

## Large Museums: Characteristics and Comparisons

Large museums' access to more resources supports their ability to have wider programming, more diverse audiences, and allows them to be more involved in their communities. Compared to museums of smaller size categories, large museums were the most likely to run school outreach programs and recreational programs for children such as summer camps and camp-in programs. They had the highest ratings for community engagement which included library collaborations, the use of a mobile outreach vehicle. Almost all of the large museums host programs to specifically target underserved audiences. This effort is supported by their frequent participation in the Head Start Program. Additionally, they often support teacher populations by providing workshops and curriculum materials.

Almost all large museums provide an on-site eating facility and gift shop, which is a large difference from smaller museums. Over a third of large museums uniquely provide an online gift shop, which is almost exclusive to this size category. Large museums stood out from museums of other sizes with their rates of offering outdoor exhibits and outdoor gardens. The data supports that their larger square footage accommodates more flexibility in facilities offered.

We classified five 'extraordinary museums' as the museums with the highest reported values for the four proxies in measuring size. These five museums significantly stood out from the rest of rest of group in their numbers and characteristics. They are all older, highly accessible (both physically and digitally), have undergone major renovations, and have relationships with local governments.

Large museums reported feeling most accomplished in their development of new exhibits, ending the year with a balanced budget, and their impressive program growth. Their top needs include new funding opportunities, administrative reorganization, and general operating support.

ACM TRENDS:

#1.4

## ACM Trends #1.4

Our first Trends report used data from membership surveys to identify critical proxies for children’s museum size. Size likely affects many aspects of how a museum functions and separating museums by size provided a basis for further exploration into these operational details. The identified size characteristics – total operating expenses, visitor attendance, number of paid staff, and building size – allowed us to group museums into three categories (Table 1), with some museums falling in overlap zones.

Table 1. Criteria used to assign size categories.

Size Category	Total Operating Expenses	Building Size (sq ft)	Attendance	Staff
Small	Less than \$435,000	Less than 12,000	Less than 50,000	Less than 13
Medium	\$435,000 – \$1.7 million	12,000 – 37,000	50,000 – 155,000	13 – 34
Large	More than \$1.7 million	More than 37,000	More than 155,000	More than 34

This report builds on our findings by more deeply characterizing large children’s museums’ programs, facilities, and position in the field. We compared museums of multiple sizes to highlight their unique assets and to allow large museums to reflect on their own process of growth and development. We also recognize that some large museums are establishing branch museums; these branches would essentially function as small museums and go through their own growth process.

## Programming

Large museums hosted diverse programming that targeted a number of groups, including young children, youth, teachers, adults, and underserved audiences. Museums of all sizes were likely to reach school groups through field trip programs, while large museums were particularly likely to run outreach programs to schools (Figure 1).

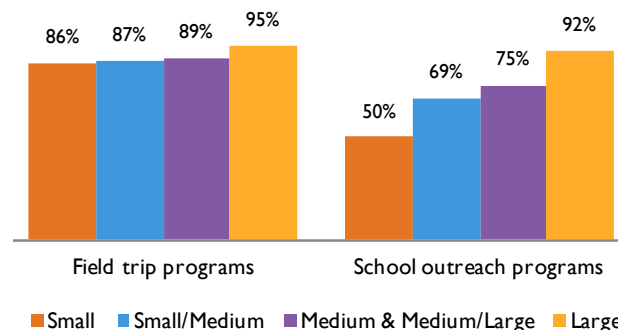


Figure 1. School programs for children.

Large museums also provided diverse recreational activities for children, including summer camps, camp-ins, and afterschool programs (Figure 2). Rates for these programs were similar to rates at medium and medium/large museums, suggesting that additional programming resources are focused on growing other areas, such as school engagement or adult programming.

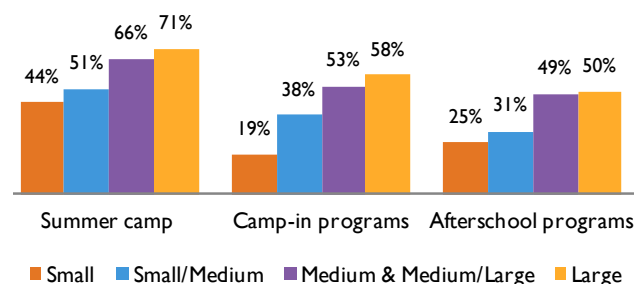


Figure 2. Recreational programs for children.

Although children’s museums of all sizes focus on young children, large museums are particularly likely to have developed permanent early childhood areas and programs (Figure 3). Additionally, more than half of large museums collaborated with Head Start programs, which promote school readiness for low-income children under 5 years old; they were also much more likely to provide childcare than museums of any other size (Figure 3).

## 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.

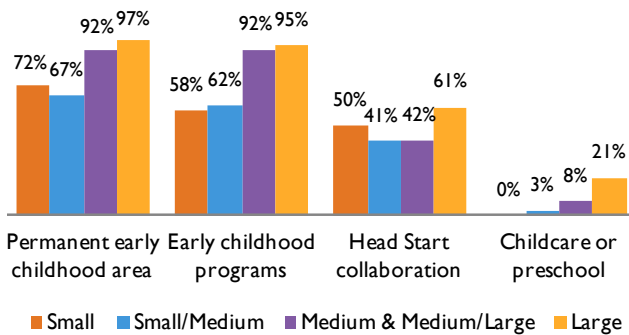


Figure 3. Early childhood resources and programs.

Increases in museum size were typically accompanied by increases in programming and resources for adults, including teachers (Figure 4). Indeed, almost all large museums provided curricular materials and hosted teacher workshops, suggesting a substantial investment in childhood learning and engagement through educators.

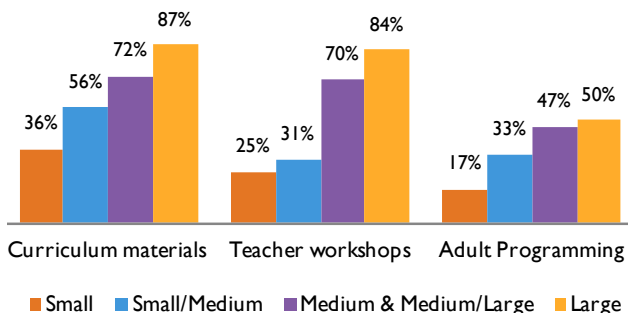


Figure 4. Programs and resources for adults

Large museums reached many different types of audiences. This breadth may be facilitated by increased investment in innovative methods of outreach. For example, 82% of large museums collaborated with local libraries and over one third had a mobile outreach vehicle.

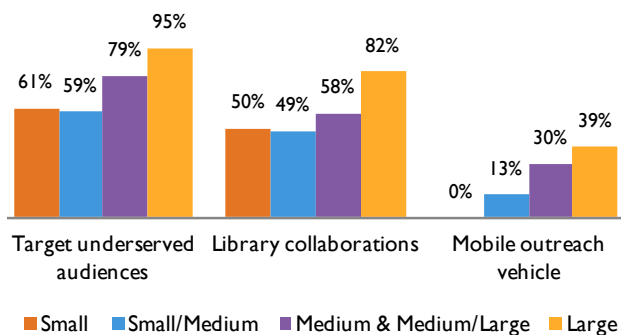


Figure 5. Community outreach.

## Facilities

Almost all large museums had an on-site eating facility, a marked jump from other museum sizes (Figure 6). While museums of all sizes had a gift shop, large museums were more likely to have online access to the gift shop (Figure 6). Examining the revenue generated could provide insight into the opportunities that opening an eating facility or gift shop may have for smaller museums looking to grow.

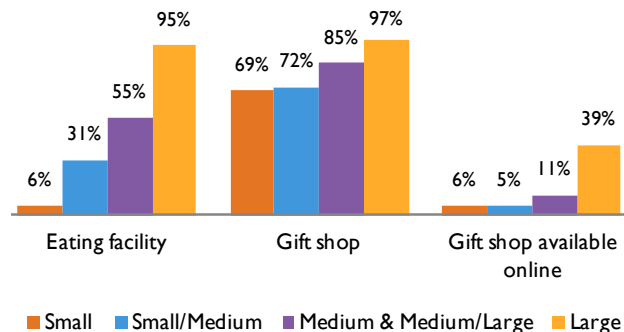


Figure 6. General Facilities.

A small percentage of large museums had a giant IMAX theater (16%) or planetarium (13%). While these percentages are low, no small museums and only 4% of medium and medium/large museums had an IMAX. Planetariums were slightly more common, with 8% of smaller museums having a planetarium.

ACM members described additional educational facilities, including outdoor learning spaces and performance theaters (Figure 7). Large museums stood out from other size categories because two-thirds had outdoor exhibits, while gardens were slightly more common across size categories. Performance theaters were only common among museums that were medium sized or larger, possibly reflecting increased space at larger institutions.

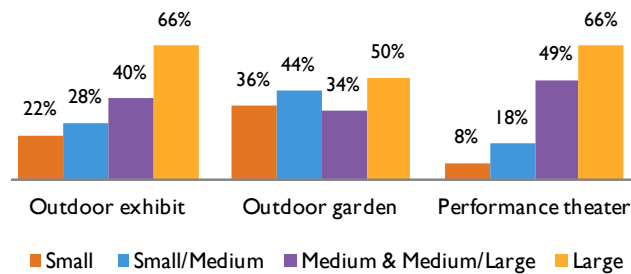


Figure 7. Educational Facilities.

## Extraordinary Museums

We identified five museums with the highest values for all four size criteria, and thereby stood out as extraordinary institutions with a particularly large visitor base and resources (Table 2). We excluded these outlier museums from earlier analyses, but examine them closely here to identify unique characteristics of very large museums.

Table 2. List of extraordinary childrens' museums.

ID	Operating Expenses	Building Size (sq ft)	Attendance	Staff	Region
A	\$26,462,577	473,400	1,314,126	324	Midwest
B	\$17,843,705	320,723	1,512,965	295	Midwest
C	\$12,525,174	320,723	940,144	194	Midwest
D	\$11,989,830	282,000	569,361	334	Northeast
E	\$10,880,290	152,177	692,503	189	Northeast

These five museums describe themselves in different ways, highlighting their focus on particular topic areas (e.g., science, history), modes of learning (e.g., hands-on play), or age groups.

All have been growing and thinking about development for many years. All were incorporated at least 30 years ago (ranging between 1925 and 1987), and all underwent major expansions between 1998 and 2008. All but one maintained independent structures rather than being located in museum complexes.

Accessibility may be an important contributor to the success of the five extraordinary museums. All are located in urban areas and accessible by public transportation. In addition to physical accessibility, these museums are accessible digitally, with all five having an active social media presence with Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts.

The extraordinary museums were particularly likely to have some government ties. All five had communicated with a government official or their staff and received a visit from a government official in the last year. All but one had a government relations staff to correspond with and maintain relationships with government figures.

## About This Research

In 2016, the Association of Children's Museums (ACM) and Knology partnered to advance understanding about the roles children's museums play in their communities and beyond. Knology identified critical questions that aligned with ACM research goals and reviewed responses to over 100 surveys deployed to ACM members since 2004. This process allowed us to identify data for exploring what children's museums have accomplished to date and what they can accomplish in the future.

Large museums (N = 38) comprised almost one quarter (23%) of ACM's member base in 2010, the most recent and robust dataset. Our dataset included relatively few medium museums, so we grouped medium and medium/large museums to more accurately compare these museums to other size categories. Medium/large museums had some size characteristics that were aligned with medium museums and others that were aligned with large museums, however, 68% of the medium/large museums had more in common with medium museums than with large museums, further justifying our decision to group the two categories.

All comparisons were based on the sample of 36 small museums, 39 small/medium museums, 53 medium and medium/large museums, and 38 large museums. Identifying differences between the four groups allowed us to make conclusions about general trends of activities and programs in museums of varying sizes, and recommendations to support best practices.

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.

Knology is a nonprofit that produces practical social science for a better world. Since 2012, the collective of scientists, writers, and educators has been dedicated to studying and untangling complex social issues.

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