

Measuring Diversity in Children's Museums & Their Communities

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Diversity and inclusion have long been at the center of the museum field's dialogue, and the field continues to strengthen this work. In 2018, the American Alliance of Museums published *Facing Change*, a short report providing definitions and resource recommendations for museum professionals working toward diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusivity. In parallel, the Institute for Museum and Library Services added a new Diversity and Inclusion category to their National Leadership Grants for Museums. At the same time, children's museums have been reflecting on how they should uniquely address these issues.

This ACM Trends Report explores different types of diversity measures that are important to children's museums. Based on a 2018 survey, we consider how ACM member institutions thought about diversity in the communities they serve, and then we compare those perceptions to measures of diversity provided by the US Census Bureau.

The data shows how important it is for the children's museum field to pay attention to the types of diversity in their communities. After all, children's museums are places for all learners, no matter their background and abilities. Children's museums can improve service—particularly with programming, exhibits, and outreach—for their community only when they truly know their community.

ACM TRENDS

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Sixty-four ACM member institutions participated in the Diversity & Inclusion survey in 2018. The majority of those respondents consider their communities to have middling levels of general diversity, with an average of 4.3 on a 7-point scale. At the same time, 43% of respondents reported that they measure diversity of their audiences by collecting demographic information.

Children's museums that report higher levels of diversity in their communities are also more likely to monitor different types of diversity among their visitors. On the flip side, children's museums that perceive lower levels of diversity in their communities are also unlikely to track diversity among their visitors. It's possible some museums have not yet thought about different types of diversity when they consider their communities and audiences.

Thinking about Diversity

The American Alliance of Museums describes diversity as “all the ways that people are different and the same at the individual and group levels. Even when people appear the same, they are different” (AAM, 2018).

There are infinite characteristics for children's museums to consider when addressing their audiences' needs. Some are general characteristics, which all museums likely care about, such as age, economic status, languages spoken, educational attainment, race, and ethnicity. On the other hand, some characteristics may be especially relevant to children's museums, including family size, learning styles, intergenerational relationships, and emotional experiences.

Many of the differences among people and groups are measurable. In this report, we focus on three measurable ways that people differ to help children's museum leaders think about diversity in their communities. There are many other ways to measure community diversity.

Economic – Members of a community may differ economically. Families in a community have different standards of living, with some challenged to put food on the table, while others can afford several vacations each year. Economic diversity means families in a community have a wide range of means related to covering basic needs and more. These economic differences may help children's museums consider admission scales and admission accommodations.

Educational – Members of a community may differ educationally. The highest educational level reached by adults (over age 25) in a community may be 9th grade or it may be a professional degree. Educational diversity means individuals in a community have a wide range of educational experiences and skills. Understanding the education level of caregivers can help children's museums scaffold intergenerational learning experiences.

Racial & Ethnic – Members of a community may differ in their race and ethnicity. People may have different experiences based on which races and/or ethnicities they identify with or are identified as by others. These experiences are complex; they can be positive, negative, and everything in between. Racial and ethnic diversity means that people have a wide range of identities and cultural experiences, which may help children's museums reflect on how to address and represent their communities.

Perceived vs. Actual Diversity

We compared children's museums' perceptions of diversity in their community with diversity data from the counties where those institutions are located. We used a composite diversity index based on economic, education, and race and ethnicity diversity data gathered from the American Community Survey 2012-2016. Figure 1 shows

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.

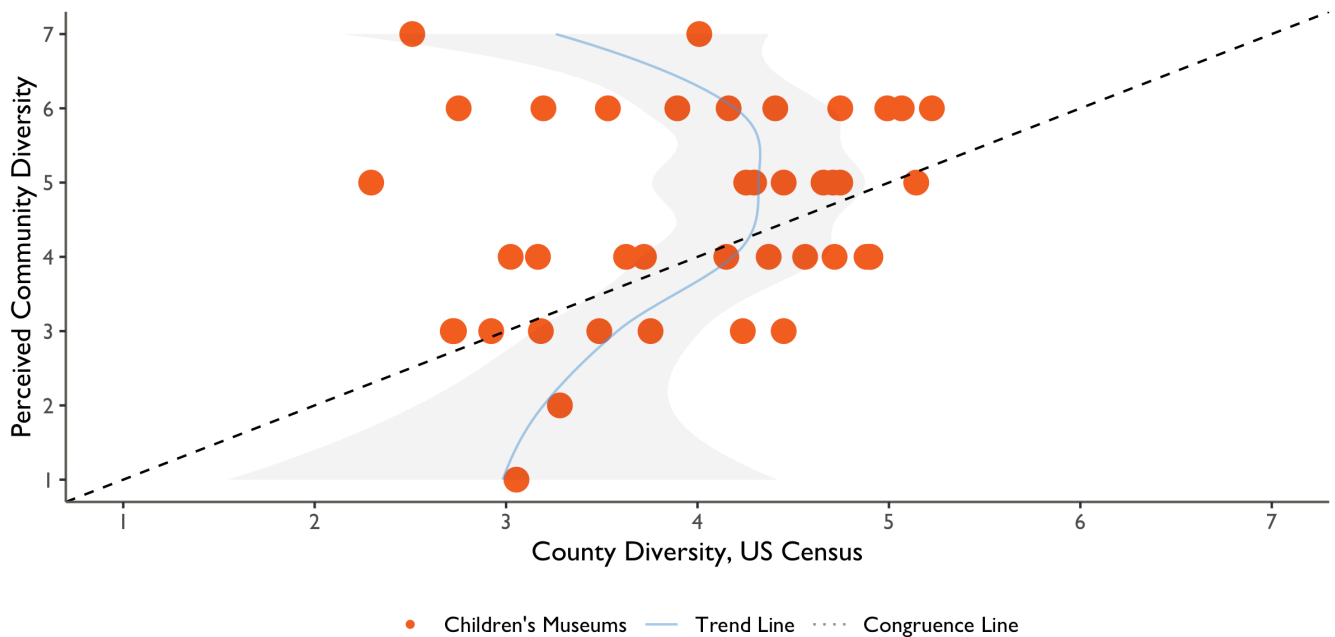


Figure 1. Perceptions of community diversity and actual diversity based on composite index of US Census data (n = 44).

Note – On the x axis, 1 = Lowest score on county diversity index, 7 = Highest score on county diversity index.
On the y axis, 1 = People in my community are similar, and 7 = People in my community are different.

that perceptions of diversity and actual measures of diversity rarely align.

Figure 1 is a complex graph; let's discuss how to read it. Each orange dot represents one children's museum that responded to ACM's Diversity & Inclusion survey (many of the dots overlap). The dashed congruence line shows where perceptions and actual measures of diversity matched. Children's museum dots that appear above the dashed line overestimated their community's diversity, whereas the museum dots appear below the line underestimated their community's diversity. The blue line is the midpoint of museums that responded with similar diversity ratings in the survey. For example, museums that rated their community diversity as 3 have a midpoint of about 3.5 for their actual diversity index rating. The gray shaded area shows the range of how most children's museums would rate their community's diversity.

Looking at Figure 1, children's museums professionals can reflect on how their institution perceives its community and how that might differ from the actual range of differences found in their community. While this graph presents an index with just three types of measures—economic, education, and race and ethnicity—it shows how perceptions can differ from a community's reality.

Children's museums should track diversity among their audiences to compare to the wider community. *Which parts of our community are we serving? Is there anyone missing? Why?* are important questions to ask as children's museums continue to work toward inclusivity. Any children's museum can find measures for different types of diversity in their own community. Local municipal offices, such as the county clerk, and the local school board have this public data and can provide such information by request. Or, children's museums leaders can explore local data in the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey website (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>).

About This Research

Here, we describe details that shaped the research for this Trends Report. This dataset is from a Diversity & Inclusion Survey that ACM invited its members to participate in from November 2017 to March 2018. The survey initiative originated in an ACM webinar exploring how addressing inclusion begins with measuring diversity. This survey was sent to ACM member directors and administrators.

We matched 44 of the 64 survey respondents to US Census data to find more information about the communities they serve. “Actual Diversity” was calculated by combining racial, economic, and educational diversity indices derived from the American Community Survey 2012-2016 estimates for a museum’s home county. Each index was calculated based upon the number of individuals, families, or adults identified within specific categories used by the US Census to understand diversity.

For economic diversity, we used the ratio of income to poverty level of families divided into 12 categories. These categories ranged from those with an annual income of less than 50% of the national poverty level, up to those with an annual income over 500% of that same level.

For educational diversity, we used reported levels of highest educational attainment for adults over age 25, and included 23 categories: No schooling completed; Nursery school; Kindergarten; 1st grade; 2nd grade; 3rd grade; 4th grade; 5th grade; 6th grade; 7th grade; 8th grade; 9th grade; 10th grade; 11th grade; 12th grade, no diploma; Regular high school diploma; GED or alternative credential; Some college, less than 1 year; Some college, 1 or more years, no degree; Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Master's degree; Professional school degree; and Doctorate degree.

For race and ethnicity diversity, we used the following nine self-identified categories: White alone; Black / African American alone; American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; Some other race; Two or more races; and Hispanic / Latinx.

Once we had calculated a diversity index for each of the above three types of diversity for each county, we then calculated the average of the three indices to generate a composite County Diversity Index. This County Diversity Index shown in Figure 1 was scaled to match the 1-7 rating scale used in the Diversity & Inclusion Survey.

References

American Alliance of Museums. (2018). *Facing Change: Insights from AAM's Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, & Inclusion Working Group*. Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums. Accessed December 20, 2018: <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/AAM-DEAI-Working-Group-Full-Report-2018.pdf>

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