

**A Descriptive Analysis of Artificial Intelligence Usage and Opinions
In Museums**

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Abstract

As the museum sector embraces artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool for exhibits, collections, and beyond, minimal attention has been paid to the ways it is being utilized in museums, by museum staff. In this study, museum professionals were surveyed on the frequency with which they use AI tools, what tools they use and why, and their opinions on AI in museums. Responses suggest that museum staff are of two minds - either they refuse to deliberately use AI tools, or they have begun to use AI frequently. When asked about the role of AI in museum, participants were split between perceived positive applications of AI - primarily in its potential to help them be more efficient at the administrative tasks of their jobs - and concerns about ethics, the role of people regarding AI tools, and the way AI usage may impact the perception and mission alignment of museums. As these tools continue to make their way into this sector, professionals have begun to question the specific role of AI, and guidelines which they can utilize to inform the ways they use it in their work. This study suggests the museum field would benefit from field-wide general best practices for utilizing AI, especially large language models and generative AI, to ensure that museums remain trusted, value-based organizations.

Introduction

Problem

At this point, artificial intelligence (AI) is inescapable, integrated into many of the daily technological interactions that people experience every day. Email software suggests the rest of a sentence or corrects your grammar, large language models (LLMs) generate blocks of text in response to a prompt, and neural networks analyze gigantic amounts of data to speed along research. AI is being used across museums in a variety of ways – in exhibits, to create guided tours, furthering research based on collections, all the way up to the theoretical creation of smart museums (Corsini et al., 2025; Gaia et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2024; Wang, 2021).. Regardless of the opinion of the individual, AI is here to stay. Our understanding of the usage of AI technology in the museum sector has been primarily focused on large, organization wide case studies, but as the technology becomes more readily available in quotidian tasks, it may be more widely used than the case studies indicate (Maksimova, 2024; McNutt et al., 2018; Murphy, 2023). For the purpose of this thesis, AI is defined as a software that can be prompted to provide the most likely response from a set of data with the intent to mimic human thought processes and outcomes, especially generative content creation algorithms (GenAI), and large language models, which are primarily used by individuals to perform a wide variety of tasks (Derda & Predescu, 2025; Sheikh et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2019). Chatbots, while a present utilization of AI models, are not going to be discussed within this paper. While this is a broad definition, to understand AI usage, specifications between different models are critical to establishing what technologies are being utilized and with what outcomes.

Large museum and governmental bodies have been issuing guidelines and overviews of the potential impact of AI in the cultural heritage sector in recent years (Dikow et al., 2023; Pasikowska-Schnass & Lim, 2023). Additionally, individuals have continued to speak on the importance of clear guidelines and developed best practices in the sector regarding AI technology (Boiano et al., 2024;

Derda & Predescu, 2025; Marstine, 2012). However, there have been few field-wide discussions, and rarely addressing overall ethical nuances within the museum as regards their responsibility as respected and trusted institutions to the public (Grotz & Rahemipour, 2024; Wilkenstein Consulting, 2021). Museums gain huge amounts of value from implementing new technologies, but it is critical to balance between useful technologies and unhelpful or unreliable technologies in the organizational structure that may jeopardize the museums' relationship to the public (Erbay, 2019; McNutt et al., 2018; Romanelli, 2020). To identify that balance with regards to AI, we must first understand how and where AI is used and is seen as useful to those who work in the field. This article describes a research study designed to document the tendencies of AI usage across the museum sector by professionals in the field.

AI in Education

Educational research into AI (AIED) has a lack of agreement on many topics, but the extant body of literature seems to agree that there is no removing AI tools from education anymore. This technology has become too prevalent and popular to remove. Thus, the discussion has become based on the questions of where, how, and when to use AI, alongside emotional and social impact.

There is not one universal opinion about AI in formal educational settings. Depending on the context and methodology, researchers have reported varying attitudes. For example, one study on science teachers in the UAE reported high praise and confidence, while tourism education researchers bring up strong concerns about plagiarism and disclosure of AI usage to students (Al Darayseh, 2023; Wingström et al., 2024). AI is seen as helpful in a variety of ways, but there are also fears of redundancy for educators, privacy, and misinformation to the students and educators using AI tools (Akpan et al., 2025; Celik et al., 2022; Grassini, 2023). Lim et al. propose that the current opinions of AI in education has four inherent paradoxes: friend yet foe, capable yet dependent, accessible yet restrictive, and popular when banned (Lim et al., 2023). These paradoxes may help

unify the proponents and opponents of AI into approaching the practical utilization of the tools, regardless of opinion in both formal and informal education settings.

Research and meta-analysis have been conducted on AI implementation in education and has turned up an interesting limitation- or perhaps a biasing perspective in the body of research. Based on a meta-analysis conducted by Topham et al. on AIEd the practical applications in formal education are prioritized by researchers, with underrepresented areas of research in AIEd including but not limited to: administrative applications, ethics of AI usage in education, and strategies to mitigate academic misconduct (Topham et al., 2026). If this is to be found in formal education, it stands to reason that informal education has not addressed these areas of AI usage as well. AI usage in education is focused on application and direct human interactions, rather than considering alternative models of interaction and influence, and removing focus from the ethical element entirely.

Ethics and AI

Both proponents and opponents of AI admit that AI is not perfect, especially in ethical questions that have remained open throughout its emergence (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Stokel-Walker & Van Noorden, 2023). One of the most notable points of contention in AI ethics is the alignment problem, which is, fundamentally, the divergence between what human coders and users intend the tool to do and what an AI tool actually provides as output (Christian, 2021). Alignment problems have manifested in racial biasing, age biasing, and other biases which arise from various parts of the process of creating and using AI (Chu et al., 2023). Infamously, the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) recidivism algorithm, when analyzed by ProPublica, was found to have significant biasing towards black individuals, and likely impacted hundreds of people's lives by affecting their process through the American justice system (Larson et al., 2016). This is only one example of many ethical questions inherent in AI, across many sectors.

In educational usage, the issues are more directly laid out. The European Union directly prohibits the usage of AI in education for many purposes, claiming that:

“When improperly designed and used, such systems may be particularly intrusive and may violate the right to education and training as well as the right not to be discriminated against and perpetuate historical patterns of discrimination, for example against women, certain age groups, persons with disabilities, or persons of certain racial or ethnic origins or sexual orientation” (Artificial Intelligence Act, 2024).

While not infringing on human rights, as previously mentioned, ethical academic conduct and accurate information are additional issues in educational AI usage. Proponents for AI usage in education insist that one method to prevent this is to present AI as a tool to encourage students to engage in critical thinking (Lee & Kwon, 2024; Martindale et al., 2024). AI is no different from any other new tool in this regard- novel implementation brings nuanced ethical questions regardless of the sector it is used in.

AI Usage in Museums

Having illustrated the points in which AI brings ethical questions and points of distrust, as well as its current standing in formal education, the question becomes whether museums, centers of informal education, should utilize this technology. Museums are notably highly trusted institutions by the general public, believed to be reputable sources of information (Grotz & Rahemipour, 2024; Wilkenstein Consulting, 2021). Unsurprisingly, then, museum professionals and academics have batted the ball back and forth on how AI should be utilized, if at all, and in what ways. Museum studies academics have compiled some of their recommendations and observed usages. There are already prevalent uses of AI reported within the museum sector, with datasets indicating that the most common uses are visitor-facing and operational (Villaespesa, 2021). However, considering the ethical nuances of AI as presented earlier in this paper, museums must question whether the practical usages and perceived benefits outweigh the risks and potential to breach the trust that is so inherently important to them.

Within the EU and UK, there have been some attempts to collect comprehensive data on AI usage within what they refer to as the heritage sector. A report for the National Lottery Heritage fund states that AI is generally used in three areas: heritage and collections management, use and research; visitor experience; and, business operations and management (Pavis, 2023).

Recommendations to the EU Parliament presents these same recommendations for usage categories (Pasikowska-Schnass & Lim, 2023). This aligns with research in East and Southeast Asia, as well as the Americas, where museums primarily have demonstrated use of AI in creating museum exhibits and adaptive visitor guides, (Trichopoulos et al., 2023; Varitimiadis et al., 2021; Zhao & Shen, 2025). Additionally, archives and research within museum collections have used AI to help analyze and digitize collections (Jones et al., 2024; LaFortune & Johnson, 2025; Zhao & Shen, 2025).

Additionally, there is no data about education on AI in museums, leaving a dearth of understanding about the digital literacy of museum professionals regarding AI technology, which indicates a potential lack of support, as digital literacy is critical for effective education and utilization of tools available (Vercruyssen et al., 2023; Wu, 2025; Zhang et al., 2023). However, most of these are conducted via case studies- and there is no comprehensive survey of museums within the United States.

Perceptions and Opinions of AI in Museums

The way in which museums are perceived as using AI and as museum staff perceive AI to be useful vary wildly. Curators of exhibits with AI narratives have been found to be generally critical, and unable to avoid points of discourse when AI is involved in an exhibit- with a notable struggle between accessible information and nuanced, critical engagement with AI (Maksimova, 2024).

Research with a small sample of museum professionals suggested a high variability of AI literacy, leading to inconsistent stances and practices, but that the same museum professionals generally believes that AI had a high degree of usefulness yet low necessity to their work (Derda & Predescu,

2025). Museum visitors generally seem to have positive reception to AI-incorporated museum experiences, with notable success in two case studies with two different uses of AI. The first case study showed positive engagement metrics for teenagers at a museum interacting with a LLM chatbot (Gaia et al., 2019). The second usage was more indirect- using AI to translate visitor movements into an interactive projection, and also demonstrated positive engagement and opinion metrics (Winter et al., 2022). Overall, the reception from visitors in these case studies is positive, but there are not many widespread surveys of museum visitor opinions of AI. Judging by the case studies available, however, it suggests that museum staff and visitors may have a discrepancy of opinion towards AI tools, which has not been investigated yet.

Frameworks and Metrics of AI Usage

Considering the nuances in AI ethics, and the variation in museum implementation, the Smithsonian took a large step in 2023 and published an implementation plan and values statement. The Smithsonian staff put forth a framework which separates AI usage between research and strategic intentions, and a value statement which indicates their intent to monitor and prevent ethical concerns with their AI usages (Dikow et al., 2023). This is the only statement from a museum within the United States that was available to the public at the time of writing, and there are few statements identifiable on the internet overall. Researchers and museum professionals have spoken about their ideals for museum ethics with AI usage as well. Select frameworks have been proposed for museums to consider as they implement AI- the SAFE-D framework among them (Boiano et al., 2024). Other researchers have proposed specific framework elements such as explainability, accessibility, and reliability, which have been brought up in ethics discussions of AI in education more broadly (Holmes et al., 2022; Pansoni et al., 2023; Tiribelli et al., 2024). However, without more comprehensive analysis of museum perspectives, utilization, and interests in utilizing AI, frameworks may be less thoroughly applicable or adaptable across the different sizes of museums.

To begin to address the nuance inherent to implementing AI in museums, more thorough data collection which reflects the diversity of the museum field is crucial.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to begin to describe and illustrate the tendencies of AI usage across the museum sector by professionals in the field. At this stage in the research, the tendencies of usage and opinions will be generally described via self-reports, focused on gathering descriptive data within the sector. Museums have a strong drive to use novel and innovative technologies to engage the public, but the cost and potential usefulness of the technology is not always equal to the need or possible value of its usage. While there are prevalent case studies focusing on how museums are implementing AI in certain specific use-cases, there is little understanding of a technology that is currently socially nuanced, especially with regards to art, culture, and communication. In order to begin to analyze the ways in which AI is used within the field and how much the museum sector is embracing or rejecting it, we must first gather data and describe the general state of the field and its technology usage, in a way that has not been formally conducted, or even reported yet. This study was guided by 3 key research questions:

1. How do museum professionals think about AI and its application to the museum field in general?
2. How do museum professionals use AI in their own work?
3. How do museum professionals characterize their museum's expectations for and policies around AI use?

Methods

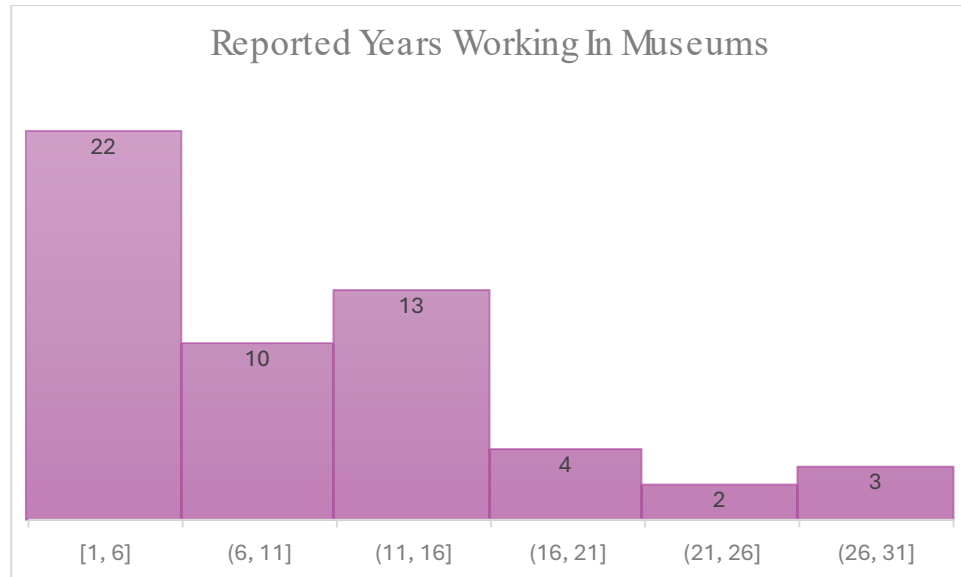
This study was conducted using a convenience sampling survey design, distributed via the Internet and deliberate posting by groups with audiences consisting of the desired demographic groups. Participants were asked to participate if they were currently affiliated with a museum and

self-identified as someone who had opinions on AI, had spoken to a coworker about AI, or had utilized AI tools in their work recently as examples of qualifying experiences. The survey was designed and distributed via RedCap, with four general categories of data collected within the survey: a) participants provided their demographics as related to museums, b) their usage rates of AI, c) their opinions of AI in the museum field, and d) their affiliated organization's stance on AI tools (see appendix A for the survey). The survey was presented in English with text-to-speech capability and required internet access to complete. Surveys were distributed on various social media sites (X, LinkedIn, Facebook) and the link was provided alongside a short blurb of the research. Additional recruitment was conducted at the American Alliance of Museums annual meeting in Philadelphia.

Participants

The survey was completed by 54 individuals over the span of three months. No respondents were excluded from the dataset at the time of analysis. 78 percent of respondents (n=42) provided demographic data. Of all participants, the average duration of time working in the museum field was just over 10 years (n=54, st.dev=7.5), depicted in Graph 1 below. Participants reported an average of 35 years of age (n=54, st.dev =9.3), which indicates that most participants who completed this survey have worked most of their careers in the museum sector. Additionally, survey respondents were asked to generally categorize their organization, and of 54 participants, 31% (n=17) were from art museums, the largest category, and the second largest group, 17% (n=9) were from historic sites. Children's museums, science centers, and cultural museums each represented 11% of the participants (n=6).

When asked to describe the general role they hold at their organization, many participants were education staff (n=25, 46%), and the second largest group were in exhibits and collections (n=12, 22%). Administrative and development staff were the third largest group, at 15% of the participants (n=8).

Figure 1: *Reported Years Working In Museums*

Results

1) How do museum professionals think about AI and its application to the museum field in general?

a) Perceptions of What AI Is

When asked about how they would define AI to someone who did not know what it was, 37 participants responded (69%). Table 1 shows the 6 themes that characterize how participants thought about what AI is. Some responses were longer and nuanced in their approach to AI, while others focused on brevity. Responses varied in their valence on AI as well - some participants gave definitions influenced by a negative opinion of AI, such as “AI is an umbrella term for everything from large language models that can compile data sets to ones that scalp the internet and plagiarize art in various mediums to spit back out low quality content that steals from real artists”, while others were more neutral, such as “AI is nothing more than a new tool to help us do basic tasks allowing us to free up time and brain power to think creatively”.

Table 1: *Qualitative Frequency Analysis of Responses to Question “How would you briefly explain AI to someone who has never heard of it and knows nothing about it?”*

Category	# of Responses	Example Key Terms and Eligible Content
Umbrella Technology	16	“set of technologies”, “models”, mentions training data or pattern recognition
Professional Utility	11	“assisting”, “efficient”, “proofreading”
Search and Answer Tool	10	“search”, “answers”
Generative Tool	9	“create”, “generative”, large language model
Ethical Concerns	7	“hallucination”, direct mention of ethical concerns, “plagiarism”
Environmental Concerns	3	Mentions water usage, electrical consumption,

Of note, definitions which mentioned generative tasks of certain AI models specifically (n=9) were completely distinct from those which focused solely on the professional application of AI tools as useful things (n=11). Professional application responses resembled the following response: “An assisting tool that is not perfect but can help to make you more efficient.” In comparison, this participant mentioned generative functions and did not focus on efficiency or professional utility, but on the basic functions of the program: “AI is a language learning model or generative image service that utilizes the work of others (with or without attribution and compensation) to create new work.”

Of these 37 definitions, only 7 mentioned ethical concerns of any kind (19%). Ethical questions and concerns regarding AI often were brought up at the end of the definition, such as in this response:

“Computer algorithms that learn from human-generated data that then perform explicit tasks based on prompts. AI output tends to lack cultural context and accuracy, and can only generate content based on the data it has "learned" from. AI platforms require vast resources to run and much of the data they are fed is taken without permission, so there are many complex questions about the efficacy and ethics of AI use.”

Definitions ranged in their utility, with some resembling the sort of definition expected to be provided in an educational context, representing the facts of these technologies. Others were brief

and reflected a more casual conversational tone, such as, “It is a tool that is not going away and we need to know how to use it.”

b) Perceptions of AI Use in the Museum Field

After being asked to define AI, participants were then asked, “What do you think of AI usage in the museum field?” as an open-ended response. 46 of 54 respondents provided their opinion on this (85%), and responses were classified into strong positive, negative, and unclear valences regarding their opinion on AI in museums in Table 2.

Table 2: *Qualitative Valence Analysis of Responses to Question “What do you think of AI usage in the museum field?”*

Category	# of Responses	Example Key Terms and Eligible Content
Positive Valence	9	“fine”, “necessary”, “useful”, “don’t have a problem”
Nonspecific Valence	20	Indicators of both positive and negative valence, or doesn’t indicate strongly either way- “no strong feelings”
Negative Valence	17	“wary”, “dislike”, “don’t trust”, “will never compare”, “dangerous”, “unethical”

The largest group of respondents expressed opinions which acknowledged benefits of AI utilization but also had concerns about utilizing AI in museums, such as this response, which pointed out the variety of utilizations but did not unilaterally endorse using AI: “I’m sure it’s useful for some things like translation/transcribing. Would prefer to keep things human-centered for staff, in how we share stories or art.” Many of these responses helped to codify categories of specific interest to museum staff regarding AI usage, as they indicated points of contention that were still impacting their opinion or keeping it from demonstrating stronger valence in favor of or against the usage of AI in museums.

Some respondents were firm in their stance about AI not having a place in museums, such as the following response: “AI demeans the work of humans and is an environmental scourge.

There may be times when it is useful to individuals, but I do not believe the tradeoffs are worth it.”

Not all responses in this category were this explicitly negative, but often shared similar concerns, such as this participant’s response: “Personally, I’m not a fan. I think relying on AI weakens our personal skills and leads to laziness.”

Most of the positive valence responses were briefer, and provided less nuance in analysis, such as this response: “I think like anything new, it needs regulation, but it can be a very helpful tool for some tasks. That being said, it’s important that outside research is still being done and the accuracy of the information is being checked.” Another participant wrote, “Will be helpful - should be careful we aren’t left behind.”

Museum professionals varied intensely in their opinions on the presence of AI in museums, with multiple themes emerging in the qualitative analysis of their responses. Ten distinct categories emerged, which are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: *Qualitative Frequency Count and Categorization of Responses to Question “What do you think of AI usage in the museum field?”*

<i>Category</i>	<i># Of Responses</i>	<i>Example Key Terms and Eligible Content</i>
Human Input	12	Mentions human input, “compare”, “shallow”, “creativity”
Museums in Society	11	“mission”, “people trust museums”, mentions visitors or students
Utility	10	“tool”, “shortcut”, “efficiency”
Ethics	10	“trust”, “responsibility”, “values”
Regulation	9	“guidelines”, “more research”, specifies only certain contexts to be appropriate
Environmental Impact	8	“sustainability”, mentions environmental harm or costs
Transparency	7	“transparency”, “acknowledge”, “undisclosed”
Job Security	6	“layoffs”, discusses replacing staff
Accuracy	5	“checked”, “plagiarism”, “primary sources”
Inevitability	4	“inevitable”, “not going anywhere”, “widespread”, “left behind”

Responses emphasizing the importance of human input in AI usage often indicated that human review or control was a crucial part of how AI could or could not be part of museums, such as, “I think it can be a helpful tool but feel the work we do needs to be primarily created by people. It is importantly to me that a human be responsible for the final product.” Comments about museums in society focused on mission or values of the field, for example, “I particularly dislike museums using generative AI, particularly if they are an art museum. It feels like it goes against the mission and spirit of many of these organizations.” There were also more positive approaches to museums and AI interacting, such as “I also think museums could be a place where people engage with AI as an idea and offer space to grapple with the wide ranging logistical, ethical, and philosophical questions surrounding this technology.”

Ethical concerns were notably present, ranging from AI generated art – “I strongly believe, however, that it is unethical to not disclose the use of AI in art. It's not okay to plagiarize, and it's not okay to present AI-generated art as art created by a human,” - to the cultural interactions with AI in the field - “I think this field is already over-burdened with ethical problems and labor issues and should not add more onto its plate.” AI as a utility for the museum field primarily aligned with positive or neutral responses, such as, “It's necessary, it does not substitute critical thinking but makes our work faster” or “As long as it is used as a tool to enhance our work, I don't have a problem with it.” These responses also notably overlapped with the regulation category wherein participants indicated that AI in museums needed more clarification, guidelines, or to be restricted to certain usages to be allowed.

Comments about the environmental impact of AI primarily discussed water usage or electricity consumption rates of AI tools as they are utilized. This was not the primary objection of any responses, but a meaningful element for the participants who did include it, such as this participant, who wrote,

“I do think that everyone, including museums, has a responsibility to acknowledge the environmental harm of AI and make informed decisions about the scale of its use because of that. We cannot claim to be focused on sustainability while using AI for every little task. Because I do find value it using it some in my work (and am encouraged to use it), I choose to never utilize AI in my personal life as a small effort to acknowledge the environmental impact.”

The distinction between individual usage and professional work usage did not recur in other responses, but it is important to note that distinction, as later in this paper, direct requests from organizations to staff will be discussed.

Additionally of note, some participants included language that indicated job security was a concern of theirs regarding AI usage in the museum field. A selection from one response illustrates this concern best:

“The museum field already has myriad problems with an over reliance on unpaid (volunteer) labor and depressed wages for professional staff with advanced degrees. These problems, of course, tend to impact marginalized workers most acutely. The current marketing of AI as a tool to improve productivity while reducing the necessity of staff might be attractive to cash-strapped museums, but as a long term solution simply serves to reify the deep inequalities in the museum workforce.”

Finally, a small subset of museum professionals categorized AI as an inevitability, such as, “I think AI is a tool that is the future and you'll fall behind if you don't use it.”

c) Perceptions of the Usefulness of AI in Museums

Participants were asked to rate the utility of AI to their jobs, on a scale from 1-7 where 1 was “Not at all helpful” and 7 was “Completely helpful”. The average rating was 4.5 out of 7, with a response rate of 65% (n=35). Participants also gave open-ended responses to explain why they utilized AI in their day-to-day work, and of those responses, some common underlying themes emerged. The categories and example key terms used to categorize responses are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: *Qualitative Frequency Analysis of Responses to Question “In the last 30 days, why did you choose to utilize AI for those tasks?”*

Category	# of Responses	Example Key Terms and Eligible Content
Efficiency/Time	17	“save time”, “time management”, “efficient option”, “expedite”, “quicker”
Knowledge Building	6	“information”, problem-solving, overcoming a lack of knowledge or focusing
Creativity/Productivity	9	“brain fry”
Social Influence	6	Mentions of other people
Accessibility	2	Mentions translation of content to other languages, improving access, increasing engagement.

Those participants who said they used AI mostly for efficiency purposes said things like this participant: “I felt it was the most efficient option given the time available to complete the task and the bandwidth of the other staff.” AI was often specifically referred to as a tool for efficiency and knowledge-building due to the workload of museum staff. One participant explicitly drew attention to this, saying “I wasn't able to debug using my own knowledge, or stackoverflow search results. I wish I knew how to do it myself.”

For knowledge-building prompts, participants described using AI to begin processes, or to edit and respond to their existing understanding of a piece of information, characterized notably in this response:

“A lot of those prompts were the start of more inquiries from myself. Sometimes with current events, like Artemis launches, a Google search is flooded with articles that all say the same thing. Starting an inquiry session with ChatGPT feels like a more efficient way to get information.”

These participants often either overlapped with efficiency, as in the previous quote, or with creativity, where they were using AI to generate things they were not experienced with creating, such as this response: “I am not good at coming up with creative program titles, and this particular program was not in the scope of our marketing team.”

2) How do museum professionals use AI in their own work?

All participants were asked to describe how frequently they utilized AI tools for work, choosing from options that ranged from never to daily or more than once/day. Thirty-eight percent (n=17) indicated that they had never used AI in their work; 7% (n=3) said that they had used AI about once a year; 11% (n=5) once a month; 24% (n=11) weekly; and 20% (n=9) daily or more than once a day. When asked about what AI tools they had utilized in the last month and why, 63% of all participants (n=34) provided responses. (The remaining participants indicated they had never used AI in their work and were exempted from answering which specific AI tools they had used, and what prompts they recalled utilizing.) Overwhelmingly, the tools these participants used favored LLMs such as ChatGPT (n=23, 68% of responses), and secondarily built-in AI tools such as Microsoft CoPilot and Google Gemini (n=12, 35% of responses). In addition, data analysis tools and museum-specific AI tools were mentioned (n=6, 18%), and generative image tools specifically were listed once in the responses (3%).

When asked why they utilized these AI tools, qualitative analysis of the responses indicated that the overwhelming common factor was efficiency and time management. Participants provided some examples of prompts given to AI tools as well (n=33), which varied in their precision. Some example prompts included: asking AI to write emails, generate text, handle errors in Excel analysis formulas, and summarize documents and information. Of the 33 responses, notable categories of usage emerged: 36% (n=12) of participants indicated they used LLMs to correct their grammar or generate copy text, and 24% (n=8) utilized AI to prompt research or generate text intended to help them direct their own research further. Less frequent prompts included the 21% of participants asked AI to perform data analytics or summarize information (n=7), and another 9% of participants utilized AI to translate documents (n=3).

Due to the nuanced state of AI in museums and the perceived desirability of these tools, participants were asked whether they had received training on AI usage or done independent research on how to use them. Of fifty-two participants who responded, 55% had not received or pursued any training (n=30), 26% had pursued independent training (n=14), 11% had received training from their organizations and sought out independent research (n=6), and another four percent had received training from their organizations alone (n=2).

3) How do museum professionals characterize their museum's expectations for and guidelines around the use of AI?

As museums are not uniform organizations, participants were asked whether they had been asked to use AI at work. This question aims to identify whether museums are actively asking their staff to use AI, or if AI usage is being proliferated by staff independently of organizational policy and guidelines. Of all participants, 65% responded to this question (n=35). Overwhelmingly, of these, 71% (n=25) indicated that they had not been asked to use AI directly, while 26% (n=9) had been asked to use AI by their museum. One participant (3%) responded "Other" but did not elaborate further.

When asked whether their organization has an AI policy, 52% of participants (n=28) indicated that their organization did not have an official policy present. Thirteen percent of participants (n=7) indicated that there was an existing AI policy at their museum. Twenty-two percent were unsure of the extent to which their organization has a policy (n=12), and the last thirteen percent selected Other (n=7) but did not elaborate.

Of the seven individuals whose organizations do have an AI policy, five elaborated on their institutional policies. Of these extant museum policies on AI, five restrict use of these tools significantly, primarily to internal software without sharing their data, and one requires consent of use in interpretation by the artists of the pieces on exhibit should AI be used. The last response

connected directly to institutional values: “As a conservation organization, we really try to limit our use due to the environmental impact.”

Fifty-three percent of participants (n=25) said that while their organization doesn’t have an AI policy currently, there are discussions happening around AI policy. For example, one participant shared, “We have a series of optional staff workshops and conversations that you can attend... It’s clear that our CIO is very much pushing for expanded use of AI but not all staff share that perspective.” Twenty-four percent (n=6) indicated that their organization was in the active process of developing a policy. For example, one participant explained, “We are also concerned about ethics, so administration is carefully considering and is working on an AI policy. In the meantime, all employees are banned from using AI.”

Discussion

This study was designed to understand how museum professionals are thinking about AI and its use in the museum field, how they are using AI in their own work, and how their museums are characterizing expectations and guidelines for the use of AI. Data were collected from 54 museum professionals through online questionnaires.

Results suggest that there are two large contingents in museum professionals’ opinions and approaches to AI- strong anti-AI staff, and ambivalent to supportive but concerned staff. Across all three qualitative sections of AI definitions, utilization, and opinions, museum staff mentioned ethical concerns and uncertainty about how much AI should be allowed in museums, especially how widely so. As museums are mission-dependent organizations, generally focused on shared values of educating and supporting their communities, it is unsurprising that museum professionals have strong opinions on the roles of the individual in this way, let alone the strong ethical questions that were brought up in this dataset. The only area where AI usage seemed to be confidently accepted was in utilizing primarily LLMs for written editing and even then, primarily with human review.

Efficiency and timesaving was a major supporting factor in utilization of AI by museum professionals, which is unsurprising, considering that museums are a field with notable labor concerns that have become more evident in recent years (Museums Moving Forward, 2025). However, it is unclear whether the desire for efficiency is unique to AI or a symptom of the larger demands on museum staff in their roles. The role of human oversight and irreplaceability does seem to be prevalent in the minds of museum professionals when considering AI, regardless of their opinion on its usage.

This dichotomy of opinion within participants was reflected across multiple qualitative datasets - individuals who had notably strong anti-AI opinions also tended to have more comprehensive definitions of AI and brought up at least one specific ethical concern. Some specific ethical concerns which stood out were sustainability, plagiarism of artists, transparency with visitors, and replacing museum staff. While some of these are unchangeable about the tools themselves- museums cannot alter the data that has been fed into AI models- others are approachable and resolvable with stable AI guidelines and clear best practices. This dichotomy is unsurprising, considering the paradoxes of AI in education as discussed previously, but it does indicate a potential weak point in museums continued implementation of AI, both in practical work and in larger-scale narratives and exhibit utilizations (Fulsher et al., 2026; Lim et al., 2023).

As AI is a new technology being introduced to museums, there are no complete frameworks, and of the participants, few had extant policies. Some others indicated that policies were in development, but more did not have a policy or any indications that there was one in process. Of the extant policies available, as previously discussed, all have come from large museums and development of toolkits to help support museums in constructing their AI policies revealed no field-wide ethical policies or guidelines (Dikow et al., 2023; Murphy, 2023). Established policies will likely have serious impact on helping the two disparate groups of museum professionals build confidence

in navigating these tools, as well as establishing more thorough professional development. While museum professionals may vary in utilization of AI tools, training is very limited based on this sample. Considering the importance of digital literacy in formal education settings, this form of technological literacy is likely equivalently important in the informal education settings such as museums (Murphy & Villaespa, Elena, 2020; Vercruyssen et al., 2023; Wu, 2025). The structural support of these guidelines and understandings will help to maintain the strong place in the public consciousness that museums prize in their efficacy.

Museums hold strong public trust, especially in their ability to provide accurate and unbiased information, however, participants brought up a strong concern that AI utilization by museums may not be aligned with the values of organizations - or museums in general. This nuance is important to understand- if museums do not develop strong guidelines and ensure transparency in their practices, it is possible that they would degrade this trust.

Implications

Further research will have to conduct more comprehensive surveys of attitudes and usage metrics, as well as investigating the nuances of ethical AI frameworks as compared to organizational values. If museum professionals already have a present dichotomy, it will be essential to ensure that this is investigated further to identify points of contention and whether any demographic lines exist in this dichotomy. Additionally, while museum professionals demonstrate certain levels of AI literacy, it bears note that there is no analysis of misinformation in the field. As a final note for future research, in order to properly represent AI usage in the museum sector, data must be collected on usages across US organizations, both by professionals and in larger-scale projects such as visitor guides, to compensate for the lack of formalized data that exists.

If museums wish to implement AI further or restrict its usage more specifically, this research can be used to establish a clearer standard for best practices and guidelines. Museum staff are aware

of ethical nuances and the importance of making sure that utilization of this tool is aligned with the role of museums overall, and creating a set of best-practice guidelines would act as a major step towards assuaging these concerns and preparing museums as a sector for future usages of these tools. In order to overcome the lack of specific organizational policies, leadership in museums ought to be encouraged to pursue internal development based on assessments of the field overall, especially in comparison to educational standards for AI usage as they develop, and ensuring that their usage policies align with their mission and values. Multiple resources have been published on this topic, discussing various organizations' individual approaches to this nuanced topic, and even more museum-specific overviews exist today (Michelle Padilla & Jane Thaler, 2025; Murphy & Villaespa, Elena, 2020). Organizations must implement clear and precise guidelines, to ensure they maintain trust and respect within their communities, collaborators, and visitors. There are no clear best practices for AI usage in this sector, and while it is unlikely that one size will fit all, a clearer general guideline that could be adapted to individual organizations would likely serve well for beginning this process. If museums are to keep up with technology and maintain their positions as trusted sources of information, organizational guidelines and field best practices will be crucial to ensure that they can live up to the central values and ethics of the field.

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Appendix A

All participants completed this survey. Some questions were logic-gated, so that if participants did not have relevant experiences (e.g. participants who indicated that they did not have an existing AI policy at their museum did not get asked to describe their organization's policy). All participants were required to answer four questions: the type of museum they are affiliated with, how long they have worked in the museum field, how frequently they say they would utilize AI, and whether their organization has an existing AI use policy.

Surveying AI Usage in Museums

Please complete the survey below. If you have any questions, please contact the research team at museumaisurvey2026@gmail.com.

This survey should take you about 15 minutes, but if you need to come back and complete your answers, you can do so. Please note that all links to return to the survey will be locked after February 28th, 2026.

Thank you for participating in our research!

What kind of museum are you affiliated with?

- ☐ Art museum
- ☐ Science center
- ☐ Children's museum
- ☐ Botanical garden
- ☐ Historic sites
- ☐ Cultural museum
- ☐ Zoo
- ☐ Aquarium
- ☐ Other

Please identify the type of museum you are affiliated with.

Approximately how many staff members would you estimate your museum has?

- ☐ 0-10
- ☐ 11-25
- ☐ 26-50
- ☐ 51-100
- ☐ 100+

How long have you been working in the museum field?

What department of the museum do you work in?

How old are you?

Do you wish to provide additional demographics?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What terms best express how you describe your gender identity?

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Transgender man/Female-to-male (FTM)
- ☐ Transgender woman/Male-to-female (MTF)
- ☐ Gender non-binary/Genderqueer/Gender nonconforming
- ☐ Agender
- ☐ Bigender
- ☐ None of these describe me
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ No formal Schooling
- ☐ Primary/Grade/Elementary School (approximately grades 1st through 5th)
- ☐ Middle School/Lower Secondary Education (approximately grades 6th through 8th)
- ☐ Secondary/High School/Upper Secondary (grades 9th through 11th) without a high school diploma
- ☐ General Educational Diploma (GED)
- ☐ Secondary/High School/Upper Secondary (grades 9th through 12th) with a high school diploma
- ☐ Occupational/Technical/Vocational Programs
- ☐ Associate's Degree (approximately 2 years)
- ☐ College/University/Bachelor's Degree/Equivalent Tertiary Education (approximately 3-5 years)
- ☐ Graduate/post-graduate degree/professional degree/ (JD, PhD, MD, EdD, Eng, Master's Degree, etc.)
- ☐ Other/Not listed here

Please select the racial/ethnic category or categories with which you most closely identify. Select all that apply.

- ☐ Native American, Indigenous Peoples or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian or Asian American
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
- ☐ White
- ☐ An identity not listed here
- ☐ I prefer not to say

The following section is going to ask about your utilization of artificial intelligence tools in your work with museums. For the purposes of this survey, AI tools refers to programs and softwares which can generate materials including but not limited to text and images, based on a user-submitted prompt or request. This includes but is not limited to softwares such as: ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft CoPilot, Otter.AI, and Motion.

If the tool in question is optionally integrated into other software (such as Canva), only indicate usage if you specifically chose to utilize AI features when working with that software. Softwares and tools such as Gemini, the AI Google has debuted, which summarizes results automatically, or grammar checkers such as Grammarly, should not be included in your responses.

In the last thirty days, how many times have you utilized AI tools in your work? Please provide a number.

Over the last 30 days, for what purposes have you used AI in your work? Please list which tools you utilized as well, if you remember.

What kinds of prompts have you given AI tools for your tasks at work? Please list any prompts you can remember from the last 30 days.

Have you been directly asked to use AI in your professional tasks for the institution you are affiliated with?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other

Please elaborate on your experience with AI usage at work.

On a scale from 1-7, where 1 is not at all helpful and 7 is completely helpful, how helpful do you find AI tools in your work? Please respond with a whole numerical value.

Please elaborate on why you rated AI tools as that level of helpful.

Why have you minimally, or not at all, utilised AI in the last 30 days?

Does your institution have an existing policy for AI usage at work?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I'm not sure
☐ Other

Please describe your organization's policy on AI usage at work.

Is your organization actively discussing AI usage in the museum at the moment?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Please describe the current discussions within your organization about AI usage and its applications, in as much detail as you feel comfortable providing.

The following section collects information on your personal opinion of AI technology. This section is completely optional, and if you wish to complete the survey without providing this information, you are welcome to do so.

How would you briefly explain AI to someone who has never heard of it and knows nothing about it?

What do you think of AI usage in the museum field?

Have you attended training or done independent research into utilizing AI in your work?

- ☐ Yes, my organization provided training
☐ Yes, I have conducted independent research into how to use AI
☐ Yes, both of the above
☐ No, neither option listed applies to me

If you would like to be followed up with about any of your responses here or receive notice about this dataset after it is completed, please provide an email address here, or email the provided address museumaisurvey2026@gmail.com.
