

**New Zealand Museum Sector Web Survey  
prepared for Museums Aotearoa  
by The New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, AUT University**

**March 2007 (revised July 2007)**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Museums Aotearoa is regularly approached by both museums and other interested parties seeking reliable cross-sector information, and is currently unable to provide it. Unfortunately information collected by other agencies such as Statistics NZ is not specific enough to be utilised by individual institutions or the museum sector as a whole.

To fill this important gap in knowledge, Museums Aotearoa wishes to gain a more thorough understanding of the NZ Museum Sector.

This report discusses findings from an initial attempt to gather background information on the Museum sector. The research is drawn from a web survey run from 1-20 February 2007 - 122 museums completed the survey (a response rate of 28.6%). The survey achieved good coverage by region, age, size, collections focus, and ownership.

The initial findings were reported to the Museums Aotearoa AGM in March 2007. Additional analysis in July 2007 provided a breakdown of results by 'size' of museum, based on the number of Full Time Equivalent paid staff:

micro museums	0
small museums	1-5
medium museums	6-20
large museums	over 20

The survey also provides additional information on the degree to which there is interest in the development of a web-survey based museums 'barometer'. Such a tool would provide Museums Aotearoa and others with timely information about the museum sector and enable time-series analysis of trends and issues.

- Most of the museums that responded to the survey are located in Wellington, Auckland (16% each), Canterbury (11%) and the Waikato (10%).
- Nearly a third of the museums surveyed were established between 1958 and 1977. More than 1 in 10 was established more than 50 years ago (Table 2). A further 14% have only been established in the past four years.
- Over half (52%) of the museums surveyed attract fewer than 5,000 visitors per year. Only 7% of museums surveyed attract more than 100,000 visitors.
- Micro museums receive about 3,000 visitors per year and small museums receive just over 20,000 visitors, while medium and large-sized museums attract about 70,000 and 200,000 visitors respectively.
- Eighty-five percent of micro museums and around 30% of small museums attract less than 5,000 visitors per year. More than 75% of large museums attracted over 100,000 visitors per year.
- Only one museum in 5 does not count its visitor arrivals (19%) in a systematic fashion. Three quarters cannot, however, breakdown visitor information into robust domestic/international visitor estimates.
- Three-quarters of the museums that responded to the survey have 5 or fewer paid employees. Of this group 54% (49 museums) stated they have no paid employees. Only 5% of the museums surveyed employed more than 40 staff.

- There are significant variations in the number of human resources employed depending on the size of museums; large-scaled museums employ more paid employees than the small museums, and small-sized museums mainly employ volunteer staff.
- The numbers of paid FTE increase as museums increase in size; micro and small museums have 0–5 paid FTE, medium museums employ 6–20 paid FTE, and large museums employ 21+ FTE.
- Volunteers are an important component of the labour force in this sector. Virtually all of the museums surveyed make some use of voluntary staff. Nine percent have more than 50 volunteers associated with their organisations.
- Volunteer staff is especially important micro and small museums.
- A quarter of museums surveyed work with a budget of less than \$5,000. Over 50% of museums surveyed operate on budgets of less than \$50,000 per year. For many museums finances appear to be a relatively sensitive issue – largely because several struggle to simply make ‘ends meet’.
- Micro and small museums reported an average operating budget of around NZ\$40,000 and NZ\$195,000 respectively, while medium and large museums reported average operating budgets of NZ\$2.7m and NZ\$5.3m respectively.
- Generally, the operating budgets of micro museums are less than NZ\$20,000, and the small-scale museums work with budgets of less than NZ\$100,000. Medium-sized museums’ operating budgets range from NZ\$500,000 to NZ\$2m, and large museums work with budgets of about NZ\$1m to more than NZ\$2m.
- The diverse nature of the sector is clearly seen when museums are asked to identify their most significant items and collection areas. The most significant collection theme to emerge is local history.
- Respondents found the survey to be easy to use – with 92% ranking it as very easy or easy to complete and submit.
- When asked about the value of an on-going web-based barometer to the museum sector - 53% of respondents stated that they felt it was of considerable or very considerable value. A further 35% of respondents felt that such a barometer would be of some value. Only 11% of museums felt that such a barometer would have limited or no value.
- Virtually all (93%) of the museums responding to the survey stated that they would be interested in participating in future surveys designed to support an ongoing barometer.
- There was a strong feeling among those surveyed that any information gathered must be disseminated effectively and in a timely fashion.
- The research represents a starting point for an ongoing barometer of the sector’s performance and ‘issues’. The good response to the survey and the generally positive way in which it has been received and completed bodes well for MA, should it decide to pursue the barometer approach in the future.
- This initial study has shown that data on the sector can be collected in a timely and cost-effective manner through the use of a web-based survey. The next step towards a barometer is a relatively simple one. An underlying survey is already in place as is its related database. New themes and foci can be added with ease.
- Future surveys can be tailored so they can better reflect the character of different sub-groups – the web-survey approach is ideally suited to this.
- NZTRI will continue to support this program of research through the incorporation of graduate students and cost-effective research techniques – we look forward to working with Museums Aotearoa in the future to bring the concept of a museums barometer to fruition.

The full survey report can be downloaded from the Museums Aotearoa website at [www.museums-aotearoa.org.nz](http://www.museums-aotearoa.org.nz) under Activities, or contact the office for details.