

October 2, 2000



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Dear Exhibitor:

Thanks again for participating in the survey we conducted on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities. As promised, an executive summary of our survey results is attached. By sharing information regarding your institution you have provided important input in the national dialogue regarding the resource needs of museums. Thank you.

If you are interested in receiving more detailed results of the survey, please contact John Meredith, Division of Public Programs, NEH, either by email ([imeredith@neh.org](mailto:imeredith@neh.org)) or by telephone (202-606-8218).

Again, thank you for your participation.

With best wishes,

Mary Kennedy McCabe  
Director  
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**National Endowment for the Humanities  
Results of Museum Survey  
September 2000**

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has a genuine interest in seeing that first-rate humanities exhibitions, funded by the NEH, receive broad-based engagement with national audiences. In 1999, ExhibitsUSA, a national museum service organization, received a cooperative agreement from the NEH to identify methods that would broaden and deepen the reach of NEH-funded exhibitions. The study, which was completed in August 2000, consisted of a mailed survey, telephone interviews, and on-site visits. A total of 5,100 surveys were mailed to primarily humanities museums throughout the United States. A total of 1,119 surveys were returned for a total response rate of 22%. The key findings of the survey are as follows:

- In the United States there are more than 6,000 small and mid-sized museums, making up approximately 70-75% of museums in this country. After considerable analysis of the data and examination of institutional behaviors, small, medium, large, and major museums were defined as follows:

<u>Operation Budget</u>	<u>Classification</u>
\$0 – 100,000	Small
\$101,000-500,000	Medium
\$501,000-1,000,000	Large
Over \$1,000,000	Major

By using operating budget as the key criterion, many other criteria conformed as well: number of professional employees, visitorship, funding sources, and program capacity.

- Small and medium museums are providing cultural programming without the resources that are available to their colleagues at large and major institutions. The majority of *all* museums, from the smallest to the largest, provide temporary exhibitions, lectures (smaller institutions using in-state resources, larger institutions using out-of-state resources), receptions, classes, workshops, school tours, and public tours. However, access to every resource required to operate and advance a museum, including exhibition resources (available from major museums, peer institutions, national and regional traveling exhibition services), training, public funding, national foundation support, and regional/local corporate support, diminishes dramatically as the size of the museum decreases.
- Small and medium museums provide “best practice” models for healthy relationships between the community and the institution, yet because their voice is not currently part of the national cultural dialogue their examples are often overlooked. Small and medium museums are typically organized by community interests as opposed to discipline. These *place-based* museums have virtues that are sometimes lost on the visitor to major discipline-based museums. Frequently found in towns with populations under 100,000, they occupy a unique position in the preservation and advancement of a community’s culture. Because they are community-based instead of discipline-based, they are often referred to as “general,” and understood to present such a diversity of objects that they are dismissed as less meaningful than their specialized counterparts. This stereotype and disregard is radically off target.
- Facilities at small and medium museums are better equipped and managed than perceived within the museum community. The majority of all museums (including those with operating budgets of less than \$25,000) have electronic security alarm systems, smoke and heat sensors, air conditioning, and heating. While most of the small and medium museums did not have humidity control, it is interesting to note that 32% of those institutions with budgets in excess of \$500,000 also did not have humidity control. Exhibition space is more limited at small and medium museums (averaging 250 running feet and 2,000

square feet), but they are well equipped to handle the environmental and security needs of most moderate traveling exhibitions.

- Access to every form of earned and contributed income is limited for small and medium museums. Most large and major museums are located in well-populated, metropolitan areas, where access to local, regional, and national foundations, corporations, city, state, and federal public funding, and major philanthropists is much greater. Additionally, household incomes are larger and the primary employers are larger business/service and manufacturing companies. Most small and medium museums are located in non-urban areas, where access to national foundations, corporations, public funding, and major philanthropists is not as accessible. Household incomes in communities with small and medium museums are less and the primary employers are agriculturally based (farming and ranching) plus small service-related businesses (family owned).
- Unless there is some intervention, the gulf between small/medium and large/major museums will continue to widen. The 75% of museums (small and medium) with operating budgets under \$500,000 who do not receive national foundation and corporate support cannot keep pace with the 25% (large and major museums) that do. Some form of subsidization must occur if small and medium museums are to gain access to resources (i.e., temporary exhibitions, technical assistance, funding, etc.) needed for institutional sustainability, let alone institutional advancement. There are insufficient opportunities for contributed and earned income within the communities they serve. What has long been perceived as a resource gulf between the large and major museums and the small and medium museums is, in fact, evidenced in the data. Yet, despite a current operating environment characterized by shrinking resources and lack of institutional advancement, the commitment of small and medium museums to engaging their communities with enriching cultural experiences is undaunted. Their ability to imagine new and creative methods for broadening and deepening community participation remains extraordinary.