

WMA 2024 Annual Meeting Evaluation

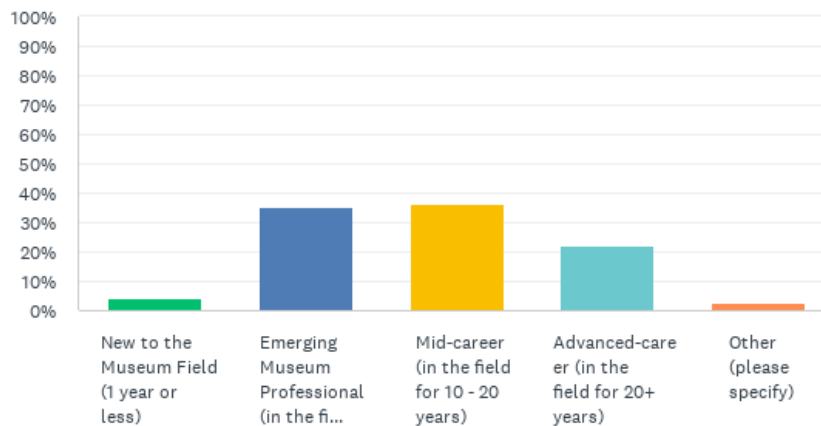
PURPOSE

The Western Museums Association's (WMA) 2024 Annual Meeting was held September 25-28 in Tucson, Arizona . More than 400 museum professionals from across the West and beyond, came together to reconnect, learn from professionals in a variety of sessions, and attend fun networking events. To understand, evaluate, and improve upon the 2024 attendee experience, WMA sent out an Annual Meeting Evaluation. A total of 119 people responded, an increase of over 20 people compared to last year. The results are shared below.

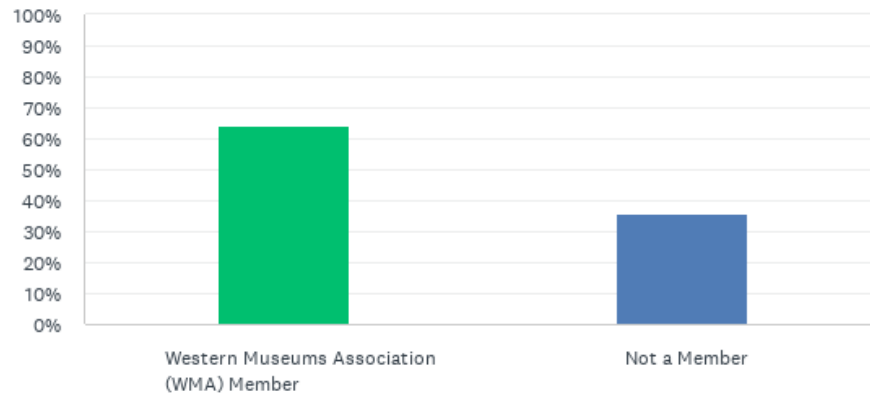
GENERAL QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

To get to know the survey respondents better, WMA first asked a few generalized questions. The first was "At what stage are you in your current career path?" and all 119 people answered. 43 (36%) are Mid-Career Museum Professionals; 42 (35%) are Emerging Museum Professionals; 26 (22%) are Advanced-Career; 5 (4%) are New to the Museum Field; and 3 (2.5%) are something other.

The three individuals who entered "other" shared that they are either a volunteer, intern, or N/A.



The next general question asked if the survey taker was a current member of WMA. Out of 118 respondents, 76 (64%) are a WMA member; 42 (36%) are not a member, and 1 did not answer.



In the third generalized question, we wanted to know where the respondents lived. 114 people responded. 3 respondents reside in Canada, while 110 reside in the US. Of those living in Canada, 2 responded that they live in Ontario and 1 responded that they live in British Columbia. 48 respondents (42%) live in Arizona, with 18 (16%) from the Tucson area and 22 (19%) from the Phoenix area. Of those living in the US, 27 (24%) live in California with 9 (8%) from the Oakland/San Francisco area, 13 (11%) live in Washington with 7 (6%) from the Seattle area, 6 (5%) live in Salt Lake City, Utah, 4 (4%) live in Reno, Nevada, and the rest live somewhere else in the US. We also had 3 attendees from the East Coast; 2 from NY and 1 from PA.

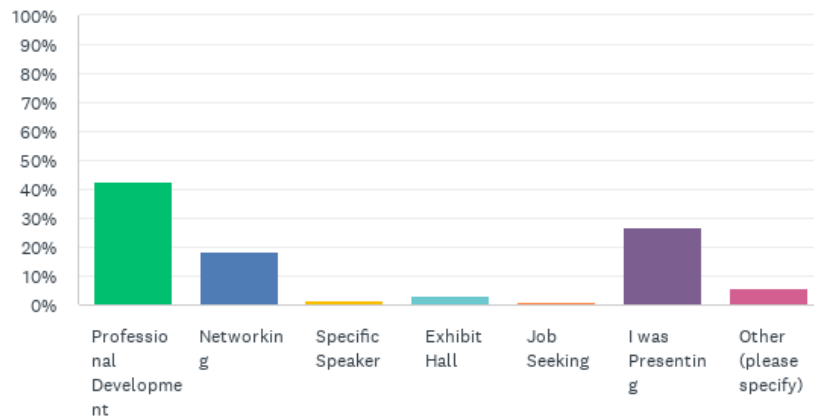
San Francisco CA Los Angeles California San Diego CA us Seattle WA
 AZ Tucson AZ Oakland CA USA California
 Phoenix AZ Arizona United States Salt Lake City Utah

Moving onto more Annual Meeting-specific questions, WMA first asked “What was your primary reason for attending the Western Museums Association 2023 Annual Meeting?” Out of 119 responses, 51 (43%) people stated they primarily attended WMA 2024 for professional development; 22 (18%) for networking; 4 (3%) for the exhibit hall, and 32 (27%) respondents said they attended because they were presenting. Additionally, 2 people attended just to see a specific speaker and 1 for job-seeking purpose. 7 people stated they attended for another reason.

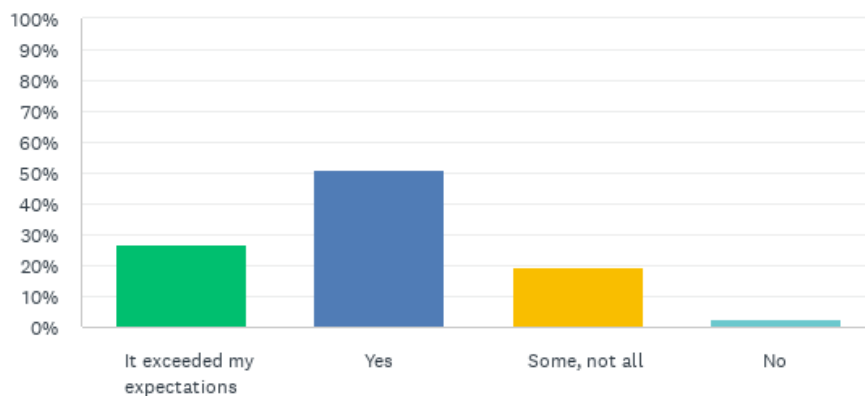
Those that selected “Other” stated the following reason for their attendance:

- Volunteering!*
- Volunteer*
- Member of MAA Board*
- Board of Directors and Presenting*
- On Program Committee*
- Exhibitor for Gaylord Archival*

I was presenting with coworker but was very excited to network & attend panels.



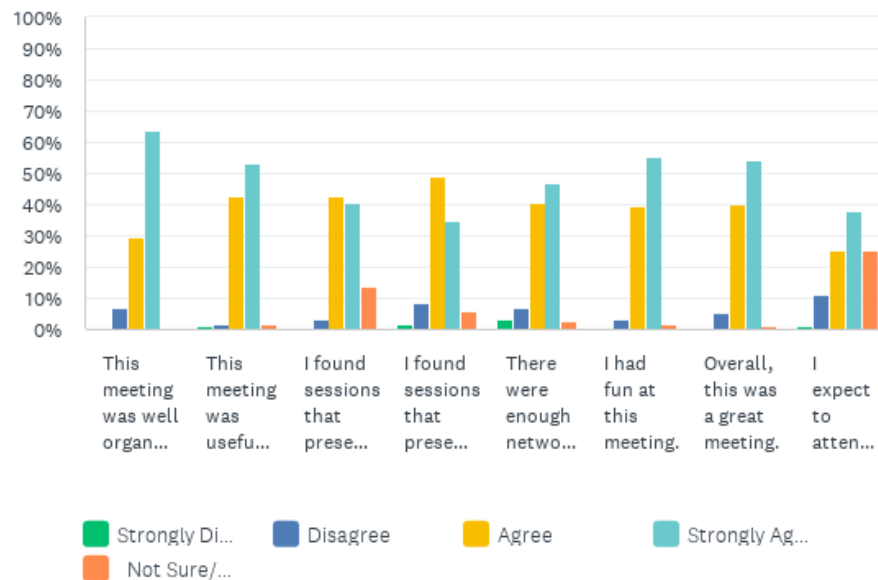
The 5th question asked if the Annual Meeting met their expectations. Out of 119 responses, 61 (51%) said it met their expectations; 32 (27%) said it exceeded their expectations; 23 (20%) said it met some, but not all, of their expectations, and 3 (2.5%) said it did not meet their expectations. This marks a 3% decrease in overall satisfaction from last year's respondents.



The 6th question asked survey respondents if they agree or disagree with the variety of statements seen below.

- 76 (64%) strongly agreed that the meeting was well organized
- 66 (55%) strongly agreed that they had fun
- 64 (54%) strongly agreed this was a great meeting overall
- 63 (53%) strongly agreed that the meeting was useful to them as a professional
- 58 (50%) agreed that the session material was presented at an appropriately advanced level for them
- 55 (47%) strongly agreed that there were enough networking opportunities
- 51 (43%) agreed that the session material was presented at an appropriately introductory level for them

- 45 (38%) strongly agreed that they expect to attend next year



The second part of the survey moved to focus specifically on the Annual Meeting Sessions. A total of 6 questions were asked in this section.

WMA began with questions 7a-e. Question 7a asked “What were the two or three best sessions you attended? What made them great?” A total of 88 attendees responded, 31 skipped. Here are the top sessions of WMA 2024:

These are the sessions attendees found to be the **best session** they attended:

10 attendee votes

Ke Ola Nei: Living Museums and Indigenous Authenticity

9 attendee votes

The Complex Journey of Decolonizing Colonial Institutions

5 attendee votes

Leading in 360 Degrees: Managing Up, Down, and Sideways

Strengths-Based Problem Solving: A Nature Infused Journey

4 attendee votes

Lahaina Restoration Foundation: Response, Recovery, Resilience

Harness the Techniques of Augmented Reality (AR)

These are the sessions attendees found also to be **great**:

8 attendee votes

Is it Your Time for Change?

7 attendee votes

The Complex Journey of Decolonizing Colonial Institutions

5 attendee votes

In Case of Emergency: Future-Proofing your Collections with Emergency Planning

4 attendee votes

These are the sessions attendees found to be **good** as well:

5 attendee votes

The Future of Indigenous Exhibitions in a Post-NAGPRA World

4 attendee votes

Honoring Visitor Contributions: Tools for Analyzing TalkBalk Exhibit Data

3 attendee votes

Creating Responsive Programs: Events Based on Visitor Behavior

Balancing Act: Preservation, Access, and Sustainability

Blaze of Glory: The Healing Flames of the Desert

Next, 7b asked: "What was the least effective or valuable session you attended? What made it less than wonderful? How could it have been made better?" A total of 71 attendees answered, and 48 skipped.

WMA categorized the responses by session title. These were the top 3 **least effective or least valuable sessions** that received 3 or more votes:

1. Keynote Speaker Seema Rao (4)
2. Collections Policy: What is it Good For? (3)
3. Collegial Collaborations Between Collections and Fundraising (3)

Below, are all the individual responses.

I recommend having the roundtables in a separate room from the inspiration stations and poster session. The noise level made it difficult to hear and have conversations.

Corporate Partners session was not useful for larger museums and didn't really talk about ROI which is the biggest issue in corporate fundraising

Disaster Planning - it was also very good, but at a more introductory level. Having known that it was more introductory, I may have chosen another option.

Collegial Collaborations Between Collections and Fundraising - this session could have been greatly improved by providing an in-depth case study of a successful collections grant proposal, wherein the presents explained the major challenges to the process and how they resolved such challenges. I felt that not enough time was spent explaining specifics.

Not a specific session, but there were very few sessions about evaluation and audience research so I had difficulty finding sessions that were applicable to my work

During breaks between sessions, there needs to be more focus on ways to bring attendees into the exhibit hall. The first night was great, for 90 minutes. The second day brought lower traffic into the hall and the third day was an absolute ghost town in the exhibit hall. I shared this information, but it seemed to generally not be enthusiastically received. After speaking with my fellow exhibitors, I can say confidently that this was a universally held opinion.

EXHIBIT HALL NETWORKING LUNCH. I did not feel this was an inviting space. People were hungry and wanted to sit. Everyone was spread out. Ballroom, hallways, session rooms, lobby lounge area... Every space

is different but in future, you could add more seating in/out of ballroom area and high tops. I would also add an ice breaker or prompt on each table.

The Time for Change (Fri, 9am) one was great because it was such an open conversation about the work we do and how people have made transitions. I needed to hear some of that...right message at the right time!

Shipping Art and Artifacts 101, Thursday, 11:15. This session was packed with extremely detailed information, but was specifically for large institutions focusing on international air travel. There was little to no information for smaller institutions that ship domestically, no details about traveling 3D exhibitions (other than international art), and no time for questions.

Opening session; including the awards/business to start the conference was a bit long/dry and less inspirational/motivating than other opening sessions I recall. The keynote was "subversive" in her own words and again not motivating. The last portion was the most thought-provoking/helpful, focusing on being more than your job/that we are more than just museum professionals.

Not sure I felt the Keynote hit the right note, though I understand the sentiment.

STRENGTHS-BASED PROBLEM SOLVING, too many questions too fast, I couldn't keep up. I appreciated the content but there was too little time to reflect on each question.

Sustainable Museum Leadership. It seemed the presenter(s) used it a platform to air their grievances, about their lives, people they needed to work with or now work with

The first session of the first day. Immediately both invited speakers spoke on how they needed to get rid of the white people in their departments to make things function. Both speakers and moderator were very passionate about how white people needed to be either passed over, especially white males. And that whites couldn't understand them because they were colonizers who could not relate to their cultural identities. It was uncomfortable and clearly not a safe space for differing thoughts and opinions.

Putting the NAGPRA Duty of Care Regulations Into Practice. I was disappointed not to hear more about the impacts and processes that the museums and tribes are going through under the new regulation.

I had a mixed experience at "The Complex Journey of Decolonizing Colonial Institutions" at 11am on Friday. The big change at The Confluence was definitely the highlight! The rest of the conversation felt like a repeat of the Burke's sessions from the past two years. I love the work they are doing, and would love to see some fresh angles on it.

CREATING A COLLECTIONS MODEL BASED ON INDIGENOUS NEEDS Sat 10:45a I think it didn't exactly cover what it said it was going to. It was more like a case study of how they are inventorying and moved spaces, and less about the tribal priorities that were unique or things they did differently. They were both very pleasant presenters though.

It's not that the session lacked value or effectiveness—I did learn something new. However, balancing the community's desires with the museum's resources... is that even possible? The 9/27 session at 9:00 am didn't quite meet my expectations. While it covered problem-solving as a staff and using different thought processes to approach challenges, it didn't address balancing the community's expectations.

THE FUTURE OF INDIGENOUS EXHIBITIONS IN A POST-NAGPRA WORLD (Thrs 9/26 1:45pm); Presented misleading/very biased information and opinions that were stated as fact. Focused almost solely on the administrative process to develop and pass the new NAGPRA regulations, as opposed to anything useful about moving forward with them into the future.

The opening meeting on Thursday morning. I think having enough seats to accommodate everyone would have been ideal. I ended up leaving early because I felt bad for folks who were sitting/standing in the back.

WMA Community Lunch. It was way too expensive for a rubber chicken lunch, a not very helpful presentation, and nothing to justify the cost. Also, half the room was seated so they couldn't see the presentation properly.

The Cultural Planning session was probably the least effective. I wish there had been more discussion between the different presenters about how cultural planning and museums could work together - each presentation was interesting, but each section didn't feel fully connected to create a complete picture.

Injustices Righted: Exhibit Development Driven Community Curators (Thursday 11:15-12:30) - Didn't quite address what the description stated

American 250: What does that mean in the West, Friday 2-3:15 pm. The session had good information and solid panelists but I would have liked to see/hear more about the sorts of programs other institutions are doing/planning to help inform an approach for my own institution.

7c asked, "What session formats did you find the most valuable?" There was an even split between those who preferred active, discussion-based learning (15 attendees) and those who preferred passive or presentation-based learning (13 attendees). Most of the written answers suggest that attendees enjoy sessions that start with a presentation and conclude with the opportunity to discuss and ask questions. Some also indicated that they enjoyed the mix of formats offered throughout the annual meeting.

enjoyed Hands activity presenting interactive Active
passive learning better active learning
presenters conversation examples sessions
really formats Q discussion learned
presentations group panels found valuable

Here's what attendees had to say about the session formats:

There was value to all; I went to a combination of active learning, passive learning, and conversation formats. The conversation format allowed folks to participate and listen openly. The active learning was engaging and changed it up from the normal "passive learning" style typical of conference sessions. Moreso, I appreciated that there was a variety of formats.

Presentation of a case study followed by a group discussion or activity. Ones that I found most interesting were the ones where the group activity involved using the thinking framework presented in the case study or example, most effective sessions had activities that were not just question-and-discussion

I liked the interactive one that asked you questions and had you chatting with your neighbor.

I liked those that presented helpful info and allowed connection to peers in audience.

Active learning was most valuable to me

Passive Learning, I just want to hear about case studies and gain examples. Making small talk with whoever your sitting by is usually not helpful. And the conversation or active learning sessions feel like a cop out for the presenters since they often aren't really presenting.

All the sessions were well formatted.

I felt that a mix of passive learning and conversation was the most valuable. This way, we got to hear from the presenters and then discuss with others.

Almost all of the sessions involved breakouts into small groups for discussion, and that helped keep the energy up, and it also helped with networking.

exchange between participants, rather than all the panelists providing examples

I really enjoyed sessions with activities and/or that got people moving around

didn't really have a preference, topic dependent

Active learning was fun and it was great to see the exhibit later in the evening of the activity we did.

Interactive sessions are the best. I enjoy hearing other peoples perspectives and sharing our experiences.

I went to sessions of every kind (passive, active, and conversation) and found the format appropriate for the subject matter. That said, I did appreciate active learning slightly more (just because passive learning is usually the most common format with presentations)

I know people love interactive sessions, but I tend to avoid those. I enjoy sessions where a portion is dedicated to the presentation and the rest of the time is for Q/A.

I like the combination of presentation and guided discussion. The format for "Leading in 360 Degrees" worked really well.

Roundtable discussions and workshops

Those that combined a panel and a group exercise.

I appreciate passive learning formats.

Interactive discussions

Question 7d asked the survey takers to share any additional feedback about the sessions they attended. 39 of the 119 respondents (33%) wrote in their thoughts, and this is what they had to say.

It would be great to have session materials shared electronically (ex. handouts, ppts)

Some of the active learning sessions were very loud and they drowned out the speakers in the adjacent rooms.

Without mics, it was often hard to hear in the back of the room especially as several speakers spoke very quietly. Asking them to speak louder didn't work.

The political ideologies need to be left at home. Moderators should be neutral parties who help to facilitate helpful and inventive discussions on all topics related to museum work.

love sessions that had handouts/ example forms to take with us

I feel like 2023 had stronger sessions personally. This year had a lot more case studies where the message was harder to apply to other organizations.

I really enjoyed seeing the diversity among the presenters, not just demographically but also in their museum careers—ranging from directors to students assisting with the study.

The best session I attended had an excellent moderator who directed the conversation. I think more sessions could have used a moderator to guide the topic at hand.

I would like to see a broader range of presentations and presenters and a greater emphasis on inclusion of smaller institutions and younger professionals. Right now, WMA feels more exclusive than it seems like it should.

I appreciated the empowerment activities in the morning

Session were diverse in content and format but well delivered.

Poster and roundtables should be last session of the day. "SO YOU WANT TO DO A STUDY..." was only attended by 13 people. It was one of my favorite sessions and believe it would be useful to a majority of attendees.

I was really blown away by how many valuable sessions were offered at this conference. I'm happy I attended so thank you for how much hard work undoubtedly went into putting this together.

I wanted to attend a few sessions that were full. I wonder if people could "pre-register" for sessions just so the room size could be selected for sessions that are popular

I really appreciate the range of people presenting from different locations and areas of expertise!

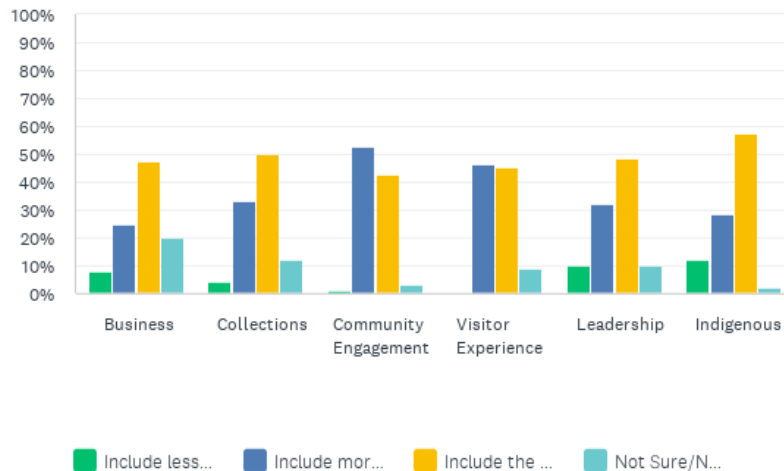
Overall I felt each session that I attended had great topics. I walked away with key ideas to bring back to my institution.

too many activities had additional fees, and none were justified.

They were just stellar across the board. Kudos to all!

I adored the inclusion of outdoors, nature-based sessions. I was only able to make one of them and wish I could have joined more.

Question 7e asked, "As WMA prepares for 2025, how should we structure the new program compared to this year's program?" A total of 94 survey respondents answered. To highlight the responses, 48% want the program to include **the same amount** of **Business** content; 50% want it to include **the same amount** of **Collections** content; 53% want the program to include **more Community Engagement** content; 46% want it to include **more Visitor Experience** content; 48% want it to include **the same amount** of **Leadership** content; and finally, 58% want it to include **the same amount** of **Indigenous** content.



Some attendees shared their thoughts:

Marketing and advertising strategies

Evaluation, audience research, market research, and strategic plan implementation

Would have liked to see more sessions about engaging with children in museums, effective tour ideas, small museum panel/panelists, more archival sessions.

Design, fabrication, collections management, mount making, project management, art handling, interactive design, experience development, preparation and exhibit production, were all grossly underrepresented. I didn't feel like I was at a conference with museum workers I related to or had much in common with.

I would love to see more sessions on the following: -Museums and unions ("museum work is work," SFMOMA has one of the oldest unions in museums and staff created a toolkit for how to unionize) -Poor pay equity in the field and how it can be addressed -How museums can be drivers of change in the climate crisis (more from an education, community engagement view, less from a sustainable architecture/building view). -Can museums stop taking money from oil companies/how do museums respond to activism in the galleries?

I'd like to see more best practices tips or mini "back to school" sessions that help keep our skills sharp, and less case studies. It would be nice if some of these sessions were integrated into the whole conference and not just represented in pre-conference workshops.

My only critical feedback is that as the only presenter hosting a session focused on LGBTQ+ content, I felt that being placed in the evening event with an additional charge was slightly limiting. If an equity-deserving group is represented by only one session, I would prefer to see that session included in daytime programming to ensure participants who are paying for only the 'basic' itinerary can still access this. (However, the evening session was also lots of fun!)

Sessions with practical tools and takeaways.

Museum education, particularly ones focused on supporting the educators. I would also like to see more content related to authenticity at workplace/what does that mean for museum professionals?

I would like to see a broader emphasis on ethnic or minority groups generally. I would also like to see more participation from smaller institutions and emerging professionals. I would encourage a larger program with more sessions to give more people the opportunity to engage with this opportunity.

Maybe I missed them in the program, Capital projects, fundraising, facility management. Perhaps these are beyond the mission of Strengthening museums to serve diverse communities.

healing/safe space like the time for change session. A lot of individuals don't think they're facing the same struggles as others so possibly a space that one can go to reach out for guidance.

Issues affecting Executive Directors especially as related to maintaining financial sustainability

program was well-balanced topic-wise.

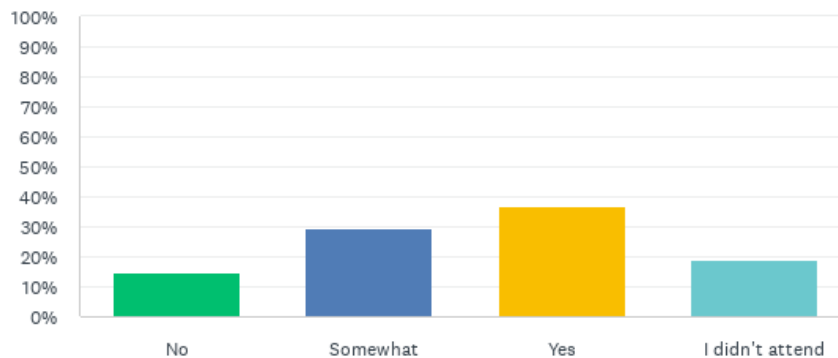
It would have been nice to have more funding/development related sessions.

exhibitions (from the preparator's, collections', and education's points of view), volunteer engagement, programming, website and marketing, and how to incorporate the gift shop to more fully support the mission

Exhibits: Processes for design, fabrication, Interpretive Plan vs Exhibit Plan.

Evening Event Busses: If 2 buses are used for the evening event, at the end of the evening, one bus should be allowed to load up earlier than 15 minutes before the second bus. People wanted to go home earlier that Jason allowed and wasn't flexible on the time. His lecture to the volunteers was that our mission was to make all of the attendees happy to make it a successful conference. I don't think it's a success when people get tired of waiting to be allowed on to the bus and decide to take an Uber or Lyft back to the resort.

Next, Question #8 asked the survey takers if they found the 2024 Opening General Session & Keynote speaker Seema Rao, to be valuable or not.” A total of 95 people responded – 35 (37%) voted “Yes;” 28 (30%) voted “Somewhat”; 18 (19%) did not attend; and 14 (15%) voted “No.”



Some people elaborated further on why they found the Opening General Session and keynote to be valuable or not.

Seema's talk was polarizing - and everyone talked about it throughout the conference - but it left me feeling a bit negative as I started the conference.

I really needed to hear that keynote!

While I appreciate the sentiment of self-care and preservation as the overall message of the keynote speaker, I didn't find that the particular way of getting at that message was engaging; rather, it was a little disheartening (though I'm sure this wasn't their intent), and not exactly the inspiring kick-off I'd hope for to a conference that was otherwise great. I don't have suggestions for specific keynote speakers, but I think

someone who is able to engage the audience, celebrate our unity and shared (yet diverse!) work, while still honestly acknowledging the difficulty/struggles in our line of work, would be appreciated.

Something more inspiring, even if being honest and supportive.

frankly, I think a lot of what was said, though valuable, is practically useful only for upper-leadership and more well established professionals. I think content that takes into consideration power differentials within museums would be great.

It was a strange way to open the conference. I appreciated her sentiments and her advice is useful for people early in their careers (which isn't me).

Rao's core message of self-care was sound, but that message was blurred between scattershot anecdotes; namedropping, questionable equivalencies to frontlines health care workers, and assertions that the nebulous Likes and Follows of the digital ether somehow love us more than museum objects. In the future, I'd like to see a speaker just as well-intentioned, but with a stronger focus on inspiration than mercenary wisdom; drawing on their impressive experience in the museum field to offer substance and supportive pragmatism over defeatist alternatives and metadata self-deceptions post-pivot.

I thought her message was very relevant both to the theme of the conference as well as to the Museum Industry as a whole. I wish someone would have said this to me when I first began my career.

I loved Seema's take. It was a really great talk for someone just coming into the museum world. After only working for a museum for a year and a half, I can already see that I wrap myself up in what the museum is and lose sight of myself sometimes. It is so important that we pursue ourselves as much as we pursue the well being of our museums.

I didn't agree with much of what she said - or perhaps it was more how she 'packaged' it - however I found her perspective interesting and valuable to hear.

Honestly and respectfully, I was confused by the Keynote speaker choice. Ms. Rao was inspiring for sure, but also, she made me think about my career in a not so inspiring way. :-

Being a mid-career professional, I completely understood where she was coming from and she voiced a lot of hard lessons that I have learned first-hand and wish were spoken about more openly in our field. Museums do not love us. We can find joy in our work but at the end of the day it is a job and we do not have to kill ourselves for it to work.

Not the same old folks... Seema really doesn't add much to push discussions into new directions. Look outside the field. We are in the West! Why not Deb Haaland? Why not cutting edge tech folks? We need folks who will push us to think, reflect, feel and feel inspired--amped up to make a difference or try something new or consider something from a new angle.

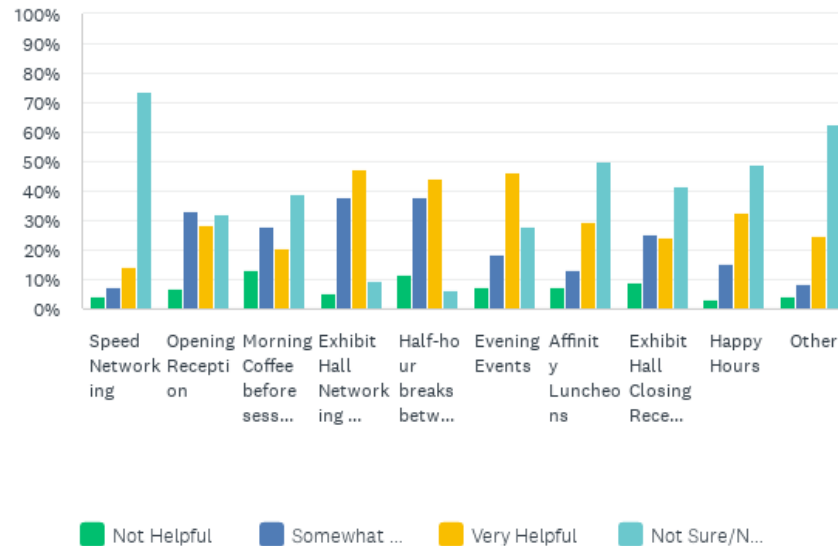
Now, the survey enters the third section focusing on **Networking and the Exhibit Hall**.

First up, WMA wanted to gauge just how much the various WMA 2024 networking opportunities facilitated networking for each attendee. Of the 119 survey takers, 93 answered and 26 skipped.

The top 3 opportunities that were very *helpful* in facilitating networking were the Exhibit Hall Networking and Refreshment Breaks (47%); and the Evening Events (46%) and half-hour breaks between sessions (44%). The bottom 3 opportunities that were *not helpful* in facilitating

networking were the Morning Coffee before sessions (13%); Exhibit Hall Closing Reception (9%) and Affinity Luncheons (8%).

Additionally, 33% said the Opening Reception was *somewhat helpful*. 74% of respondents did not attend speed networking.



Here are a few comments from each networking opportunity:

Half-Hour Breaks Between Sessions

great to catch up with familiar faces

Longer breaks would be appreciated

I would have like some longer breaks between sessions, which would have built in time to visit more museums in the area

Allowed time for conversations between sessions

didn't network in these breaks, but needed them for down time

this allows me to use the facilities, refill my water bottle, and find the next room without being late

Exhibit Hall Networking & Refreshment Breaks

more food would be great

Not enough access to exhibit hall, lack of food was a big one (many people rely on that coffee session for getting through the day food wise)

Loved having the breaks in the exhibit hall + the silent auction

It's good to meet the vendors. The "refreshments" were unimpressive

I find these more of a personal rest moment not a networking time

I felt it was hard to network during these breaks as I really needed time to use the restroom, retreat and review what I heard in previous sessions. I think it would have been cool to offer a meditation room during these breaks for those of us who felt overstimulated and just needed a break from chatting! It would have fit with the overall theme of balance as well! Not sure how you could incorporate that in next year's theme, but I felt so exhausted and needed a chance away from networking during these breaks.

Not nearly enough refreshments, and not always inside of the hall itself.

I liked the Exhibit Hall and met some great people networking inside.

I am noticing lots of museum people stay with people they already know and struggle at mingling.

Evening Events

food options were way too limited and lighting was tough for the ticket price. Limited vegetarian options

Incredibly expensive

Food at evening events was not reliable for anyone with dietary concerns

somewhat cost prohibitive, couldn't attend all of them

Did two events; Tohono Chul - enjoyed, very low key, Presidio Museum - enjoyed a lot, docent led tours were informative and warm.

Events were expensive, and again, food was disappointing from what I heard from others

Evening events were too expensive for me, generally.

Loved all the evening events I attended

But too expansive

Best informal conversations and connections made here.

Nice, but they got a little pricey

Happy Hours

I made a few connections here at Business Card Bingo.

These were the best at getting people out of their shells and mingling.

\$15 for one drink? no, thank you

I wish I could do all of the happy hour breakouts

Affinity Luncheons

Director luncheon. Enjoyed Jennifer Ortiz.

We had time for introductions, but then we were listening to the speaker for the majority of it.

Wasn't able to attend

Too expensive.

affinity luncheons could have been better quality for amount paid per ticket. Would've liked to network with others as we all stayed to our own tables.

too expensive

This is selective networking, but yet another \$67 (\$35 for the registrar one)

This is where I did most of my networking!

Opening Reception

I was hoping for more time for Wanda Chin Awardees to introduce themselves and get to know each other.

This was very nice.

I would have preferred a paid bar with food present.

The vendors were the most helpful part

I thought it would be a little more of a reception not in the vendor hall.

Exhibit Hall Closing Reception

Enjoyed silent auction.

You need this to announce the winners of the silent auction

basically nonexistent, the entire final day of the exhibit hall was very poorly attended. There was nothing to draw attendees into the hall.

Morning Coffee Before Sessions

Weren't long enough, didn't have enough time to participate really

Not in exhibit hall

ESSENTIAL

Having one draw might have increased attendance and people staying in the space instead of grabbing a cup and going. IE a small presentation like the poster sessions for each day.

coffee outside of the exhibit hall made no sense

too early for me and it would have been lovely if there were very light snacks provided for morning coffee

Speed Networking

High stress, organization was a bit hectic

This was my second year attending this. I think that a format really needs to be established as both years it has kinda been messy and unorganized.

This was a great way to quickly meet a lot of new people, though it seemed to be 'vendor'-heavy.

Needed a little more proctoring to keep participants in the time frames set, or longer time frames much like speed dating, this barely gets anything productive accomplished

Love this, can be over stimulating

Other

I was surprised at the lack of food. Maybe make that clear in your program.

The morning activities were fabulous and allowed for casual interaction and physical activity.

Field Trips are great

Leadership reception was a good place to network - I appreciated the Board Members and Program Committee folks who talked with us and took initiative to engage.

the timing/spacing was great - other than the fact that there were always more sessions happening at once than I could attend!

Facilitating networking. I made many introductions between attendees.

Pre-conference events like CSI: Registrars

The days were very long if you attended morning activities and evening events. Less is more :-) Also, 67 dollars for a luncheon, each day, is a lot of money

Question 10 asked the survey takers to let WMA know if/how the Exhibit Hall served their interests during the Annual Meeting. 49 answered, and 70 skipped.

8 people simply answered yes. These were some of the key responses/critiques.

It was nice talking to the exhibitors and having a place to rest and catch up with people.

good place to go for networking and taking a break

It was great to meet some vendors, but most of these we already had relationships with (like U.S. Art, Gaylord, and Hollinger). However, would still like to see these types of vendors at future conferences because they can be valuable to smaller / unique institutions.

Would have liked to see more traveling exhibit vendors. Not enough time. Too far of a walk to exhibit hall.

It did. Would love to see the posters/activities dispersed throughout the hall for the entire event

I was able to connect with several vendors that will help me in the near future.

The vendors were great, but the energy in the Exhibit Hall was low.

Not particularly. It seemed sparsely filled and there were several times when vendors were absent from their booths. It was a place to sit down though.

I visited with several exhibitors. They are always professional and helpful.

It was spacious and made a great home base post-session

Great mix of options to explore

Few vendors were applicable to my role but I enjoyed seeing new products

At this point in my career, none of the exhibit hall vendors were of value to me/my institution

not many vendors; vendors present didn't relate to current projects

I was able to connect with different vendor who could be helpful for future projects.

I wish the exhibit hall was open longer.

The Exhibit Hall was great and was a good space for meeting and networking.

It was great. I know how challenging it is to get vendors. I felt like some left after the first day.

This was a nice size group, there seemed to be a little bit of everything.

The exhibit hall was great check-in and meet-up place

The vendors were all wonderful and it was a great opportunity to do more networking while connecting with resources.

Yes. Plenty of time was allowed to speak individually with exhibit design/build firms.

Honestly my favorite part of the Exhibit Hall was the silent auction and connecting to other attendees. I'd be interested to see more exhibitors representing traveling exhibitions.

For exhibitors, the lack of attention to the Exhibit Hall was disappointing.

Nice area for mingling, snacks are always appreciated.

It did serve my interest, I thought there was a good mixture included in the hall.

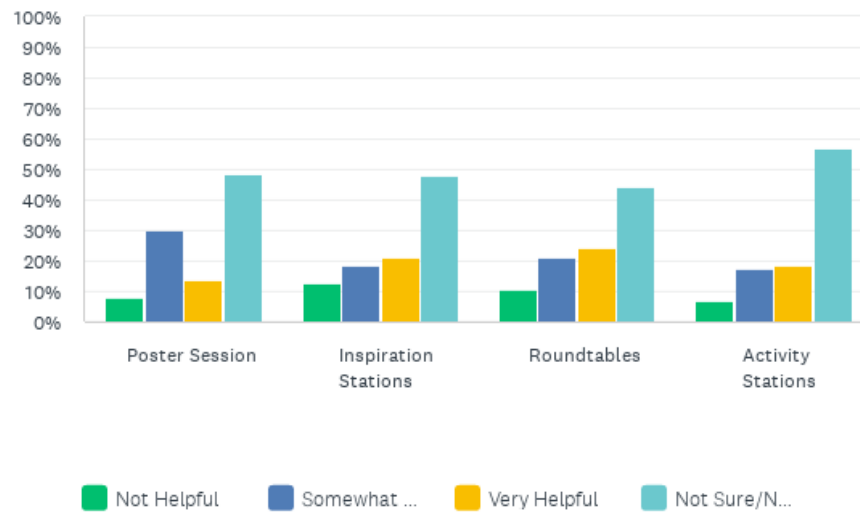
I enjoyed meeting the vendors

Up next, the survey asked if people attended the Special Screening of *Voices of Vail* documentary. If so, how did they find it valuable? Of the 52 people who answered, only 1 attended; they said “Yes, it was very good and provided an insightful way to share oral histories.” For those who did not attend, most cited the conflicting evening event as their reason for missing the screening.

The fourth portion of the survey focused specifically on the Sunday Afternoon Exhibit Hall Activities (Poster Session, Inspiration Stations, Roundtables, and Activity Stations).

The question asked how much the Poster Session, Inspiration Stations, Roundtables, and Activity Stations facilitated networking. 87 answered, and 32 skipped.

Overall, 21 (24%) attendees found the Roundtables to be the *most helpful*, while 18 (21%) found the Inspiration Stations to be *most helpful*. 26 (30%) attendees found the Poster Session *somewhat helpful*. Attendees found the Activity Stations to be both *mostly helpful* (16, 19%) and *somewhat helpful* (15, 17%).



Here's what people had to say about...

Roundtables

It was hard to hear what was being said, difficult to have conversations.

would've enjoyed more attendance or ability for people to see who & what the roundtable discussions were.

I participated in one roundtable. It was a little slow- maybe 4 or 5 people total

This provided the most opportunity for discussion.

Please give roundtable hosts more information about the format! Many expected a much more structured experience, and were over-prepared

I really struggles with noise and distractions here. I would have liked to have roundtables in different rooms.

I was hosted a roundtable and was able to make some good connections. My only issue was that it was hard to hear due to the level of noise in the room.

I saw many people spend the whole time at a roundtable, while I felt I gained the most by visiting multiple stations.

Poster Sessions

Recommend not doing all of these things in one room, hard to engage.

Visited several stations, variety of topics.

Fantastic

There were too few posters

I found these charming but not super helpful

Activity Stations

Too crowded of a space to engage, can't hear anyone

Other than roundtables; there was no differentiation between poster, inspiration and activity.

these would have been better in a different room or at a different time

fun!

Really great idea. Would be improved by spreading it out over greater area in order to reduce the overall noise level. Some attendees and presenters with faint voices were hard to hear even while sitting or standing near to them.

Inspiration Stations

a great reminder that creativity and curiosity are core to what we do

Too crowded of a space to engage, can't hear anyone

Just hard to talk with people, very loud in the room

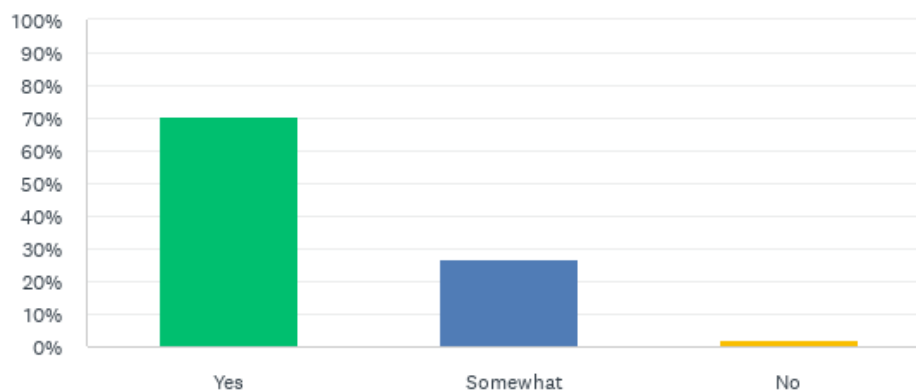
Has some great conversations with folks

Valuable

These would have been better in a different room or at a different time

The final section of the Annual Meeting survey, "You get the last word..." went back to asking more generalized questions.

First up, WMA asked if attendees felt like the 2024 Annual Meeting was diverse and inclusive. A total of 85 people answered, and 34 skipped. The results revealed that 60 (71%) thought "yes" 23 (27%) thought "somewhat" and 2 (2%) thought "no."



Of the 85 people who answered, some commented:

Yes, in every way. Thank you!

I think we had good representation but can always be working to improve inclusion. The hotel and registration were very expensive, which is a barrier.

My apologies for the repetition! I enjoyed seeing the diversity among the presenters, not just demographically but also in their museum careers—ranging from directors to students assisting with the study.

There is good representation of Indigenous communities but it seemed thin for African American, Hispanic, and/or Asian communities.

I liked the diversity of presenters and sessions. I feel like there were some accessibility issues with the venue. It required a lot of walking, sessions were hard to hear without mics, stairs in several gathering spaces, etc. The venue itself was pretty inaccessible for those having to stay off site as well.

I emailed the hotel prior to attending to ask if there would be a space available for pumping (lactation) and did not receive a response. This is not on WMA, but having WMA handle this aspect could be useful in the future. Making nursing parents feel comfortable and welcome would be valuable, particularly since the museum field includes so many women/parents who may be nursing.

Not enough POCs in attendance

There was a fantastic range of voices presenting about a broad scope of topics, and highlighting cultural achievements on both large and small scale. Without speaking for them, I felt there was something for everyone.

Offering an LGBTQ+ oriented session during the Thursday evening on site event was a nice touch. Conference attendees seemed to be a diverse group in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity.

A lot of diversity among types of museums as well as individuals.

A variety of panels focusing on BIPOC, disabilities, and other similar topics.

There's always room for improvement in our fields but yes, overall it seemed diverse and inclusive. Since you have an Indigenous focused track of sessions, a networking or HH for Indigenous museum practitioners might be nice. That can mean either "I am Indigenous and I work in a museum" or "I am not Indigenous but I work in an Indigenous museum." Also I think the costs for all the extras (HHs, lunches, evening events, etc.)

really add up quickly for young museum professionals /those without robust personal budgets -- prohibitively so. It would be nice if at least some of those could have been offered for free, and probably would boost attendance as well.

It was divisive in that there were too many add-on's for too much extra money

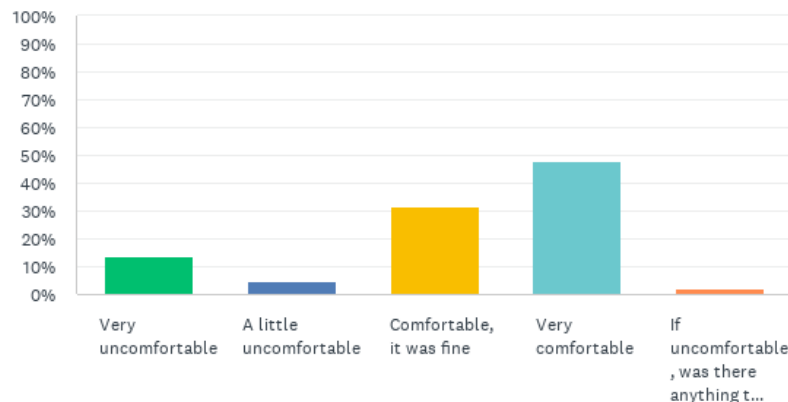
Wide variety of sessions and presenters.

as an old white guy, I am the wrong one to ask, but yes, it felt wonderfully diverse and inclusive without being heavy handed or performative.

As an indigenous person, I felt seen, felt like there were many sessions that touched on the subject, I feel like there could have been more DEAI specific sessions. I appreciated the Tribal welcome.

There was a concerted effort to include sessions for underrepresented groups.

Next, we wanted to know how comfortable people were attending an in-person conference, post-COVID-19 pandemic. With 88 responses, 42 (48%) were **very comfortable**; 28 (32%) were **comfortable**; 12 (14%) were **very uncomfortable**; and 4 (5%) were **a little uncomfortable**. This is a marked increase in comfortability from last year.



To help WMA design stronger future Annual Meetings, we asked “What is one thing the Annual Meeting organizers could have done to make your experience better?” Common threads included more robust food options at both free and paid events; the hotel location was isolating, didn’t allow for many food and activity options; more affordable Evening Events; better directional signage around the hotel; and more seating/space for session rooms.

Here are some of the selected comments:

more food instead of alcohol at evening events. outdoor events need more lighting

I have to say that the organizers did an excellent job - this was the best conference I've been to in years.

Everything from the amount of time each session took, to the (beautiful) location, to the session options given, to the breaks between all felt carefully planned and much appreciated.

Having the conference at a resort away from places to walk or see what not ideal. I felt a little trapped and there wasn't good food choices, or enough variety that I could afford. I ate a lot of snack bars to help cover meals as my per diem is not high enough to cover the costs at the restaurants. It is also nice to be able to walk around and see things, go to stores, etc. I wouldn't recommend a resort type setting again.

More directional signage might have been helpful with how widespread some of the sessions/events were.

more networking opportunities

Overall experience was wonderful and welcoming. I personally would have liked a shorter 'intro' plenary and then maybe another 2nd plenary?

Better food for gluten free - I had a hard time with the options.

There were some communication gaps around evening event transportation, pre-conference event details, etc.

It would be great if there were more substantial food options during breaks beyond just coffee.

Sufficient food during the exhibition hall luncheon - it ran out before I got there.

So many of the networking sessions were paid events and not all attendees have the budget to sign up for so many paid events.

Larger meeting rooms for sessions - the popular sessions were uncomfortably crowded, and not accessible for people with diverse body sizes

Providing food would have been nice. The hotel didn't have a lot of quick and cheap options, and it was hard to get around without a car at this location.

Invest in more food. The hotel was nice, but WMA needs to provide adequate food, especially if charging \$67+ for ticketed events. As a manager, I will need to figure out how to reimburse staff at a higher rate since they needed to purchase meals on top of events--this costs our org more overall.

Conference was incredibly comfortable; great venue--kudos!

It was disappointing how expensive the happy hours and events were. The paywall really effected my decisions in what I attended.

Not have it on a Saturday! Bring costs down (find more sponsors!)

Develop a much stronger track of programs on fundraising, grant writing, development, planned giving, obtaining sponsorships.

I would have liked to go to more museums. We weren't able to arrive until Wednesday evening and missed our opportunity to go to local museums. It would be great if the sessions took place in museums so we can interact with the art.

Having stated that WMA's Programs Committee worked hard to present a different, out-of-the-box conference for WMA 2024, we wanted to know if anyone noticed a difference in this year's conference. Out of the 56 who responded, 21 (38%) stated that this was their first-time attending a WMA conference, so they had no previous model to compare this year to. 3 (5%) attendees stated that they did not notice a difference in this year's conference.

With that in mind, here are some of the other responses:

Fabulous energy. The most effective in-person museums gathering I have attended since COVID by far. Evening events were unique, impactful and memorable.

Yes! Much more discussion and openness to realigning our personal and professional priorities. Not killing ourselves in service to a museum

Yes. The choice of having the conference at a resort made it feel very exclusionary. My institution would not have approved a stay at the resort, and I certainly cannot afford it myself (historically underpaid museum worker after all). It was very difficult to eat lunch in-between sessions due to having to drive, when the conference is in a downtown area this is much easier as one can walk to multiple options. I also felt I could not attend the reception I was invited to because that meant the coworker I attended with would have waited around the resort for hours or driven back and forth to accommodate my attendance.

great variety of programs, really nice to have a swimming pool at the venue

YES! I loved it! Much more relaxed!

appreciated the Indigenous and Native Hawaiian presenters and being able to follow a track for Indigenous museum perspectives

All the sessions I attended were engaging and included group discussions and activities.

This conference had both a broad professional appeal and also a very relaxing vibe. I think the theme of Balance was achieved beautifully.

Yes, I loved the focus on Balance - from a variety of perspectives.

Yes - I thought the venue choice was a great fit for the theme

Yes, I appreciated the focus on the individual, empowerment, mindfulness

The location provided a different back drop than several of the previous conferences. I appreciated the change. It was hot.

I really liked all the outdoor sessions (even in the heat) and appreciated that conference made good use of the location

Enjoyed the emphasis on Indigenous cultures

I did notice a difference! I like the idea of being at a special, resort location, but was frustrated with the shortage of rooms and inability to walk from other hotels that was possible at past locations.

The only other WMA conference I went to was Boise a few years back. I was disappointed in the program offerings and not comfortable with the networking opportunities. I was new to WMA and had trouble "breaking in". This conference was much more comfortable. People seemed more open and friendly--much better vibe.

I appreciate the out of the box conference and found it beneficial.

Yes, the combo of outdoor and indoor experiences was great, and I especially loved the outdoor sessions and activities. Plus the location was STUNNING.

The focus on mindfulness and balance was amazing. I loved those sessions!

As WMA begins to plan for the 2025 Annual Meeting in Reno, NV, WMA wanted to know if there was anything our Program Committee and other organizers should take into consideration during the planning process.” Common themes found within the responses focused on making the hotel/activity/food options more affordable; changing the conference location to offer more amenities; more group outings to museums; and continuing the “kid zone” for attendees with children.

Here are a few more of the responses:

Keep pushing the envelope on interesting ways to engage with content and one another.

My junior staff struggled to find affordable lunch and dinner options. Not sure how the conference can improve on this but wanted to mention it

Please please include preparators, installers, fabricators, conservators, mount makers, art handlers, technical specialists, etc. I feel like a lot of the museum organizations are maybe a little elitist/classist and “blue collar” technical and physical museum workers are not represented. There is also a big emphasis on art and culture themed museums, and not a lot of natural history or science museums represented in the offerings. Maybe include meet ups for these groups so they can find each other?

Invitations to participate go a long way in helping justify attendance/travel. Reno-Sparks Indian Colony - hope you're engaging with them & vice-versa! Also, since WMA seems to have a strong Indigenous focus, you might consider inviting Native artists/vendors (at little to no cost) to come set up a 'marketplace' to sell their items to conference attendees.

While I did not bring my child with me, it was impactful that space was made for children at this conference. Highlighting this as an available benefit would be a good idea for Reno.

More affordable hotel options would be appreciated. I couldn't afford this year's conference hotel (even with the discount code) and stayed at another accommodation.

location and nearby amenities is everything

Conference site. While the resort was very nice and comfortable, the distance between the conference site and the rest of the city made it difficult to go offsite for meals, breaks, and visiting museums in Tucson.

My one complaint this year was that the venue was far away from most of the museums in the Tucson area. This made it difficult to visit as many as I would have liked to.

Work to broaden participation maybe by facilitating smaller organizations, lowering the cost of attendance, providing further scholarship opportunities.

Seems like it will be a very walkable conference. I like this but a certain faction of the conference goers might require accommodations.

It will be interesting to see if holding evening events that are all within walking distance of the conference will enable more conference attendees to participate and at a lower cost.

Give opportunities to explore Reno in the daylight!

Every city has unique opportunities, so take advantage of what the city has to offer

Please take consideration of dietary restrictions when offering lunch/snacks. Unfortunately, the first day's lunch was a big disappointment. It seems there was not enough food total, but there was no gluten free option and very little vegetarian/vegan options. I would recommend surveying attendees beforehand to get a sense of dietary needs.

More affordable hotel rates and locations with more food options.

Choose a better venue. More accessible, more (cheaper) dining options, closer to cheaper hotel options,

If you have a part of the program in a different building from where the majority of the programs are, a more visible trail of signs is important. Waves of participants walked to the ballroom area when they should have headed to Kiva A, delaying the seating/start of the opening remarks.

Always time for breaks and rest.

You are doing a fantastic job! Keep it up!

Keep this format!

Fewer expensive evening events - reduce costs somehow. Perhaps have only one higher cost night event?

After asking for feedback on specific aspects of the conference, WMA invited attendees to write comments we might use for social media. Those responses are:

The WMA 2024 conference was, as expected, a wonderful convening of welcoming and caring people who happen to be connected to museums in some way. I learned a lot about myself and how I approach my work and ways to engage in self-care so I can continue to enjoy it.

As this was my first conference, I was impressed and inspired to take what I've learned and implement it in my programming. I'm eager to discover more meaningful ways to connect with my community, understanding that building rapport will take time.

As a first-time attendee I felt welcomed and included by the WMA team and my fellow attendees. Lots of great information, conversations, activities, and people. Thank you for making this a warm and FUN space to engage and learn!

The WMA conference in Tucson was a terrific professional training and development opportunity for our museum's staff. I am so happy that we could send the entire staff to this well-organized meeting.

Learning, engaging, networking and building museum community in a beautiful setting! What could be better!

WMA 2024 had a broad professional appeal and a very relaxing vibe. The theme of Balance was manifested beautifully.

This was a lively and impactful gathering of like-minded professionals. Each session was well thought out, and the organizers made the most of an exceptional location to deliver a gathering that was both productive and restorative.

It was so good to reconnect with my friends and colleagues, catch up, and learn what they're doing. I'm inspired!

For the final question, we wanted to know what other museum conferences our attendees attend, other than WMA’s Annual Meetings. Out of 64 answers, 45 (70%) attend State Association conferences; 28 (44%) attend the American Alliance of Museums conference; 28 (44%) attend discipline-specific association conferences; 26 (41%) attend the National Association conference; and 12 (19%) attend Region association conferences.

More specifically, the top 3 conferences people also attend include CAM, AAM, and AASLH. Others mentioned ARCS, ATALM, and ASTC.

