

Reduced Admission: Benefits and Challenges for Children's Museums

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Abstract

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To offer reduced admission or not is a question that many museums struggle to answer. This qualitative case study examines the benefits and challenges that children's museums experience by providing reduced admission through the *Museums for All* (MFA) initiative. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were conducted at four U.S. children's museums to better understand this phenomenon. The results of this study indicate that benefits gained for children's museums in providing reduced admission outweighed the challenges. These benefits include the ability for the museum to partner with other organizations on a program that reaches underserved families in a way that does not require the museum to vet them. The primary challenge centered on communication issues, either with making visitors acutely aware that reduced admission was available at the museum or with the authenticity of providing such an option. To a lesser degree, some museums struggled with internal communication issues. Further research is needed to gain a greater understanding of other types of benefits and challenges experienced by museums that offer reduced admission.

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Chapter One: Introduction

To offer reduced admission or not is a question that many museums struggle to answer. Often this debate has centered on contrasting propositions about charging admission fees. Some of these propositions are based on concerns for the organization's financial needs. Other propositions stem from apprehensions about public accessibility, and whether charging such a fee may be contrary to the museum's cultural and educational mission statements (Baily, Falconer, Foley, McPherson, & Graham, 1997).

While there have been many discussions in the museum industry about the advantages and drawbacks (Harju, 2013) of charging admission, there has been little research surrounding the benefits and challenges for museums providing reduced admission via the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative for individuals and families based on their income.

Children's museums are unique in that it is the only type of museum that has its intended visitor in its name. Another difference is that children's museums tend to focus sharply on cultivating multigenerational visitorship due in part to its intended visitors requiring parental supervision. What truly makes children's museums extraordinary is the institutional desire to create access opportunities for all children no matter their socioeconomic background.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to examine the benefits and challenges children's museums experience by providing reduced admission via the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative.

The study was guided by three research questions:

- 1) Why do museums offer reduced admission?

- 2) What the benefits and challenges that museums experience by providing reduced admission?
- 3) Has offering reduced admission influenced the relationship between the museum and its communities?

Significance

Audiences who may benefit from the results of this research are museum professionals such as those who are working in outreach, development, museum education, museum directors, and museum board members because this information could be used to enhance visitor recruitment by soliciting a wider audience. The study's findings may also help museum professionals request funding from individuals and organizations that are interested in creating outreach opportunities through free and reduced museum access initiatives. The third group who may benefit, based on the findings, are those who receive free and reduced museum admission.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to understand the benefits and challenges that children's museums encounter by offering reduced admission to families based on their income. Family, in this context, is defined as a multigenerational visiting group who may or may not be blood-related but are intimately connected to each other (Borun, 2008). This chapter will review relevant literature from 3 main areas: 1) museums and admissions fees; 2) why people visit museums, factors that influence their decision to visit, and benefits of visiting museums; and 3) program strategies for engaging underserved audiences in museums.

Museums and Admissions Fees

The debate on whether museums should charge an admission fee has centered on contrasting propositions. Some of these propositions are based on concerns for the organization's financial needs. Other propositions stem from concerns for public accessibility, and whether charging such a fee may be contrary to the museum's cultural and educational mission statements (Baily, Falconer, Foley, McPherson, & Graham, 1997).

Opponents of museums charging admission fees have often cited various concerns about public accessibility especially regarding financial barriers for visitation. In 2012, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, marked its 40th anniversary by eliminating its admission fees. Holly Block, Executive Director of the Museum, was quoted saying, "At a time when other New York City museums are raising their admission fees, we have chosen to focus on increasing access to the museum as a resource for our community" (Kennedy, 2012, p. C3). On the Bronx Museum's website, its justification for dropping its admission fee is "the Museum implemented a universal free admission policy, supporting its mission to make arts experiences available to all audiences" (Bronx Museum, 2017). According to the Bronx Museum of the Arts' 2014 annual

report, “the Museum’s Free Admission initiative has helped eliminate the perceived barrier of suggested admission, in turn increasing visitorship by 54%” (Bronx Museum of the Arts, 2014, p. 6).

Similarly, The Broad Museum, Los Angeles, CA, eliminated its admission fee in 2015. According to the museum’s founder Eli Broad, who has provided over \$200 million in funding for the museum, going free was not only a “gift to the people of Los Angeles” but also a way of making contemporary art “accessible to all” (Langfield, 2015). According to the Los Angeles Business Journal, attendance at The Broad Museum exceeded projected figures by 3 times with a total of 823,216 visitors in the same year as the museum eliminated its admission fees. Broad was quoted as saying, “Our goal has always been to share our art with the broadest possible public, and our first year has exceeded all of our expectations” (Fine, 2016). This example of eliminated admission fees resulting in increased visitors is supported by a recent research study. Chen, Chen and Tsai (2017) studied free admission policies of museums in Taipei City and the New Taipei City. Their research was based on museum attendance records that were obtained through the Taiwan Tourism Bureau from 2004 -2011 and observations of visitors (N=1,786). One of the study’s findings was that “...free admission policy can directly boost the number of museum visits” (p. 158).

If museum visitation is bolstered by free admission, then what happens when a free museum decides to start charging admission? Lampi & Orth’s (2009) study examined the effects of introducing an admission fee to a previously free, state-funded museum, the Museum of World Culture in Göteborg, Sweden. This study employed the Contingent Valuation (CV) method to evaluate information about visitors’ socio-economic backgrounds and whether an admission fee would change visitor composition based on these factors. Visitors, over the age of

19 years old, were asked to complete a questionnaire before leaving the museum. Completed questionnaires were collected in fall of 2006 (N=565) and spring of 2007 (N=315). Findings revealed that visitor demographics changed when admission fee increments of approximately \$5.73 USD, \$6.60 USD, and \$11.46 USD were charged. Even a modest admission fee increase, from free entrance to approximately \$5.73 USD at the time of the survey, decreased specific visitor groups consisting of men, immigrants, or pensioners. Visitorship from groups who were employed incrementally increased as the fee increased from free to approximately \$5.73 USD, \$6.60 USD, and \$11.46 USD (Lampi & Orth, 2009).

Gurian (2002) asserts that based on demographic studies, most museum visitors tend to be people who are from a higher socioeconomic class where the admission fee is not a barrier for them (Gurian, 2002). Most museums hold their collections in public trust, therefore it can become difficult for these museums to be fully accessible to all visitors if the admission fee prevents certain visitor groups from accessing the museum.

Admission fees can be a barrier for visitors especially when their income is a factor. Lin (2008) used in-depth qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires with non-museum visitors of lower incomes to understand the extent to which admission charges can deter people within this income bracket. Low-income is defined by the “Survey of Family Income and Expenditure in the Taiwan Area, 2002” as personal income that is under €6,311 or approximately \$5,947.92 in US currency in 2002. The survey population came from all 12 administrative districts in Taipei City, Taiwan and consisted of 2,447 people ranging in gender, age, personal income, and educational levels. What was revealed in this study was that low-income groups, especially families, who were interested in visiting a museum can be significantly impacted by admission fees.

Whether visitors see the admission price as an actual or subjective barrier can affect who visits a museum. Kirchberg (1998) used a standardized questionnaire to survey a representative population of 1,080 Germans in 1995 to understand what they saw as motivating factors and barriers to visiting a museum. One significant result of this study was that admission fees were seen as a subjective barrier for museum visitation. However, when this finding was compared to an individual's socioeconomic factors such as education and professional status then these findings influenced whether the visitor saw the admission fee as a barrier or not. For example, people who were in higher income brackets were less likely to see the admission fee as a barrier than those who are in the lowest income bracket. In fact, those in the lowest income bracket were five times more likely to see admission fees as a barrier than those in the highest income bracket (Kirchberg, 1998).

Proponents of museums charging admission fees have often cited financial need for their institution and other benefits. The 9/11 Memorial & Museum in New York City claims that admission fee revenue is essential because donations would not cover the expenses necessary for the museum to fulfill its mission (Matthews, 2013). In 2014, Michael Frazier, Executive Vice President of Communications and Marketing, responded to an inquiry about how the museum intended to cover its estimated annual operating costs of \$60 million by saying, "The memorial and museum does not receive city, state, or federal funding" (Sisto, 2014). Not receiving these types of funding could be detrimental for a museum that is also not charging admission fees.

Another advantage for museums to charge admission fees is to incentivize membership. McFelter (2007) points out that while revenue gained from admission fees alone does not cover the cost of services provided, the admission fee does provide an important opportunity for museums to gain revenue from memberships. One incentive for visitors to become members is

free admission. Another benefit for members is receiving discounts in the gift shop, food service, and on other programming offered by the museum. If a museum does not charge admission fees then it may lose these types of incentives for visitors to become members (McFelter, 2007).

Many museums depend on membership to demonstrate public support and to build their donor base.

Beyond financial need, some museums report that museum attendance has increased after they raised their admission prices. Grant (2014) reported that both the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met), New York, NY, and the Art Institute of Chicago saw positive results from increasing their museum's admission rates. In 2013, the Met saw a 15% revenue increase of \$400,000 over the preceding year and reported that annual visitation had "increased to a record topping 6.2 million people" (Grant, 2014). The Art Institute of Chicago reported that visitor attendance increase by 7% in the same year that admission fees were raised (Grant, 2014).

An alternative to either free or paid admission is to provide a subsection of the visitor population free access to the museums. This position allows for the museum to generate revenue from admission fees and creates some opportunities to engage with underserved museum audiences. For instance, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) has offered free admission for visitors under the age of 12 years old since 1995. In 2013, the museum was able due to \$610 million gained from a capital campaign to offer free admission to teens who are under the age of 18 years old. Artists who have their work in the museum's collection can receive a free lifetime membership to the museum (SFMOMA, 2013). The Museum of Flight, Tukwila, Washington charges admission but offers free membership via its "Connections" program to students between the ages of 5- 18 years old. This membership allows unlimited free visits to the museum for the cardholder and one adult (Museum of Flight, 2017).

Offering free admission based on either the recipient's age or his or her connection to the museum can be problematic when an institution is interested in reaching a wider visitor demographic, especially those who are from an underrepresented community. An alternative approach could be providing access through the "Museums for All" (MFA) initiative. MFA is a joint initiative between the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Association of Children's Museums, that provides free to reduced museum admission for those of limited means across a network of museums. Participants can demonstrate financial need by showing their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cardholder at the time of admission (Museums for All, 2017).

The Museums for All (MFA) initiative launched in 2014 (Clinton Global Initiative, 2014). MFA's website currently list 169 institutions across the United States that are participating in the initiative. Participant organizations include historical centers, science centers, art museums, children's museums, and a zoo. For a museum to take part in this initiative, the institution must adhere to the program's minimum required guidelines. These guidelines include offering either free or reduced admission that does not exceed \$3.00 (USD) to an individual who presents a valid form of photo identification and Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card during regular business hours. The reduced admission rate must also be offered to up to three additional individuals per EBT cardholder. For the recipient to receive the reduced ticket price, he or she present both cards at the time of admission. Currently, there are no publicly accessible research or evaluation results related to the Museums for All Initiative (Museums for All, 2017).

While many museums offer free admission days and times which may suggest that there is an institutional desire to carve out opportunities for full public accessibility, these days/times may not always accessible for visitors given that often that these events are often held either

monthly or during limited hours. Instead, MFA allows participants to choose the days and times that works best for their schedules (Museum for All, 2017).

Why People visit Museums, Factors that Influence their Choice to visit, and Benefits of Visiting Museums

Falk and Dierking (2013) assert that people visit museums out of a desire to fulfill a personal need and the belief that their needs can be met by visiting a museum. These desires stem from identity-related needs that range from inward desires such as fulfilling their curiosity and desire for learning to focusing outward as being motivated to facilitate the experience for others in their group. What these identity-related needs share is the belief that their needs can be met by visiting a museum. As for why people may opt not to visit a museum, Falk and Dierking assert that it is because these people may not feel that their identity-related needs can be met in these types of institutions (2013).

Another factor that can influence visitors' decisions to attend either visual or performing arts is the desire to learn something new or socialize. Perceived barriers can also be a determining factor for visitation. A 2015 report published by National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), "When Going Gets Tough: Barriers and Motivations Affecting Arts Attendance" examines attendance of various visual and performing arts. This study used information collected by the General Social Survey (GSS) from the general public, those who are 18 years of age or older, non-institutionalized, living in the United States and are who are either English and Spanish speaking. The study collected information by using interviews that lasted about one and a half hours. Results are based on the 2012 merged data that used a rolling panel design which included the third wave of the 2008 respondents (N=1,295), the second wave of the 2010 respondents (N=1,551), and the first wave (a cross-section) of 2012 respondents (N=1,974). This

study was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA, 2015). Results from this study indicate that 88 percent of exhibit respondents asserted their reason for seeing an exhibit was to learn something new, and 68 percent of exhibit respondents cited socialization as a motive (NEA, 2015). Almost 60 percent of people with children who are the age of six years old cited time as a barrier that influenced whether they attended visual and performing arts (NEA, 2017). However, non-visitors of the same demographic were approximately four times more likely to have visited a zoo at least one to four times within the past year.

In continuing to explore motivating factors for museum visitors, it is important to examine individuals' perceptions of leisure activities. Based on a 1980-81 study in collaboration with the Toledo Museum of Art, Hood (1983) asserted that how individuals choose to spend their leisure time is a determining factor in museum visitation. Participants, 502, across the Toledo Metropolitan area, which includes urban, suburban, exurban, rural areas, were contacted via phone and were asked to participate in a questionnaire. The questionnaire asked respondents to give their views and preferences on leisure activities and where they believed that these activities could be fulfilled. The study's findings revealed that people who visited a museum more than three times per year were more likely to perceive museums as possessing all the leisure attributes that they found important, such as learning opportunities, "having a challenge of new experiences and doing something valuable in leisure time" (p. 53). People who were less likely to visit a museum ranked social interaction, being able to actively participate, and feeling comfortable in their surroundings higher than frequent museum visitors. Based on this research study, the determining factor on why certain people visit a museum, and others do not may be based on how they value leisure attributes, their preferences for certain leisure activities, and places where these attributes and activities could be fulfilled.

A motivating factor for why some people visit museums is that they feel that someone in their party could benefit from the experience. In 2014, The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) posted on its blog an article entitled, “The Importance of Taking Children to Museums” which listed quotes from various museum professionals from institutions within the United States of America. The synopsis of these quotes centered on ideas of introducing children to unfamiliar subjects, learning through exposure, and the importance of quality family time. Munley (2012) asserts that museums can provide young children with an opportunity to develop their interest in a particular field before they enter formal education. Crowley & Jacob (2011) assert that museums provide a compelling opportunity for children to connect prior knowledge on a particular subject to the authentic object. For example, a child might read about trains in books. It is when he or she can see a train in real-life that the realization about the size and scope of the train become solidified to the prior knowledge. That solidified knowledge gives the child a stronger foundation in which new information can be further built upon via readings and discussions (Crowley & Jacob, 2011). As for families, visiting a museum offers a variety of benefits ranging from being able to spend quality time together to opportunities to further their children’s learning.

Benefits gained from museum experiences can extend throughout the participant’s lifetime. McCreedy and Dierking conducted a retrospective qualitative study, “Cascading Influences: Long-Term Impacts of Informal STEM Experiences for Girls,” that focused on the long-term impact of informal Science Technology Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) programing for teen-age girls. One hundred and seventy four women, who participated in one of the six STEM programs (Eureka!, National Science Partnership [NSP], Washington Integrated Nutrition System [WINS], Science, Mathematics & Research for Transformation [SMART],

Techbridge, and Rural Girls), for at least a year were asked to complete a retrospective questionnaire about their experience in these programs and whether those experiences had influenced their present understanding and attitudes about science and themselves. Based on the study's findings, 67% of the respondents expressed how their experiences in informal STEM programs positively influenced their personal identity, which included their self-image, self-esteem, confidence, and leadership abilities. Twenty-two percent of the respondents expressed that their experiences in informal STEM programs influenced their relationship or connection to science. How this information relates to the benefits of museum visitation is that many of the study's participants attributed museum visits as an important aspect that influenced them later in life.

Program Strategies for Engaging Underserved Audiences in Museums

In exploring program strategies for engaging with underserved audiences it is important to acknowledge that not all audiences who fall under this umbrella term experience the same type of challenges in participation at the same time. According to Quinn (1999), low-income youth often experience barriers for participation that includes transportation, geographical distance to services, and fees associated with service. Youths' perceptions can also be influenced by their physical ability/disability, gender, race and whether they belong in the museum. These factors can influence their decision in participation. For older adults, limitations include the number of programs that are offered in their area. This section will discuss ways in which museums have attempted to mitigate challenges of transportation and nuanced feelings in hopes of bettering engaging with underserved audiences.

In 2016, Danielle Marino, Manager of the STEM Scholars Program, The Franklin Intuition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was a part of a brief case study, "We Want You! The

Targeted Recruitment of Youth.” The study was conducted from a panel session at the Association of Science-Technology Centers Annual conference in the same year. The study included a panel discussion, question and answer section with the panelist, and small focus groups. The discussion chair was Nick Martinez, American Museum of Natural History, other panelists who were represented included Andrea Motto, After School Program Director, Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, Catherine Paisley, Vice President, Science Education, Ontario Science Centre, and Neal Ramus, Senior Manager of Youth Programs, California Academy of Sciences. Marion indicated that transportation was a challenge for the program that she is involved with. How this challenge was mitigated was by the institution providing public transportation fare for the participants (We Want You, 2016). If transportation cannot be provided upfront by the institution, then according to Association of Science-Technology Centers: Handbook for Youth Programs (2005) handbook, strategies include either reimbursing youth for the cost of round-trip travel or giving detailed public transportation or driving instructions (p.39). Another transportation option is for the institution to look for donors to sponsor free transportation (Houston & Ong, 2013).

Overcoming visitors’ nuanced feelings of belonging in the museum can be difficult for institutions in attracting underserved audiences. MCGOWN, Laven, Manning, and Mitchell (2012) examined how the National Park Service (NPS) engages with diverse and underserved audiences. This study used qualitative, semi-structured interviews with NPS staff and individuals from selected organizations. In total 25 interviews were conducted, 16 were from NPS and 9 worked for other organizations. The study participants included NPS superintendents, heads of interpretation and education, Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU) coordinators, youth program coordinators, park rangers, as well as former NPS personnel, academics, presidents of

partner organizations and consulting groups. The study highlighted that its participants were racially/ethnically and geographically diverse. Many of the study's participants felt that one method for the NPS to engage with underserved audiences was to take an active role in building meaningful relationships with those communities through inductive practices. For example, the NPS should introduce the organization, its missions, and parks to those in the community within settings that are familiar to a community such as at local churches, schools, and recreations centers. According to the study's findings, the intent of such practices is to "...help build a meaningful relationship between communities and national park units as a whole" (p. 281).

Summary

The literature demonstrates that admission price does influence how audiences engage with museums. While some studies indicate that increased admission price increases certain visitor demographics, many more studies indicate that museum visitorship as a whole can increase when admission is either free or reduced. Additionally, for those visitors where admission is a financial barrier, admission prices may become an exclusionary factor for them which is often contrary to many museums' mission statements. Studies show that visitors value museum experiences for a myriad of reasons including the opportunities to learn something new. Studies also show that the museum experience can have long-term impacts on visitors. Some institutions, such as the National Parks Service, are recruiting visitors via community building practices. There are gaps in the literature. As of now, there are no published studies on the *Museums for All* (MFA) initiative. By examining the MFA initiative, this is one way of understanding how to increase museum accessibility for a wider audience especially for those who hail from underrepresented communities.

Chapter Three

The purpose of this research study was to gain a better understanding of the challenges and benefits that children's museums experience by offering reduced admission to families based on their income via the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Why do children's museums offer reduced admission?
2. What are the benefits and challenges for museums in providing reduced admission?
3. How has reduced admission influenced the relationship between children's museums and their communities?

Sampling Case Sites

This research was designed as a case study (Yin, 2003). In selecting sites for this study, the following criteria were used: 1) children's museums, due to their predominant visitor demographic that consists of at least one adult and child; 2) children's museums affiliated with the "Museum for All" Initiative, a federally-funded initiative designed to promote low-income families to visit museums by offering reduced admission (Museum for All, 2017); 3) children's museums that charge reduced admission in the amount of a \$3 entrance fee, because it requires a visitor to pay a significant amount of the admission fee in order to visit; 4) children's museums that feature information on their website about their reduced admission policy, and about their hours; and 5) children's museums that do not have "Member only" days because of concerns regarding potential accessibility issues.

Using these criteria, four case study sites were identified. These sites included a small museum located in a rural area in Montana, that joined the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative in the summer of 2016; two medium sized museums located in urban areas of Illinois which joined

the MFA initiative in 2015 and 16; and one medium sized museum located in a suburban area of Washington that joined the initiative in 2015. Size of the museum was determined by their annual operating budget. This information was accessed via the museums' 2014 and 2015 990 tax forms on the GuideStar's website.

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews and Document Analysis

Data sources included semi-structured interviews with professionals at these four case study sites, as well as document analysis of relevant written material pertaining to the museum's reduced admission policy. At each site, 1 to 2 participants were interviewed, selected because of their involvement with the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative. Interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person and lasted between 10-30 minutes. The interviews collected qualitative data regarding the benefits and challenges that each participant saw that their institution experienced by being a part of the "Museum for All" initiative (see Appendix A for the interview guide). All interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the interviewees.

Documents were either given by the interviewees to the researcher or the researcher accessed documents such as the institution's annual report and 990 tax form via the internet.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed all the interviews using NVivo software. Once transcribed, the researcher analyzed responses to identify themes and patterns important to the guiding questions of this study (See Appendix B for the coding matrix). These themes and patterns were then reviewed by the committee chair for reliability.

Limitations

This research design is a case study approach which collected data from four children's museums within the United States of America. One limitation of this study could be whether

other children's museums would share the same perspective. Another limitation could be that the results of this study are not relevant to institutions that are unfamiliar with reduced admission policies and this phenomenon.

Chapter 4: Results & Discussion

Case Study Descriptions

All of the interviewees who spoke on behalf of the museum that they work for were not addressed by their given names, titles, or name of the institutions that they represented for the study but by the title "Museum" followed by a capitalized alphabetic letter. All interviewees currently work for the museum that she or he spoke for during the interviews and hold employment positions in upper management. Their employment roles within each of their institutions differ from each other. Each museum that took part in this study was enrolled in the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative at the time of the interviews. These museums joined the initiative at different times within the same two-year period.

Museum A was a small museum located in a rural area in Montana. Museum A joined the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative in the summer of 2016. Museum B and Museum C were medium sized museums located in urban areas of Illinois. Museum B joined the initiative in fall of 2015. Museum C joined the initiative spring of 2016. Museum D was a medium sized museum located in a suburban area of Washington. Museum D joined the initiative in winter of 2015. Size of the museum was determined by their annual operating budget. This information was accessed via the museums' 2014 and 2015 I 90 tax forms listed on the GuideStar's website.

As part of the MFA initiative requirements, all museums must accept an *Electronic Benefits Transfer* (EBT) card as proof for reduced admission. However, 3 of the 4 museums also accepted other forms of government support such as *Women, Infants, and Children* (WIC) card as verification to receive reduced admission. Museum C has opted not to require a valid state-issued identification card or driver's license in addition to presenting an EBT card at the time of admission as required by the MFA's guidelines. Museum C's justification for altering the MFA's

regulations were because EBT cards tend not to have the recipient's name printed on the card which makes it impossible at the time of admission to connect the valid state-issued identification card or driver's license to the EBT cardholder. Museum C admitted that there could be the potential for fraud, however; the museum felt that it was unlikely that its MFA participants would take advantage of the discount in this manner which will be discussed later in this section.

All four of the museums asserted that their institutions were not interested in terminating their participation in the MFA initiative. Museum A asserted, "No, we are not even considering terminating the participation in the program." Museum D also said "no" when asked the same question. Museum C asserted, "No, if anything we would be looking to potentially expanding it." Museum B stated, "We have not considered terminating our participation, we are in the process of expanding." Museum C and B did not elaborate on how their institutions would expand their participation in the MFA initiative.

Research question 1: Why do children's museums offer reduced admission?

Three main motivations emerged from the data, including a) creating more accessibility opportunities for low-income or underrepresented communities; b) leading by example; and c) opportunities to talk to other organizations.

a) Creating accessibility for low-income or underrepresented communities

All four museums asserted that a motivation for joining the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative was to create greater accessibility opportunities for their low-income or underrepresented visitors. Museum A stated, "Attempting to give opportunities for others who might find it expensive and/or a burden to visit the museum..." Museum C expanded on that position by stating,

The motivations were primarily to position the museum to be able to provide experiences that inspire every child. We wanted to have a venue for allowing children in different socioeconomic statuses to be able to visit the museum, families that were perhaps less well off, less well to do.

Museums B, C, and D connected creating greater accessibility opportunities for their low-income or underrepresented visitors to either the museum's mission or its core values. Museum B asserted that one of its motivations was mission driven in that, "One, it is already in line with one of our annual objectives which is to ensure that at least one-third of our visitors come from low-income or underrepresented communities." Museum C focused more on making the museum's resources available to under-resourced communities such as those who were unable to pay for memberships themselves by stating, "Those factors, I think, are kind of what govern all of our outreach initiatives and which include this *Museum for All* program." Museum D connected its motivations to the museum's values by stating, "Access is one of our core values as an organization, so we are always interested in new opportunities to expand our reach." A central theme for all the museums interviewed was the idea that the MFA initiative could aid the museum in creating greater accessibility opportunities for reaching low-income or underrepresented visitors.

b) Leading by example

Two of the four museums emphasized that another motivational factor for their institution joining the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative was the idea of leadership, either with their visitor audience or other museums. Regarding joining the MFA initiative Museum C asserted, "Again we want to position the museum as sort of a leader in the field of early child education for all children and this is just an excellent avenue for us to point to to say that this is one of the steps that we are taking to meet that goal of ours." Museum B indicated that being a leader among

other children's museums would encourage other museums to join the initiative. Museum B stated,

And lastly, we wanted to be the first museum in a major metropolitan region to join because at that time there was still not museum in New York City and not in Los Angeles proper so, we saw it as a great opportunity to encourage others in similar cities to also join Museums for All.

Leadership, either among other museums was a powerful motivation in joining the MFA initiative for half of the museums that took part in this study.

c) Opportunities to partner to other organizations

While other museums mentioned that opportunities to engage with other individuals and organizations arose from offering reduced admission, only Museum B asserted that these opportunities were a motivating factor for the institution to join the Museums for All initiative.

Museum B stated,

Secondly, we are excited because it would be a new way for us to engage our community partners, and I am happy to elaborate on that later, that it has allowed us to sit at tables where a children's museums normally would not be perceived to be at. That was a great opportunity.

Museum B was able, due in part to its lengthy participation, to gain access to other individuals and organizations through the MFA initiative. Which leads to the question of what are the benefits for museums in offering reduced admission?

Research question 2: What are the benefits and challenges for children's museums in providing reduced admission?

Benefits

Museums in this study articulated two key benefits they perceived from offering reduced admission: a) positioning themselves around the MFA initiative and its reduced admission; and b) reaching underserved families.

a) Positioning themselves around the MFA Initiative

All the museums mentioned that one of the major benefits for their institution being part of the MFA, and offering reduced admission, was that they positioned themselves around it, leveraging it in their other community-based efforts and holding it up as an example of a key accomplishment in the field. Museum A stated, “It is fabulous to see it used and be able to talk about it when we talk with other not-for-profit or service agencies – in outreach opportunities.” Museums working with outside agencies around the MFA initiative is evident in Museum D’s quote: “There are a couple of different organizations we work through because we know that they are working with more individuals in our community that utilize these services and we want to make sure that information is out to them.” A fluent theme that was alluded to in most of the interviews was the idea that communication with other individuals and organizations was a form of community outreach. The MFA initiative often allowed these museums an opportunity to engage the community.

Since Museum B had performed extensive research and evaluation before joining the MFA initiative, it also presented the museum with opportunities to work more closely with other non-profits, services provider, and recipients of social services. The quote from Museum B listed below illuminates the actions that Museum B took in this process:

So, we spent a better part of six months of the summer leading up to our launch actually engaged in pretty extensive background research so, it started with community focus groups both with... the LINC...our SNAP recipients...We call it LINC in Illinois, and both with SNAP and also services providers... to really gain their insight to what would being a part of the program... administrating the program... what it would be like... and then we did a round of field research... to reach out to all the museums that are currently participating who had similar demographics and/or location to find out their experience.

Due to Museum B’s lengthy and in-depth participation in the MFA initiative, the museum had gained a vast amount of benefits that range from opportunities to engage with other museums on

a local to nationwide scale to other benefits that expanded from those interactions. One of those benefits was highlighted in this quote from Museum B: “It has given us a really nice piece of social capital as far as being a leader in this and other museums trusting our procedures to implement.”

b) Reaching underserved families in a way that doesn't require institutional vetting

Two of the four museums stated that one of the benefits that their institution gained from participating in the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative was that it reduced institutional efforts in creating their own programs to reach underserved families, and in particular it removed the need for institution to decide what constitutes “underserved” and what evidence might be required to demonstrate that one is “underserved.” Museum C said, “I think it is a wonderful way for us to be able to not have to create our own program which includes staff time and other things like that.” In addition, Museum C said, “It gives us an efficient way to kind of evaluate our families in need but I think secondly it also promotes beyond us.” Regarding Museum C’s point about the MFA initiative being an efficient evaluation method of determining which families need reduced admission, Museum D supported that position by asserting, “...without us having to vet them in any way to see if they are in true need of that support because they are already being vetted by applying for food stamps, or applying for housing aide.” The vetting process provided via the MFA initiative allowed for these two museums to focus more on helping families that needed reduced admission.

Museum C highlighted a significant concern for the museum about how best to determine eligibility for its low-income visitors regarding reduced admission. The quote below illustrated an internal institutional predicament surrounding philanthropic support for low-income visitors’

eligibility for reduced admission, and how the MFA initiative worked as a bridge between these two points for one museum. According to Museum C,

We do we get donations and philanthropic support from donors that are very interested in saying, ‘How are you helping to serve those who are less capable of visiting the museum on their own?’ This seems to be a good avenue. The issues we have run into in the past,...if we try to say, ‘Oh we will accept donations to help other families in need,’ we did not have a good sense of how do we determine how in need a family is. Who are those populations? If people come to us and say, ‘I am in need’ or ‘Do you have anything to help a poor family?’ How do you define who would be eligible for that? Having a structure program, by ACM and IMLS, to identify... this is a good barometer of family that have established needs... finically. If they are getting support from government agencies then we can deduce that they are a family that we would want to provide discount admission to.

In addition, Museum C also asserted about the MFA initiative that, “I think the way that this program was designed with the electronic benefit card, it really is helping to identify families who are under resourced and could benefit from the museum, and what the museum has to offer.” Museum D supported this point by asserting,

Museums for All really allows us to offer easy access for any individual on their schedule on their timeline without us having to vet them in any way to see if they are in true need of that support because they are already being vetted by applying for food stamps, or apply for housing aide. All of that vetting work is done. They have an easy way of show it so it easily creates an opportunity for us to truly allow anyone at any income level access to the facility.

Museum D also highlighted a concern about the role of the museum when it comes to its visitors and providing reduced admission opportunities by asserting,

I think our job as an organization is to provide early learning, early educational opportunities for children and families in our community. Are job is not to decide who deserves those and who deserves those at a discount rate. And, our job is also not to question the people who walk through our doors. They should not have to pass some kind of exam to be able to enter.

Challenges and mitigations

Three challenges were articulated by museums in this study regarding offering reduced admission, including a) communication challenges; and b) “what if?” challenges. In addition, museums articulated various strategies they use to attempt to mitigate these challenges.

a) Communication challenges

When asked about the challenges that they had experienced through offering reduced admission, all four of the museums referred to communication. Communication challenges ranged from the awareness of the initiative to how it operated and even to a lesser degree its authenticity. Museum A’s challenge was communicating to its community that the museum participated in the MFA initiative as stated in the following quote, “More getting the word out and advertising the program.” Museum D supported this position by asserting, “I think the main challenge has been communicating to our community that we offer this. Where we communicate this, where it is posted and how to do that appropriately.”

Communication challenges experienced by other museums were often evident by visitors’ inquiries about whether the museum offered *any* discounts for low-income families. Museum C stated that “...we get phone calls [from] people saying do you offer any discounts for low-income families?” While Museum B also experienced visitors inquiring about discounts, their questions often focused more on the authenticity of the MFA initiative:

...probably once a week I get a call from somebody who says...‘I just want to see if this program is real? I don’t want to drive all the way there, get a bus all the way out there, if I am going to get there and learn that it is fake.’ It is incredible how many people still cannot believe we are offering this type of discount.

A subsidiary challenge that arose out of the communication theme was visitors’ understanding of how the MFA initiative operates even though all the museums that took part in

this study post this information on their websites within the general admission section. Museum D highlighted its experience with this issue in the following quote: “It tends to be one on one communications with individuals that are confused or concerned about what kind of ID that they have to show... is it \$3 per person or \$3 for four.”

Another challenge that arose within the communication theme was educating visitors and staff about the MFA initiative such as what are EBT cards and which types of government assistance were required as proof for reduced admission. Museum C mentioned that some of their visitors were unfamiliar with what an EBT card was as evident in the following quote:

We have had a few people question and say, ‘I see here that there is a discount for EBT card people- what is that? Is that a frequent flyer card or frequent user of the museum?’ and we will say ‘No, it is an electric *Benefit Transfer Card*.’ Clearly there are people who are not familiar with the sort of lingo.

Visitors who are unfamiliar with what EBT stands for could be problematic for museums that desire to enable visitation via the MFA initiative because the EBT card is a key component of the initiative’s guidelines. Another challenge could be if visitors who are unfamiliar with such language then they might not be aware that reduced admission could be an option for them.

Having an educated staff to handle visitors’ inquiries can be challenging as well especially, if the museum has opted to accept other forms of government assistance as proof for reduced admission. Three of the four museums that took part in the study have opted to do so.

Museum D highlighted this challenge in the following quote:

Making sure that our staff knows the right version of a card to accept. We are just receiving more inquiries. ‘Well, I heard that you take EBT, do you also take this?’ Just having that knowledge... I think it was our only challenge making sure we were accepting the right thing.

Communicating and educating visitors and subsequently staff about the MFA initiative and its guidelines was the largest challenge mentioned by all the museums that took part in this study.

b) *“What-if” potential challenges*

Two of the four museums mentioned “what-if” concerns before joining in the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative and deciding to offer reduced admission. Museum C’s concerns focused on whether participating in the MFA initiative could potentially negatively affect the museum.

The following quote from Museum C highlighted these concerns:

Certainly, there were questions...’Oh, is this going to negatively affect us or are we going to be swamped with people that are using this discount? Is it going to negatively affect us financially? Is it going to overcrowd the museum and there were suspicion and what-ifs’.

Museum D’s concerns predominately rested on the idea of how offering another discount could potentially negatively affect the museum. Museum D asserted, “Yes, at the time we had an abundance of discounts that we were offering. Adding one more wasn’t... it merited discussion. Because we did have a lot of discounts at the time.” Both of these concerns were mitigated as evidenced by these museums joining the MFA initiative. Which leads into the question of how did these museums mitigate challenges that arose by participating in the initiative?

c) *Mitigation of challenges*

Both Museum C and D mitigated their *what-if* concerns through open dialogue and a willingness to participate in the initiative. For Museum D, mitigation came in the form of dialogue with administration as stated in this quote, “But, our president was onboard with it immediately so, that was a pretty quick conversation.” Museum D overcame its *what-if* concern through contemplation and caution as illustrated in the following quote:

We determined there is no way to really know that until you try it. You don't know if you can swim if you don't get into the water. And so, we made the decision to go forward with it and just keep an eye on it to see if it explodes or gets out of control very quickly. We determined that it probably was not going to make a great financial impact to us because the families who would be participating in this program are probably very much less likely to visit the museum at full price any ways.

Mitigation of challenges took all forms. As for the communication challenge mentioned earlier, these museums approached that challenge differently. Museum A was working on creating more communication in either spoken or visual formats as illustrated in the following quote, “Signage, telling other not-for-profits and service agencies, developing a flyer.” Museum C had used its website and other forms of social media. Museum D focused its efforts internally as illustrated in these quotes regarding staff education and visitors’ inquiry about what type of government proof was required to receive reduced admission; “questions and also to continually educate our staff at the first desk about how we are going to answer those” and “We collectively decided just started accepting those under the Museum for All blanket. That was just our way of solving that problem. We were able to say yes to more people by accepting the cards that they do have.” As for Museum B, it is working directly with non-profits, service providers, and recipients of social services to get the word out that the MFA initiative is an authentic option for eligible visitors.

Research question 3: How has reduced admission influenced the relationship between children’s museums and their communities?

Two of the four museums asserted it was too early to tell whether providing reduced admission via the *Museum for All* initiative had influenced the relationship between the museum and its community. Museum A said, “I think it may be too soon to tell as we are building capacity and have yet to really advertise that we are participating in the program.” Museum C elaborated on that position by stating, “... We've only been in it for a year now. I definitely think it gives us the ability to do that. Yes. I think that's something we need to cultivate more.”

Conversely, Museum B also asserted that participating in the MFA initiative did have some effect on its community relations by stating, “I think it gives us a stronger standing in the

community” alluding to the museum’s ability to strengthen its relationship with its community via reduced admission in order to provide all children with an enriching early education.

Both Museum A and C had participated in the initiative for approximately one year or less at the time of this study which may have contributed to their views on whether the relationship between the museum and its community had been influenced by the initiative.

Both Museum D and B expressed that participating in the MFA initiative had, to some degree, influenced the relationship between the museum and its community. Museum D saw that the relationship between the museum and community had been influenced on an individual basis:

I think it has on an individual basis. I think that we do have efforts to partner with other organizations to get the word out about this. I don't know, we don't do any surveys seeing if people have heard it through an organization or if they heard about us through inquiring personally. But, I do think that any time you are reaching more people in your community then that's a good thing.

While Museum B asserted not only that its relationship with its visitors had been influenced by joining the MFA initiative, but also that its relationship with museums had been influenced, as expressed in the following quote:

And how many people who I am on the phone with who get emotional and say, ‘I can have a birthday party for my son this year... for 20 dollars. I can come out there and have a full day and bring his best friends’ so, it has made us a lot more relevant... it has changed our relationship with the museum community in Chicago with us being the first to launch and four to five other museums directly meeting with us to learn how to model their operation process(ices) and their marketing strategies after ours. It has given us a really nice piece of social capital as far as being a leader in this and other museums trusting our procedures to implement. And it also helped us out on the national scale in that we have been invited to write a couple of national blog posts for IMLS and ACM and they have recently hosted in January a symposium at our museum where they invited partners from the other main cities that they are trying to expand to so... like Pittsburgh and Cincinnati being two other cities that have large concentration of museums for... if you can get upwards of 50% of your museums participating then there is motivation for all of your museums to participate and that's what we have been gradually doing in Chicago. It is a tipping point where now not every museum is not a part of *Museum for All* they are showing a message to the public

that they do not prioritizing serving low-income families and pretty incredible...
so power persuasion by your peers to have that involvement.

More than likely due to Museum B's extensive participation in the MFA initiative had granted
the museum a closer relationship with its visitors and other museums.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this case study was to understand the benefits and challenges experienced by children's museums that offer reduced admission via the Museum for All (MFA) initiative. Data were collected for this study using semi-structured interviews to answer three research questions:

- 1) Why do museums offer reduced admission;
- 2) What are the benefits and challenges for museums in providing reduced admission;
- 3) How has reduced admission influenced the relationship between children's museums and their communities?

Using a case study design, data were collected from museum professionals at four sites that offer reduced admission via the *Museum for All* (MFA) initiative, through in-depth interviews and document analysis.

Conclusions

Research question 1: Why do children's museums offer reduced admission?

What this study revealed was that children's museums are motivated to provide reduced admission based on three main factors. The first motivational factor focused sharply on the idea of creating greater accessibility opportunities for low-income or underrepresented visitors beyond providing limited, one-off access points to the museum such as free days or events. The desire to create this increased level of access spurred two of the four museums to want to become leaders among children's museums in providing this level of access for low-income or underrepresented visitors. This second finding may suggest that other institutions could be motivated to provide reduced admission via the Museum for All (MFA) initiative. The last

finding may indicate that participating MFA museums were motivated to join the initiative because it provided them with opportunities to partner with other organizations and individuals about a particular type of reduced admission program. The museums gained access to other agencies and individuals that the institutions might not have access to under different circumstances. For example, one museum stated that it had received a call from a potential visitor who mentioned seeing a flier about the museum providing reduced admission via this initiative at church.

Research question 2: What are the benefits and challenges for children’s museums in providing reduced admission?

Perceived benefits for the museums that offer reduced admission opportunities via the Museum for All (MFA) initiative outweighed the challenges. The two main benefits were the ability for the museum to position itself around the MFA initiative; and the ability for the museum to reach underserved families in a way that did not require institutional vetting. Within the first main benefit, museums noted that providing reduced admission via the MFA allowed the museum to situate itself in a position where it could partner with other non-profits to promote access opportunities for low-income and often underrepresented communities which allowed for the museum to gain access to a wider audience. An additional benefit gained for the museum was its ability to leverage its community-based efforts and then present those actions as a key accomplishment within the museum field. Non-profits gained the ability to inform their clients that the museum offers a reduced admission rate for qualified visitors which allow for visitation on their schedule. Yet another benefit for participating museums was that reduced admission provides some degree of flexibility in its guidelines. For example, three of the four museums also accept other forms of government assistance, such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) card, as proof to receive reduced admission. By taking other forms of

government assistance, this allowed the museum to offer a reduced admission rate to a wider audience without having to vet each visitor individually.

The second main benefit was that museums that provided reduced admission via the Museum for All (MFA) initiative did not have to use their resources to design, vet participants, and then implement a reduced admission program or event. Lastly, MFA visitors can access the museum on days and times that work best for their schedule which is less pressure on the museum to provide access opportunities.

The one main challenge that these museums faced was communication. Communication problems ranged from making visitors fully aware that reduced admission was available via this initiative and its authenticity to having a knowledgeable staff able to handle visitors' inquiries. Mitigation of communication challenge ranged from engaging with community partners about the initiative to working more closely with museum staff to ensure that they fully understood the initiative's guidelines.

Two of the four museums mentioned "what-if" concerns which were reasonable given each of the institution's unique situations. The first concern focused on what effect it would have on the museum to offer an additional discount in conjunction with all its other discounts. For example, it could mean that the museum has overestimated the value of its admission price. Within this concern, one of the museums was apprehensive about how the public might start to view the institution as for-profit entity rather than a non-profit that is here to serve its community. The second museum's concern pertained to its previous held apprehension about the museum becoming overly crowded with visitors during peak business hours and whether MFA visitors would contribute to that issue.

What these findings may suggest is that while the benefits of joining the MFA initiative outweigh the challenges, there were still challenges. These challenges were overcome through dialogue and contemplation about what it meant for the institution to join the initiative.

Research question 3: How has reduced admission influenced the relationship between children's museums and their communities?

Two of the four museums asserted that providing reduced admission via the Museum for All (MFA) initiative had influenced the relationship between the museum and its community either on an individual or collective scale. These two museums have participated in the initiative since 2015. The first museum said that the relationship between the museum and its community had been influenced and that was evident in two different ways. The first way was how the museum engages with other non-profits and service providers. The second way is how the museum engages with its low-income and often underrepresented visitors.

This museum spent six months soliciting input from non-profits, service providers, and recipients of social services about what it would mean for them if the museum provided reduced admission via the MFA initiative. At this stage, the museum conducted a focus group to evaluate what types of questions would be non-intrusive to ask. By working closely with these organizations, the museum has not only formed a relationship but that relationship was influenced by the museum offering reduced admission to low-income and often underrepresented communities. This museum accomplished this by continuously soliciting information from MFA visitors at the time of admission with a brief survey card. With this information, the museum can check in with the non-profits about the number of visitors being directed to the museum from each site. If a limited number of visitors are being directed from a site then the museum is able to contact that site and ask if there is something that the museum can provide to help increase

visitorship from that organization. Or if a non-profit is directing more visitors, the museum can call that organization and congratulate it on a job well done.

The second form of evidence of how the relationship between this museum and its community had been influenced by providing reduced admission came in the form of phone calls from visitors. For example, one visitor called inquiring about the authenticity of the museum providing reduced admission via the MFA initiative and became elated hearing that it was true and then learned that her son could have his birthday party at the museum for about \$20.

The second museum asserted that the relationship between the museum and individual members of the community had been influenced by providing reduced admission via the MFA initiative. This relationship was highlighted in one visitor's experience of opting to pay the MFA reduced price each visit rather than applying for a museum sponsored annual membership of \$25. The visitor's rationale for this decision was that by paying the fee each time she was partnering with museum.

The other two museums claimed that it was too early for their institutions to say whether the relationship between the museum and its community had been influenced by providing reduced admission via this initiative. Both of these museums have participated in the initiative for approximately less than one year at the time when the interviews were conducted. What these findings may suggest for the museum field is that duration of participation in the MFA initiative could influence the relationship between the museum and its communities.

Implications for practice

Implications for practice greatly depend on whether a museum is currently providing reduced admission via the Museum for All (MFA) initiative or contemplating joining. For museums that are already participating in this initiative, providing reduced admission over time

can influence the relationship between the museum and its community. This study suggests that museums that experience a change with their communities also work directly with non-profits, service providers, and recipients of social services. This means, for participating museums, the relationship between the museum and its community can be influenced by providing reduced admission but it could take a longer period of time and a greater level of commitment on the part of the museum to be able to partner with other community-based organizations.

Implications for practice.

Museums that are contemplating joining the Museum for All (MFA) initiative could consider whether the motivational factors and benefits of providing reduced admission via this initiative are in line with their institution's values. Based on this study, museums were motivated to provide reduced admission based on three factors. These factors are as follows: 1) creating greater accessibility opportunities for low-income or underrepresented communities; 2) leading by example; and 3) developing opportunities to partner with other organizations. Even if only one of the above motivations are in line with institution's values then providing reduced admission via this initiative could be a viable option.

Museums that are interested in offering reduced admission via the MFA initiative could also gain these benefits. The ability for the museum to position itself around the MFA initiative; the ability for the museum to reach underserved families in a way that did not require institutional vetting; and the ability to leverage the museum's community-based efforts and then present those actions as a key accomplishment within the museum field all appear to stem from providing reduced admission via the MFA initiative.

As for challenges, an implication for practice for museums that are contemplating offering reduced admission via the Museum for All (MFA) initiative, is that the museum should

be aware that the main challenge centered on communication issues. These issues ranged from making visitors fully aware that reduced admission was available via initiative and its authenticity to having a knowledgeable staff able to handle visitors' inquiries.

Implications for future research

This study examined the benefits and challenges experienced by a select number of children's museums that are currently participating in the Museum for All (MFA) initiative in hopes of understanding whether providing reduced admission can influence the relationship between the museum and its community. Future research is needed to understand whether the findings of this study are representative of the field. The future research could include examining the benefits, challenges, and community relationships of a large number of the participating MFA institutions in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the different effects that each type of institution experiences. A future study could explore why, if at all, some participating institutions are able to reach a wider audience than others. This could help them understand and eventually create greater museum accessibility opportunities for low-income and often underrepresented visitors via engagement.

Another suggestion for future research could be to compare the benefits and challenges that participating MFA initiative museums experience to other museums that are not participating in this initiative but do offer reduced admission programs. This qualitative comparison study could examine the institutional values and perceptions of providing reduced admission in hopes of gaining a greater understanding of other factors that drive museums to provide this option for certain visitors.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. For this interview, I'm interested in your experience as an employee of a museum that offers reduced admission fees to individuals and families based on their income. The goal of this interview is to understand the benefits and challenges for museums to offer such services. I will be asking a series of questions. If there are any questions you'd like to skip, or if you would like to take a break at any point, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Let's begin!

What is the name of the museum that you work for?

What is your role within the museum?

In what month and year did your museum join the *Museums for All* initiative?

What was the museum's motivation for becoming part of *Museums for All*?

At the time that you were considering joining, was there any concern or reluctance amongst staff? (Probe: How would you characterize that concern or reluctance?)

How exactly does *Museums for All* operate at your museum? (Probes: How do visitors qualify for reduced admission? How do they receive reduced admission?)

During your most recent full fiscal year, what percentage of your visitorship would you estimate benefitted from reduced admission? Have you seen any shifts in this percentage over time, since you started offering it?

Do you keep track of who receives reduced admission? If so, what information do you record? If not, why not?

Have you ever conducted any evaluation related to the *Museums for All* initiative at your museum?

What have been the benefits for the museum being involved in *Museums for All*?

What have been the challenges that the institution has encountered by offering reduced admission to individuals and families based on their income?

What have been the implications of those challenges for your museum?

How are you working to mitigate or overcome those challenges?

Has the museum ever considered terminating its participation in *Museums for All*? Why/why not?

Do you think that your average visitor knows that you offer reduced admission to those who qualify? Why/why not? (Probe – If they do know, do you think it changes the way they view the museum? If they don't know, do you think that if they knew it would change the way they view the museum?)

Do you think that offering reduced admission has influenced the relationship between the museum and its communities? If, so, how? If not, then what does this mean for the organization?

Appendix B

Interview Questions	Museum A	Museum B	Museum C	Museum D
What is your role within the museum?	Executive Director	Associate Vice President of Community and Educational Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Marketing and PR. • Vice President of Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects Manger • Membership and Events Manager
In what month and year did your museum join the <i>Museums for All</i> initiative?	Summer 2016	November 2015	May 2016	February 2015
What was the museum’s motivation for becoming part of <i>Museums for All</i> ?	“Attempting to give opportunities for others who might find it expensive and/or a burden to visit the museum to be able to find ways to access the museum. ”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with annual objectives that at least 1/3 of total visitors are either low-income or hail from underrepresented communities. • New way to engage community partners. • Wanted to be the first museum in major metropolitan area to join 	“The motivations were primarily to position the museum to be able to provide experiences that inspire every child. We wanted to have a venue for allowing children in different socioeconomic status to be able to visit the museums, families that were perhaps less well off, less well to do”	“ Access is one of our core values as an organization, so we are always interested in new opportunities to expand our reach. We were excited when we learned about <i>Museums for All</i> . The ease of signing up and participating certainly helped us join quickly.”
At the time that you were considering joining, was	“No reluctance from staff and/or our	Yes, from the Marketing Department. However, those	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this going to financially negatively 	Yes. Concerns about the number of discounts that

<p>there any concern or reluctance amongst staff?</p>	<p>Board.”</p>	<p>concerns were reduced by the museum performing research and formative evaluation.</p>	<p>affect us? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding issue that was already an issue. </p>	<p>were already being offered.</p>
<p>How exactly does <i>Museums for All</i> operate at your museum?</p>	<p>“\$3 admission by showing EBT card.”</p>	<p>“All Illinois EBT or WIC card holders receive \$3 admission for up to 6 people. Families must include 1 adult and 1 child age 15 or younger. Present a valid EBT (known as the Link card) or WIC card to qualify.”</p>	<p>“It essential a family would come to our ticketing desk and they show any sort of proof of government assistance whether it is the Illinois Link card, or WIC card or any sort of electron benefit transfer card...”</p>	<p>“The Museums for All rate is \$3 per person for up to 4 people with proof of participation in the following programs: EBT, CHIP, Provider One, or WIC.”</p>
<p>During your most recent full fiscal year, what percentage of your visitorship would you estimate benefitted from reduced admission? Have you seen any shifts in this percentage over time, since you started offering it?</p>	<p>“Only been in operations one year 9 months.”</p>	<p>“Already have seen 11 thousand people this fiscal year.”</p>	<p>“Again, we haven't committed a full year. Our fiscal year starts in July so, I have a little more than 9 month lefts of the school year. It is a little less... 1 percent... at this time”</p>	<p>“I don't know about the percentage. Really low in the past although this year we have seen an uptake in the amount of people who are using it already and it is only April. I would say it is on the rise. But... I am sorry... I didn't prepare.”</p>
<p>Do you keep track of who receives reduced</p>	<p>“We just record numbers not of whom or</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily numbers • Sends bi-weekly report to MFA. (MFA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks non-members for their zip codes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks non-members for their zip codes.

<p>admission? If so, what information do you record? If not, why not?</p>	<p>any other information” [As per MFA requirements].</p>	<p>requirements) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome card (Survey cards for MFA visitors) </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MFA requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MFA requirements
<p>Have you ever conducted any evaluation related to the <i>Museums for All</i> initiative at your museum?</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front-end evaluation, focus groups, and visitor survey cards at the time of admission. • Waiting for a full year of data to produce an Internal Report on the welcome cards </p>	<p>No, but did speak to a couple of other museums before joining the MFA initiative.</p>	<p>No</p>

<p>What have been the benefits for the museum being involved in <i>Museums for All</i>?</p>	<p>“It is fabulous to see it used and be able to talk about it when we talk with other not-for-profit or service agencies – in outreach opportunities.”</p>	<p>“The benefits, I think we can look at them on a number of levels...” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining social capital with other museums • Demonstrating that low-income & underrepresented visitors are a priority for this museum. • Partnering with other non-profits, service providers, and recipients of social services. • Becoming a leader within the museum </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We [are] able to offer this quote on quote sliding scale to families that we trust and believe that are need.” • Tell donors about how their funds are being used to help fill in the gap. • Making museum’s resources available to under-resourced communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlining our discounts. • Allowed us to give discounts to people who truly need it on their schedule. • “We have tried many different things having a free night, having a dollar night, reduced admission night, all sort of different things and this really... kind of solved that problem for us. You can just come when you want to come.”
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		<p>field on the topic of reduced admission.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It gives us efficient way to kind of evaluate our families in need but I think secondly it also promoted beyond us. It brings families and we that we might not normally have access to or have communications with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It got us talking across our departments a lot more. I thought we were just oh hey we are going to do this new discount.” • “Museum for All really allows us to offer easy access for any individual on their schedule on their timeline without us having to vet them in any way to see if they are in true need of that support because they are already being vetted by applying for food stamps, or apply for housing aide. All of that vetting work is done. They have an easy way of show it so it easily creates an opportunity for us to truly allow anyone at any income level access to the facility.”
<p>What have</p>	<p>“We are</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “..saturation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Is this going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Mostly just

<p>been the challenges that the institution has encountered by offering reduced admission to individuals and families based on their income?</p>	<p>working on signage other than the decal on our front door.”</p>	<p>point now where we have to start applying for external funding in order to insure that it is sustainable.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People started using MFA more than other free events • “The only other challenge that I was going speak to is people are often concerned about program fraud when they talk to me. We have only had once instance of it and... I shouldn't say one instance... We only had one large spread instance of it and we were able to combat it pretty early” 	<p>to negatively affect or are we going to be swamped with people that using this discount. Is it going to negatively affect us financially? Is it going to overcrowd the museum and there were suspicion and what-ifs.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think our biggest concern is whenever we are going to put more people on the floor how will that effect our overcrowding issue especially during our peak times.” 	<p>housekeeping things. Making sure that our staff knows the right version of a card to accept. We are just receiving more inquires... well I heard that you take EBT, do you also take this? Just having that knowledge. As far as administratively, what we had to do to set it up it was really easy. I think it was our only challenge making sure we were accepting the right thing.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think the main challenges has been communicating to our community that we are offer this. Where we communicate this.”
<p>What have been the implications of those challenges for your museum?</p>	<p>“More getting the word out and advertising the program.”</p>	<p>“It is really interesting that basically you know that low-income families are telling us we don't just want to be relegated to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We determined there is no way to really know that until you try it. You don't know if you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think the main challenges has been communicating to our community that we are offer this. Where we

		<p>coming on a free Thursday night from 5-8 pm. We want to come on a Tuesday at 1 o'clock. We want to come Wednesday at 6 pm. They want the flexibility as does any full paying family to be able to come at a time that works with their schedule and life."</p>	<p>can swim if you don't get into the water."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "So, you know it isn't like we started doing this and all the sudden we have an overcrowding issue. We already had that issue. So, I think that was more the concern. On that front, it's something almost every issue we talk about kind of comes back to that same what's that going to do our kind crowding issue." 	<p>communicate this... where it is posted and how to do that appropriately."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A big part of removing the majority of our discounts is because we really believe in what admission is worth, what a membership is worth, and what that will provide to your family when you come and spend that time. We truly believe in the value of investing, for families to invest that money. The exception now that we have discounts solely based on people that financially couldn't invest that money, it creates the feeling , it's not that the museum is over-valued, it's that we are simple, again, creating an opportunity to
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				<p>ensure that everyone has access regardless of ability or income level. It also honors us as an organization and the service that we are providing to the community. And, as I said before, I think it reinforces us as a non-profit.</p>
<p>How are you working to mitigate or overcome those challenges?</p>	<p>“Signage, telling other not-for-profits and service agencies, developing a flyer”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We are anticipating that and getting a head it by starting to apply for foundation funding to keep supporting the program.” • “The way that we addressed it was to step up our free nights and focus on those as group nights so to start recruiting more school groups, community groups, to come for free nights.” • Worked more closely with front-end staff. 	<p>“And so, we made the decision to go forward with it and just keep an eye on it to see if it explodes or gets out of control very quickly. We determined that it probably was not going to make a great financial impact to us because the families who would be participating in this program are probably very much less likely to visit the museum at full price any ways.”</p>	<p>“It tends to be one on one communications with individuals that are confused or concerned what kind of id that they have to show... is it 3 dollars per person or 3 dollars for 4. Anything that someone could be unclear over they tend to call with a question. It is just having the staff bandwidth to answer those questions and also to continually educated our staff at the first desk about how we are going to answer those.</p>

<p>Has the museum ever considered terminating its participation in <i>Museums for All</i>? Why/why not?</p>	<p>“No, we are not even considering terminating the participation in the program.”</p>	<p>“We have not considered terminating our participation... we are in the process of expanding.”</p>	<p>“No, we haven't... if anything we would be looking to potentially expanding it.”</p>	<p>“Not that I am aware of. No.”</p>
<p>Do you think that your average visitor knows that you offer reduced admission to those who qualify? Why/why not?</p>	<p>“It could change the way people view the museum, and I believe that few people know about the program.”</p>	<p>“Oh, absolutely it been fascinating because community members so normally... probably once a week I get a call from somebody who says... and this me... my program staff gets it more often... but it makes it up to my level of a phone call... just a random person who will just say is I just want to see if this program is real? I don't want to drive all... get a bus all the way out there if I am going to get there and learn that it is fake. It is incredible how many people still cannot believe we are offering this type of discount. And how many people who I am on the phone with who get emotional and say I can have</p>	<p>“I am not sure that they necessarily do. It is something that is... it is on our website...it is on our homepage of our website.”</p>	<p>“Anyone who has gone on our website... I would say average visitor it's would be hard to tell.”</p>

		<p>a birthday party for my son this year... for 20 dollars. I can come out there and have a full day and bring his best friends so, it has made us a lot more relevant... it has changed our relationship with the museum community in Chicago...</p>		
<p>Do you think that offering reduced admission has influenced the relationship between the museum and its communities? If, so, how? If not, then what does this mean for the organization?</p>	<p>“I think it may be too soon to tell as we are building capacity and have yet to really advertise that we are participating in the program.”</p>	<p>Yes, evident in phone calls, interactions with other museums, non-profits, service providers, and recipients of social services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Too early to tell...” • “I think... we've only been in it for a year now. I definitely think it gives us the ability to do that. Yes. I think that's something we need to cultivate more.” 	<p>“Individual basis”</p>