



# AMERICAN ART MUSEUMS INVEST IN EVERY VISITOR. THEIR MOST IMPORTANT DECISION MAY BE HOW TO INVEST THAT MONEY.

Attention paid to rising admission fees at many American art museums may create the impression that admission fees cover the cost of the visit. But no matter how high the admission fee, that is not the case.

<b>INVESTMENT</b>	<b>\$101</b> Average	<b>\$82</b> Median
	<b>PER VISITOR</b>	

A Remuseum database on 153 major American art museums confirms the need for more data while also grounding a new analysis of museum operations in one measure of museum effectiveness: how much the museum spends on each visitor.

Since the public at the center of the museum's mission, the point of this focus is not for museums to invest less in the public, but to help each museum choose the best ways to maximize both the quantity and quality of museum visits.

## ACCESS

# FREE ADMISSION

attracts more visitors without increasing costs.

A focus on cost per visitor helps museums get smarter about fulfilling a visitor-centered mission, and may undercut some common assumptions along the way: If you think that charging for admission will generally lower the cost per visitor, think again. Offering free general admission does not appear to increase costs per visitor; it may, in fact, lower the cost per visitor by increasing the number of visitors the museum can attract.

It does leave unanswered questions about how to replace admission and membership revenue, but it might inspire donors interested in supporting organizations that maximize their efficiency and public impact.

## SCALE

# BIGGER ~~≠~~ BETTER

at serving the public

Museums keep growing: growing their buildings, their collections, and their expenses. While some industries illustrate economies of scale (growing more efficient in serving their mission as they grow larger), museums do not. Costs per visitor increase (and increase substantially) as museum expenses grow larger.

These diseconomies of scale don't mean that museums should never grow, but they do mean that that bigger does not necessarily mean better at serving more members of the public.

**REACH**



Maximizing museum

**MARKET  
SHARE**

means right-sizing the museum

Almost every American museum wants to increase the number of visitors who come from its own region. As a percentage of their Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), most museums attract no more than 9% of their regional residents each year.

For most museums, finding the best ways to increase that percentage is not just the lowest-hanging fruit for growth, but may be the most sustainable way for the museum to sustainably fulfill its mission. It also offers some interesting insights about how to right-size your institution to maximize the number of visits (and lower the cost per visitor).

## **CONCLUSION:**

These preliminary findings present more questions than answers, and uncertainty is always better than being certain of something that may be wrong. Remuseum is grateful to the museums that share data publicly and hope that others will recognize that:

### **More data, more mission.**

The more publicly available data about museums, the more insights that anyone (including Remuseum) can generate to help each American museum make its most important decision: how to invest its resources to fulfill its own mission and thrive.

**RE → MUSEUM**