

Exploring Museums for All's Impact on Museum Visitors

The benefits of museums have been well documented (see, for example, Yocco, et al.¹, 2009; Kelly, 2006²; Henderson and Atencio, 2007³). With an increased focus on diversity, equity, access and inclusion (DEAI) efforts in the field, it is critical to recognize that museum visitors are not reflective of the diversity of their communities. Several scholars have explored barriers to participation (Dillenschneider, 2020⁴; Dawson, 2014⁵; Kay, Wong, and Polonsky, 2008⁶, for example.) While it is unclear the degree to which cost is a barrier to participation, the NEA (2015) reports 78% of people who named cost as a barrier to participation identified it as the most important barrier they faced when deciding whether to participate.⁷

Research on museum organizations' approaches to equity showed that, for many organizations, increasing the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of their visitor populations was the most commonly cited primary goal.⁸ Those same organizations identified three kinds of perceived barriers to their desired audience: Logistical (transportation, translation, etc), cultural (lack of welcoming experiences and staff, irrelevant content), and financial. Every organization participating in the study offered free or greatly reduced admission options. Subsidized museum admissions are not a new idea, but the Museums for All program is the first national-scale attempt to institutionalize a mechanism for subsidized admission that cuts across museum fields and offers a chance for widespread knowledge of and familiarity with the opportunity to visit museums.

Using Museums for All as a case example, this research seeks to understand the impact of subsidized museum admissions programs on both visitors and museums. In terms of visitors, we will explore the influence of the museum experiences on visitors who attend as part of an income-qualified admission program. In particular, we will explore the impact of museum visits on familial relationships and intentions to continue visiting museums in the near future. In terms of museums, we will explore how participating in the Museums for All program contributes to organizational DEAI goals.

Project Justification

Which program goal and associated objective(s) of National Leadership Grants for Museums will your project address?

This project directly addresses NLG Goal 2: *Strengthen Community Engagement*, in particular, Objective 2.1: *Promote inclusive engagement across diverse audiences*. Museums for All was initiated to provide access to an audience less likely to attend museums. In other words, to promote inclusive engagement. Understanding who this is happening for, in what ways, and under what circumstances, will contribute meaningfully to the achievement of both program and agency-level goals of the NLG grant line.

¹ Yocco, V. S., Heimlich, J. E., Meyer, E., & Edwards, P. (2009). Measuring public value: An instrument and an art museum case study. *Visitor Studies*, 12(2), 152-163.

² Kelly, L. (2006). Measuring the impact of museums on their communities: The role of the 21st century museum. *Intercom*, 2(4).

³ Henderson, T. Z., & Atencio, D. J. (2007). Integration of play, learning, and experience: What museums afford young visitors. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(3), 245-251.

⁴ Dillenschneider, C. (2020). The five biggest barriers to attending cultural entities in 2020 (DATA). Retrieved from: <https://www.colleendilen.com/2020/09/16/the-five-biggest-barriers-to-attending-cultural-entities-in-2020-data/>

⁵ Dawson, E. (2014). "Not designed for us": How science museums and science centers socially exclude low-income, minority ethnic groups. *Science education*, 98(6), 981-1008.

⁶ Kay, P., Wong, E. and Polonsky, M. (2008). , Understanding barriers to attendance and non-attendance at Arts and Cultural Institutions: A Conceptual Framework, in ANZMAC 2008 : Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference 2008: Marketing: Shifting the Focus from Mainstream to Offbeat, Promaco Conventions, Canning Bridge, W.A., pp. 1-7.

⁷ Farrell, B., & Medvedeva, M. (2010). Demographic transformation and the future of museums. Washington, DC: The AAM Press.

⁸ Feinstein, N. W., & Meshoulam, D. (2013). Science for what public? Addressing equity in American science museums and science centers. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 51(3), 368–394.

We anticipate that many museums currently collaborate with third-party service providers in their communities to promote their participation in Museums for All. Thus, while not the direct goal of the research, findings may also address Objective 2.2: *Support community collaboration and foster civic discourse.*

What field-wide need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?

This project addresses a field-wide challenge to provide community-wide access to museums and the benefits of their work. Multiple barriers have been identified by earlier research (Kay, Wong, and Polonsky, 2008⁶), including 1) Physical; 2) Personal Access; 3) Cost; 4) Time and Timing; 5) Product; 6) Personal Interest; 7) Socialization/Understanding; and 8) Information. This inquiry is situated in the broad need to understand barriers to museum attendance and is specifically situated in the barrier of cost. Still, Kay, Wong, and Polonsky argue that many of these barriers are intertwined. In turn, we will be sensitive to the interaction of cost with others in their framework.

Individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic and racial minorities are less likely to visit museums than wealthier and whiter populations.⁹ intends to reduce financial barriers of attending museums for low-income families, while also affirming that museums are meant for all community members. The 2018 evaluation of Museums for All showed that participating museums see several different increases after enrolling in Museums for All, including attendance, development revenue, connections with community partners, positive perceptions of the museum, internal dialogue on inclusivity and accessibility, and shifts in visitor demographics.¹⁰ This same evaluation report (page 30) recommended that "Future studies of the Museums for All initiative could look to rely on museum staff to appropriately, respectfully, and systematically gather information from Museums for All participants." This study seeks to fill this recommendation.

Who is the target group for your project and how have they been involved in the planning?

We anticipate two target groups, both at an organizational level, whom we anticipate will be immediately and positively affected by the project: museums that participate in the Museums for All program, and the parent organizations of the initiative: the Association of Children's Museums (ACM) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

Museums who participate in the Museums for All program. At the time of this writing, this includes more than 1000 museums of various content across the US, including the District of Columbia and the US Virgin Islands. They will be able to use data and findings from this study 1) to inform their implementation of the program, 2) as a vehicle for partnerships and community outreach, and 3) in advocacy efforts as evidence of their DEAI practice.

How this group has been involved in the planning. The origins of this project are at Thanksgiving Point, a five-venue farm, garden, and museum complex in Lehi, Utah. Inspired by the Development staff's request for evidence of the Museums for All program's impact on visitors, the Research and Evaluation team created a survey to understand this type of impact. We considered survey best practices and consulted with the local WIC and SNAP offices to understand preferable modes of deployment. After a few months of data collection, the team was invited to present their work at a Museums for All "Hangout" hosted by ACM for participating museums. The presentation was well received by the individuals attending, and the Thanksgiving Point team invited other participants on the Hangout to collaborate on the next iteration of the survey. Representatives from the Santa Cruz Children's Museum of Discovery (Santa Cruz, CA) and Wonderscope (Kansas City, MO) responded. The collaboration revised the survey to be relevant across sites and has begun to deploy the survey to Museums for All visitors at all sites. Likewise, the collaboration worked to articulate the research design of this project.

ACM and IMLS. Aurora Consulting's 2018 evaluation of the Museums for All program also suggested that "As discussions about how to improve the museum field's efforts around diversity, equity, access, and inclusion, ACM and IMLS could promote the Museums for All initiative as a concrete yet flexible way for museums to begin taking immediate action" (p.

⁹ Olivares, A., & Piatak, J. (2022). Exhibiting inclusion: An examination of race, ethnicity, and museum participation. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 33(1), 121-133.

¹⁰ Cohen, Sarah (2018) Museums for All Evaluation Report. Retrieved from: (<https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/museums-all-evaluation-report-2018.pdf>.)

29.) We anticipate the results of this project will help ACM rework resources available to participating museums to this end.

How this group has been involved in the planning. Since initiating a Museums for All survey at Thanksgiving Point in late 2021, we have been in regular communication with ACM staff members with direct responsibility for the Museums for All program. We have kept them informed of our process and findings and been open to their suggestions. Now, those staff members have reviewed this project proposal and agreed to serve as advisors on this project.

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project?

The ultimate beneficiaries for this project are the visitors who gain access to the benefits of museums through the Museums for All program, and individuals who are eligible for the program. While we approach this project as basic research rather than action research, we anticipate the results will still provide participating museums with findings that can be acted on to improve the efficiency, reach, and impact of the program at their site. We anticipate museums will use results to make themselves not just more accessible, but welcoming places where people feel they belong. Benefits of visiting museums like those described by Yocco, et al. (2009), Kelly (2006), and Henderson and Atencio (2007) will be more accessible to audiences that may have previously been excluded. Additionally, findings will be useful advocacy content as participating museums with boards, funders, and other stakeholders.

How will the museum field benefit from your project?

Museums need access to research-quality, field-wide information about attendance and impact in order to make data-driven decisions for the benefit of their communities. Museums utilize Museums for All to ensure their programs and facilities are available to all members of their communities. Aurora Consulting's 2018 evaluation showed that when museums implement the program, their attendance increases. What we don't know is if the visitors this increased attendance also represents an increase in diversity among visitors. With information from this project, we intend to make the case that the program is helping to erode barriers to visitation. While Museums for All is intended to specifically reduce financial barriers, we are curious to explore if additional barriers are impacted, such as cultural perceptions, interest, and feelings of welcome or belonging.

As described above, museums are the ultimate beneficiaries of this work. We anticipate the project will result in:

- Evidence of a barrier-reducing program meeting its intended outcomes.
- Evidence of visitors benefiting from museum attendance.
- Data for decision making at both the individual museum level and the program level (ACM and IMLS).

With increased competition for funding, increased pressure to provide evidence of outcomes, and increased focus on IDEA principles, this kind of information is important for improvement and advocacy. Most museums do not have the capacity to test this question on their own—collecting and analyzing demographic data is complex and expensive. Additionally, as research this project will contribute new knowledge to the field as we illuminate the impacts and mechanisms of programs designed to facilitate museum attendance among diverse populations.

How does this proposed project differ from, complement, or build upon existing theory, scholarship, and/or practice?

This project builds upon existing research on barriers to museum attendance. Most directly, Dawson (2014) explored how people from low-income, minority ethnic groups perceive and experience exclusion from informal science education institutions and concluded that many current practices reinforced participants' sense that museums and science centers were "not for us." Kay, Wong, and Polonsky (2008) identified eight barriers to attendance and suggest that they may be interrelated and as such strategies to address them need to consider this interrelatedness. This project will build upon existing research by interrogating a specific case example with a focus on the voices of the people participating in it, as well as considering other barriers that may be influenced by the program.

The primary work exploring the Museums for All program is the 2018 evaluation conducted by Aurora Consulting. The Aurora report collected data from participating museums. This project will differ not only in its research focus (rather than evaluation) but in the inclusion of the visitor perspective.

Since December 2021 Thanksgiving Point Institute has been distributing a survey to Museums for All visitors at their venues. After sharing ideas at a Museums for All “Hangout” in March 2022, representatives from Santa Cruz Children’s Museum of Discovery and The Regnier Family Wonderscope Children’s Museum expressed interest in also distributing the survey at their sites. The three organizations collaborated on revisions of the Thanksgiving Point survey and are now piloting this iteration of the survey. Findings are trending positive, showing that Museums for All visitors are benefiting on multiple levels. This work will build upon the collaborative’s piloting and take the research to a national scale.

Project Work Plan

What specific activities will you carry out and in what sequence?

See the “Schedule of Completion” document submitted with this narrative for intended time frames for each activity.

Year 1

Survey development. Before notice of funding awards, the three partner museums will continue to deploy the pilot survey at their sites and consider the value of the results. Upon award of funding, we will consider knowledge gaps the current instrument is not filling and consult with our advisory team for an expert review of the instrument and how to improve it.

Simultaneously, we will develop a parallel survey to be deployed with general admission museum visitors. This second survey will be important to understand similarities and differences between Museums for All visitors and general admission visitors. The advisory team will also be instrumental in helping us identify appropriate sampling methods, incentives, and target sample sizes for both surveys. Both surveys will be created in English and Spanish.

Host site cohort engagement. While instrument development is underway, we will recruit thirty museums from the Museums for All participants at the time to deploy the surveys at their sites. We will extend an invitation to apply to the cohort assisting with the research. Our advisors from ACM will help with this process, and we will host informational events at the American Alliance of Museums and Association of Children’s Museums conferences this year. The cohort will be representative of all museums participating in Museums for All at the time. We will consider size, geographic location, content area, and general admission price. Cohort Museums will be offered a \$750 stipend for participating.

Meetings of the project team, advisory committee, and cohort will be conducted online.

Year 2

Survey launch. When the cohort is selected, the project manager will provide implementation training to each of the cohort museums. During this time, we will also conduct focus groups with the cohort to understand their goals and expectations for participating in Museums for All, and the internal impact it has had on their institution in terms of intentionality towards IDEA practices.

Data collection. Survey responses will be collected over a nine-month period, July to March of the second funding year. This length of data collection will accommodate different busy seasons for the various cohort museums. During this time the project manager will provide ongoing support as needed to the cohort museums, including identifying and addressing issues and concerns with survey deployment. At the conclusion of data collection, we will provide each cohort museums with raw data of responses from their visitors, scrubbed of identifying information. Project partners will travel to the American Alliance of Museums and Association of Children’s Museums conferences this year for informal meetings and support activities with cohort museums.

Analysis. The project team will analyze the data on aggregate level. We will hold meaning-making sessions with our advisory team to consider the results, findings, and the implications for the field from a variety of perspectives. More information on this phase of the project is addressed in the section below titled, “How will you collect, analyze, and use the data?”

Year 3

Reporting. We will share findings from the study through webinars and sessions at relevant professional conferences, including American Alliance of Museums, Association of Children’s Museums, and Visitor Studies Association. Grant funding will also support a subsidy for cohort museums who may attend and co-present at these conferences. We will propose posts to professional association blogs and submit a manuscript for publication to journals representing the field.

Instrument publication. The survey instruments will be published through the Museums for All website. Along with the survey instruments, we will include resources that address their use, including valid sampling, sensitivity to non-dominant populations, and other issues identified by the cohort in survey deployment.

What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?

We will be collecting data from museum visitors who may be considered a “vulnerable population.” This is a sensitive group to collect data from. Because they are coming to a museum as part of an income-qualifying program, they may feel uncomfortable being invited to take a survey based on that criterion. To mitigate this risk, we will work with our IRB to confirm that our plan of study is being conducted ethically. Sensitivity to this concern will be addressed in training with each cohort museum’s frontline staff. We will provide scripted language to extend the invitation simply and casually, and suggestions for concise responses to acceptance or rejection. We will refer to existing Museums for All training materials and align with them as needed.

Another risk we will address is selection error. The population for our survey is all visitors who come to cohort museums as part of the Museums for All program. Though they will all be invited to take the survey, we recognize that accepting the invitation is completely voluntary. Prior research has shown that with web-based surveys demographic identification impacts the likelihood of starting and completing a survey¹¹ Thus, we will not claim a randomized or representative sample in the findings. In consultation with our advisory team, we will consider a sampling method and a sample size that best suit the target population and study context. We will be transparent in our reporting as to the nature of our sample.

Bias may emerge in terms of survey responses, which is not uncommon in self-report data. People may feel the need to report their experiences higher because of the admission benefit. To mitigate this, we will use wording in the survey that encourages them to be open and honest with their feedback. We will also conduct interviews with a sample of respondents as a validity measure. In reporting, it will be important for us to recognize the limitation of potential response bias and temper our findings considering it.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

The project team of Stephen Ashton, Kari Ross Nelson, Natalie Ortega Wells and Rhiannon Crain will collaboratively plan and implement the project. Kari Ross Nelson will manage the project and evaluate progress in an ongoing manner to ensure intended results. She will also liaise with each of the cohort museums to support training and implementation at each site and monitor incoming data. The table below identifies the individuals committed to involvement in the project and the nature of their role in it.

Name	Position	Institution	Project Role
Stephen Ashton, Ph.D.	Director of Audience Research and Evaluation	Thanksgiving Point	Principal investigator and project director
Kari Ross Nelson, M.A., M.S.	Research and Evaluation Associate	Thanksgiving Point	Project manager
Natalie Ortega Wells, LMSW	Director of Program Development and Evaluation	The Regnier Family Wonderscope Children’s Museum	Project partner

¹¹ Jang M, Vorderstrasse A. Socioeconomic Status and Racial or Ethnic Differences in Participation: Web-Based Survey. JMIR Res Protoc 2019;8(4):e11865 doi: [10.2196/11865](https://doi.org/10.2196/11865)

Rhiannon Crain, Ph.D.	Executive Director	Santa Cruz Children's Museum of Discovery	Project partner
Keni Sturgeon, M.A.	Director of Strategic Initiatives	Association of Children's Museums	Association Advisor
Brendan Cartwright, M.A.	Program Manager of Special Initiatives	Association of Children's Museums	Association Advisor
Jessica Luke, Ph.D.	Director, Museology Graduate Program	University of Washington	Academic Advisor
Jared Barton, Ph.D., MSW	Assistant Research Professor, School of Social Welfare	University of Kansas	Academic Advisor
Sarah Cohn, M.A.	Principal Consultant	Aurora Consulting	Project evaluator

The project team is highly qualified to carry out this project.

Stephen Ashton, Ph.D., has been involved in museum work for twelve years. He has been heading up the research and evaluation efforts at Thanksgiving Point for about ten years. In that time, he has participated on several ILMS funded projects, including being the lead research partner on the Measurement of Museum Social Impact (MOMSI) IMLS National Leadership grant project. Dr. Ashton currently serves on the Visitor Studies Association Board of Directors as the VP of Organizational Development.

After twelve years as a museum educator, Kari Ross Nelson turned her focus to research on and evaluation of museum learning. She has worked on several major grant-funded projects and has extensive research and evaluation practice and study as part of employment and her current pursuit of a Ph.D.

Natalie Ortega Wells is a licensed social worker and holds an MSW from Columbia University, with a specialization in Advanced Generalist Practice and Programming. She has experience working with under-resourced communities at a macro, mezzo, and micro-level from her work in evaluation and policy reform in New York state prisons, her work as a case manager for children and families at a nonprofit, and now in her work developing, leading, and evaluating community programs for families at The Regnier Family Wonderscope Children's Museum.

Rhiannon Crain is Executive Director at the Santa Cruz Children's Museum of Discovery. Her past research focused on socio-cultural systems driving science learning in out-of-school settings. She received her PhD from the University of California, Santa Cruz where she was a fellow with the Center for Informal Learning and Schools. Dr. Crain has worked in many informal science education organizations across the country, including the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Exploratorium conducting research on scientific language, the importance of objects in science learning settings, the emergent potential of online social networks in science learning, citizen science, and on innovation in science education.

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?

The total requested amount of grant funding for all three years is \$529,079 with \$708,553 cost share. Most of the requested grant funding will be used to support the work of the project team, outside evaluator, and advisors. The following is a breakdown of personnel costs:

- 20% of Dr. Ashton's time to oversee and manage the project: [REDACTED]
- 15 hours/week for Kari Ross Nelson to coordinate the project and conduct research: [REDACTED]
- 15 hours/week for a part-time research and evaluation team member. This person will assist with Qualtrics data and dashboard management along with data analysis, developing reports, and sharing findings: [REDACTED]
- Research and collaborative work conducted by Rhiannon Crain (Santa Cruz Children's Museum of Discovery) and Natalie Ortega Wells (Wonderscope Children's Museum of Kansas City): [REDACTED] + [REDACTED] = [REDACTED] total.
- Other time and work from Thanksgiving Point staff will go toward cost share, including 5% of Lorie Millward's time to mentor Dr. Ashton and provide advice on the project: [REDACTED]; 5% of Hannah Browne's time to manage

the backend of the grant, including grant reporting: [REDACTED]; and 2% of Jeremy Andrus's time in Year 3 for graphic design of support materials and final report documents: [REDACTED]. This is a total of [REDACTED].

- \$2,500 of honorarium per year per project advisor (four advisors): [REDACTED]
- Sarah Cohn from Aurora Consulting will serve as our outside evaluator. She anticipates working about 260 hours on this project: [REDACTED].

This grant will help pay for travel expenses for partnership in-person meetings at ACM's annual InterActivity Conference each May and at the Visitor Studies Association Conference held each July. This travel will also allow the project team to recruit museums for the cohort and share findings and support materials with the museums field. The total travel cost for the three years is \$51,576.

This grant also seeks funding to support the cost of technology to help collect and analyze the data. The project team will use Thanksgiving Point's Qualtrics software license (including Qualtrics' qualitative analysis tool Text iQ). Qualtrics will be used as the tool for collecting and analyzing large quantities of both quantitative and qualitative survey data and evaluation data. Qualtrics dashboards will be created to show filterable survey data in real-time to museums participating in the study. Lastly, the grant will pay for a Zoom license to facilitate virtual meetings. The total technology cost for the three years is \$110,403.

A *significant* amount of cost share funding will come from what we are calling the Museums for All (M4A) gap admission cost share. This is the revenue that is NOT received by museums when they admit museum guests through the M4A program: \$669,250. See the attached Budget Justification for a detailed description and breakdown of the gap admission cost share from partner museums and the 30-museum cohort. *Note: It was confirmed by IMLS Supervisory Grants Management Specialist Helen Weschler that this M4A gap admission is an acceptable form of cost share.*

During Year 2, a cohort of 30 varied museums participating in the M4A program will be recruited to participate in this study. Each cohort museum will be given \$750 to help alleviate the costs of rolling out the survey, including printing invitations and training frontline staff to distribute them. The total of this stipend is \$22,500.

How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?

Upon award of funding, the project team will create a project outline with goals, milestones, tasks, and deadlines. While the project manager will systematically track project progress according to this outline, we will also engage the services of an outside evaluator to evaluate our process throughout the program with various formative evaluations and a then a summative evaluation of our process at the end. This evaluator will help us measure the IMLS performance goals:

- Effectiveness: The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results.
- Efficiency: How well resources (e.g., funds, expertise, time) are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group.
- Quality: How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group.
- Timeliness: The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the timeframe proposed.

What are your research questions, methods, and theoretical framing?

Using Museums for All as a case example, this research seeks to understand the impact of an income-qualifying museum admissions programs on both visitors and museums. Our research questions are:

1. What is the influence of museum experiences on visitors who attend as part of a subsidized/an income-qualified admission program?
 - a. What benefits do they perceive from visiting?
 - b. How does the experience of Museums for All visitors compare to the experience of general admission visitors?
 - c. Are other barriers to attendance mitigated by a program to reduce the cost barrier?
 - d. What is the impact of visits on familial relationships among Museums for All visitors?
 - e. What is the impact of visits on Museums for All visitors' intentions to continue visiting museums in the near future?

2. How does participating in Museums for All contribute to a museum's ability to serve a diverse community?
 - a. How do general and this survey demographics differ?
 - b. Are museum staff more intentional in IDEA practices as they implement Museums for All?

Question 1, related to Museums for All visitors, will be addressed through two methods:

- Online surveys of Museums for All visitors. We are currently using surveys in the pilot of this project. They are an effective way to gather data from large numbers of people while maintaining their anonymity – especially important for vulnerable populations.
- Online survey of general admission visitors for comparison purposes. This survey will include a subset of the items on the Museums for All visitor survey to allow for outcome comparisons.
- Interviews with a sample of visitors to confirm and explicate survey data. Survey takers will be invited to participate in interviews at the end of the survey. In the pilot survey, many people have indicated a willingness to contribute to the research in this way.

Question 2, related to participating museums, will be addressed through two methods:

- Focus groups with the 30 cohort museums who will participate in this study. In these focus groups we will explore the goals of museums who participate in Museums for All, and how the program helps them achieve those goals.
- Document analysis of existing Museums for All content, including correspondence from participating museums. This document analysis will enable us to see how representative the experiences of our 30-museum cohort are of the larger population

We are approaching this inquiry through the lens of a critical theory of social science research. Critical theory focuses on power, inequality, and social change. Researchers in the critical paradigm acknowledge that social science can never be truly value free and seek to cultivate positive change in the research participants and the systems being studied as well as collect important data. Critical theory is an appropriate approach to this research in that we seek to cultivate change in the conventions of museum visitation in a way that extends benefits to traditionally underserved audiences.

What is the relevance of your proposed research for current practice?

As described earlier, multiple barriers to museum attendance have been identified, and we hypothesize that many are intertwined. Subsidized museum admission programs target one barrier, but other barriers may be reduced by them. A quick scan of the American Alliance of Museums Blog reveals issues pressing on current practice: accessibility, social impact, community engagement, families, DEAI. In one recent post about IMLS-funded research into belonging in museums, Appelbaum and Price (2022)¹² argued that “museums must take ownership of their own lack of initiative in expanding their audiences.” Seeking to extend reach into a community and connecting with non-dominant audiences is not only crucial to a museum's sustainability, but also is the right thing to do. Our inquiry into the Museums for All program will shed light on one aspect of the field's work toward this.

What type of data will you gather for your research (separate from that identified in your Performance Measurement Plan)?

We will collect data from museum visitors and cohort museum staff. Two similar surveys (one for Museums for All visitors and one for general admission visitors) will contain primarily closed-ended items producing quantitative data with some open-ended items producing qualitative data. All survey data will relate to the museum experience and its influence on the participant. Focus groups will be conducted with cohort museum staff, producing qualitative data related to the internal impact of participating in Museums for All.

How will you collect, analyze, and use the data?

Visitor survey data will be collected using the online survey platform Qualtrics. We anticipate using descriptive statistics to understand basic trends among the Museums for All visitors, and factor analytic methods to explore factors at play in

¹² Price, A. and Applebaum, L. (2022). **A Free Survey to Measure a Sense of Belonging at Museums**
<https://www.aam-us.org/2022/09/30/a-free-survey-to-measure-a-sense-of-belonging-at-museums/>

their experience more deeply. Independent Group t-Tests will be used to determine differences between the Museums for All visitors and general admission visitors. Appropriate statistical tests will be confirmed by our advisory team and run in R. Findings will be used to describe the influence of museum visits on Museums for All visitors.

Focus group data will be collected as both notes from focus group facilitators and transcribed recordings of the focus group. This data will be analyzed inductively to derive concepts and themes that emerge from participant dialogue. This data will be used to understand the impact of Museums for All on participating museums.

Does your study require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval? If so, what steps have you taken to secure IRB approval?

Yes. We have a relationship with an independent IRB provider and, upon award of grant funding, will work with them to secure appropriate approval.

How will you report and disseminate your findings?

We will share findings from the study through webinars and sessions at relevant professional conferences, including American Alliance of Museums, Association of Children's Museums, and Visitor Studies Association. We will propose posts to professional association blogs and submit a manuscript for publication to peer-reviewed journals representing the field.

Additionally, the survey instruments will be published through the Museums for All website. Along with the surveys, we will include resources that address their use, including valid sampling, sensitivity to non-dominant populations, and other issues identified by the cohort in survey deployment.

Project Results

What are your project's intended results, and how will they address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified?

This project addresses a field-wide challenge to provide community-wide access to museums and the benefits of their work. We intend that this project will result in evidence that shows the impact of a subsidized admissions program (Museums for All) both on the visitors who access museums with the program and on a museum's attendance and DEAI practice. This project will advance knowledge and understanding of the benefits of museums to individuals in their communities, with insights particularly into the less-studied benefits to individuals in non-dominant populations. This has the practical implication of helping museums better understand how to extend their reach to provide benefits community-wide. The project will also result in data museums can use for advocacy and case-making. The case example we will explore, Museums for All, is an IMLS initiative itself, so having this kind of data about it will ensure the investment in that initiative is effective.

How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the target group change as a result of your project?

The target group for this project is the 1000+ museums participating in the Museums for All program. Our data will help ACM strengthen support material for current and future participating museums. The results of the research will also be useful to the individual museums in terms of advocacy and case-making.

What models, tools, research findings, and/or services will result from your project? How will you ensure that they are broadly adaptable and usable by other institutions and are widely disseminated to the field?

This project will result in both a survey instrument and research findings. The tool will be made available to any museum on the Museums for All website. We know it will be usable to other institutions as it will be the instrument used for research data collection in 30 museums across the US. We will document challenges in its use during the research period and make appropriate adjustments to the tool or supporting materials before publication of it. The research findings will be published through an array of channels with reach to a wide variety of museums professionals, including blog posts, conference presentations, and peer-reviewed journals.

How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?

The preparatory work that we have done for this proposal ensures the sustainability of our work. We are involving key stakeholders with a strong interest in the project and advisors who will help us do reliable and relevant work. By involving ACM as advisors, the results of our work will be accessible to our target groups: Museums for All participant museums and the sponsors of the initiative. Understanding what kind of change the program is making for museums visitors is important for museums as they move forward with DEAI programming. Even if the program is not reaching the right visitors – that is important to know. This work is poised to shape the future of the Museums for All program.