



Science Center Highlights

Science centers: “major components of the cultural landscape”

The 445 science centers and museums that belong to ASTC are located in 43 countries. There are ASTC members in every U.S. state (38 in California alone). Science centers vary widely in scale, from very large institutions like Spain’s CosmoCaixa Barcelona (with more than 350,000 square feet of exhibits) to very small centers like Bismarck, North Dakota’s Gateway to Science (with 2,500 square feet of exhibits). ASTC estimates that there were 81.2 million visits to science centers and museums worldwide last year (60.3 million in the United States). Jon Miller, who does research on public understanding of science, describes them as “major components of the cultural landscape.”

An integral part of the global educational infrastructure

School groups make up a significant percentage of science center and museum attendance—an estimated 17.6 million student visits worldwide (13.4 million in the United States). But school field trips are just the beginning: most science centers offer demonstrations and workshops (89.7%), outreach programs in the schools (81.5%), professional development for school teachers (81.0%), science camps (65.1%), overnight camp-in programs (54.4%), and resources for home schoolers (57.9%); many (48.7%) also offer after-school programs.

Connecting science with the community

Science centers offer places where science and citizens can meet. Most have membership programs (88.2% of respondents); 168 institutions reported a total of 808,937 memberships (many including several family members). Many (29.2%) offer programs designed for senior citizens. Besides the hands-on, experiential exhibits and programs that are the hallmark of science centers, many have large-format theaters (reported by 30.3% of survey respondents), planetariums (38.5%), and outdoor “science parks” (31.8%).

Adding value to the local economy while enriching lives

As cultural amenities, science centers add value to their local economies. Most charge for general admission (89.2%). While they rely on public funding, 43 cents of every operating dollar comes from ticket sales, program fees, facility rentals, and other “earned income” sources; 25 cents comes from public funds; 28 cents from private donors; and 4 cents from endowment income. Science centers also bring jobs to their communities. More than 18,500 paid employees were reported by 191 institutions. On, average, personnel costs constitute 53% of operating expenses.

Supported by volunteers

Volunteers make extraordinary contributions to science centers. Most science centers and museums (91.8%) have volunteer programs. 171 institutions reported 77,870 volunteers. The number of volunteer hours reported by 166 institutions worldwide totaled 2,640,983. Among 148 U.S. respondents, volunteer hours totaled 2,105,670—a contribution worth \$41 million.

Based on data reported in July–September 2008 by 195 respondents to an ASTC survey (161 were from the United States, 7 from Canada, and 27 from 19 other countries). For more information, see the *2008 ASTC Sourcebook of Statistics & Analysis*, Washington, DC, ASTC, 2009. Contact pubs@astc.org or call 202/783-7200.