

REPORT

# The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey

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The Mellon Foundation encourages distribution of the report. For questions, please write to [lw@mellon.org](mailto:lw@mellon.org).

## Introduction

In June 2013, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation made a \$2.07 million grant to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to enable the museum and four other major metropolitan museums in the United States (Art Institute of Chicago, High Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art) to launch a pilot program of undergraduate curatorial fellowships.<sup>1</sup> The initiative was designed to open up the museum as a potential workplace to students from historically underrepresented minorities and other undergraduates who are committed to diversifying our cultural organizations. At a time of unprecedented rates of demographic change in the United States, the program was intended as an experiment in what may need to be a concerted effort, supported by many organizations, to make the country's art museums more representative of the growing diversity of the American people. In each of its five sites, the program met with enthusiastic responses, but also with questions. Why was such a program needed? How did the art museums and the Mellon Foundation know that demographic homogeneity was a problem in art museums?

To people familiar with the professional profiles of American art museums or with the graduate programs that prepare students for jobs at the intellectual heart of museums, the questions may seem naïve. Both the relative underrepresentation of people of color on art museum staff and the preponderance of men in museum leadership positions are well known phenomena, subject to regular discussion in the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), American Alliance of Museums (AAM), Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), and Center for Curatorial Leadership. Nevertheless, the questions focused the Foundation's attention on the absence of reliable data about the demographic makeup of art museum staff across the country. Aware of AAMD's recent finding of a pronounced gender gap in museum directorships,<sup>2</sup> the Mellon Foundation proposed partnering with AAMD to conduct a demographic survey of art museum staff and boards. In the fall of 2014, the Foundation commissioned Ithaka S+R to design and implement a survey with the assistance of an advisory committee of AAMD staff and member museum leaders. AAM supported the effort by enabling distribution of the survey to art museums that are not AAMD members. In the winter of 2015, 77% of AAMD institutions and 15% of the additional AAM cohort completed the staff survey. AAMD and AAM response rates for board diversity were considerably lower (38% and 4%, respectively), and too unrepresentative for inclusion in this report. While the report below is generally limited to the AAMD respondents, the findings for the smaller AAM

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lacma.org/node/13365>.

<sup>2</sup> Anne-Marie Gan *et al.*, "The Gender Gap in Art Museum Directorships," report of the Association of Art Museum Directors and SMU National Center for Arts Research, March 7, 2014; available at [https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/The%20Gender%20Gap%20in%20Art%20Museum%20Directorships\\_0.pdf](https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/The%20Gender%20Gap%20in%20Art%20Museum%20Directorships_0.pdf).

group are not substantively different from those for AAMD museums. More than 90% of respondents were in the United States; there are a few institutions from Canada and Mexico in the sample.

The results summarized by Ithaka S+R below lead to a range of conclusions, many of which are perhaps best addressed by museums on the local level, as local and regional demographics tend to differ considerably across the continent. The headline is unsurprising: utilizing the categories employed by the 2000 U.S. Census, 72% of AAMD staff is Non-Hispanic White, and 28% belongs to historically underrepresented minorities.<sup>3</sup> As the American population is today 62% Non-Hispanic White, the overrepresentation of this group on museum staff may at first not seem as dramatic as one might have expected. Ithaka S+R's analysis shows, however, that there is significant variation in demographic diversity across different types of museum employment. Non-Hispanic White staff continue to dominate the job categories most closely associated with the intellectual and educational mission of museums, including those of curators, conservators, educators, and leadership (from director and chief curator to head of education or conservation). In that subset of positions, 84% is Non-Hispanic White, 6% Asian, 4% Black, 3% Hispanic White, and 3% Two or More Races. With the exception of the Asian demographic category, which makes up 5% of the United States population today, these proportions do not come close to representing the diversity of the American population.

Two specific results point to pathways for diversifying museum leadership and the positions that shape museums as venues of research and lifelong education. First, progress is likely to be swifter and easier on gender equality than on minority representation. As museum staff has become 60% female over the past decade or so, there is now also a preponderance of women in the curatorial, conservation, and educational roles that constitute the pipeline for leadership positions such as museum director, chief curator, and head of conservation or education. With close attention to equitable promotion and hiring practices for senior positions, art museums should be able to achieve greater gender equality in their leadership cohorts within the foreseeable future.

Second, there is no comparable “youth bulge” of staff from historically underrepresented minorities in curatorial, education, or conservation departments. The percentages of

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of producing a baseline picture of the demographic composition of art museum staff in North America, the survey employed the widely used racial and ethnic categories introduced in the 2000 U.S. Census. They are the most convenient tool for measuring diversity, but there is a growing and cogent critique that they do not adequately capture the true diversity of the American population. For an introduction to this problematic, see Kenneth Prewitt, “Fix the Census’ Archaic Racial Categories,” *New York Times*, August 22, 2013; Prewitt was director of the United States Census Bureau from 1998 to 2000. The categorizations are of even more limited value for institutions in Canada and Mexico.

staff from underrepresented communities in such positions are basically level at 27.5% across the different age cohorts born from the 1960s to 1990s. Therefore, even promotion protocols that are maximally intentional about the organizational benefits of diversity are not going to make museum leadership cohorts notably more diverse if there is no simultaneous increase in the presence of historically underrepresented minorities on museum staff altogether, and particularly in the professions that drive the museum's programs in collection development, research, exhibitions, and education. This finding suggests that diverse educational pipelines into curatorial, conservation, and other art museum careers are going to be critical if art museums wish to have truly diverse staff and inclusive cultures. It also indicates that the nation will need more programs that encourage students of color to pursue graduate education in preparation for museum positions, such as the AAMD/UNCF diversity initiative and the undergraduate curatorial fellowship program supported by the Mellon Foundation.

While the results of the 2015 art museum staff demographic survey may seem discouraging, they provide baseline data against which future surveys can be measured, and, one hopes, progress tracked. For their energetic and thoughtful collaboration on the survey, the Mellon Foundation is deeply grateful to AAMD President Susan Taylor and Executive Director Christine Anagnos, former AAM President Ford Bell, Director Elizabeth Merritt of AAM's Center for the Future of Museums, and all the directors and HR directors of the art museums who responded to the survey and reacted to an initial presentation of results at the 2015 AAMD annual meeting in Detroit. Directors of AAMD member institutions lent invaluable advice to the Foundation and to Ithaka S+R; for their time and insights, we thank Gail Andrews, Andrea Barnwell, Johnnetta Cole, Timothy Rub, and Julián Zugazagoitia. At Ithaka S+R, Deanna Marcum, Roger Schonfeld, and Liam Sweeney were tirelessly persistent and thoughtful in the design, administration, and interpretation of the survey.

As a small beginning, the 2015 art museum staff demographic survey lends support to the resolve of the many institutions that seek to mirror the country's demographic transformation and become fully inclusive of the interests of their diverse communities. The case is clear and urgent, and constructive responses to it will be critical to the continued vitality of art museums as public resources for a democratic society.

Mariët Westermann  
Vice President  
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

## Methodology

Ithaka S+R developed the survey with the advice of AAMD museum leaders and HR directors, AAMD staff, and Mellon Foundation program staff. The questionnaire was split into three components: A spreadsheet that each museum was asked to fill out indicating the demographic categories into which each of its employees fell; a survey questionnaire targeted at HR directors, which focused on museum diversity programs; and a survey questionnaire targeted at museum directors, which focused on board member diversity and policy issues.

In the employee spreadsheet, we gathered demographic and employment information in a variety of categories. We asked respondents to categorize each employee into one of 17 job categories as indicated in Figure 1. We asked respondents to categorize each employee by race and Hispanic/Latino status, and we elected to utilize the U.S. Census categories from 2000 that are used for various reporting purposes, notwithstanding their limitations, as indicated in Figure 2.<sup>4</sup> For analytical purposes, we frequently combine categories to provide binary analysis of the categorizations “White Non Hispanic” and “Historically Underrepresented Minority,” abbreviated as “Minority.” We asked respondents to categorize each employee by gender, offering the choices of “Male,” “Female,” and “Does not identify as either male or female.” We recognize that all these categorizations collapse a great deal of complexity and diversity but elected to use them for ease of data gathering and analytical comparisons with other existing data sources. Finally, we asked for information on decade of birth and decade of employment.<sup>5</sup>

*Figure 1 Job Categories*

Conservators	Curators	Education
Exhibition Design and Construction (includes Fabrication)	Facilities	Finance/Human Resources
Information Technology/ Web Development	Marketing/Public Relations	Membership/Development (includes Event Planning)
Museum Leadership (includes "C" positions)	Preparators/Handlers	Publication/Editorial
Registrar	Retail and Store	Rights/Reproduction (includes Photography)
Security	Support/Administrator	

<sup>4</sup> These categories were adopted by the federal government for equal opportunity reporting purposes and therefore are in common use at many institutions in our survey population. For more details, see Source: <http://www.eeoc.gov/employers/eeo1survey/2007instructions.cfm>.

<sup>5</sup> We considered asking about LGBT status and/or disability status but determined that there would be regulatory or legal issues in many states associated with employers tracking or reporting these data to us.

Figure 2 Race and Ethnicity Categories

<p>Race</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• White – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.</li><li>• Black or African American – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.</li><li>• American Indian or Alaska Native – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.</li><li>• Asian – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.</li><li>• Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.</li><li>• Two or More Races – All persons who identify with more than one of the above five races.</li></ul> <p>Hispanic or Latino – A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yes</li><li>• No</li></ul>
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The survey was fielded from February 2, 2015 and was closed on March 13, 2015. Invitation messages were sent to AAMD museums by Mellon vice president Mariët Westermann and AAMD president Susan Taylor, and to other AAM art museums by vice president Westermann and AAM president Ford Bell. Several reminder messages were issued by the same individuals. The message to AAMD members indicated that the survey was mandatory, and AAMD also conducted direct outreach to its members.

Response rates varied between the AAMD and AAM populations, and also by the different survey components, as seen in Figure 3. In this overview report, we focus on AAMD respondents, drawing demographic data from the employee spreadsheets. Those findings are based on a 77% AAMD response rate to that component of the survey.

Figure 3 Levels of Response

	AAM		AAMD	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Art Museums	643	100%	235	100%
Spreadsheets Returned	97	15%	181	77%
HR Surveys Completed	105	16%	206	88%
Director Surveys Completed	27	4%	90	38%

## Executive Summary: Race and Ethnicity

- In the aggregate, AAMD museum staff are 72% White Non Hispanic and 28% Minority. Staff composition varies significantly across respondents, ranging from 100% White Non Hispanic to 100% Minority, as illustrated in Figure 4. Many but not all of the museums that are majority Minority are culturally specific institutions. Some but not all of the museums that are 100% white are located in geographical areas that may have comparatively lower Minority populations.
- Many job categories are highly specific to White Non Hispanic employees or, to a lesser extent, to Minority employees. As Figure 5 shows, Security and Facilities staff are split fairly evenly between these two groupings. Other job categories are majority White Non Hispanic, with approximately 9 out of 10 Registrar staff being White Non Hispanic. Figure 6 drills in on a subset of Job Categories that includes Curators, Conservators, Educators, and Leadership (a category that is broader than just the director to include other “C-level” employees), showing that this group is 84% White Non Hispanic, 6% Asian, 4% Black, 3% White Hispanic, and 3% Two or More Races.
- In terms of year of birth, younger employee cohorts appear to be somewhat more diverse. Of employees born in the 1930s, about 20% is minority; this percentage grows to approximately 30 for employees born in the 1980s and 1990s, as shown in Figure 7. In the Job category subset (Figure 8) of Curators, Conservators, Educators, and Leadership, the pattern of apparent change is even more gradual, with percentages hovering around an almost steady 27.5% for Minority employees born in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

- The employees in six job categories that are heavily Minority (Facilities, Security, and Finance/HR) or White Non Hispanic (Leadership, Curators, and Conservators) are 20-30 years older than the majority of museum staff.

Figure 4 White Non Hispanic and Under Represented Minority, By Museum

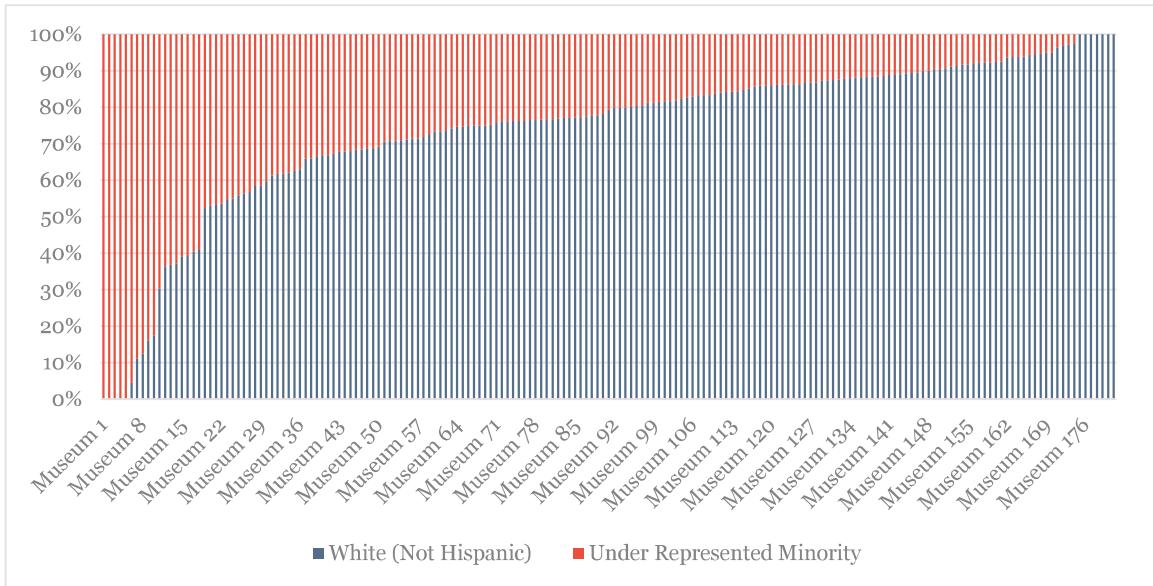


Figure 5 White Non Hispanic and Under Represented Minority, By Job Category

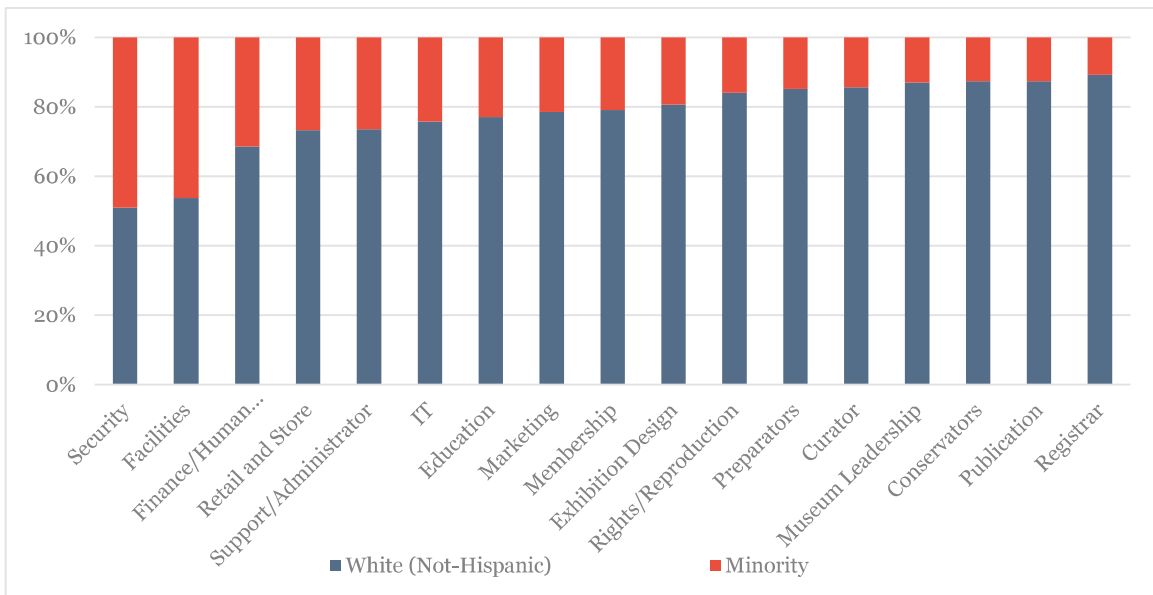


Figure 6 Race and Ethnicity (Curators, Conservators, Educators and Leadership Only)

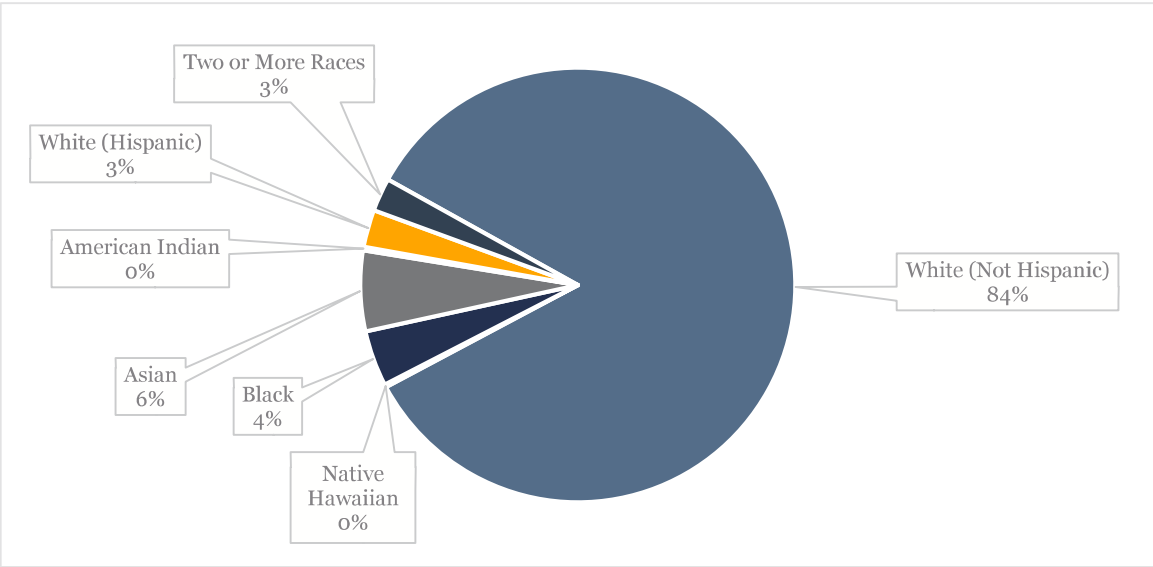


Figure 7 White Non Hispanic and Under Represented Minority, By Decade of Birth

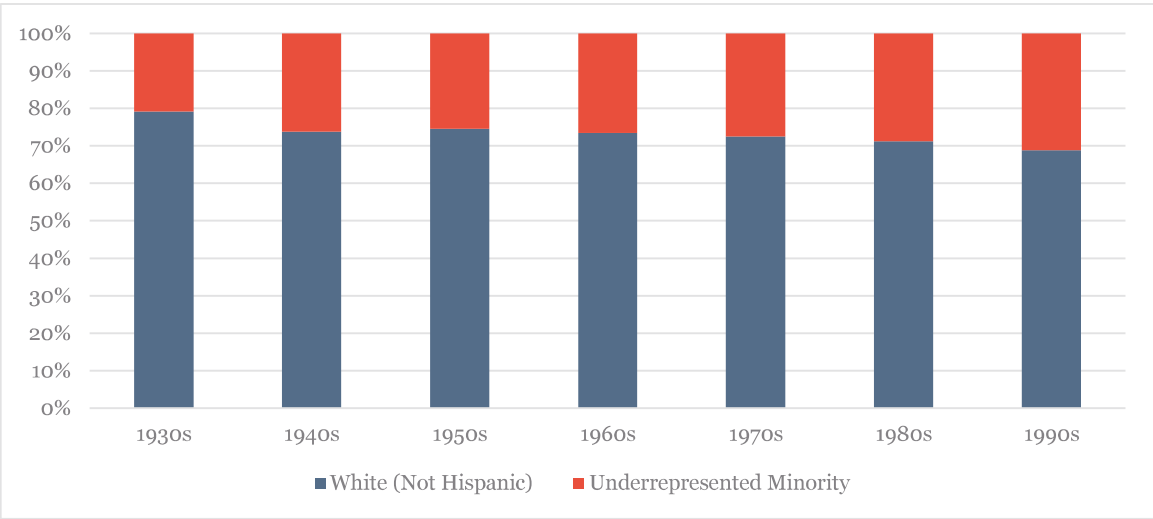
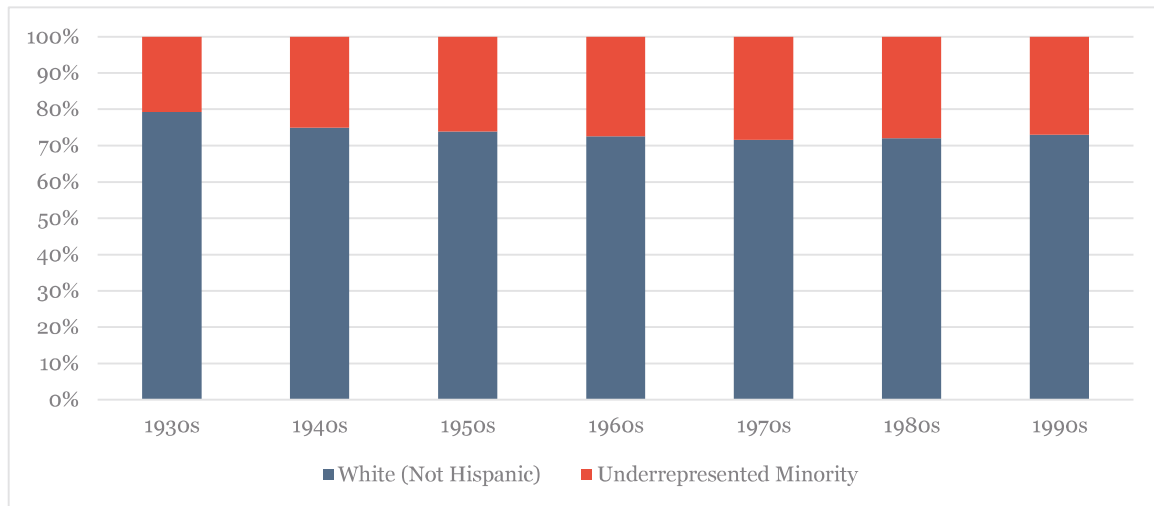


Figure 8 White Non Hispanic and Under Represented Minority, By Decade Born (Curators, Conservators, Educators and Leadership Only)



## Executive Summary: Gender

- In the aggregate, AAMD museum staff are 60% Female and 40% Male.<sup>6</sup> There is significant variation among individual museums, varying from 94% Female to 63% Male, as shown in Figure 9.
- Many job categories are highly gender-specific, as shown in Figure 10. Facilities, Preparators/Handlers, Exhibition Design and Construction, IT, and Security are heavily weighted towards Males. Rights/Reproductions and Museum Leadership (again, a category that is broader than just the director to include other “C-level” employees) are each approximately equally staffed by Male and Female employees.<sup>7</sup> Other job categories, including the subset of Curators, Conservators, Educators, and Leadership, are approximately 70% or more Female.
- By decade born, museum employees appear to be growing comparatively more Female, as shown in Figure 11. For the job category subset of Curators, Conservators, Educators and Leadership, Males remain approximately 35-40% of museum staff regardless of decade born, as shown in Figure 12.

<sup>6</sup> Less than 1% identify as neither male nor female, according to the museums completing the spreadsheets. This is likely an underrepresentation of actual identity percentages but reflects the fact that so many employers track this categorization on a binary Male/Female basis.

<sup>7</sup> By comparison, AAMD’s recent report found that 43% of directors themselves were women, with significant disparities in salary as well; see Gan *et al.*, 2014.

These findings show a notable difference between race/ethnicity and gender in terms of the availability of younger professionals to move into leadership positions over time.

Figure 9 Gender, By Museum

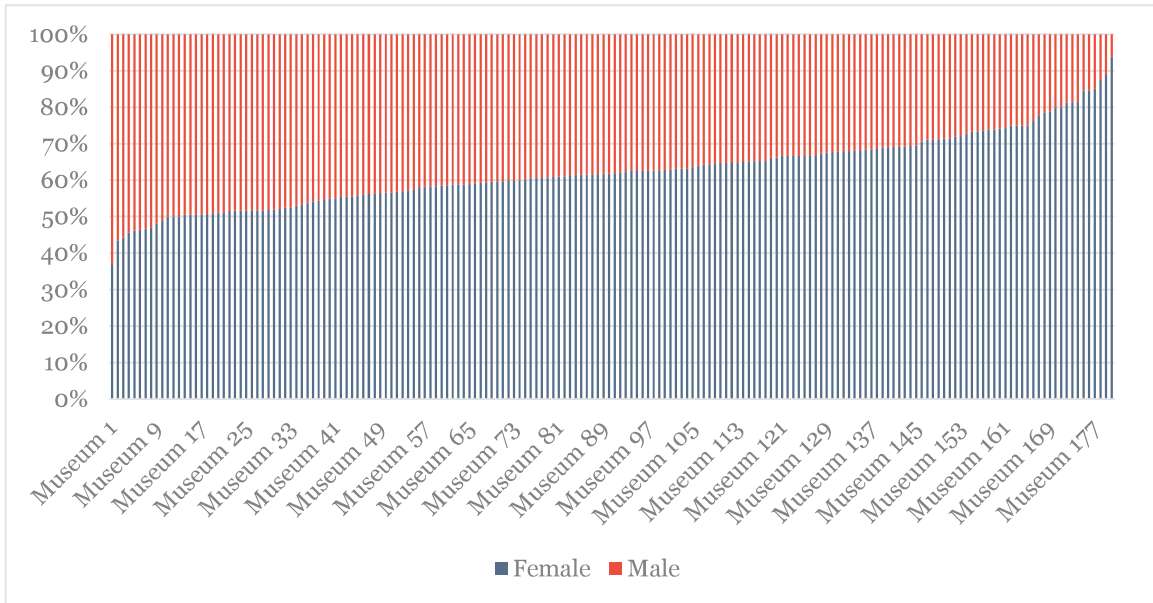


Figure 10 Gender, By Job Category

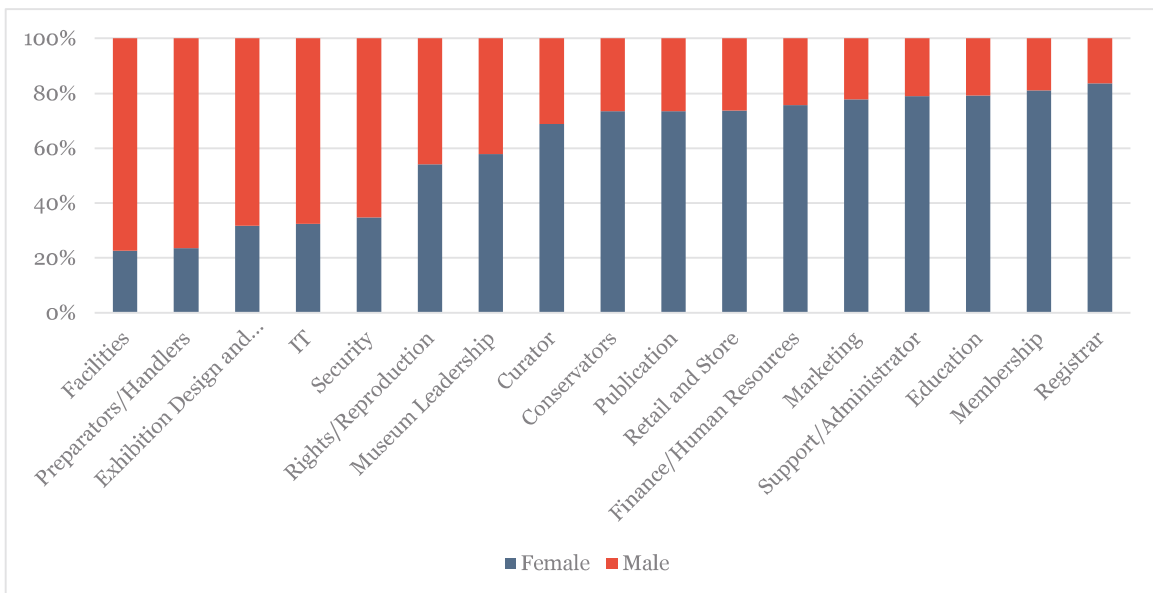


Figure 11 Gender, By Decade Born

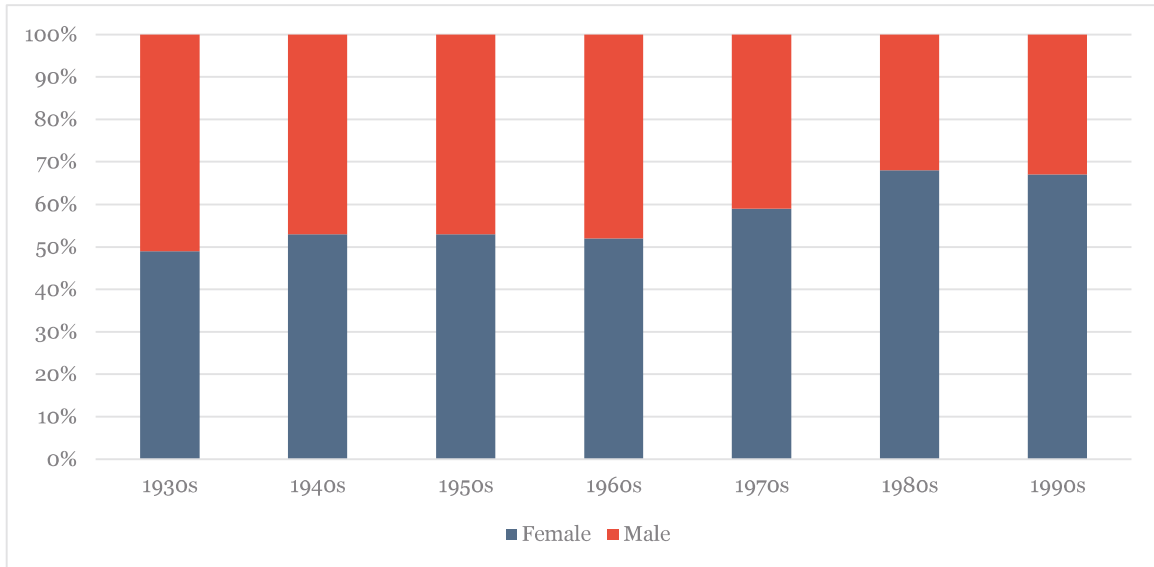


Figure 12 Gender, By Decade Born (Curators, Conservators, Educators and Leadership Only)

