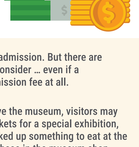
PAYING FOR EXTRAS:
MUSEUM VISITORS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES, PART 1
A 2026 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

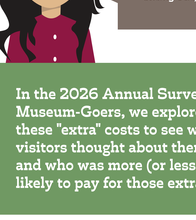
FOR MANY PEOPLE, cost is a key consideration when visiting a museum.

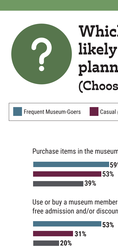


There is the cost of admission. But there are additional costs to consider … even if a museum has no admission fee at all.

By the time they leave the museum, visitors may have also bought tickets for a special exhibition, paid for parking, picked up something to eat at the café, or made a purchase in the museum shop.

Some visitors are happy to spend money on these "extras," while others must be selective about additional costs.

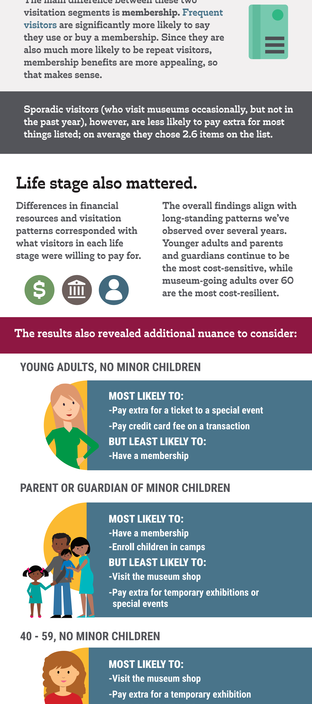




In 2024, we considered the cost of admission in a *Data Story*, examining it through the lens of life stage and household budgets. That Data Story, if anything, is even more timely and relevant today, as many households face economic uncertainty.[1]

In the 2026 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, we explored these "extra" costs to see what visitors thought about them, and who was more (or less) likely to pay for those extras.

Which of the following are you likely to do when visiting (or planning to visit) a museum?
(Choose those you are likely to do.)



Overall, **frequent visitors** (who visit museums often) and **casual visitors** (who visit museums at least once a year) are about equally likely to pay extra for things when visiting museums. The average respondent in both categories chose about 3.5 items on the list we provided.



The main difference between these two visitation segments is **membership.** **Frequent visitors** are significantly more likely to say they use or buy a membership. Since they are also much more likely to be repeat visitors, membership benefits are more appealing, so that makes sense.



Sporadic visitors (who visit museums occasionally, but not in the past year), however, are less likely to pay extra for most things listed; on average they chose 2.6 items on the list.

Life stage also mattered.

Differences in financial resources and visitation patterns corresponded with what visitors in each life stage were willing to pay for.

The overall findings align with long-standing patterns we've observed over several years. Younger adults and parents and guardians continue to be the most cost-sensitive, while museum-going adults over 60 are the most cost-resilient.

The results also revealed additional nuance to consider:

YOUNG ADULTS, NO MINOR CHILDREN

MOST LIKELY TO:
-Pay extra for a ticket to a special event
-Pay credit card fee on a transaction
BUT LEAST LIKELY TO:
-Have a membership

PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF MINOR CHILDREN

MOST LIKELY TO:
-Have a membership
-Enroll children in camps
BUT LEAST LIKELY TO:
-Visit the museum shop
-Pay extra for temporary exhibitions or special events

40 - 59, NO MINOR CHILDREN

MOST LIKELY TO:
-Visit the museum shop
-Pay extra for a temporary exhibition
BUT LESS LIKELY TO:
-Have a membership

60 OR OLDER, NO MINOR CHILDREN

MOST LIKELY TO:
-Have a membership
BUT LESS LIKELY TO:
-Pay extra for special events

The extras during a museum visit can add up, and some visitors are feeling the pinch. Our next *Data Stories* will explore visitors' responses to extra fees, as well as their thoughts about membership itself.

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
- 2026 Broader Population Survey: n = 1,742; 18 museums participating
- 2026 Broader Population Sampling: n = 2,547
- *2017 - 2025 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers*

[1] Cost of Admission and Museum Visitation, October 3, 2024

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.

Susie Wilkening, lead author

American Alliance of Museums

WilkeningConsulting

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