

ASTC Research Reports



Total On-site Attendance, 2002-2011

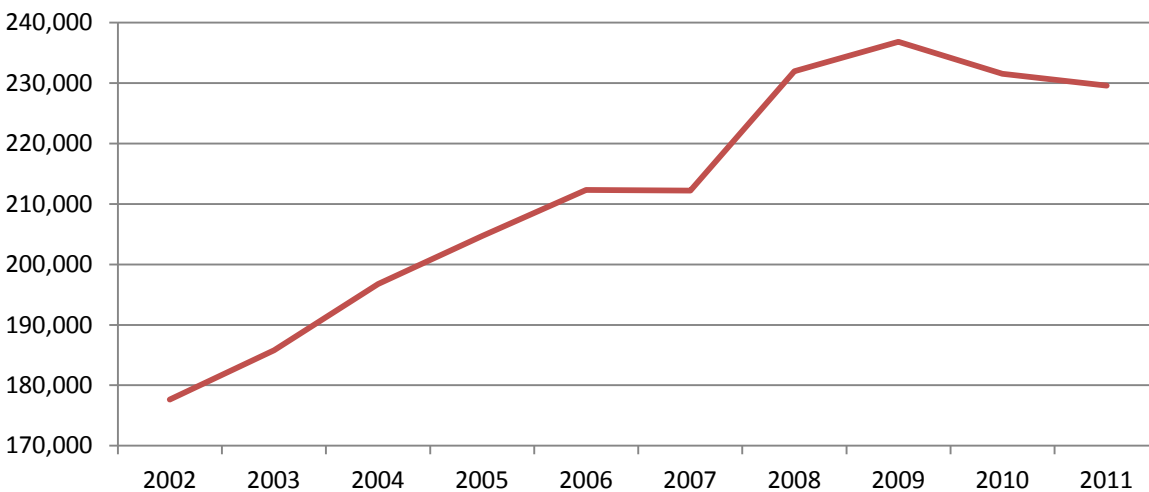
Introduction

In November 2012, ASTC asked its science center and museum members to submit annual on-site attendance data for calendar years 2002-2011. One hundred fifty-five science centers and museums responded; 107 of those provided data for all 10 years.¹ The goal of the survey was to collect consistent, long-term data and try to determine if there has been a clear upward or downward trend.

Overall Findings

Median on-site attendance for individual institutions rose until 2009 (see Figure 1). The total attendance reported by all respondents also increased until 2010 other than a dip in 2008 (Figure 2). Additionally, more than half of all respondents saw an increase in attendance over the previous year every year except for 2010 (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Median on-site attendance, all respondents (n=107)



¹ Most institutions that did not provide data for all years were not open for the entire 10 years. They opened for the first time during that period or were temporarily closed, either for renovations or to move into a new facility, sometime during the 10-year period.

Figure 2. Total on-site attendance, all respondents (n=107)

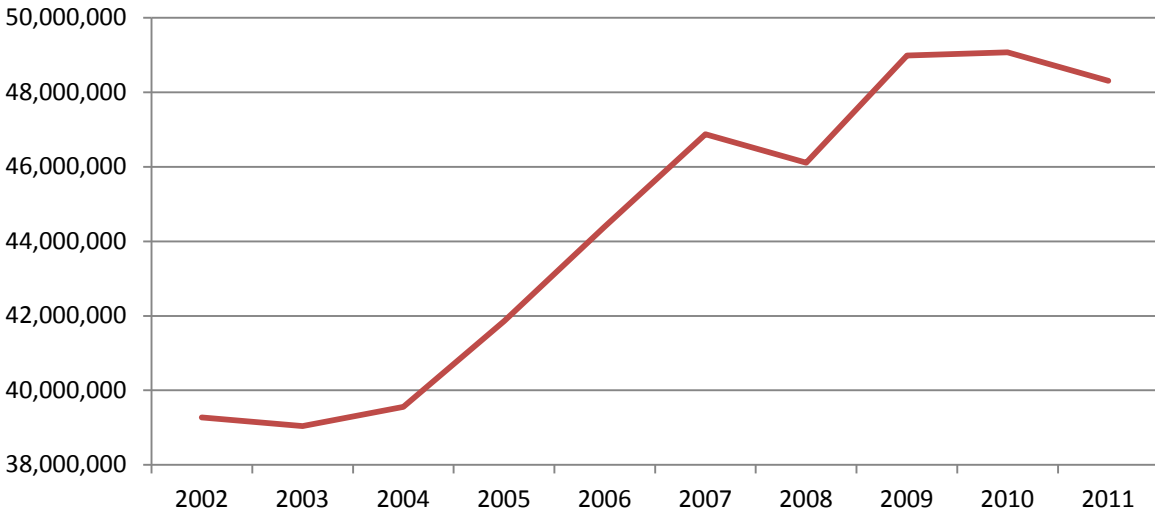
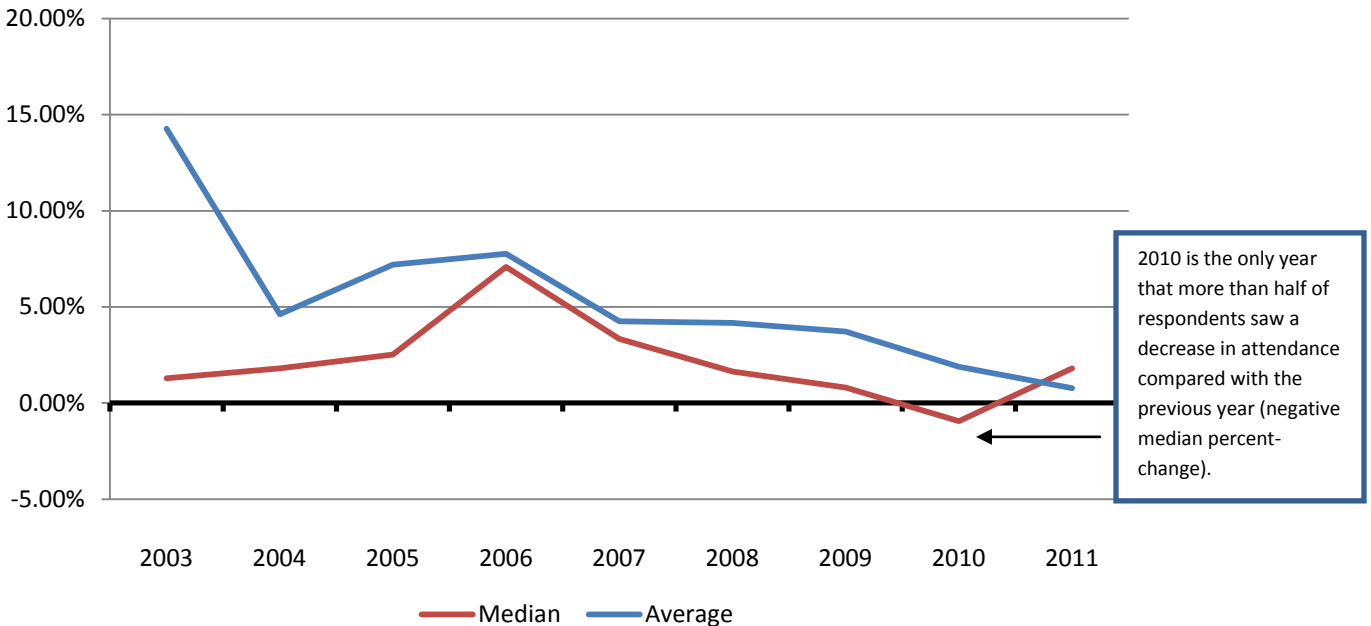


Figure 3. Attendance change over previous year, all institutions (n=107)

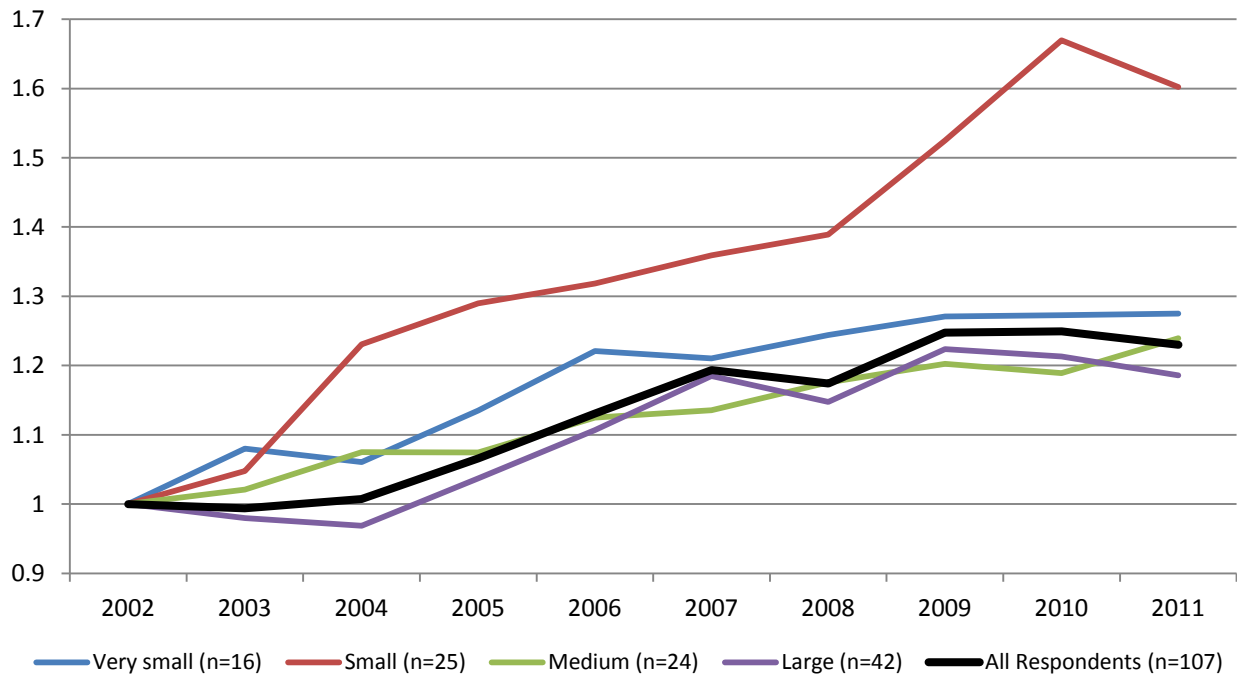


Trends at different-sized institutions

Different patterns emerge, however, when looking at institutions categorized by size. Figures 4 and 5 compare the trends for very small (<12,000 square feet of interior exhibit space), small (12,001-25,000 square feet), medium (25,000-50,000 square feet), and large (>50,000 square feet) institutions. The data has been normalized, using 2002's median attendance as a base for all groups (2002=1).

The total attendance at very small, medium, and large institutions was 20-30% higher in 2011 than in 2002. Small center attendance increased far more, though, peaking at about 70% higher than 2002 in 2010 before dropping back down to a 60% increase in 2011 over the beginning of the decade.

Figure 4. Annual summed attendance normalized for each size group and all respondents

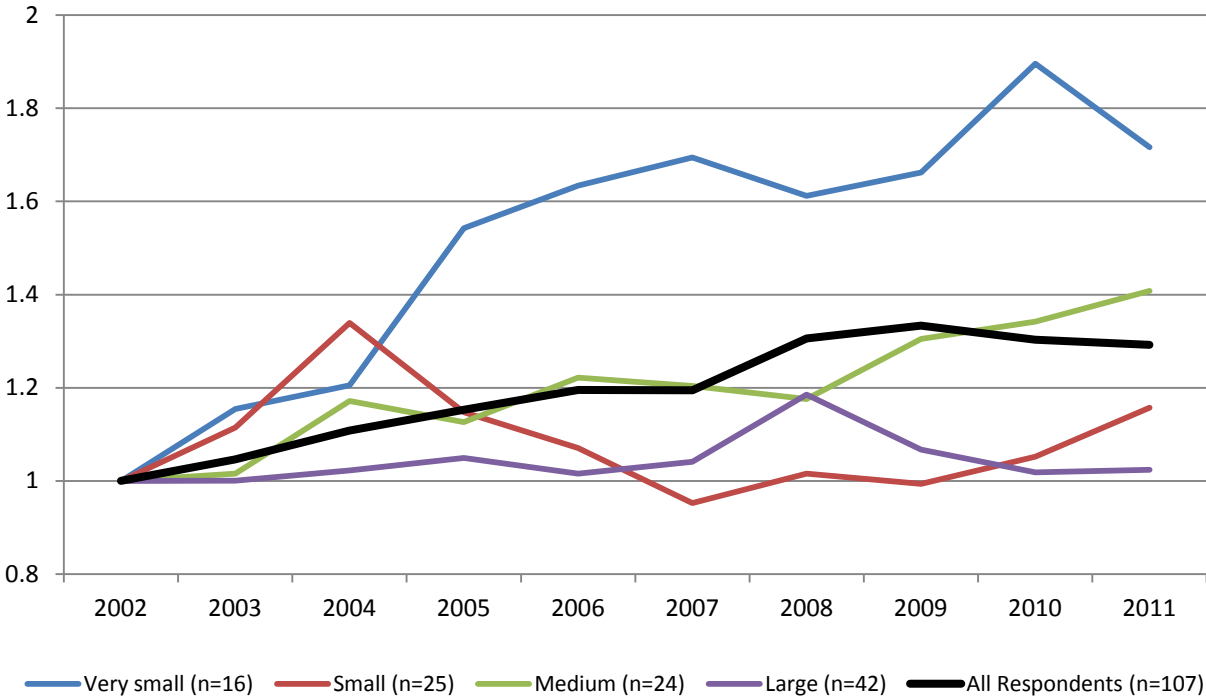


Median attendance patterns (Figure 5), which give a clearer idea of what is happening at individual institutions, varied more among the different groups. Very small institutions saw the highest median increases, and medium institution median increases were pretty steady as well.

After spiking in 2004, the median for small institutions decreased through 2007, even though that group's total summed attendance had still increased a bit during those years. Median attendance climbed again from 2009 to 2011 to end the decade 15% higher than 2002.

Large institutions showed the flattest attendance across the years—2011's median attendance was only 2% higher than 2002's. Median attendance peaked in 2008.

Figure 5. Median attendance normalized for each size group and all respondents



Possible contributing factors

The downward trend for all respondents coincides with the global economic crisis that began in 2008, so that likely is a major contributing factor. Large institutions, however, are the only group that saw a significant decline in attendance during this time. Small and medium center attendance is on the rise. And while the line dips in the last year of the decade, median attendance at very small institutions was still higher in 2011 than all other years except for 2010.

It is difficult to determine exactly why the patterns vary for different size groups, though. A higher percentage of very small institutions reported opening new centers or major expansions in 2003, 2005, and 2006—that could account for much of that group's steep increase in the first half of the decade.

More large centers reported hosting blockbuster exhibitions, such as *BodyWorlds*, in 2005-2010 than at the beginning and end of the decade, possibly contributing to the "bump" in an otherwise fairly flat line, but it is unclear from the data why median attendance peaked so sharply in 2008.

Graphs showing the number of openings and blockbusters hosted each year as well as attendance trends specific to each size category can be found on the pages that follow.

Figure 6. Number of institutions that opened a new building or major expansion

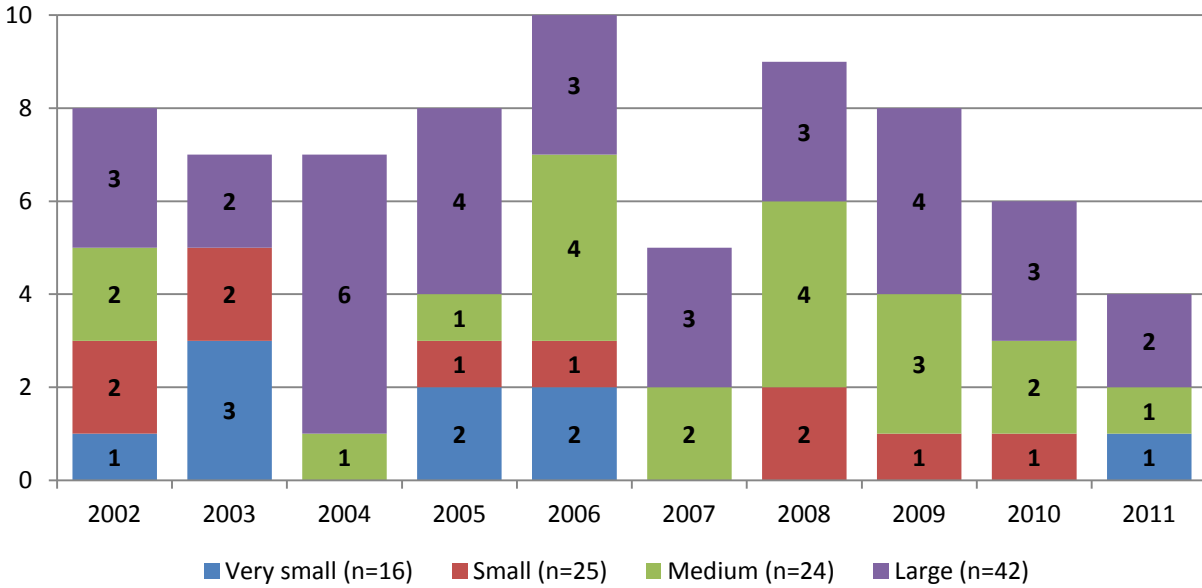
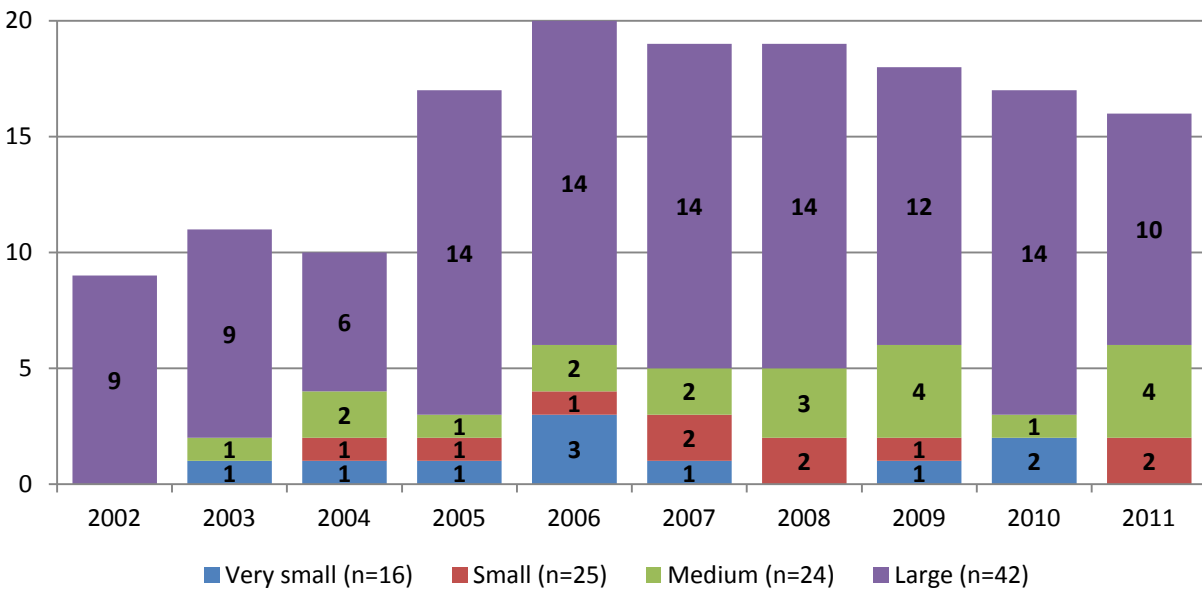


Figure 7. Number of institutions that hosted a major blockbuster exhibition (e.g., *BodyWorlds*)



Very small centers (<12,000 square feet of interior exhibit space)

Figure 8a. Attendance change over previous year, very small institutions (n=16)

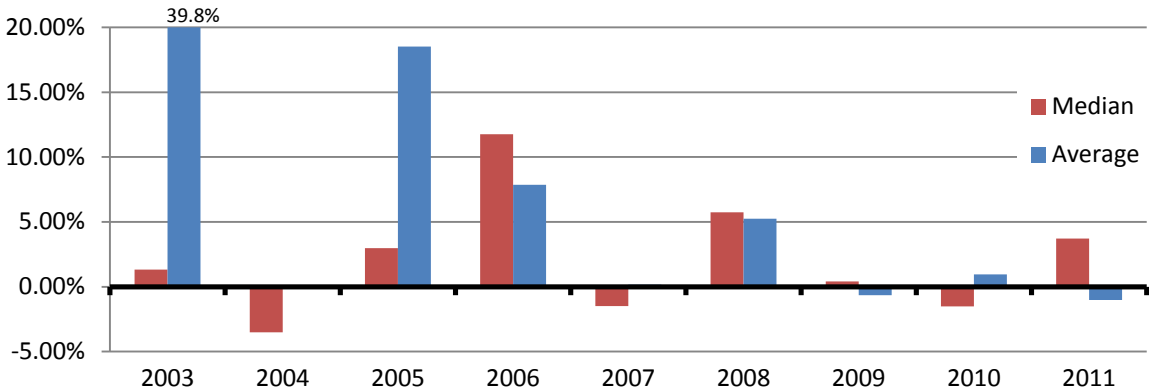


Figure 8b. Total annual on-site attendance, very small institutions (n=16)

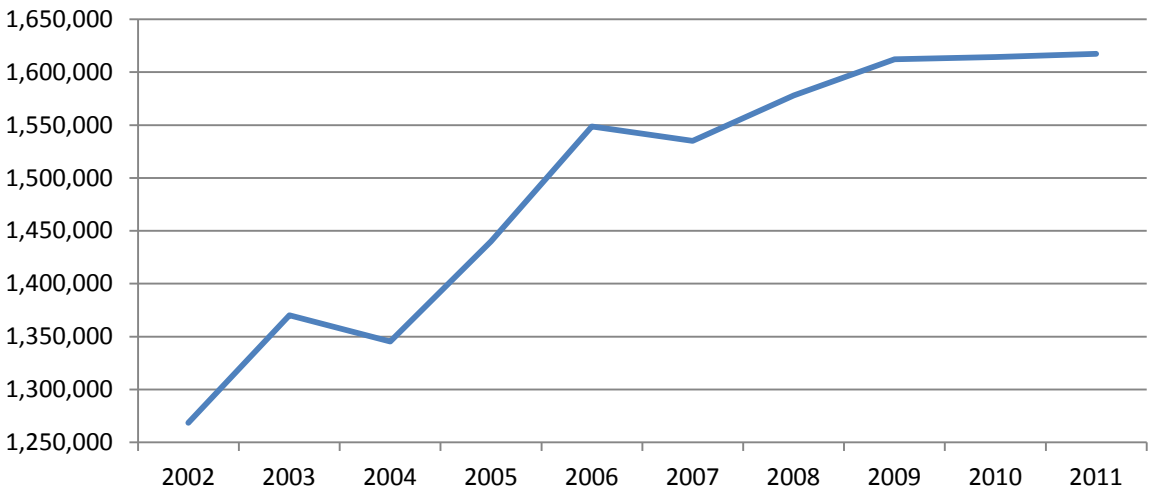
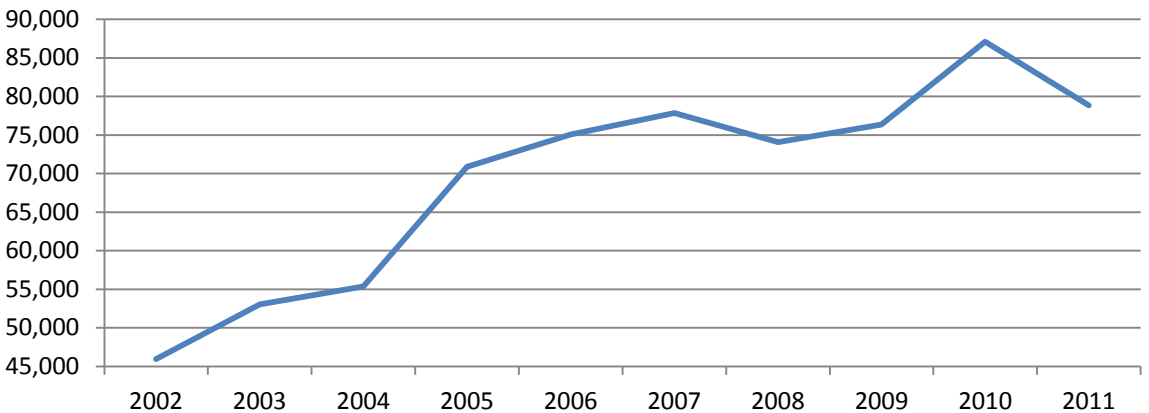


Figure 8c. Median annual on-site attendance, very small institutions (n=16)



Small centers (12,000-25,000 square feet)

Figure 9a. Attendance change over previous year, small institutions (n=24)

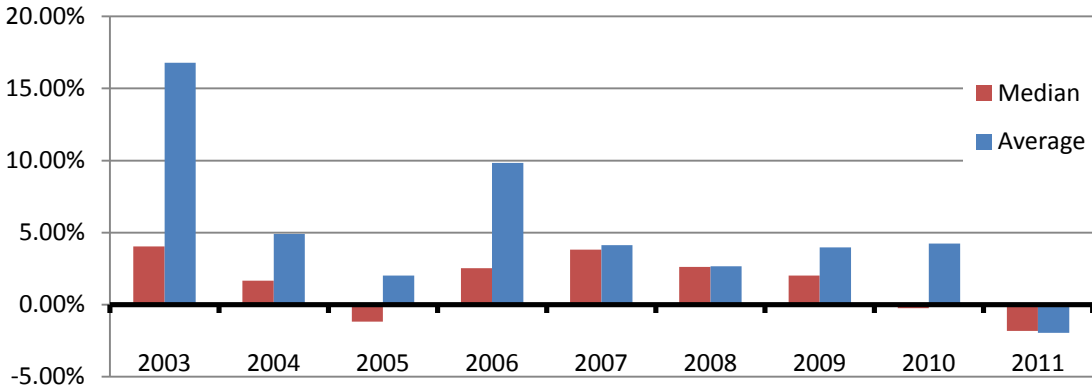


Figure 9b. Total annual on-site attendance, small institutions (n=24)

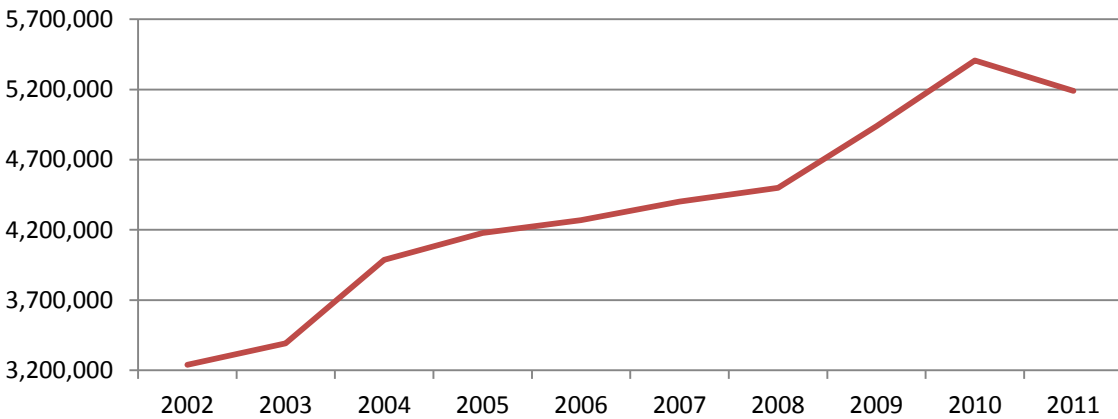
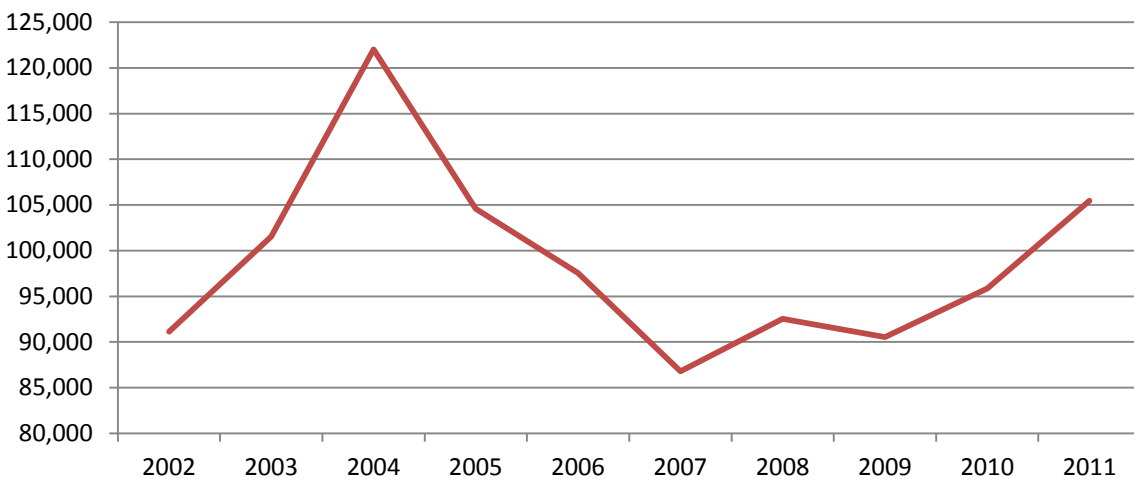


Figure 9c. Median annual on-site attendance, small institutions (n=24)



Medium centers (25,001-50,000 square feet)

Figure 10a. Attendance change over previous year, medium institutions (n=22)

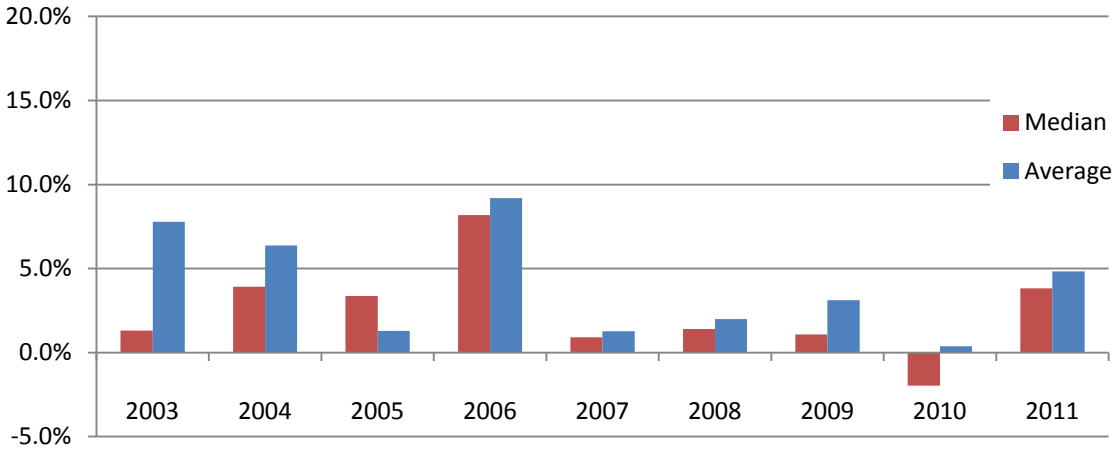


Figure 10b. Total annual on-site attendance, medium institutions (n=22)

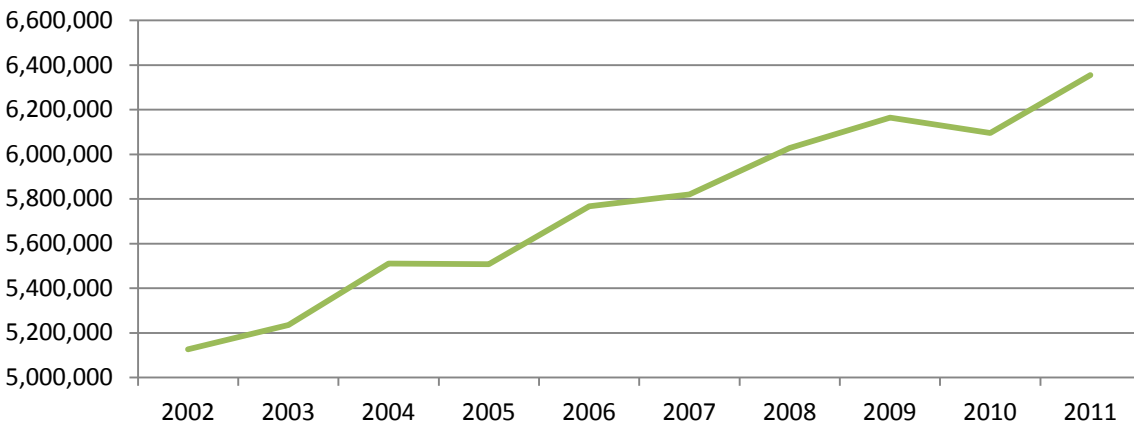
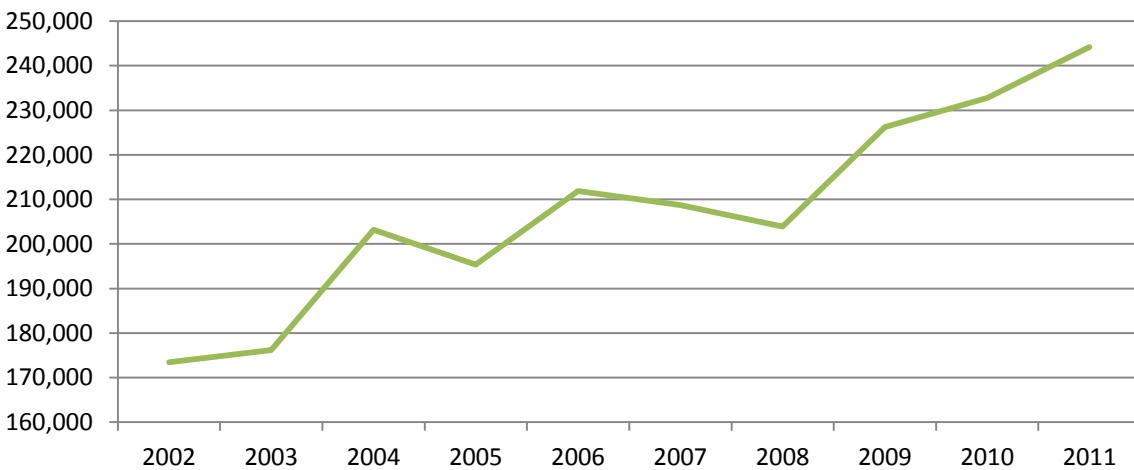


Figure 10c. Median annual on-site attendance, medium institutions (n=22)



Large centers (>50,000 square feet)

Figure 11a. Attendance change over previous year, large institutions (n=42)

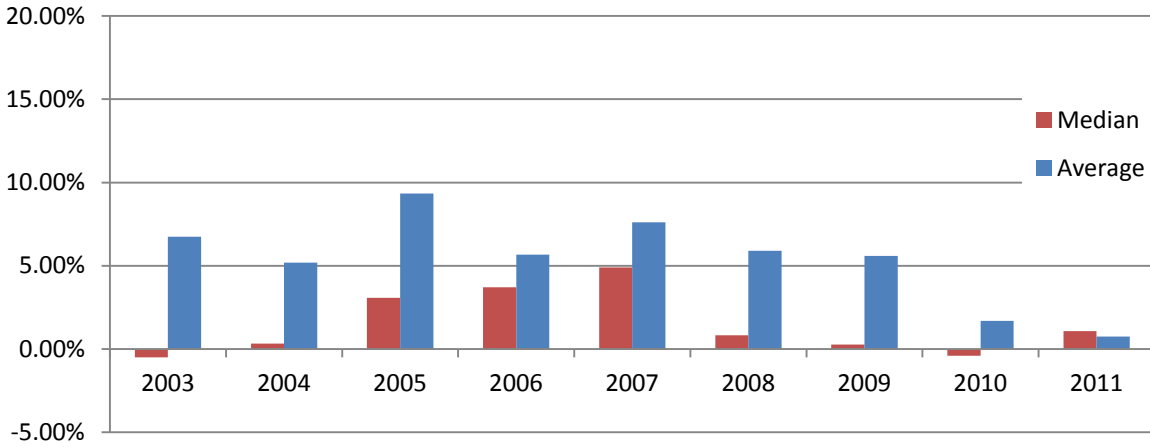


Figure 11b. Total annual on-site attendance, large institutions (n=42)



Figure 11c. Median annual on-site attendance, large institutions (n=42)

