

## MUSEUMS WORKING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Public education, in its broadest sense, is best served not only by our schools and libraries, but also by museums. As community centers, they offer people of all ages and future generations access to our nation's cultural and natural heritage. Their special role in public education is centered on the capacity of museums to provide the public an interactive, object-based place to better understand its community, our nation, and our world. From art museums to zoos, museums are gathering places for people to meet and spend time with families and friends.

The public benefits from the many services a museum provides to its community.

### Centers of Learning

The educational role of museums is at the core of their service to the public. People of all ages and backgrounds come to learn from the collections, exhibits and programs created by museums through their research and scholarship.

- A recent national survey indicates that Americans view museums as one of the most important resources for educating our children and as one of the most trustworthy sources of objective information.
- Museums provide more than 18 million instructional hours for educational programs such as professional development for teachers, guided field trips, staff visits to schools, and traveling exhibits in schools.
- Nearly 11,000 American museums provide K-12 educational programming.
- Most museums offering educational programs in math, science, art, and history use local and state curriculum standards to shape their educational programs.
- Almost 9 out of 10 Americans (87%) find museums to be the most trustworthy or a trustworthy source of information among a wide range of choices, including 38% who see museums as one of the most trusted sources.

### Civic Institutions

Museums – in the extraordinary variety of communities across the country that have created and cherished them – have a deeply rooted community connection that is uniquely its own.

- Americans from all income and education ranges visit museums. There are 2.3 million museum visits per day, adding up to 600 million visits per year to American museums.
- There are more than 17,500 museums in the United States and 9 out of 10 counties in America have at least one museum—75% of them considered to be small and 43% located in rural areas.
- More than one-third (35%) of museums are free to the public, and of those museums that do charge, 98 percent offer special discounts and nearly 62 percent have free admission days.
- Of Americans age 18 and older, one in 480 is a museum volunteer.

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## **Protectors of our Artistic, Historic, Scientific and Cultural Heritage**

Organized as public trusts, American museums are grounded in the tradition of public service and hold their collections and information as a benefit for those they were established to serve.

- Museums care for more than 750 million objects and living specimens.
- 93% of all museums have permanent collections.
- In a recent survey, after their families, Americans rank authentic artifacts in history museums and historic sites most significant in creating a strong connection to the past.

## **Key Partner in Travel and Tourism**

Museums provide a common experience that families share across generations and create memories. They are national treasures that allow grandparents, parents and children together to see history come alive, make a scientific discovery, or wonder at a work of art.

- Trips including cultural and heritage activities comprise one of the most popular and significant segments of the travel industry, accounting for over 23% of all domestic trips.
- Museums rank in the top three family vacation destinations.
- One-third of Americans say they have visited an art museum, a history museum, an aquarium, zoo, botanical garden, or science and technology center within the past six months. Almost a quarter has gone within the past year.

## **Key Element in Attracting and Retaining Major Business Activity**

Quality of life issues contribute significantly to decisions businesses make in choosing to relocate. To attract and retain the best workforce possible, location considerations are made not only on the quality of the schools and tax incentives, but also on access to cultural resources that includes a dynamic museum community.

- *High Technology Labor Survey: Attracting and Retaining High Technology Workers*, a 1998 KPMG survey of more than 1,200 high-technology workers, examined the factors associated with the attractiveness of a new job. It found that “community quality of life” was the second most important factor—just below salary and more important than benefits, stock options, or company stability.
- According to a recent National Governors Association Issue Brief, “Even in the most successful new economy regions, civic leaders are beginning to take stock of artistic and cultural assets, recognizing that they are essential to quality of life, which is, in turn necessary for sustain growth in the new economy. “