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UNESCO-ICOM 2026 REPORT ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MUSEUMS

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UNESCO/ICOM/AI REPORT/2026

FINAL REPORT

Findings of the UNESCO-ICOM 2026 Global Survey on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Museums

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I. INTRODUCTION

Following the Global Conference on Museums and Artificial Intelligence (AI) organized as a side event of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference on 1 November 2025 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) General Conference Resolution "Positioning Museums for an Equitable, Ethical, and Sustainable Digital Future through Technologies", which was adopted on 17 November 2025 Dubai, UAE, UNESCO and ICOM launched an inaugural Global Survey on the Ethical Use of AI in Museums.

Carried out between 21 May to 21 July 2026, the survey received **466** responses from **90** countries, of which **403** responses were retained for statistical analysis and reporting following the internal review of submission criteria. The survey was intended to establish a baseline understanding of if and how museums around the globe are using AI in their operations, gather concrete examples of current practice, and assess the extent to which their use of AI is guided by the following normative instruments:

- UNESCO Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity, and their Role in Society (2015)
- UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)
- ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (2004)[1]

This report is intended to inform museum professionals, cultural authorities, policymakers, AI developers and other stakeholders involved in the digital transformation of the museum sector with the aim of promoting the ethical use of AI.

Key findings of the survey[2]

- **57%** of museums are using AI in 2026
- **55%** of museums have no internal AI policy, strategy or guidelines
- AI use remains predominantly exploratory or staff-led rather than institution-wide
- **Accuracy, copyright** and **data protection** are leading concerns of museums in the use of AI
- Training and guidance were requested in the **technical and ethical use of AI** as well as for **data-governance and IP rights**

The qualitative responses provide further context for these statistical findings. Across the open-ended questions, respondents consistently described **AI as a tool to support rather than replace human expertise**. Current applications are often pragmatic, including translation, text drafting, summarization, research assistance and help with repetitive administrative tasks. More specialized experimentation

[1] At the time the survey was launched, the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (2004) was the reference document in force. The Code was subsequently revised, and a new version was adopted in June 2026, during the survey period. References to the ICOM Code of Ethics in this survey therefore reflect the 2004 version applicable at the time of its launch.

[2] Findings presented in this report are based on 403 validated responses unless otherwise stated, for the full list please see Annex 1.

with AI is taking place in collection documentation, digitization, accessibility, interpretation and visitor engagement.

Respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of **human oversight, accuracy, transparency and professional accountability**, particularly when AI-generated information is made publicly available. Concerns regarding institutional credibility and authenticity were especially expressed when referencing public-facing and interpretive or interactive applications.

The responses also reveal a **gap between AI usage and institutional governance**. Museums are already using AI while formal policies, museum-specific guidance, evaluation mechanisms and staff training remain comparatively uneven. Several respondents were unaware of existing international ethical instruments, suggesting that the dissemination of existing UNESCO and ICOM frameworks, and their translation into practical tools, requires further attention.

Finally, the qualitative findings also point to differences in institutional capacity to engage with AI across the responding museums. Responses to open-ended questions from some small museums with lower annual operating budgets (less than USD 100,000) referred to restrictions relating to staff capacity, infrastructure, digitization, financial resources and access to practical guidance, while also recognizing AI's potential to alleviate some resource constraints.

Methodology and survey respondent information

The survey was made available in six languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. It consisted of **22** multiple choices and yes-no questions. Participants had the opportunity to share additional comments, descriptions or observations to clarify their responses. This provided both qualitative and quantitative data for this report. In addition to formal correspondence about the survey sent from UNESCO to all its Member States and Field Offices as well as from ICOM to its members, the link to the survey was made available on UNESCO and ICOM web sites and shared via social media from 21 May to 21 July 2026. A total of **466** responses were received from **90** countries.[3] Following an internal review and validation process, **403** responses were retained for statistical analysis and reporting for consistency purposes. As the target audience for the survey was museum directors or relevant personnel, submissions from ministerial bodies responsible for a number of museums as well as from organizations falling outside the scope of the 2022 ICOM Definition of a Museum[4] were excluded from the museum-level dataset. This is also the case for duplicates and incomplete submissions. Therefore, the total number of museums was recalculated and thus a baseline of **403** responses was used for the calculation of all statistics and data provided.

The **403** validated responses came from museums in **90** countries. In terms of institutional governance, **271** respondents identified their institution as a public museum, **73** as private museum, **23** as a community museum, **18** as a university museum, and **18** under other governance arrangements. In this survey, reported percentages are calculated against all **403** validated responses unless a different subgroup is explicitly stated.

Note: *This survey used voluntary participation through UNESCO and ICOM networks and public dissemination channels. The findings reflect the responses of participating museums and should not be interpreted as representative estimates for the global museum sector.*

[3] See Annex 1 for a list of the number of validated museums per Member State, divided per region.

[4] See Article 3 Section 2 of ICOM Statutes (2023) "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing."

The annual visitor count of respondents ranged from fewer than 10,000 (**32%**) to 10,000-50,000 (**26%**), 50,000-100,000 (**16%**), 100,000-500,000 (**17%**), 500,000-1,000,000 (**4%**), more than 1,000,000 (**5%**).[5]

The approximate yearly operative budget (USD equivalent) of respondents ranged from less than USD 10,000 (**15%**) to USD 10,000-50,000 (**10%**), 50,000-100,000 (**8%**), 100,000-500,000 (**23%**), 500,000-1,000,000 (**8%**), 1,000,000-5,000,000 (**9%**), more than 5,000,000 (**10%**), while **16%** of respondents preferred not to say.

50% of respondents are members of ICOM.

II. GOVERNANCE

62% of respondents reported that their country does not have specific legislation, policies or guidelines concerning the use of Artificial Intelligence in museums, either specifically for museums or as part of broader AI governance frameworks**.** In contrast, **22%** reported that such a framework exists at the national level[6]. Among these respondents, **9%** identified museum specific provisions and **91%** identified broader AI governance frameworks.

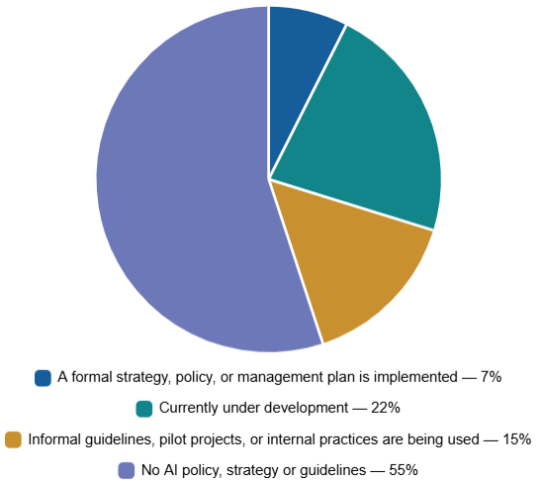
Through the qualitative data, several respondents explicitly noted the **existence of general AI regulation and yet the absence of museum-specific guidance**. The Azerbaijan State Art Gallery explained that *"although there are currently no AI regulations developed for museums, museums operate within the broader national framework."* Similarly, several respondents from different countries referred to national AI strategies, the EU regulatory framework or general government policies that apply to museums without addressing museum-specific issues. Some responses also indicated that national governance frameworks remain at an early stage. Fundy Geological Museum (Canada) noted that *"so far it has been limited to policy notices handed down from government politicians. No formal policy is in place yet."* While institutions may increasingly operate within broader AI, data protection and copyright frameworks, museum-specific policy guidance for practical application of AI remains limited.

As shown on Figure 1, when asked about existence of internal AI policy, strategy or guidelines, only **7%** of museums reported the implementation of a formal plan, while **15%** reported the use of informal guidelines, pilot projects or internal practices. The majority of museums, **55%**, reported having no AI policy, strategy or guidelines. For **22%** of museums, a strategy is currently under development.

[5] All percentages have been rounded down up until "x.4" and rounded up from "x.5" onwards.

[6] The remaining 17% selected "N/A", indicating that they were unable to provide an answer to this question.

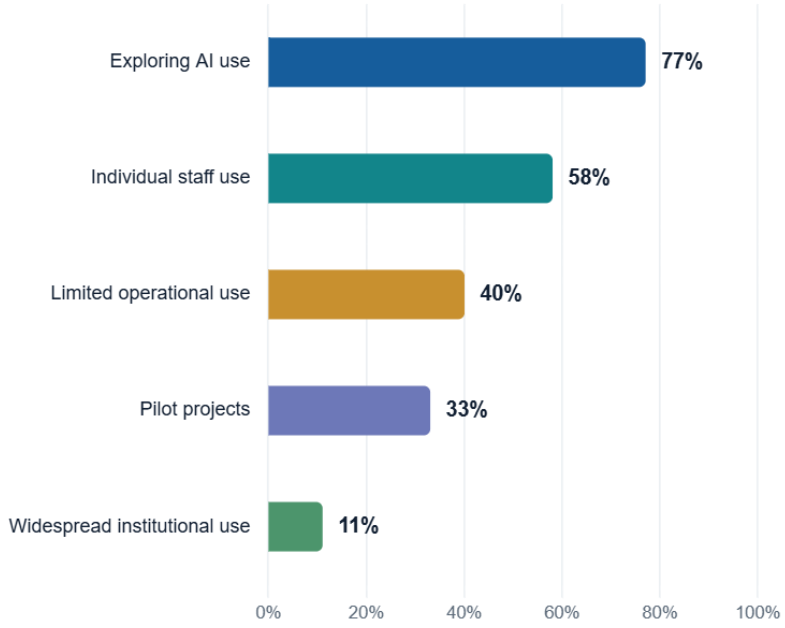
Figure 1: ***Does your museum have an internal AI policy, strategy or guidelines?***



III. USE OF AI

57% of respondents reported using AI, while **43%** indicated that they do not use AI. Although more than half of responding museums report using AI, the results indicate that adoption is still at an early institutional stage. Figure 2 shows that exploration and individual staff use are considerably more common than widespread implementation across the museum. Multiple responses were permitted.

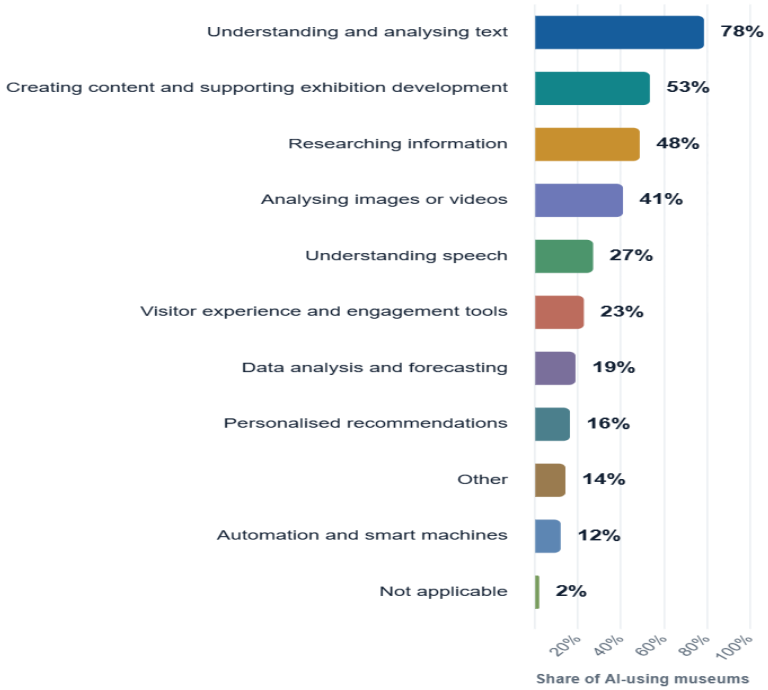
Figure 2: ***How would you describe your museum's current level of AI use?***[7]



[7] Only respondents who reported using AI are included in these numbers. This subgroup makes up 100% of this figure.

Types of AI applications

Figure 3: ***What types of AI-related technology does your museum use?***[8]



As seen on Figure 3, the types of AI technologies and applications used by museums vary. **78%** of AI-using museums use AI-related technologies for understanding and analysing text. **53%** use AI for creating content and supporting exhibition development. **48%** use it for researching information. **41%** use it for analysing images or videos. **27%** use it for speech understanding. **23%** use it for visitor experience and engagement tools. **19%** use it for data analysis and forecasting. **16%** use it for personalized recommendations. **14%** report other use of AI. **12%** use AI for automation and smart machines. Multiple responses were permitted.

Open-ended responses reveal a wide range of applications that extends beyond the questionnaire categories. Respondents reported, among others, the use of handwritten-text recognition, semantic collection search, named-entity recognition, object identification, automated metadata generation, alt-text production, archival photograph colorization, AI-assisted coding, visitor analytics, geographic information systems (GIS), and archaeological predictive modelling.

Several examples point to the potential of AI for improving access to and research on museum collections. For example, Wellcome Collection (United Kingdom) described work focused on using AI *"to aid discovery and use of our collections"*, which includes using language and vision models to support handwritten-text recognition, semantic search, named-entity recognition and collection discovery.

Other responses illustrate applications adapted to specific cultural and linguistic contexts, including AI-supported translation, cultural education and the documentation of intangible cultural heritage, such as the Maasai Heritage Museum (Kenya). Moreover, **AI can also support museums in creating and sharing content despite resource constraints**. For instance, the Fermanagh County Museum (United Kingdom) described using AI to create visual content for folklore storytelling, enabling it to share medieval and prehistoric stories through reels on its website and social media. The museum noted that this would not previously have been possible within its budget.

[8] Only respondents who reported using AI are included in these numbers. This subgroup makes up 100% of this figure.

How museums access and develop AI tools

84% of AI-using museums access systems through external tools or platforms (e.g. publicly available, online services). **26%** use external service providers or contractors to develop or implement AI solutions. **13%** develop and use in-house AI tools or systems. **5%** reported other approaches. Multiple responses were permitted.

Additionally, results from the survey demonstrate that museums access AI through a variety of tools provided by related organisations. In addition to publicly available tools and external suppliers, respondents described the use of government-approved AI environments, university-based platforms and institutionally developed systems. For example, the Morris Steinert Collection of Musical Instruments of Yale University (United States) reported the use of the university's internal AI platform, while the Aargauer Kunsthaus (Switzerland) referred to AargauGPT, a dedicated AI environment developed for the Canton of Aargau. The use of secure, organisationally managed AI platforms may be particularly significant for museums handling sensitive collections, research or visitor data since these institutionally controlled or sector-specific environments may provide different levels of accountability and data protection than publicly available consumer AI services.

Types of AI Tools

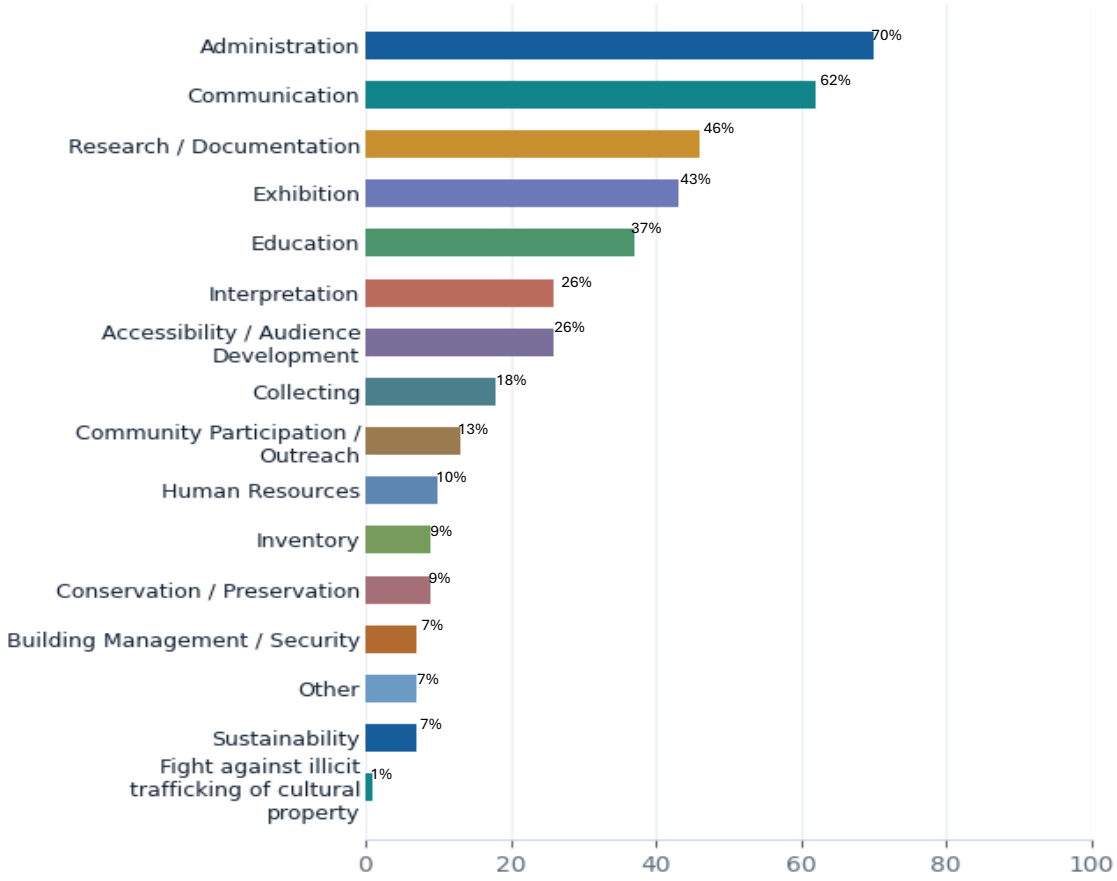
Of museums that indicated using AI, **51%** use commercial off-the-shelf AI tools, **38%** use open-source AI tools[9]and **26%** use AI functionalities integrated into existing museum software. In addition, **21%** reported using custom-developed AI tools, and **18%** indicated that their AI tools have been developed in partnership with universities or companies. Multiple responses were permitted.

AI Use Areas

The quantitative data on Figure 4 provides a nuanced overview of how AI is being incorporated into museum practice. Multiple responses were permitted. A substantial proportion of the examples submitted by respondents concern **routine or time-consuming professional tasks**, including drafting and editing texts, translation, summarization, preparation of correspondence, meeting notes, social-media communication, administrative reporting and research assistance. Such examples suggest that, at the current stage of adoption, AI is often being used as a productivity tool rather than to fundamentally transform museum operations.

[9] **Commercial off-the-shelf AI tools** are ready-made AI products or services developed by commercial providers and available for general use (e.g. ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or Google Gemini). **Open-source AI tools** are AI models or software made available under licences that allow users to access, modify and/or adapt them, subject to the applicable licence terms (e.g. Mistral models, Meta's Llama models or Stable Diffusion).

Figure 4: ***In which area(s) is AI being used in your museum?***[10]



At the same time, **some museums reported using AI in ways that directly support their public mission and core museum activities**. Examples included AI-assisted cataloguing and metadata creation, collection search, object recognition, workflow management of digitization, transcription and the analysis of archival and archaeological material. The Iraq Museum reported using AI to interpret fragments of an Assyrian relief to support reconstruction and documentation, while The National Museum of Lithuania described how AI is increasingly integrated into museum operations*: " AI is also used in digitization workflows, including museum object photography. Our institution has developed an AI-powered photography assistant, currently in the testing phase, to support photographers and improve workflow consistency. AI also supports object cataloguing in the LIMIS system [Lithuanian museums' public data catalogue], while final decisions remain subject to expert review."*

Respondents also reported using AI in relation to **interpretation and visitor engagement**. The Museum für Urgeschichte(n) (Switzerland) described an exhibition with a chatbot through which visitors could interact with life-sized representations of different historical periods, based on information curated by museum professionals. Examples from other museums included virtual tours, information for visitors through QR codes linked to AI-generated historical representations, and the creation of other educational and interpretive content.

[10] Only respondents who reported using AI are included in these numbers. This subgroup makes up 100% of this figure.

Example of using AI for public-facing experimentation at the Aargauer Kunsthaus Museum (Switzerland)



Image ©Till Forrer

The Aargauer Kunsthaus uses AI as part of an exhibition in which visitors were invited to engage directly with technology. Two chatbots were programmed to conduct an ongoing conversation about AI that included both positive affirmations and critical perspectives, while also responding to visitors' questions. The museum also provided three AI workstations where visitors could experiment with AI through specific tasks, including the recreation of a work of art.

Accessibility also emerged as a recurrent area of interest. Respondents reported using AI for transcription, translation, alt-text and visual description and adapting content to improve readability and access for diverse audiences, including people with visual impairments. The Museum of Art & Photography (India) noted that AI tools enabled colleagues with disabilities to participate more equitably in tasks involving transcription and translation, drafting and editing.

Importantly, multiple respondents emphasized that AI-supported activities remain subject to **professional responsibility and human verification**. Laboratorio Arte Alameda (Mexico) stated that all curatorial, artistic, administrative and institutional decisions were still the responsibility of professional museum staff and explicitly excluded automated decision-making (and visitor surveillance) from its current AI use.

Overall, the qualitative evidence suggests that AI adoption in museums currently spans a continuum from routine administrative assistance to specialized collection, accessibility and visitor applications. The most common pattern is one of **reinforcement rather than replacement**: AI is generally described as supporting professional activities, but final responsibility remains with museum staff.

Finally, the **responses also point to relatively limited reported use of AI in some areas that are central to museum inventories management and protection of the collection**. Only **9%** of respondents reported using AI for inventory, while just **1%** reported using it in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property. These figures are noteworthy given the importance attached to inventory, collection documentation and due diligence in international museum standards. The 2015 UNESCO Recommendation identifies professional inventory and documentation as important elements of collection management and as tools that can contribute to preventing and combating illicit trafficking. Similarly, the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums emphasize inventory, documentation, provenance and due diligence as important measures in this area. The relatively limited use reported in the survey may therefore point to areas where the potential contribution of AI to existing museum practices could be further explored.

AI learning environment

UNESCO's 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence indicates that *"Member States should encourage museums, galleries, libraries and archives at the national level to use AI systems to highlight their collections and enhance their libraries, databases and knowledge base, while also providing access to their users"*. The UNESCO-ICOM Survey found that **13%** of responding museums offer formal or non-formal learning opportunities related to AI in general and/or to the use of AI in museums. Of these, **7%** provide learning opportunities for visitors, **5%** for students, and **2%** for teachers. **87% of responding museums indicated that they do not offer learning environments on AI, be it formal or non-formal.** Multiple responses were permitted.

Reported activities included workshops on visual production, storytelling, audio generation, educational programmes for students, exhibitions involving AI, and training relating to digital heritage and more broadly on how to use AI in museum works. Several respondents described programmes that addressed not only how AI technologies work but also the opportunities and risks associated with their use, as well as their ethical and societal implications, such as copyright, fake content, manipulation and bias, as well as questions of authenticity and competition with human creative professionals. In addition to adopting AI internally, the findings reveal that more museums are becoming spaces where technological possibilities, cultural implications and ethical concerns can be explored openly and critically.

AI Partnerships

17% of responding museums have partnered with AI or technology companies to support the development and/or use of AI within their institutions, while **83%** reported that they have not engaged in such partnerships.

Of the museums that have engaged in AI partnerships, some have described partnerships with a broad range of actors, including **technology companies, specialized cultural technology providers, universities, national research institutes, exhibition developers and international research consortia**. Several respondents also referred to collaboration with major technology companies and AI providers. Other museums reported working with universities on research applications or relying on students and volunteers with technical expertise to develop AI-related projects.

External partnerships already play an important role in developing museum AI capacity. At the same time, they raise a broader question regarding **dependency on external expertise or infrastructure**. When museums start to rely on external suppliers, their internal capacity to assess providers, govern data and ensure compliance with museum ethics may become weakened.

Measurable Improvements

Of the museums using AI, **21%** of responding museums that use AI reported improvements they considered measurable in their operations, services, or activities. **14%** indicated that AI has not resulted in measurable improvements, while **65%** stated that it is too early to assess its impact. Among the respondents that reported measurable improvements from the implementation of AI, **51%** identified improvements in accessibility, **51%** in visitor services or visitor experience, **45%** in education and mediation activities, **43%** in management or administrative processes, **41%** in collections documentation and cataloguing, **39%** in research activities, **22%** conservation or collection analysis and **4%** in building security and prevention of theft. Multiple responses were permitted.

A clear gap emerges: **AI experimentation is advancing faster than its evaluation**. Museums are increasingly able to identify perceived benefits of AI, particularly the reported improved efficiency, but comparatively few appear to have established formal indicators to measure those benefits systematically.

Example of using AI for civic engagement at Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow) (Brazil)



Image ©Museum of Tomorrow publicity archive

Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow) is using IRIS+, an artificial intelligence system that engages visitors in dialogue about the themes addressed in the museum's main exhibition. At the end of the exhibition, visitors are invited to share what they consider to be their greatest concern in today's world. Based on their response, IRIS+ introduces projects from Brazilian organizations, foundations, and institutions - registered and verified by the museum's team- that offer pathways for meaningful civic engagement. This process involves rigorous curatorial oversight by the museum's staff, including verification of accuracy and clarity, as well as the ethical and transparent storage of data, in full compliance with the Brazilian General Data Protection Law (LGPD). This use of AI by the Museum of Tomorrow demonstrates how meticulous content curation and responsible data management remain essential to the experimental application of AI in museum contexts. Moreover, 37% of participants reported subsequently becoming engaged with a social or environmental cause after their experience, demonstrating the capacity of AI-driven initiatives to foster critical awareness and inspire social transformation. This case study illustrates how the balanced use of AI in museums can strengthen public engagement and contribute to broader societal change.

Respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate their evaluation methods, which resulted in several examples of measurable efficiency improvement, for instance, in the time required to create visual accessibility descriptions, data extraction, research and analysis. The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco (United States) reported that the preparation of visual descriptions for accessibility had decreased from approximately two to five hours to between ten and fifteen minutes with AI support; certain data-extraction tasks that previously required hours could now be completed in approximately one minute; and that spreadsheet analysis and formula creation accelerated by up to 90%.

Challenges

Figure 5: ***What kind of challenges has your museum faced in using AI?***[11]

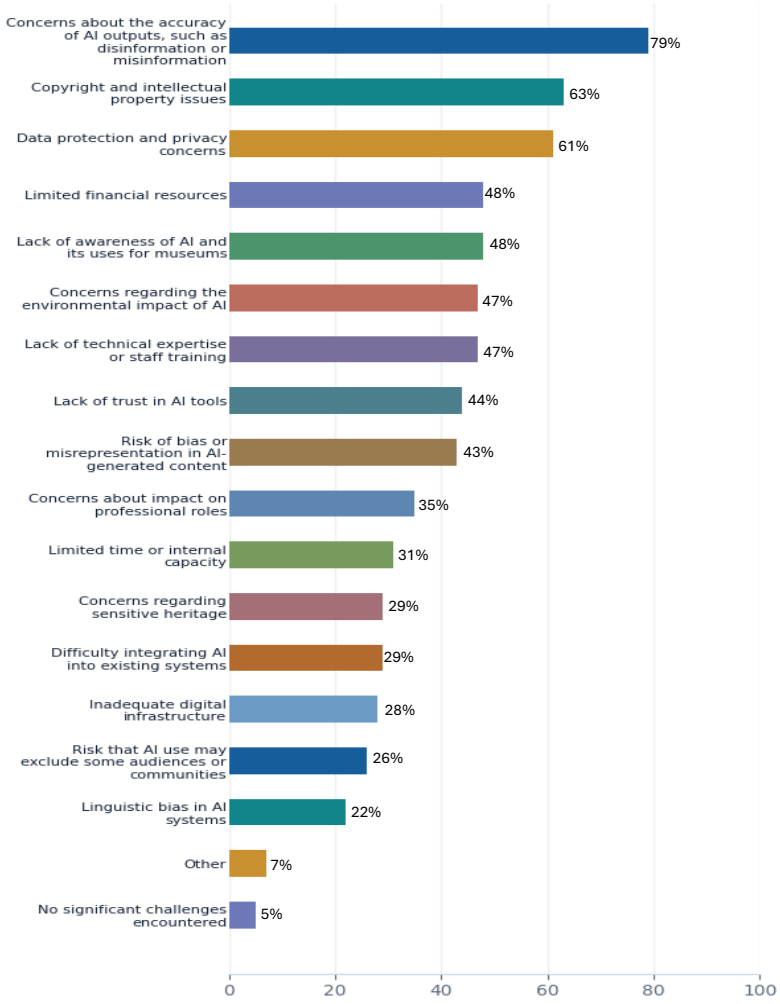


Figure 5 shows the recorded responses when asked about the challenges that arise through AI use. Multiple responses were permitted. Accuracy of AI-generated information is the most frequently reported, followed by copyright and intellectual-property issues, and data-protection concerns. Museums also reported barriers relating to staff capacity, financial resources, environmental impacts, trust and bias.

One recurring concern relates to the **credibility of the museum and public trust**. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (United States) noted *"pushback and negative feedback from some visitors"* as a challenge encountered in response to AI-related activities. Respondents noted that museums occupy a particular position as trusted providers of cultural or historical information, a role that could be undermined by inaccurate, poorly sourced or insufficiently transparent AI-generated content.

A further recurring issue concerned capacity, particularly in small museums. Limited staff time, technical expertise and financial resources may make it particularly **difficult for smaller institutions** not only to access and experiment with AI technologies, but also to assess rapidly changing AI systems while simultaneously developing appropriate safeguards. The Jázs Múzeum (Hungary) explicitly highlighted the current lack of AI guidance for museums and emphasized the need to develop *"museum-specific AI guidelines and practical examples for smaller regional museums."*

[11] Only respondents who reported using AI are included in these numbers. This subgroup makes up 100% of this figure.

Human oversight

Human verification emerges as an important safeguard. Respondents frequently cite it as the practical response to concerns over AI inaccuracy. As the National Museum of Ethnology (Japan) stated: *"Incomplete correctness is covered by human ability."* **81%** of AI-using museums reported that AI-generated outputs are always reviewed by a human before being used or published. **12%** indicated that they are usually reviewed, **4%** reported that reviews occur sometimes, and **2%** stated that reviews are conducted rarely. **1%** of respondents indicated that AI-generated outputs are never reviewed prior to use or publication.

IV. ETHICS

Ethical Framework

28% of responding museums that use AI reported that it is guided by the **2004 ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums** and **26%** indicated that they rely on the **2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**.[12] **15%** reported using other recommendations, frameworks, or policy documents to guide their use of AI. Multiple responses were permitted.

Respondents who indicated other frameworks referred to a diverse range of instruments, including the EU AI Act, data-protection legislation such as the GDPR, national government guidance, cybersecurity frameworks, university research-ethics policies, privacy rules and general institutional IT governance.

However, the qualitative responses also reveal a lack of awareness and dissemination. Some respondents stated that they had not previously been aware of the UNESCO or ICOM instruments included in the survey; therefore, the survey also provided a critical means of awareness-raising for these normative guidelines. The Samurai Museum Berlin (Germany) stressed that an ICOM policy on AI would be highly valuable for the sector.[13] The MACAM (Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Lebanon) similarly explained in the final comments that they had not previously been aware of the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and intended to consult it and share it with colleagues as a result of this survey. These responses suggest that the challenge of providing policy support is not limited to developing normative instruments. **Ensuring that existing frameworks reach museum professionals** and are translated into **practical, sector-specific guidance** is equally important.

[12] The survey instrument was developed before the adoption of the revised ICOM Code of Ethics in June 2026 and therefore refers to the 2004 version. As a result, responses should not be interpreted as measuring awareness or implementation of the 2026 Code.

[13] The survey instrument was developed before the adoption of the revised ICOM Code of Ethics in June 2026 and therefore refers to the 2004 version. As a result, responses should not be interpreted as measuring awareness or implementation of the 2026 Code.

Figure 6: ***Does the use of AI in your museum take into consideration any of the following specific ethical high-level principles[14]***

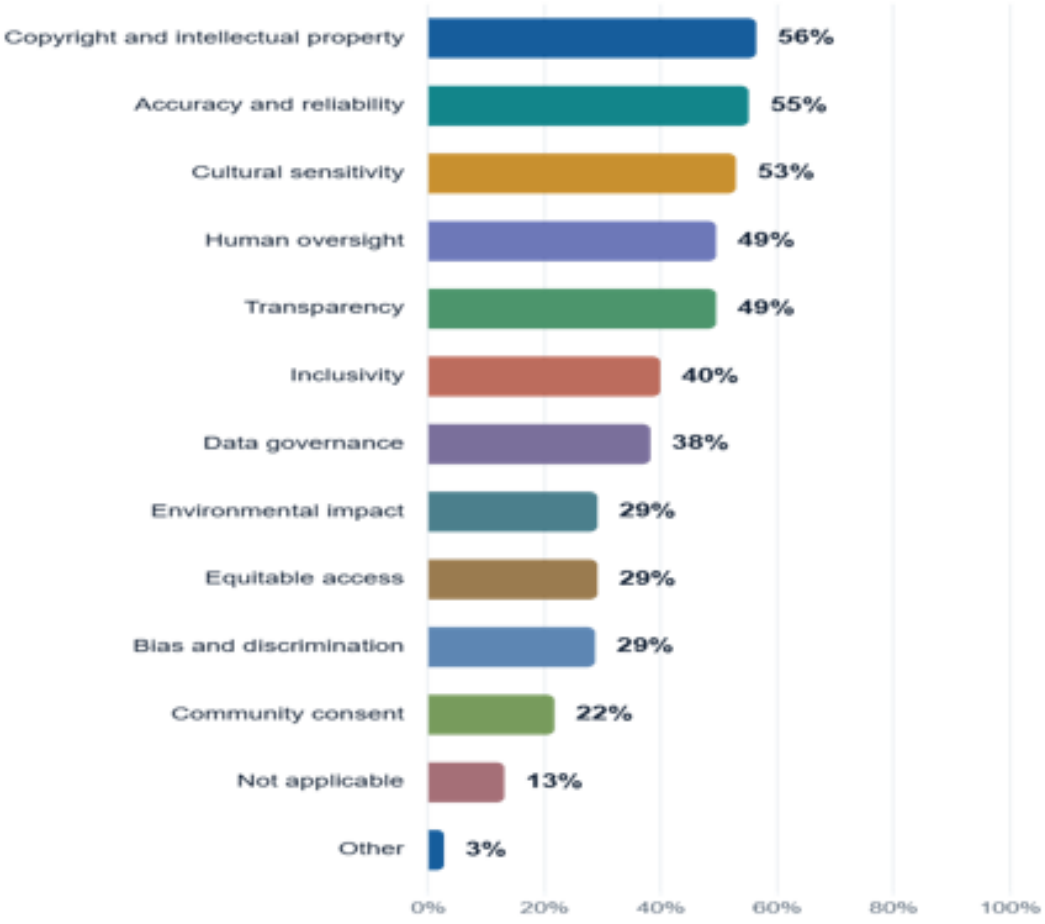


Figure 6 provides an overview of specific ethical high-level principles taken into consideration by museums in their use of AI. Multiple responses were permitted. In this question, **56%** of AI-using museums reported that their use of AI takes into consideration copyright or intellectual property rights, while **55%** consider accuracy and reliability of AI-generated outputs. **53%** indicated that cultural sensitivity in interpretation and representation is a guiding principle, and **49%** recorded human oversight and accountability in AI-assisted processes. Transparency about the use of AI concerns **49%** of respondents, and inclusivity **40%**. **38%** of respondents take into consideration responsible data governance, **29%** equitable access to digital content and services, **29%** mitigation of gender, social, racial bias, and **22%** consider community consent and governance over culturally sensitive heritage. Multiple responses were permitted.

[14] [14] Only respondents who reported using AI are included in these numbers.

Example of using AI for Cultural Knowledge and Community Governance at the Maasai Heritage Museum (Kenya)



Image ©My Chosen Vessels (MCV)

The Maasai Heritage Museum developed MaasaiGPT in collaboration with Maasai elders, youth and educators. The platform is used to document, preserve and share Maasai cultural heritage, including traditional ecological knowledge, oral histories, language, ceremonies, medicinal knowledge and cultural practices. It supports Maa-English translation, cultural education and the transfer of knowledge through generations. On a public-facing level, the museum also uses MaasaiGPT for cultural interpretation, digital storytelling and community outreach. Its approach emphasizes community governance and consent, while the museum identified Indigenous Data Sovereignty, community-led governance, protection of traditional knowledge and intergenerational knowledge preservation as relevant ethical considerations.

The Maasai Heritage Museum (Kenya) mentions distinct ethical concerns about **Indigenous data sovereignty, community-led governance, and the protection and preservation of traditional, intergenerational knowledge**. These considerations draw attention to collective and community rights in relation to cultural data and suggest that ethical AI governance in museums may need to take account of forms of stewardship and consent that are not fully captured by conventional data-protection frameworks. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (United States) stressed the **importance of necessity**, arguing that AI should be used only where it constitutes the most appropriate tool rather than because the technology is available. **Attitudes of the public** were also reported as an ethical consideration. The Riverton Heritage Museum and Tourist Centre Trust (New Zealand) described consulting its audience about the use of AI-generated promotional images. Following predominantly negative feedback, the institution decided not to use AI-generated content. This reinforces the need to understand that responsible AI in museums extends beyond legal compliance. The choice not to use AI in particular circumstances is also emerging as a relevant ethical consideration.

Budget

4% of all responding museums allocate financial resources to AI-related activities through a dedicated budget line, while **10%** fund AI initiatives through project-based or external funding sources. **19%** reported that they do not currently allocate funding to AI-related activities but are exploring funding opportunities, whereas **67%** indicated that they do not allocate financial resources to AI-related activities.

Among responding museums that allocate financial resources to AI-related activities, **53%** reported that AI investment represents less than 1% of their annual operational budget. **20%** indicated that AI investment accounts for between 1% and 5% of their annual operational budget, while **5%** reported allocating between 5% and 10%. **2%** of respondents indicated that AI-related investment exceeds 10% of their annual operational budget.

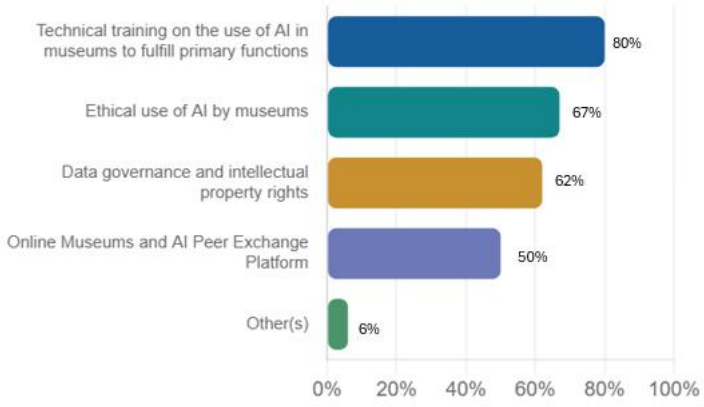
Training

17% of all responding museums offer professional training for staff on the use of AI, while **83%** reported that they do not provide such training.

The descriptions of existing training show considerable variation in both depth and format. Respondents referred to introductory webinars, online courses, general generative-AI training, training provided by government bodies or parent universities, and sessions focused on platforms of AI providers. The Estonian National Museum commented that changes are happening too fast for the current trainings to be sufficient.

Other examples demonstrate more sustained or participatory approaches, describing community initiatives where colleagues can discuss opportunities, fears, concerns and personal values surrounding AI. The Open Air Museum (Hungary) described the development and delivery of a 30-hour blended training course on applications of AI in the museum sector. The National Museum of Lithuania reported making its AI training available to professionals from other institutions too.

Figure 7: ***What type of AI training or resources would your museum need to use or improve the uses of AI?***



The need is not only high for a greater quantity of training but for **continuous, museum-specific and practice-oriented capacity-building** that combines technical skills with ethical reflection and opportunities for peer learning and sharing. As seen on Figure 7, **80%** reported a need for technical training on the use of AI to support core museum functions. **67%** of responding museums identified ethical use of AI in museums as a training or resource need to support or improve their use of AI, while **62%** indicated a need for guidance on data governance and intellectual property rights. **50%** expressed interest in an online platform for museums and AI peer exchange to facilitate knowledge-sharing and

capacity-building. **6%** of respondents identified other training or resource needs. Multiple responses were permitted.

Other training needs specified by respondents include: AI procurement, cybersecurity, data quality, metadata governance, transparency requirements, integration with collection-management systems and support for languages that are less well represented in current AI systems. Respondents also repeatedly requested practical guidance **adapted to small museums**, suggesting that broad ethical principles alone may not provide sufficient support for day-to-day implementation. This difference between smaller and larger museums is not only found in the qualitative data, but also in the quantitative data of the survey as Figure 8 confirms. Among museums with annual operational budgets below USD 100,000, **39%** reported using AI, compared with **77%** of museums with budgets of USD 1 million or more. Differences are even more pronounced in the institutional structures supporting AI use. Museums with larger budgets were also considerably more likely to have formal or emerging internal AI governance arrangements. **66%** of museums with annual budgets below USD 100,000 have no internal AI policy, strategy or guidelines, compared with **33%** of museums with budgets of USD 1 million or more. While these differences do not prove a causal relationship, they reinforce the qualitative findings that financial and institutional capacity may influence museums' ability not only to adopt AI, but also to govern and support its use.

Figure 8: ***AI adoption and institutional capacity by annual operating budget***

Annual operational budget	Use of AI	AI governance in place or under development [15]	Staff AI training	Current AI funding[16]
Below USD 100,000	39%	34%	4%	6%
USD 100,000-1 million	60%	41%	14%	15%
USD 1 million or more	77%	67%	30%	30%

Further training requests revolved around specific cultural-policy priorities. The Maasai Heritage Museum (Kenya) asked for guidance on community-led AI governance, Indigenous language preservation and the documentation of intangible cultural heritage. The Museum of Contemporary Art Manilla (Philippines) underscores the importance of addressing the relationship between AI, environmental sustainability and labour displacement, especially in countries of the Global South.

At the same time, a small but important group of respondents expressed reservations about framing capacity-building solely around increased AI adoption. Comments included *"None. We don't use it and don't want to"* and a request for guidance on *"how to not encourage the use of AI in the museum industry."* These responses indicate that capacity-building may also need to **support museums in critically evaluating whether and when AI is appropriate**, rather than assuming that adoption is always the desired outcome.

[15] "AI governance in place or under development" combines formal policy, informal guidelines/practices and policies currently under development.

[16] "Current AI funding" combines a dedicated AI budget line and project-based/external funding.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of this survey suggest that museum engagement with AI is currently characterized by pragmatic experimentation, but conducted with considerable caution. AI is already being integrated into many different museum activities, but **adoption remains uneven and widespread institutional implementation is limited**. The qualitative responses further show that attitudes towards AI vary considerably, ranging from active experimentation and demand for greater capacity-building to deliberate restrictions on, or rejection of, certain forms of AI use.

The findings indicate different levels of perceived risk. Routine internal applications, such as drafting, translation, summarization and administrative assistance, are generally described as relatively straightforward, although concerns relating to accuracy, reliability, transparency, copyright, data protection, bias and trust may still arise. Applications relating to collections, research and accessibility (including metadata generation, transcription, collection searches and multilingual access) are frequently identified as promising, but respondents stress the importance of expert verification. Across the responses, the importance of human expertise and oversight emerges as a consistent consideration, with AI generally understood as a tool to support professional judgement rather than replace it.

This survey brings forth a gap between AI use and the institutional structures needed to support responsible AI use. Experimentation appears to be progressing more rapidly than formal policy development, evaluation practices, staff training and AI-related funding. Respondents identified substantial **needs for technical, ethical and data-governance support, practical museum-specific guidance and opportunities for peer exchange**. The findings further point to an uneven institutional capacity to engage with AI across museums. Those with larger operational budgets were substantially more likely to report AI use, internal governance, staff training and dedicated financial resources. This pattern, reinforced by the qualitative responses, suggests that the capacity to benefit from and responsibly govern AI is not evenly distributed across the responding museums.

Finally, the findings suggest that future support should focus not only on encouraging adoption of AI, but also on helping museums make informed decisions about when, where and how AI should be used, taking into account its relevance to their specific institutional context, its potential benefits and limitations, and the importance of ethical principles. This includes ensuring that smaller institutions, museums with limited digital infrastructure and resources, and communities whose cultural knowledge is collectively governed and safeguarded, are not disadvantaged by this transition.

Annexure (2):

1. Number of responses to the 2026 survey per region and country
2. Survey Questions

Annex 1: Number of responses to the 2026 survey per region and country

Region and percentages out of all validated responses	**Countries and corresponding number of responses**
Western Europe and North America (37%)	Canada (21), Spain (18), Belgium (17), Germany (13), France (12), United States (12), United Kingdom (8), Greece (7), Finland (6), Italy (6), Netherlands (6), Portugal (6), Switzerland (5), Türkiye (3), Denmark (2), Luxembourg (2), Sweden (2), Austria (1), Cyprus (1), Ireland (1), Monaco (1)
Eastern Europe (21%)	Hungary (45), Slovakia (13), Uzbekistan (10), Azerbaijan (5), Albania (2), Armenia (1), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1), Estonia (1), Georgia (1), Latvia (1), Lithuania (1), Republic of Moldova (1), Russian Federation (1), Serbia (1), Slovenia (1)
Latin America and the Caribbean (15%)	Brazil (23), Mexico (18), Peru (5), Ecuador (4), Argentina (3), Costa Rica (3), Bolivia (1), Guatemala (1), Haiti (1), Venezuela (1)
Asia and the Pacific (10%)	Australia (6), Japan (5), Pakistan (4), Bangladesh (3), India (3), Nepal (3), New Zealand (3), Tajikistan (3), China (2), Philippines (2), Afghanistan (1), Fiji (1), Iran (1), Kazakhstan (1), Malaysia (1), Thailand (1), Viet Nam (1)
Africa (9%)	United Republic of Tanzania (16), Botswana (2), Ghana (2), Nigeria (2), Uganda (2), Zambia (2), Burundi (1), Cameroon (1), Côte d'Ivoire (1), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), Eswatini (1), Ethiopia (1), Kenya (1), Madagascar (1), Namibia (1), Seychelles (1), South Africa (1), Togo (1)
Arab States (7%)	Jordan (10), Lebanon (5), Qatar (4), Egypt (3), Bahrain (2), Iraq (2), Oman (1), Saudi Arabia (1), Tunisia (1)

Annex 2: Survey Questions

UNESCO-ICOM 2026 global survey on use of artificial intelligence in museums

Introduction:

This inaugural survey, carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), is intended to gather concrete examples, baseline information and data on how museums around the globe are using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their operations. The target audience for the survey is museum directors or relevant personnel. Internal consultations may be required to obtain the information necessary to complete this survey. The link to the survey will be available on UNESCO and ICOM web sites and shared via social media from 21 May to 21 July 2026.
The results of the survey will be analyzed and shared in a joint report prepared by UNESCO and ICOM on their web sites.

Each survey submitted will require the respondent to irrevocably grant to all users, for an unlimited period, the right to use, copy, or distribute the data submitted on their use of AI in museums. All data received will be made freely available to the public on the internet, as per the UNESCO Open Access Policy for information.

If you have any questions, please contact the UNESCO Museum Programme Secretariat: sec.mus@unesco.org

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Instructions:

1. Only one submission per museum will be accepted.
2. Please kindly ensure that the responses submitted are approved by the direction of your museum prior to submission.
3. The answers to the survey must be submitted online.
4. Respondents may complete the questionnaire progressively, save and come back to finish it later. Please email the Museum Programme Secretariat (sec.mus@unesco.org) if you would like to receive a Word Version of the questions in order to prepare your responses offline; however, kindly note that you will need to copy your responses onto the online survey afterwards for submission. We regret that Word Versions of the survey will not be accepted, and it must be completed online.
5. It is estimated to take less than 60 minutes to complete the survey, depending on the amount of details provided in the optional responses.
6. All multiple-choice responses are mandatory.
7. All fields for additional information are optional except for the survey respondent information in questions 1 and 2.

References:

- UNESCO 2015 Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity, and their Role in Society
- UNESCO 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence
- ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums

I. Survey respondent information

1. **Contact details of the survey respondent**
   - **a.** First name: _____
   - **b.** Last name: _____
   - **c.** Title: _____
   - **d.** Email: _____

2. **Identity of the Museum**
   - **a.** Name of the institution: _____
   - **b.** Governance of the institution:
     - □ Public
     - □ Private
     - □ Community
     - □ University
     - □ Other
   - **c.** Country: _____
   - **d.** City / Address: ____
   - **e.** Approximate number of visitors per year:

     Select the range that best reflects your annual visitor count
     - □ Fewer than 10,000
     - □ 10,000 – 50,000
     - □ 50,000 – 100,000
     - □ 100,000 – 500,000
     - □ 500,000 – 1,000,000
     - □ More than 1,000,000
     - □ Unknown

   - **f.** Approximate yearly operative budget (USD equivalent):

     Select the range that best reflects your annual operational budget

     - □ Less than USD 10,000
     - □ USD 10,000 – USD 50,000
     - □ USD 50,000 – USD 100,000
     - □ USD 100,000 – USD 500,000
     - □ USD 500,000 – USD 1,000,000
     - □ USD 1,000,000 – USD 5,000,000
     - □ More than USD 5,000,000
     - □ Prefer not to say

   - **g.** Is your institution a member of ICOM?
     - □ Yes
     - □ No

3. **Open Access Authorization**

   Do you agree that all information provided in this survey, except for the name and contact details of the survey respondent, may be shared publicly by UNESCO and ICOM (websites, social media, report, publications, either in aggregated form or as attributed examples)?

This information is voluntary. Declining will not affect the use of anonymized data.

- □ Yes
- □ No

II. Governance

4.

a. Does your country have specific legislation, policies or guidelines concerning the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in museums, either (i) specifically for museums, or (ii) as part of broader AI governance frameworks?

- □ Yes
- □ No
- □ N/A

b. If "yes", please specify: (*Please select all that apply)*

- □ Specifically for museums
- □ Part of broader AI governance framework(s)

c. Details: Please provide relevant details (e.g.: title and/or description, year and any URL) *(optional)*

(*limit 300 characters*)

5. **Does your museum have an internal AI policy, strategy or guidelines?**

- □ A formal strategy, policy, or management plan is implemented
- □ Informal guidelines, pilot projects, or internal practices are being used
- □ Currently under development
- □ No AI policy, strategy or guidelines

III. Use of AI

6. **Does your museum use AI?** *(Please note that the survey focuses on institutional and officially supported uses of AI. Individual or informal uses by staff are not the primary focus.)*

- □ Yes
- □ No

7. **How would you describe your museum's current level of AI use?** *(Please select all that apply)*

- □ Exploring possible uses
- □ Pilot projects only
- □ Limited operational use in specific departments
- □ Individual staff use
- □ Widespread use across the institution

8. **Please specify the type of AI-related technology that has been used in your museum:** (*Please select all that apply)*

- □ Understanding and analyzing text (e.g. chatbots, automatic translation, summarizing documents)
- □ Analyzing images or videos (e.g. recognizing objects, tagging collections, facial recognition)
- □ Creating content and supporting exhibition development (e.g. generating text, images, audio, or exhibitions using AI tools)
- □ Personalized recommendations (e.g. suggesting exhibits, content, or products to visitors)
- □ Automation and smart machines (e.g. robots, automated processes, or smart systems in operations)
- □ Understanding speech (e.g. voice assistants, audio transcription, or voice-based guides)
- □ Data analysis and forecasting (e.g. predicting visitor numbers, trends, or behaviors)
- □ Visitor experience and engagement tools (e.g. interactive guides, virtual assistants, personalized visitor pathways)
- □ Researching information (e.g. research on collections, artists, provenance, contextual information)
- □ N/A
- □ Other(s)

9.

a. How are AI tools or systems accessed or developed in your museum? (*Please select all that apply)*

- □ Use of external tools or platforms (e.g. publicly available AI tools, online services)
- □ Use of external service providers or contractors (e.g. companies developing or implementing AI solutions for the museum)
- □ Development and use of in-house tools or systems (e.g. developed internally by the museum)
- □ N/A
- □ Other(s)

b. If "other(s)", please specify: *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

AI Use Areas

10.

a. In which area(s) is AI being used in your museum? (*Please select all that apply)*

Accessibility / Audience Development	□

Administration (e.g. drafting, editing, translating, summarizing, reporting)	□
Building Management / Security	□
Collecting	□
Communication	□
Community Participation /Outreach	□
Conservation / preservation	□
Education	□
Exhibition	□
Fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property	□
Human Resources	□
Interpretation	□
Inventory	□
Research / Documentation	□
Sustainability	□
Other(s)	□

b. Details: Please provide a brief description or examples of how AI is being used in each selected areas. *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

AI learning environment

11.

a. Does your museum offer formal or non-formal learning environment(s) on AI in general and/or the use of AI in the museum? (*Please select all that apply)*

□ Yes, for teachers
□ Yes, for students
□ Yes, for visitors
□ None

b. Details: Please provide a brief description with specific example(s) *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

AI Partnerships

12.

a. **Have you partnered with any AI/technology companies to support the development/use of AI in your museum?**

□ Yes
□ No

b. **If "yes", please specify:** (name of the company, projects, etc.) *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

Measurable Improvements

13.

a. **Has the implementation of AI led to any measurable improvements in the museum's operation, services, or activities?**

□ Yes
□ No
□ Too early to assess

b. **If "yes", please specify how these improvements are measured:** (e.g. performance indicators, user satisfaction survey, efficiency gains, cost reduction, audience engagement) *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

c. **If "yes", in which areas has the use of AI contributed to improvements in your museum's activities?** *(Please select all that apply*)

□ Collections documentation and cataloging
□ Conservation or collection analysis
□ Visitor services or visitor experience
□ Education and mediation activities
□ Accessibility (e.g. translation, transcription, captioning)
□ Research activities
□ Management or administrative processes (including human resources)
□ Building security and prevention of theft
□ Other(s)

d. If "other(s)", please specify: *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

Challenges

14.

a. What kind of challenges has your museum faced in using AI?

(Please select all that apply)

- □ Concerns about the accuracy of AI outputs, such as disinformation or misinformation
- □ Concerns about impact on professional roles
- □ Concerns regarding sensitive heritage (e.g.: human remains, secret or sacred heritage, etc.)
- □ Concerns regarding the environmental impact of AI
- □ Copyright and intellectual property issues
- □ Data protection and privacy concerns
- □ Difficulty integrating AI into existing systems
- □ Inadequate digital infrastructure
- □ Lack of awareness of AI and its uses for museums
- □ Lack of technical expertise or staff training
- □ Lack of trust in AI tools
- □ Limited financial resources
- □ Limited time or internal capacity
- □ Linguistic bias in AI systems
- □ Risk of bias or misrepresentation in AI-generated content
- □ Risk that AI use may exclude some audiences or communities
- □ No significant challenges encountered
- □ Other(s)

b. If "other(s)", please specify: *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

15. **When AI is used in your museum, are outputs reviewed by a human before they are used or published?**
    - □ Always
    - □ Usually
    - □ Sometimes
    - □ Rarely
    - □ Never
    - □ N/A

AI Technologies Used

16. **Which of the following best describes the AI tools used by your museum?** *(Please select all that apply*)
    - □ Commercial off-the-shelf tools
    - □ AI integrated into existing museum software
    - □ Custom-developed tools
    - □ Developed in partnership with universities or companies
    - □ Open-source tools
    - □ Other(s)
    - □ N/A

IV. Ethics

Ethical Framework

17.

a. What recommendations, framework or policy documents have guided the use of AI in your museum, if any? (*Please select all that apply)*

- □ 2004 ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums
- □ 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence
- □ N/A
- □ Other(s)

b. If "other(s)", please specify: *(optional)*

(*limit 300 characters*)

18.

a. Does the use of AI in your museum take into consideration any of the following specific ethical high-level principles: (*Please select all that apply)*

- □ Inclusivity
- □ Transparency (disclosing when Artificial Intelligence is used)
- □ Equitable access to digital content and services
- □ Cultural sensitivity in interpretation and representation
- □ Mitigation of Gender, Social, Racial Bias
- □ Copyright or Intellectual Property rights
- □ Responsible data governance (including provenance and use of collection data)
- □ Accuracy and reliability of AI-generated outputs (Trustworthy information / Evidence-based information)
- □ Community consent and governance over culturally sensitive heritage
- □ Environmental sustainability of AI technologies
- □ Human oversight and accountability in AI-assisted processes
- □ N/A
- □ Other(s)

b. If "other(s)", please specify: *(optional)*

(*limit 300 characters*)

V. Budget

19. **Does your museum allocate financial resources to AI-related activities?**

- □ Yes, through a dedicated budget line
- □ Yes, through project-based or external funding
- □ No, but funding is being explored
- □ No

20. **What is the approximate scale of your museum's AI investment relative to its annual operational budget?**

- □ Less than 1%
- □ 1–5%
- □ 5–10%
- □ More than 10%
- □ N/A

VI. Training

21.

a. Does your museum offer professional training for staff on the use of AI?

- □ Yes
- □ No

b. If "yes", please describe the training provided: *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

22.

a. What type of AI training or resources would your museum need to use or improve the uses of AI? (*Please select all that apply)*

- □ Ethical use of AI by museums
- □ Technical training on the use of AI in museums to fulfill primary functions
- □ Data governance and intellectual property rights
- □ Online Museums and AI Peer Exchange Platform
- □ Other(s)

b. If "other(s)", please specify: *(optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

23. **Would you like to receive information or be contacted by UNESCO and ICOM on activities related to AI and museums?**
    - □ Yes
    - □ No

24. **Any additional comments or observations you would like to share?** *(Please share any other thoughts or context not covered by the survey above.) (optional)*

(*limit 800 characters*)

Thank you *for taking the time to contribute to this first UNESCO-ICOM Survey on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Museums. Your input will contribute to building an overview of how AI is shaping museum practice around the globe. The results of this survey will be widely shared and will guide future capacity building efforts led by UNESCO and ICOM.*

By participating, you are helping to advance global dialogue, research, and collaboration on AI in museums. We appreciate your commitment and generosity in sharing your experiences and insights.