



What is the definition of a small museum? Survey Results

Earlier this year, the AASLH Small Museums Committee distributed an electronic survey to the membership and received 455 responses out of 6,500 sent. It was designed to create a working definition for the Committee so we can better respond to the needs of small museums.

The results reinforced the committee’s belief that budget size is the primary determinant of small museums, but there are also numerous variables that contribute to this classification. For example, 41% of respondents indicated that budget size is the primary way to define a small museum; however, the list of free responses to question five was sizeable and nearly everyone responded to question four’s request to indicate “other factors.” Of special note are the responses to budget size (questions one and two). When looking at the aggregate data, 50% of respondents indicated that the defining budget size is \$100,000 or less. A second look at the aggregate data indicates that 80% of respondents believe that the defining budget size is \$250,000 or less. The entire data set is presented here and notable “data spikes” are in bold and are outlined.

Comments? Email your thoughts to smallmuseums@aslh.org. Thanks for your participation.

1. How would you define a small museum?	Respondents	Percentage
a. By its budget size (go to question two)	183	41%
b. By the number of staff members (go to question three)	96	21%
c. By the square feet of exhibit, storage, and office space (skip to question four)	98	22%
d. None of the above:	72	16%

2. If you answered “a” to question one, what is the defining budget size?	Respondents	Percentage
\$25,000 or less	26	11%
\$25,001-\$50,000	25	10%
\$50,001-\$75,000	25	10%
\$75,001-100,000	47	19%
\$100,001-\$150,000	29	12%
\$150,001-\$200,000	21	9%
\$200,001-\$250,000	22	9%
\$250,001-\$350,000	16	7%
\$350,001-\$500,000	34	14%

3. If you answered “b” to question one, what number of staff defines a small museum?	Respondents	Percentage
0-3	112	58%
4-6	58	30%
7-10	15	8%
11 or more	8	4%

4. What other factors define a small museum (choose all that apply)?	Respondents	Percentage
Number of “hats” the director and other staff members wear	352	25%
Volunteers performing key staff functions	294	21%

Sources of funding	245	18%
Number of annual visitors	236	17%
Size of volunteer corps	172	12%
Relationship to other museums in your community	76	5%
None of the above (go to question 4)	17	1%

5. How else would you define a small museum (the results were open-ended and are not included here)?

6. What is the nature of your organization (choose the closest approximation)?	Respondents	Percentage
Art museum	6	1%
Historic house	41	9%
Historic site	40	9%
Historical society (no museum)	11	2%
Historical society (with museum)	123	27%
History museum	91	20%
Natural history museum	3	1%
Other	134	30%

7. How is your organization funded (check all that apply)?		Percentage
City	109	13%
Commercial	36	4%
County	92	11%
Federal	71	8%
Other.	88	11%
Private nonprofit	312	37%
State	128	15%

8. How long have you worked in the museum field?	Respondents	Percentage
0-5 years	115	26%
6-10 years	95	21%
11-15 years	66	15%
16-20 years	66	15%
20+ years	107	24%

9. Are you a paid or non-paid (volunteer) employee of the museum where you work?	Respondents	Percentage
I do not work at a museum	39	9%
Non-Paid, full-time	7	2%
Non-Paid, part-time	65	14%
Paid, full-time	271	60%
Paid, part-time	70	15%

10. What is your job title (choose the closest approximation)?	Respondents	Percentage
Accountant	4	1%
Administrator	52	12%
Building/Grounds Manager	3	1%
Coordinator	31	7%
Curator	77	17%

Development Officer	8	2%
Director	186	41%
Educator	33	7%
Marketing Coordinator	1	0%
Receptionist	3	1%
Registrar	26	6%
Tour Guide	1	0%
Volunteer	24	5%

11. Do you consider the museum where you work a small museum?	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	283	63%
No	111	25%
N/A	55	12%