

Making a Museum Sing: the Children's Museums Workforce

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While funding and facilities are essential to making children's museums run, personnel make these institutions truly sing. In this ACM Trends Report, we explore the 2016 Membership Survey and Workforce Survey data, as well as national statistics on labor to understand how children's museums use personnel, how they support their team members, and opportunities for optimizing the children's museums workforce.

First, we explore the breakdown of different types of labor in children's museums, including full-time staff, part-time staff, and volunteers. This information shows how trends in the workforce and volunteering may be affecting children's museums. In particular, we explore volunteers, the largest contingent of the children's museums workforce. The data point to opportunities for reflecting on the balance of paid versus volunteer personnel and understanding the value of volunteers. We also look at the cost of supporting personnel across different types of museums, including how children's museums invest in professional development. Finally, we briefly discuss trends in how children's museums work with other types of personnel: contractors and board members.

In this report, we continue to use size and locale categories first discussed in Trends Report #1.7 to understand patterns in the children's museums workforce. To make the data clearer and help us make comparisons, we clumped some categories. We compared: Large museums versus Small and Medium museums; and City museums versus those Outside of Cities (i.e., Rural, Town, and Suburban museums).

ACM TRENDS:

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ACM Trends #1.10

The children's museum workforce consists of a broad range of people, with diverse professional backgrounds and interests. Overall, the total number of personnel at children's museum varied widely, according to the 2016 ACM Member and Workforce Surveys. Museums Outside of Cities, and Small and Medium museums had an average of 44 and 56 total personnel, respectively. Meanwhile, City and Large museums had an average of 132 and 475 total personnel, respectively. Most differences stop there. All sizes of museums and those in different locales have a lot in common when it comes to how they work with personnel.

How museums work with different types of personnel shed light on overall operations and opportunities for the children's museums field. We studied how full-time staff, part-time staff, volunteers, and contractors are involved. On average, 76% of children's museum personnel were volunteers, 16% were part-time staff, and 8% were full-time staff in 2016.

Volunteers: A Force to Be Reckoned with

Volunteers were clearly essential to children's museums operations in 2016. For every full-time staff member, 8-10 volunteers worked in a variety of capacities across all types of museums. In other words, an average of 36 volunteers worked in each Small or Medium museum, and an average of 380 volunteers worked in each Large museum in 2016.

At first glance, it seems like these institutions may have disproportionately relied on volunteer labor. However, the number of hours worked give a clearer picture of how different members of the workforce helped children's museums run in 2016. Using data from a selection of children's museums, we estimate a typical volunteer worked 130 hours during the year. Using national labor statistics, we estimate that full-time staff work 1,852 hours and part-time staff work 1,089 hours per year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

Beneath these numbers, there was a distinction in how children's museums orchestrate their volunteer labor. While the ratio of volunteers to full-time staff was consistent across all museums, a larger volume of volunteers requires more management. According to the 2016 Workforce Survey, 55% of Large museums staffed volunteer coordinators, compared to 45% of Small and Medium museums. The fact that all children's museums reported having volunteers in 2016, combined with the absence of volunteer coordinators in about half of all institutions, suggests that multiple staff members took on volunteer management in many children's museums.

As ACM members consider these trends, they may reflect on how their volunteer and paid personnel are balanced. Are there too few volunteers, so much so that these volunteers are carrying an excessive workload? On the flip side, are there too many volunteers for staff to manage if there is no dedicated coordinator?

In 2016, Independent Sector estimated the value of one hour of a volunteer's work was \$24.14 for the organization they're volunteering for (Independent Sector, 2016). Based on our estimate that a typical children's museum volunteer works 130 hours per year, the children's museum sector had a volunteer workforce valued at \$105,368,000 in 2016. Figure 1 shows how volunteers' value is spread across different types of institutions, compared to other institutional costs for paid staff.

ACM members might consider these enormous sums when thinking about personnel costs and value. Are there other ways to think about the value of volunteers? Is the

ACM Trends Reports

The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) is the world's foremost professional member service organization for the children's museum field. We leverage the collective knowledge of children's museums through convening, sharing, and dissemination. ACM has partnered with Knology to create the ACM Trends Reports. Knology is a nonprofit that produces practical social science for a better world.

ACM Trends Reports are commissioned on behalf of our membership to help advance the work of this community. They seek to draw attention to emerging issues and opportunities for elevating the field, and help our members use data to become more accountable to their mission and fiscal responsibilities. A product of collaborative efforts to collect data, the Trends Reports are an effort to support ongoing, accessible dialogue. Our objective is for this approach to be an equitable and inclusive way for museum professionals to contextualize our work and use data to produce effective outcomes.

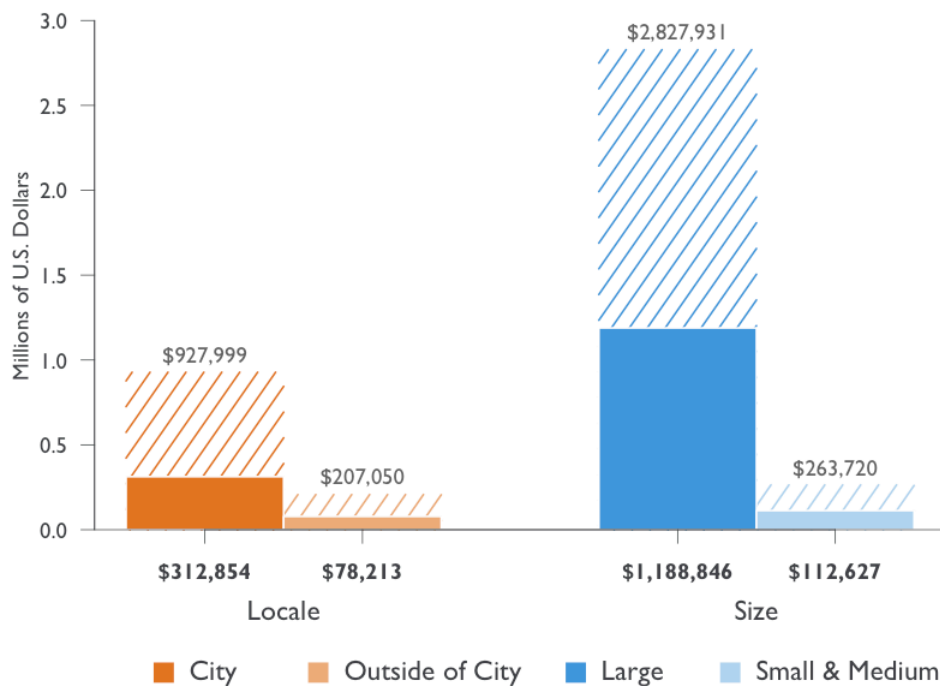


Figure 1. Average value of volunteers' time (solid bars), compared to average total costs of paid staff (striped bars) in 2016.

level of value balanced with the resources that are allocated to supporting volunteers in your institution?

Investing in the Children's Museum Workforce

Children's museums spent a large proportion of their operating funds on personnel costs, which include salaries, taxes, and benefits. For Large and City museums, personnel costs are 45% of their overall budget. By comparison, Small and Medium museums and those Outside of Cities allocated a smaller proportion (about 34-35%) to personnel.

Professional development (PD) is an important way of investing in the workforce, aside from compensation and benefits. It can improve staff effectiveness and strengthen staff commitment to an organization. In 2016, the amount that children's museums in every category spent on professional development was equivalent to 1% of their total personnel costs.

It's likely that most PD resources are allocated to paid staff. And of those staff, most professional development opportunities are likely offered to full-time staff. As a result, a large proportion of the ACM workforce may not ever see professional development outside of training for

their specific role. This trend points to an opportunity for children's museums to consider how to develop their personnel and how to allocate professional development and training resources across their teams.

At the same time, the data fail to capture other types of PD that are not part of an institution's budget, yet offer valuable PD for personnel. The Association of Children's Museums, along with other networks, provide training resources to member institutions for little to no fee. Peer and in-house trainings are also common at museums. Considering these factors, museum leaders may consider how to reflect the investment they make in "free" PD opportunities for their teams.

With visitorship composed of young people ranging from infants to toddlers to adolescents, children's museums' audiences can be considered vulnerable. As children's museums work with large numbers of volunteers, institution leaders and volunteer coordinators might consider how they protect their audiences, while providing satisfying volunteering experiences. For instance, how does your museum approach standards for liability training? In a different vein, how does your museum promote access to and support for volunteerism?

Other Personnel

There are other personnel who played important roles in children's museums' operations in 2016. Most children's museums worked with contractors, who performed a range of tasks. Most commonly, museums used contractors for design and maintenance of exhibits, galleries, and theaters, and visitor services in these spaces. Large and City museums were more likely to use contractors of all types.

Board members also play a role in supporting children's museum operations with decision-making, policy setting, and fundraising. In 2016, most institutions had an average Board size of 14 to 18 individuals. Large museums were an exception, with an average of 25 Board members.

About This Research

The estimates used in the discussion of general trends in children's museums' personnel and the volunteer workforce were based on the following information and assumptions. Where possible, researchers used conservative estimates to avoid exaggerating results.

Full-time staff – To understand the number of hours worked, we combined two estimates regarding full-time staff: the Bureau of Labor Statistics' data showing that full-time staff work 38.6 hours per week, and our estimate that most staff work about 48 weeks per year, accounting for holidays, vacation, sick leave, and other times when they do not work. These numbers result in a lower estimate (1,852 hours) than the federal standard of 2,087 hours (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.). We use the lower number because we analyzed the number of hours worked, rather than the number of hours museum staff could potentially work.

Part-time staff – The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that, on average, part-time workers put in 5.34 hours on the days they work. The federal government does not have an official designation for part-time workers' cumulative time, so we conservatively estimated that part-time staff work 17 days per month. We limited how much we used these estimates in other calculations due to our uncertainty about the part-time designation.

Volunteers – We surveyed five representatives from a variety of children's museums about the number of hours volunteers work per week. These museums were: Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose, Portland Children's Museum, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, The Peoria PlayHouse Children's Museum, and Sciencenter. We also performed a Web search of additional ACM member websites to gather information on volunteering requirements for hours worked. With this information, we estimated a typical children's museum volunteer worked 2.7 hours per week for 48 weeks per year. Researchers plan to study volunteerism in children's museums with future mini-surveys with ACM members.

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Started in 1962, the Association of Children's Museums (ACM) is the world's foremost professional member service organization for the children's museum field. With more than 400 members in 48 states and 20 countries, we leverage the collective knowledge of children's museums through convening, sharing, and dissemination.

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