THE INFLUENCE OF STAFF ON **MUSEUM ENGAGEMENT AND VISITATION** A 2024 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

While most people visit museums to learn, see amazing things, relax, and spend time with the people they care about, there is another aspect of visiting that can make or break a visit. That is, an amazing



can affect museum experiences deeply, perspectives on staff deserve greater scrutiny.



To learn more about staff interactions, we looked at the results from the 2024 **Annual Survey of Museum-Goers to sort** respondents based on their answers. They fell into three categories:

33% 3% Staff is a problem. These respondents indicated either they wanted These "friendlier/ more welcoming

staff" and/or

that staff was

"inattentive or

third of

"Best staff - friendly,

rude." Only 3% of respondents chose this.

amongst these respondents. Staff is great!

and engaging, and not just with the kids! As a parent, I feel welcome here each and every time we visit. A huge thank you to the staff for

The respondents who were complimentary about staff are super-engaged museum-goers. Compared to other respondents they:

Are 2 - 3x more likely to think museums help people in the community Are 50% more likely to say museums contribute



cycle, this seems like an effective way of increasing engagement and visitation overall.



Respondents who wanted

staff, or who said staff was

inattentive or rude, were

extremely unhappy with

few (only 3%), their

friendlier or more welcoming

(and likely negative word-of-mouth) makes it worthwhile to stop and consider what's happening here. Interestingly, these respondents appear to care deeply about museums. They visit almost as frequently as those who felt staff was great, and they have similarly

It is unclear if their dissatisfaction with staff is the cause or a symptom of a problem. That said, what are the scenarios that create tension between staff and visitors? Written-in responses give us some insight. Some negative comments are concentrated in a few museums where internally.

important to note. Respondents that are dissatisifed with staff are: 60% more likely to be people of color.

Why do we say that? Overall they are: Visiting museums less frequently

to tip the experience into one that is stellar, or terrible, is great. Giving staff the support they need to provide high-quality experiences,

(which you can train),

at all ... skipping answer choices. Let's now look at the differences

It's a bit of a chicken-and-egg scenario, but if improving satisfaction with staff breaks more people into that virtuous When it goes wrong "Every time I enter the museum, I get nervous because I get treated like a criminal smuggling in

"I was so turned off by the staff. I haven't gone again in over a year."

museums. While they are very are actually the most likely to say

there are clearly staff and/or leadership issues. In this case, the problem is with the museum and need to be addressed Some may have been flashpoint incidents where better training of staff in customer service generally can be helpful so that these types of incidents are minimized or addressed properly. A significant percentage, however, are coming from individuals who are less

While these respondents have not been all that forthcoming about their experiences with staff, it is reasonable to speculate that at least some of them did not feel welcomed in the museums they visited. 70% more likely to be parents or guardians of minor children. Overall, parents and guardians have consistently been the most critical audience segment for years. Why? Our research indicates they more likely to

be visiting FOR their children, and a

museum visit can often be perceived as

more work than pleasure. That likely makes

The people who didn't weigh in

staff. This is by far the biggest

segment of respondents, nearly

respondents, staff interactions

likely haven't been remarkable

or memorable, leading to no

one way or the other about

two-thirds. For these

strong opinion.

them more sensitive to staff interactions.

But their lower visitation rates indicate that a more personal experience, such as positive experiences with staff, could

can open the door to much more effective museum experiences that keeps people

move the needle towards

deeper engagement.

"Staff remembers our names and engages with visitors." Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include: • 2024 Broader Population Sampling, n = 2,154

Staff is great! respondents said that "staff members always make me feel welcome." A respondents indicated this.

welcoming vibe - best

museum ever..."

1 Visit far more frequently think museums are fun Identify as curious and programs to the quality of life in the community

extraordinarily negative feedback strong motivations to visit: they

they visit for their children's

learning experiences.

do anything well"

they are:

effectively as possible. that visitor happy.

Finally, there is everyone else.

But what stood out

respondents is that,

in some ways, they

fun or relaxation

appear to be the

least engaged.

about these

1.7x

Interactions with staff are obviously not the only factor that affects visitor engagement. But its capacity

museum content more likely to say staff is welcoming?



3x more likely to cite the high cost of visiting 3x more likely to say museums are "outdated 70% more likely to hold anti-inclusive values

inclusive and/or more "resistant" to content that museums share. When they complain, they become even more embittered when their values are not validated by staff. Here, the problem is with the visitor. To address this issue, museum leadership needs to be proactive about giving front-line staff the training, support, and resources needed to handle these situation as And some are just unavoidable. There is nothing museum staff can do to make There are two more things that are

engaged, feeling "Staff makes visitors feelimportant."

Data Story release date:

valued, and coming back.

• 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 90,178; 202 museums participating 2017 - 2023 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, sporadic, and non-visitors to museums). More Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories. lead author

64% And nearly 2/3 of respondents didn't weigh in over these staff-related



Are much more likely to visit to learn and to Are much more complimentary about exhibits

Hold more inclusive attitudes The question is: if we can increase satisfaction with staff through excellent visitor services, does overall engagement increase? Or are visitors



YAWN **ヽ** / / Giving far fewer motivations for visiting, but in particular are significantly less likely to visit for They generally fall in the middle on most of the other metrics we are measuring: visitor satisfaction, attitudes towards inclusion, and the type of experiences they want to have in museums.

while also hiring front-line staff for attitude more than aptitude

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