

ASTC Research Reports

Science Center Leadership in the United States

Report on an ASTC/Noyce Foundation Study

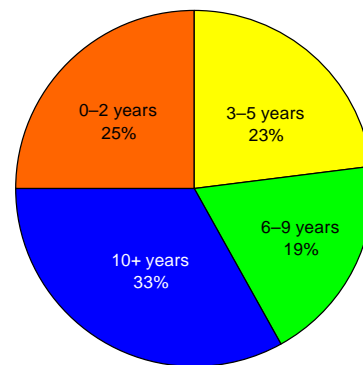
March 2007



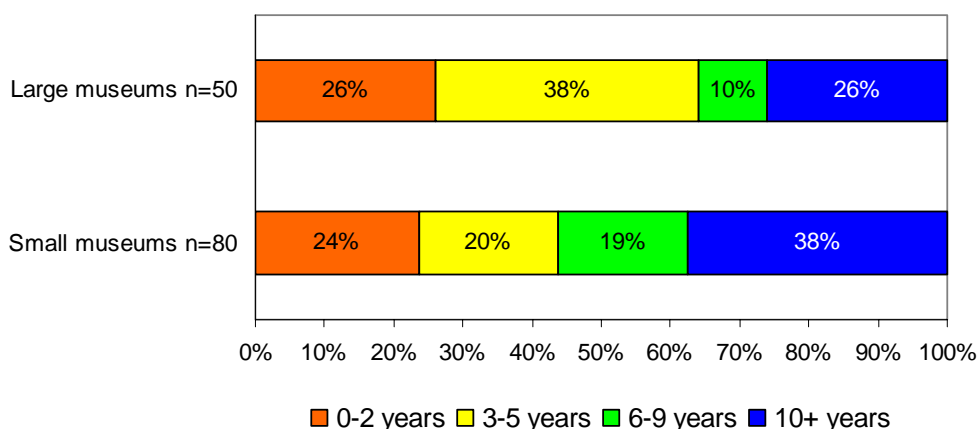
During March 2007, ASTC and the Noyce Foundation carried out a study to inform plans for a program that will address leadership and succession issues in science centers and museums. Findings summarized here are based on an online survey of ASTC's U.S. members and telephone interviews with CEOs and board members. 138 institutions responded to the survey (39.5%), providing basic data about current and previous CEOs. Interviews were completed with 27 current CEOs and 11 board members, together representing 33 U.S. science centers and museums. (Graphs break down some data by size of institution—those with operating budgets greater and less than \$2.5 million.)

Many CEOs are new in their jobs

48% of current CEOs have been in their jobs for 5 years or less—and 25% for 2 years or less. Smaller institutions have a larger percentage of CEOs who've been in their jobs for a decade or longer (38%, compared with 26% at larger centers). For a more complete picture of CEO tenure, we looked at previous CEOs: 60% stayed 5 years or less (31% 2 years or less), 19% stayed between 6 and 9 years, and 22% stayed 10 years or more.

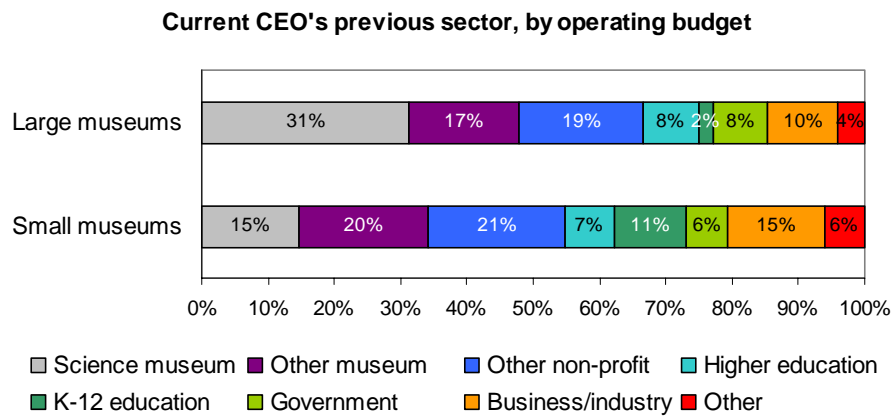
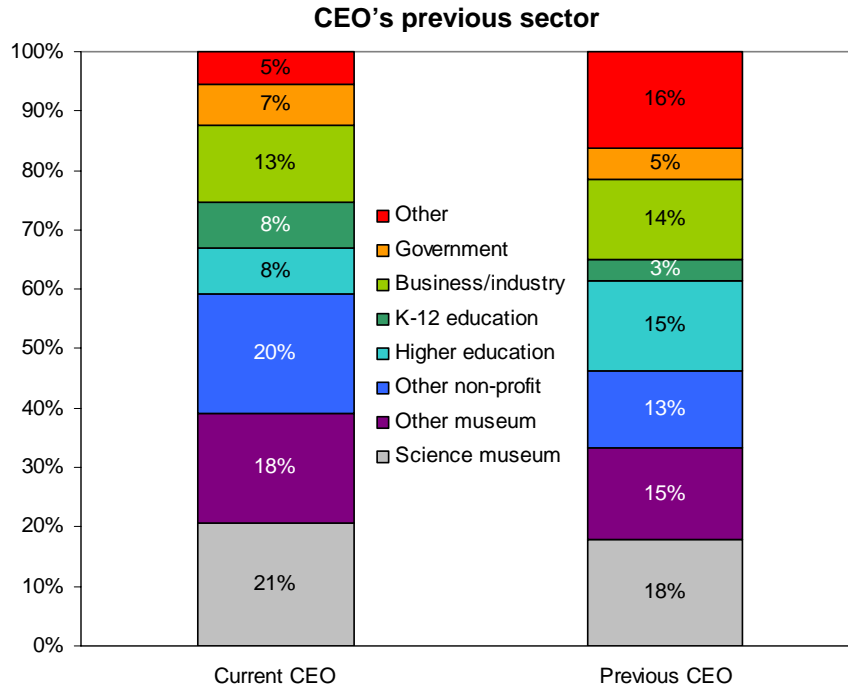


Current CEO's length of employment, by operating budget



Most CEOs come from museums and nonprofits

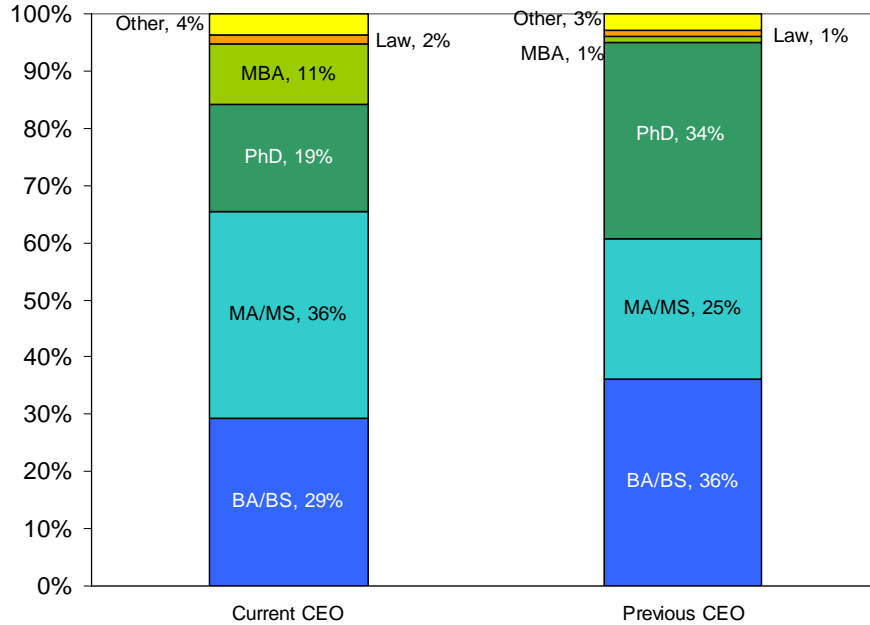
Most CEOs—59% altogether—come from science centers (21%) and other museums (18%) or nonprofits (20%). Another 16% have worked in education—8% in higher education, 8% in K-12. The overall pattern among their predecessors was similar, although the percentages from museums and other nonprofits have increased.



An increasing number of CEOs have business training

11% of current CEOs have MBAs, compared with 1% of their predecessors. The number with PhDs is decreasing (19% compared with 34% of their predecessors).

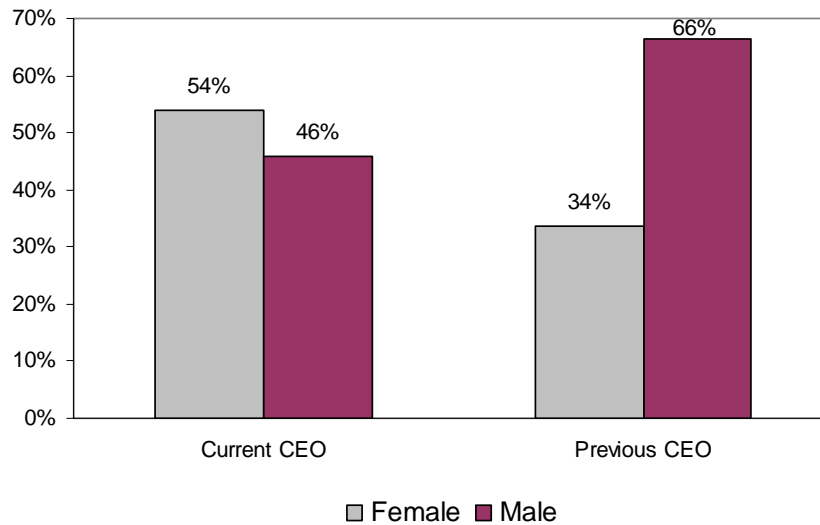
Current CEO's educational background



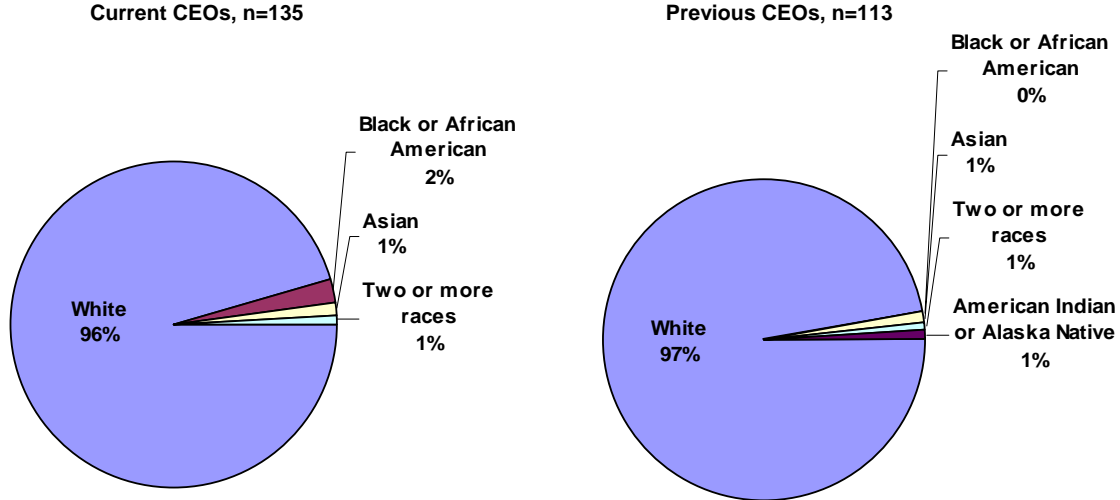
More CEOs are women, but racial composition is unchanged

There has been a significant increase in the number of female CEOs—from 34% to 54%, overall—although most of this change has been among institutions with budgets under \$1 million (where 74% of current CEOs are women). Racial composition is almost unchanged: 96% of current CEOs are white, compared with 97% of their predecessors.

CEO's gender



CEO's race/ethnicity



Succession planning? not yet

Nearly everyone we talked to reported that they do not have a formal succession plan (92% of CEOs, 100% of board members).

What qualities are needed in a CEO?

Board members focused mostly on the *mix* of capabilities they are looking for in a CEO, using words like "balance," "combination," and "blend". More than half cited the importance of academic credibility, "science credentials," or at least "comfort with science".

CEOs also typically listed a variety of capabilities, which clustered in four main areas:

- **Communication—the capacity to connect, to articulate the vision and inspire others, both internally and externally (38%)**
Biggest need is extreme emotional intelligence, to manage up (to board), down (to staff), and out (to community and donors)
- **Managing complexity and change (35%)**
Science centers have so many products, braided revenue streams—harder to operate than a much bigger manufacturing company
- **Vision—the “big-picture view” (27%)**
Understanding the kind of puzzle that a successful institution like ours is...figuring this out takes instincts, vision
- **Balance of vision and practical skills (23%) and business sense (19%)**
Business skills and creativity are critical in the CEO and senior management given the competition.

What do CEOs need help with?

We asked CEOs what kinds of professional development would have helped them around the time they assumed their position. The areas they could have used most help with, they said, included: managing people and fostering team work (37%), finance (26%), and governance issues and board relations (22%). Also mentioned were strategic planning and orchestrating change (19%), government relations (15%), and fundraising (7%).

Asked what would have helped later on, early in their tenure as CEO, they again mentioned internal communication (e.g., working with senior staff to assure shared language and approach, as well as understanding staff's perspective). Also needed: understanding the local community (including politics and funders), understanding federal funders, and simply understanding how things operate in the institution.

Most would welcome a leadership development program

Both CEOs and board members expressed strong support for a program. Board members were even more supportive, with 64% giving an unqualified "yes" when asked whether their institution would participate (one called this a "spectacular idea"). CEOs were likelier to express some cautions about cost and quality. But everyone interviewed said they would expect their institution to participate.

What form should a program take?

Intensive programs requiring a week or more away are familiar among museums and were favored by a small number of people we interviewed. But most recommended a hybrid approach that would include multiple activities over time, responsive to participants' varying backgrounds and needs. They talked about the importance of a supportive cohort, practical work (either "real-life" or case study), and mentoring and coaching. Programs might include an initial 3–4-day workshop followed by periodic online sessions and support, travel to other institutions, and mentoring services, along with case study materials and other resources.

Members of the Science Center Leadership Task Force that carried out this study include Ann S. Bowers, Pendred Noyce, and Ron Ottinger of the Noyce Foundation; Sheila Grinell, former CEO of the Arizona Science Center; Alan J. Friedman, former CEO of the New York Hall of Science and trustee of the Noyce Foundation; and Bonnie VanDorn and Wendy Pollock of ASTC.

At its May 2007 meeting, the ASTC Board of Directors reviewed study results and endorsed the development of a science center leadership development program to be piloted in 2008.

ASTC is grateful for the support of the Noyce Foundation.