

Types of Museum Jobs

Jobs Unique to Museums

Museum Educator

While educators can be found in many environments, museum educators are a unique breed. They need to be familiar with both educational theory and needs and museum content and collections. Museum educators teach school programs, create adult classes and lectures, and work with other departments within the museum on exhibits and special events.

Curator

Curators were traditionally the rock star of museums. Their knowledge, their skill in caring for collections, and their ability to pull objects together into a coherent and intelligent exhibition, all make them irreplaceable as a part of a museum team. Now that museums have refocused their missions on reaching out to the public, curators have to share the spotlight, but the fact remains that the core of any museum is their collection, and curators are their guardians.

Collections Manager

Some museums are lucky enough to have both a curator and a collections manager. If that is the case, a collections manager normally handles day to day care and conservation needs, while a curator focuses on research and preparations for exhibition.

Registrar

A registrar is a member of the collections team. They, too, need to have knowledge of collections care and practice. Their primary task is to organize all the files and forms that are inherent in any museum—deeds of gift, inventories, loan forms, etc.

Jobs That Can Be Found Elsewhere (but are more fun in a museum!)

Director

Every museum needs a Director (and for some small museums, the Director is the only staff person). Directors hold overall responsibility for the museum and its operations. They are often the “face” of their museum, representing the museum to the media and other community organizations. Depending

on the size of their institution, directors can also be responsible for fundraising, budgets, and facilities care.

Finance Director

Usually only found in larger museums, the finance director is responsible for handling all the financial resources of the organization.

Human Resources Manager

Again only found in larger museums, a human resources manager hires, fires, and deals with staff issues and benefits programs.

Development Director

Development staff meet with individual donors, work with membership programs, and write grants. Their goal is to raise funds to allow the museum to function smoothly. They don't need a museum background, but should have a passion for their work so they can be persuasive when asking for money.

Marketing Director

Marketing Directors are responsible for raising public awareness of the museum. They need to work with the media to get coverage, plan special events to garner attention for the site, and, if the budget exists, place advertisements to encourage visitation.

Jobs FOR Museums, But Not IN Museums: Museum Vendors

Museum vendors, businesses whose clients are exclusively or primarily museums, can be ideal employers for someone interested in museums and possessing special skills. Salaries can be higher as well, reaching closer to averages in for-profit businesses.

Software Companies

Museums of all sizes use software to manage their collections, keep track of visitation, handle gift shop and ticket sales, and more. Multiple companies exist simply to provide these software needs.

Web Designers

Almost every museum has a website now, and many use web designers; larger museums are also using more advanced technological features on their site, including flash-based games, podcasts, and shopping carts. All of these elements need IT experts.

Architecture Firms

If you have always wanted to go to architecture school, but love museums too, keep in mind that there are many architectural firms who work almost exclusively with museums, creating new buildings and adapting old buildings for new exhibits and uses.

Exhibit Designers

Probably the most common type of museum vendor is an exhibit designer. While some museums have in-house design staff, most will hire an outside firm to design and fabricate large exhibitions. Designers work closely with the curator at the museum to define and organize the content, develop the narrative, and then build the architecture of the exhibition.

Evaluation and Research Companies

Museums rely on visitors; they need to be constantly aware of how they are perceived by the public, and by their audiences. Research and evaluation companies are specialists who know how to create scientifically random samples for focus groups and design interviews and questionnaires for museum visitors.

Publishers

Some larger museums are able to produce catalogs and academic books; there are multiple publishers, most of them university presses, that work with these museums to publish these books.

Smaller museums may also want to publish, but they might focus on a children's activity book or a souvenir guide to their historic house to sell in their gift shop. There are several publishers who specialize in these types of books.

Technology Providers

Museums make use of different kinds of technology that assist them in sharing their collection and story with the public. Audio tours, cell phone tours, kiosks, interactive elements in exhibitions—all of these have providers who work with museums to make sure they get the best of this technology.