



Association of Art Museum Directors

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We at AAMD believe that attendance at art museums has increased over the last five years. Others disagree. What does this imply and who is right?

Two recent reports, one by the National Endowment for the Arts and one by Americans for the Arts indicate that participation in the arts has declined in recent years. In November, the NEA published its *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (www.arts.gov) stating that 27% of all U.S. adults visited an art museum or gallery in 2002, while 23% attended in 2008. In January, Americans for the Arts published their *National Arts Index* (http://www.artsusa.org/information_services/arts_index/001.asp), and reported that art museum attendance in 81 metropolitan areas dropped in the past five years, from about 33 million visitors in 2003 to about 30.9 million in 2008.

In contrast, AAMD's data—based on reporting by 80 of our member institutions—shows that art museums experienced a 2.4% *increase* in overall attendance for the same five-year period. The numbers of total visits to those 80 art museums alone reached 28.75 million in 2003 and 29.45 million in 2008. It's worth noting that neither the NEA nor AFTA reports included children's participation—an important audience served by art museums.

Clearly, gathering accurate data is a challenge. We need reliable data both to gauge the impact of our work and to supply policy makers and funders with accurate statistics. And if art museums don't track this data for ourselves, other will speak for us.

Quantitative measures are essential to our work and AAMD is exploring how to further improve our own data gathering. But whatever the quantitative data shows, we must not lose sight of the importance of the qualitative experiences of our visitors. Art museums exist to inspire and educate. As our society goes through major demographic changes, we need to know more about our audiences and how effectively we are serving them.

- How is the face of America changing and how can we develop new approaches to connect audiences with art?
- What are the implications of the aging Baby Boomer population for art museums – and what services will this aging demographic want and need?
- How can we reach younger audiences and nurture new generations of museum goers?
- What types of programming can we offer to attract audiences that don't currently visit art museums?
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We can anticipate that the 2010 Census, which will be underway next month, will give insights into just how the demographics of our country have shifted in the last decade. It is up to AAMD and its members to keep abreast with—and ahead of—the changing nature of our society, to seek new opportunities to engage with different communities, and to create exhibitions and programs that meet the needs and interests of a changing citizenry. And it is AAMD's charge to evolve as an organization to support our members in fulfilling their public mission in the 21st century.

Janet Landay
Executive Director