

- Liberals were somewhat more likely to express this concern than conservatives, but the real gap was between liberals/conservatives and moderates. That is, liberals and conservatives were 4 to 5 times more likely to express this concern than moderates. (To be honest, scarcely any moderates mentioned it at all.) Do moderates not experience this distress as much because their opinions are not as polarizing (and they thus "get along" with both liberals and conservatives)? It's an interesting hypothesis.



## 2

### Social justice and/or inclusion

These comments had respondents expressing hopes for a better society safety net and/or a desire for greater inclusion and equity. While we tried to code for these as two different things, many respondents wrote about them in such intertwined ways that it became quite difficult. Once again, young adults (under 40, no children) were the most likely to mention these hopes, but this time parents and guardians of minor children were the least likely to bring it up. Additionally, liberals were much more likely to express these hopes than either moderates or conservatives.

*"Greater diversity, efforts towards equity and inclusion, wealth inequality tackled, living wage, more affordable housing."*

*"Racial justice and world peace. Is that asking for too much?"*

## 3

### Greater support and/or access to the arts

The arts, including museums, were also mentioned by a significant number of respondents, including: a desire for the arts community to rebuild and thrive; expanding access to a broader swath of the population; and increased financial support. This time there was no significant difference by age or life stage ... but once again, liberals were more likely to mention this than moderates or conservatives.

*"More outdoor art throughout all neighborhoods. More safe spaces for meditation and healing. More cultural programs as part of the school day for children whether that is museum trips or more outreach from the museums into the school setting."*

*"Expanding local/state/federal support for the arts. More billionaires supporting the arts. Damn, they can be stingy!"*

Overall, virtually everyone who took time to write in a response wanted a more cohesive community where people worked together to improve outcomes for residents. That didn't mean they agreed on how to do that, and there certainly were some cynical responses as well. But ultimately, hope was the underlying emotion people felt for the future.

*"I want to be better than before."*

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums.

Sources include:  
 • 2021 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 53,217; 140 museums participating  
 • 2021 Broader Population Comparison Sample, n = 1,273  
 • 2017 - 2020 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Comparison Sampling

\*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).

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



American Alliance of Museums



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