

2025
NATIONAL MUSEUM SURVEY
FAQ



Background Information

- **What is the National Museum Survey's purpose?**

The NMS is the first ever comprehensive national data collection focused on museums. The survey will capture the scope and scale of museums' presence and reach within the United States over time. It collects data directly from museums to inform the museum field, policymakers, the public, and the media about the social, cultural, educational, and economic role that the nation's diverse museums play in American society.

- **What types of organizations participate in the National Museum Survey?**

The survey seeks to reach all museum disciplines including, but not limited to:

- Botanical Gardens, Arboretums, and Nature Centers
- Zoos and Aquariums
- Science and Technology Centers/Museums and Planetariums
- History Museums and Historic Sites
- Art Museums
- Children's Museums
- Natural History and Anthropology Museums
- General and Specialized Museums

- **What kinds of questions does the National Museum Survey ask?**

The NMS requests high-level information about institutional characteristics, facilities, finances, human resources, admissions and visitors, and digital presence.

The survey is designed to provide data that will be useful to the field while being easy for most institutions to complete.

- **Who should participate in the survey?**

We welcome participation from a variety of types of institutions, even those that may not typically identify themselves as museums like aquariums, zoos, botanical gardens, or arboretums. Criteria for inclusion in the survey focus on key aspects such as where and how institutions serve the public and the types of exhibits, programs, experiences, or other public engagement activities they offer. A series of questions are included at the beginning of the survey to confirm that institutions meet these criteria. For administrative purposes, we'd appreciate if all invited museums begin the survey and complete these initial questions to ensure that we reach everyone we can.

- **Why should my institution participate in the National Museum Survey?**

The NMS will for the first time provide the museum field with vital and valid baseline data against which institutions will be able to compare themselves. It will also inform policies relating to federal grant funding for institutions like yours and will allow policymakers, the media, and the public to better understand the vital importance of the museum field.
- **Who authorized the National Museum Survey?**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is administering this survey. IMLS has authority under 20 U.S.C. 9108 to conduct data collection, analysis, evaluation, and dissemination of information to extend and improve the nation's museum, library, and information services. Respondents are not required to respond to a federal information collection unless it displays a currently valid U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number; the OMB control number is 3137-0142 and the expiration date is 11/30/2027.
- **Who is conducting the National Museum Survey?**

ICF is conducting the NMS on behalf of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).
- **What is the Institute of Museum and Library Services and what do they do?**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services, commonly known as IMLS, is the primary source of federal funding for the nation's museums. The mission of IMLS is to advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. For additional information, please visit <https://www.ims.gov/about>.
- **What is the history of the National Museum Survey?**

After years of preparation, the NMS was piloted in 2023. Hundreds of museums participated in both preliminary research and the pilot itself. Their feedback, along with input from museum associations, was incorporated to ensure the NMS meets the needs of the nation's museums. The pilot was well received for being easy to complete and offering value to the field. For more information about the NMS pilot, please review the "IMLS Pilot Summary Findings Webinar" and "IMLS NMS Pilot: A Summary Report" on the [NMS webpage](#).

- How is the National Museum Survey different from other museum surveys I receive?

The NMS stands out from other museum surveys by being the only survey of the entire museum field, covering a broad range of disciplines and ensuring that all types of museums are represented. The survey employs rigorous and transparent methods to collect data with a commitment to achieving high response rates and gathering high-quality information. As a federally sponsored, large-scale survey effort, it is distributed to over 19,000 museums nationwide. The results of the NMS will be made freely available to the public providing valuable summary information. Participation in the NMS contributes to a vital tool for the museum community.

- How often will the National Museum Survey be conducted?

The NMS will be conducted annually to provide the opportunity to look at trends over time and identify important topics of interest. Over time, museums may find the survey simpler to complete, as some key information will be maintained and provided for respondents in future years so that they do not need to re-enter their data.

- Can institutions decline to participate in the National Museum Survey?

We hope that everyone who is invited will contribute to the survey so that we can create a data source that will be used to support institutions across the United States. However, the survey is voluntary, so institutions may decline participation. [Click here](#) to request to be removed from further contacts about the NMS.

Completing the Questionnaire

- What information is needed to complete the National Museum Survey?

The survey asks for high-level information about institutional characteristics, facilities, finances, human resources, admissions and visitors, and digital presence. Please see the NMS Question Reference Guide to help prepare responses in advance of filling out the survey.

- How long will it take to complete the National Museum Survey?

The NMS should take an hour or less for most institutions to complete. That hour *includes* any time required to refer to any records necessary to answer the questions.

- Can respondents save and continue working on the questionnaire at a later time?

The survey does not need to be completed in one session; it is designed so that it can be completed over time. The unique survey link sent to each institution can be closed and re-opened without losing respondents' place. This unique survey link can also be shared among colleagues within the same institution if necessary to complete specific survey sections. However, to avoid conflicting information from different users, only one person from each institution can be in the survey at a time.

- Who within the museum should complete the National Museum Survey?

Some sections may require the primary survey respondent to work with other staff at their museum to compile answers. For this reason, the individuals who are best suited to respond to the survey are typically in administrative roles such as a CEO, executive director, head of finance, director of development, or director of communications, as they are well-positioned to coordinate quick survey completion.

- What if my institution receives a National Museum Survey invitation but I'm not the right person to answer the questions?

If you received the survey invitation but are not the right person at your museum to complete the survey, please forward the email to the right person in your institution and copy the NMS email address nms@imls.gov. This will allow us to reroute future messages to the correct respondent.

- Is there a deadline to complete the National Museum Survey?

The deadline for completing the survey is March 7, 2025.

Results

- How will my information be reported?

The survey data provided will be combined with those from other institutions and reported only in aggregate so that neither individuals responding nor their institution are individually identifiable. IMLS will publish reports using summary findings that will be useful to museum administrators, policymakers, the media, and the general public and data will be included in an online data portal. For more information on the data portal, see *What is the National Museum data portal* FAQ below. The data collected will not affect any past, current, or future relationship that individual museums or museum administrators might have with IMLS in any way.

- **Is the National Museum Survey confidential?**

The survey is confidential. The survey data provided will be reported only in aggregate form ensuring that neither individuals nor institutions are individually identifiable. This also means that participation and the information provided by institutions will not affect any current or future relationship they may have with IMLS.

- **Who will have access to National Museum Survey responses?**

Only the project's researchers from IMLS's Office of Research and Evaluation and ICF have access to collected responses. IMLS's Office of Research and Evaluation has no involvement in grant-making, and no grant-makers will have direct access to the NMS data. No one outside the research team has, or will have, access to individual survey responses.

- **How will my information be protected and maintained?**

All collected survey data will be safeguarded in password-protected files on computers and systems that meet or exceed federal security requirements. Access to the NMS' survey platform is also password-protected and certified to meet the federal government's data security requirements. The collected data will be disposed of in compliance with all relevant federal statutes.

- **Will survey completion or survey results have an impact on institutions or their funding?**

Survey participation will not affect any individual or institution's current or future relationship with IMLS. Museums' individual responses will not be available to grant-funders.

- **How does my institution benefit from participating?**

Institutions that participate will benefit by gaining access to:

- Reports on the survey's findings
- A dynamic data portal to compare data with peer institutions' summary results
- Comprehensive information that has never been previously available to help inform museum administrators, the public, and policymakers about the vital role that museums play in society

- **What is the National Museum Survey data portal?**

The data portal is under development and will be released to the public early Summer 2025. It will be a user-friendly online tool designed to view, explore, and share data from the NMS. Once data gathering is complete IMLS will provide public access to this dashboard of summary results and reporting tools.

Data portal visitors will be able to look at nationwide information as well as information broken down by relevant categories such as museum type, location, and size. The portal will ensure institutions' privacy by making sure individual responses are not identifiable.

This tool will offer valuable insights, enabling users to see trends, benchmark their museum's performance, and make informed decisions. It will help museum professionals, researchers, and the public understand the impact of museums across the United States by providing easy access to survey results.

- **Has IMLS received official approval to run the National Museum Survey?**

This confidential survey has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget. This means that it meets data handling requirements and its methodology has been reviewed for fitness of purpose. Respondents are not required to respond to a federal information collection unless it displays a currently valid U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB control number 3137-0142 and the expiration date is 11/30/2027.

- **Who can I contact with questions about the National Museum Survey?**

Please contact the researchers at ICF, who are conducting the survey on behalf of IMLS, at nms@imls.gov with any specific questions you may have; someone should respond within one business day. Institutions can also use this email address to provide the name, title, and email address of the best contact for this effort.