

La Crosse, WI Historic & Cultural Museum Feasibility Study

Prepared for the City of La Crosse, Wisconsin Historic & Cultural Museum Task Force

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Prepared by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Tourism Research Institute



Acknowledgements

DRAFT

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Executive Summary

The University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Tourism Research Institute conducted a study to assess the viability of creating a new La Crosse area historic and cultural museum. The following presents a summary of data collected to gauge the interest and sentiment towards a potential new museum.

- ✓ In the Fall of 2019, a range of data collection was conducted to determine if there was interest in the La Crosse community to support a new historical and cultural museum. This data was collected via a public survey, four public meetings held throughout La Crosse county (La Crosse, Onalaska, Holmen) and focus groups held with:
 1. Local arts and historical stakeholders
 2. Hmong community members
 3. African American Community members (B.L.A.C.K. & Enduring Families Project)
 4. Archivists from local libraries
 5. The Mississippi Valley Archeology Center
 6. Centro Latino
 7. La Crosse Historical Society, and
 8. Mississippi Valley Conservancy
- All resulted in overwhelming support for a new historical/cultural museum in La Crosse County.
- Why?

Results indicated that participants felt that there are currently inadequate historical/cultural resources in La Crosse including the lack of a historical/cultural museum.

“This is our opportunity to tell our authentic story”- Hmong community member

“We need something to keep the history alive for the children growing up in the area” – Public meeting participant

A new museum would provide La Crosse County an opportunity to tell a true and informative story about the unique history of the area including:

 1. The unique geographical features and rare ecosystems,
 2. The range of cultures present in La Crosse and their influence on La Crosse’s history and development, and
 3. The range of industry present historically in La Crosse
- ✓ La Crosse area college students represent a potentially large interest group. A survey of UWL students was conducted to gauge their interest in visiting a new museum if it existed, and what would motivate them to visit.
 - 63% of students surveyed were somewhat or very likely to visit a new museum if it existed (n=224)

- What do they want to see/do?
 - By far, hands-on, interactive opportunities would generate the greatest interest from local students.
 - Students frequently mentioned “art” in reference to visual exhibits depicting local cultures, stories of the past, architecture, and the natural environment.
 - They want something unique- The building itself, the interactive opportunities, the way information and artifacts are displayed.
 - Connection to the universities – Including the history/opportunities to learn about all the local universities

What would motivate them to take friends and/or family to this museum if it existed?

- Having something new to do was most frequently mentioned as the reason they would take friends and/or family to visit the new museum.
- ✓ In fall 2019 UWL students surveyed visitors to Grandad’s Bluff and Riverside park to learn more about visitor interest in going to a new museum, and what would motivate them to visit.
- 171 individuals were survey, 64.3% of whom were not residents of La Crosse County
 - 68.3% of La Crosse County residents indicated they were either somewhat or very likely to visit the new museum if it existed
 - 62.6% of non-residents indicated they were either somewhat or very likely to visit the new museum if it existed
 - Most frequently interesting displays and exhibits followed by opportunities to learn would be top motivations for visiting the new museum

Average spending of Wisconsin visitor based on 2019 Wisconsin Department of Tourism data is \$121.02 (total spending/total visitors). In 2019 visitors were estimated to have spent \$281.4 million in La Crosse County. Based on these estimates alone there are an estimated 2.3 million visitors to La Crosse County annually. This presents a significant opportunity to create an attraction in a museum that a majority of visitors would have some interest in visiting.

Introduction

In January 2018, the City of La Crosse Common Council passed a resolution to create a La Crosse historic and cultural museum planning task force. The task force "...was created to engage the community to better understand interest and potential support for a La Crosse history and cultural museum, to gather information on programming, exhibits, displays, education and administrative needs, to gather information on possible locations, and to provide recommendations about the planning, timing, funding and partnerships needed to help develop a La Crosse history and cultural museum." Following its formation the task force adopted a vision of "engaging and inspiring people of all ages with a memorable La Crosse area historical experience" and a mission focused on "collaborating to identify location, design thematic elements and an initial business plan for a sustainable La Crosse historic and cultural museum" (see September 2018 task force meeting minutes).

In September 2019, the City of La Crosse entered into an agreement with the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse Tourism Research Institute to conduct a study that helped further fulfill the vision and mission established by the task force. The purpose of this study was to assess the feasibility of creating a new La Crosse area historic and cultural museum by engaging local stakeholders, and obtaining additional primary and secondary data to further assess interest in a new museum, create a better vision of what this museum should be (if an interest was determined to exist), determine a potential location for the new museum, and further evaluate the feasibility of developing a new museum at the proposed location. The proposed project would include upwards of 50-60 individual students and students working on course embedded research projects working with faculty, the task force, and the community to gather the desired information (see Appendix # for full proposal details). The following were goals of the project:

- Goal 1: Meet with Task Force, Advisory Committee, and City representatives for initial project discussion
- Goal 2: Involve local stakeholders
- Goal 3: Identify visitor (tourist) perceptions and attitudes towards museums
- Goal 4: Obtain information from other museums to assess feasibility of a new La Crosse Museum
- Goal 5: Use primary and secondary data collected to conduct a site analysis of a potential La Crosse museum
- Goal 6: Provide a final evaluation and summary of feasibility

The following presents summaries and details of the information gathered through the various stages of the study.

Stakeholder Participation

A primary goal of the task force and this study was to engage local stakeholders. The following section presents the information gathered from stakeholders.

Part I – Interest & Vision

The city of La Crosse and the greater La Crosse area has a rich and diverse history encompassing unique geological features and a rich cultural history. To help commemorate the progress and reflect upon the past, the city has appointed a task force to pursue the feasibility of a destination museum. This museum will seek to display a wide, and representative, array of assorted artifacts and exhibits including the collection currently held within the local historical societies and archives. To ensure the museum reflects the interests and ideas of the public, our team conducted an analysis of the La Crosse community and their opinions and ideas regarding the museum development including support for a new museum in the La Crosse area and the interest of local stakeholders to be involved with the project. Our team conducted four public meetings, eight focus groups, and administered two online surveys to gauge the interests of the local community and help determine their vision for the potential new museum. The focus groups conducted sought out perspectives from groups of people who may have especially valuable perspectives about La Crosse such as local historical societies and historically disenfranchised groups.

Stakeholder Overview

When the task force began to identify important perspectives to involve in this process, they sought to ensure the voices of the community members are heard. In the four public meetings conducted there were a total of 30 members of the public present. Focus groups were also held to ensure that the widest range of voices possible were included in the discussion. The stakeholders represented in the focus groups were:

- Local university and community library archivists
- Mississippi Valley Archaeological Center
- United Funds for Arts and Humanities
- Franciscan Sisters
- Holmen Historical Society
- La Crosse Historical Society
- Hmong community members
- African American community members (B.L.A.C.K. and Enduring Families Project)
- Centro Latino staff and volunteers
- Mississippi Valley Conservancy
- Data collection is still ongoing and additional input will be included in the final report

Additionally, two online surveys were disseminated to provide another opportunity for the public to engage in the discussion if they were unable to attend face-to-face input sessions.

Results

Throughout the entire public engagement process including 8 focus groups, 4 public meetings, and 2 electronic surveys, a total of 465 members of the community provided feedback. Everyone who engaged with the data collection indicated they were in full support of the creation of a destination museum showcasing the La Crosse area and its history.

Museum Recommendations

After the analysis of the four public meetings, eight focus groups, and an online survey, the results have been analyzed within each group and across all groups and are categorized below into the following categories: Museum Exhibit Content, Museum Experience, Museum Visioning, and Museum Location. Full data sets from each round of data collection can be found in electronic Appendix.

Museum Exhibit Content

Highlight unique geography.

One of the most prevalent topics discussed in our engagement process was the unique geography of the area. In discussions with groups such as the Mississippi Valley Archeology Center, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, and the Murphy Library Archivists it became apparent how integral a role the river played on the development of La Crosse. In public meetings such as Black River Beach, and the Holmen Middle School the community members indicated that, and underlying theme could guide the visitors through the museum from one exhibit to the next tying in stories throughout. The river offers the perfect vehicle to show the history of La Crosse. Starting with the formation of the Driftless region, and unique ecosystems within it, the river begins its influence as it carves through the Mississippi River Valley. As the river flowed it created the sandy terraces that became ideal locations for the first human inhabitants, Mississippians and Ho-Chunk. As time continued the first European decedents arrived in La Crosse, they began to utilize the natural resources in the area to earn a living and develop industries, ultimately leading to modern day La Crosse.

Highlight industry (historic and modern).

Industry was another important theme discussed throughout the public engagement process. The community stakeholders expressed interest in a wide variety of industry that had developed and thrived in La Crosse. Starting with Nathan Myrick and his fur trading post then progressing into logging, lumbering, mining, and steamboats, these industries became the catalyst for the development of the city. The stakeholders also expressed interest in the history of these early industries and their effect on the region. Additionally, industries that developed later with the arrival of more people such as agriculture, breweries, and Adolf Gundersen's medical practice were also highlighted in the various public engagements. As more industry began to develop in La Crosse, so did the labor force. Immigrating to the region from Europe, bringing with them their unique cultures, they lived and worked together continuing story of the area.

Embrace the diversity of the community.

Displaying the diverse and vibrant cultures that have existed in La Crosse was identified as one of the most important items for a La Crosse Museum. Starting with the native people and moving on to European settlers, African Americans, Hmong, Hispanic, Amish, Syrian, and Lebanese were all identified as integral to the La Crosse area. In the Mississippi Valley Archeology Center focus group, the group explained how each culture could have an exhibit that asks the questions, "What brings them here? How did they adapt? How did the existing cultures adapt to them?"

Other aspects of the cultural exhibits discussed included religion, music, clothing, and art. Lastly, regarding the creation of these exhibits, a Hmong Council Member explained, “it is important to talk with people who know and live the culture to be involved. This is our opportunity to tell our authentic story.” Allowing people within the culture to be involved with the presentation of their history and culture gives these groups of people the control and freedom to express themselves. This is especially important because throughout history some of these groups of people have been horribly mistreated and stripped of these very rights.

Embrace all of La Crosse’s history.

One final suggestion regarding the museum exhibit content is to include **all** of La Crosse’s history, even if it is not positive. Numerous times throughout the public engagement process the stakeholders indicated the importance of not overlooking the negative things that have occurred in La Crosse. Popular topics discussed in the public engagement process included La Crosse’s Sundown Town status, the forced removal of Native Americans, brothels, and the tension between preservation and development, among others. These histories and events played a vital role in making the La Crosse area what it is today. Taking the time to shine a light on this history can be a great learning experience for visitors. Acknowledging the hardships experienced by these people can help bring closure and foster understanding within the community. In our public engagement activities, it was the displays and monuments that embraced the hardships and mistreatment of the past that had the greatest effect on the visitors. Monuments like the Lynching Memorial in Montgomery, AL, the 9/11 Memorial, Japanese American Museum in Los Angeles, CA, and the Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, WI, were all identified as being the most impactful historical displays visited by the stakeholders.

Museum Experience

Tell a story and entertain participants.

Many participants brought up the idea of having exhibits that tell a story and entertain as opposed to having all exhibits being static with a written description. These types of exhibits, participants discuss, would allow museum visitors to be more likely to connect to emotion of the history and be more inclined to spend more time in the museum and engage more with the history. Participants repeatedly discussed how important it was that the exhibits should bring the museum to life with their stories and displays.

Rotating, interactive exhibits.

Closely related to the need to tell a story, participants were very eager to share ideas about having interactive exhibits as well as exhibits that rotate over time to keep the museum fresh and ensure repeat visitors. Most results showed that people preferred museums/exhibits that had some sort of participant interaction or had exhibits that would rotate so that it wasn’t the same artifact or display every time they visited. People are looking for a “living” museum that allows them to be a part of the history making and get involved. Rotating exhibits would also help to ensure that the widest range of community voices are included in the museum. So, over time, additional stakeholders could be included in the vision and content creation of the museum.

Some of the interactive exhibits and activities that were mentioned during meetings were child-friendly programs, special events during holidays, and cooking classes based on time-periods.

Programming.

To ensure the prosperity of a potential museum many of the stakeholders stressed the importance of great programming. The creation of educational programs for school children was highlighted as one of the most important opportunities. Working with the local schools to teach the youth about the past will empower students to take pride and ownership of the area's history and continue its preservation for future generations. Other programming ideas discussed include social/cultural events such as art galleries, beer tastings, Indigenous People's Day, Kube Tournaments, among others were all suggested. Exciting programming incentivizes people in the community to buy-in and support the museum. It changes the museum from a collection of displays and artifacts into place of that fosters a vibrant community.

One of the most highly requested aspects of the new museum is to include a venue capable of hosting performances, films, and lectures. The stakeholders saw great value in educational content conveyed through more than just writing. Video content in the museum can show information and history in ways not possible in a tradition display. Programming ideas discussed included hosting traveling film festivals, book tours, lectures, local films, and concerts. Giving the visitors options for how to consume the information makes the experience more inclusive for those who have difficulty reading or prefer an auditory and visual display over textual descriptions. The last recommendation made for programming is to include an outdoor space and educational programs within it. At the Holmen public meeting the stakeholders discussed the opportunity to integrate the surrounding landscapes into the museum. This would help emphasizes the underlying theme of the importance of the river and surrounding geography. Some programs discussed for this outdoor space include historical gardens containing popular crops from the time period maintained with historically accurate tools, an outdoor classroom space for school groups, and programs about native American tool making and usage.

Be flexible and maintain relevance.

A final common theme that emerged was that community members were very interested in ensuring that the potential new museum could be a draw to the area and one that maintained relevant to the community. Participants discussed having visited museums that are outdated and that do not keep up with the constantly changing culture and communities in which they sit, making them less desirable to visit. Participants felt it would be most beneficial for this potential new museum to appeal to changing community interests over time and to maintain a dialogue with the community over time to ensure it is doing so.

Museum Visioning

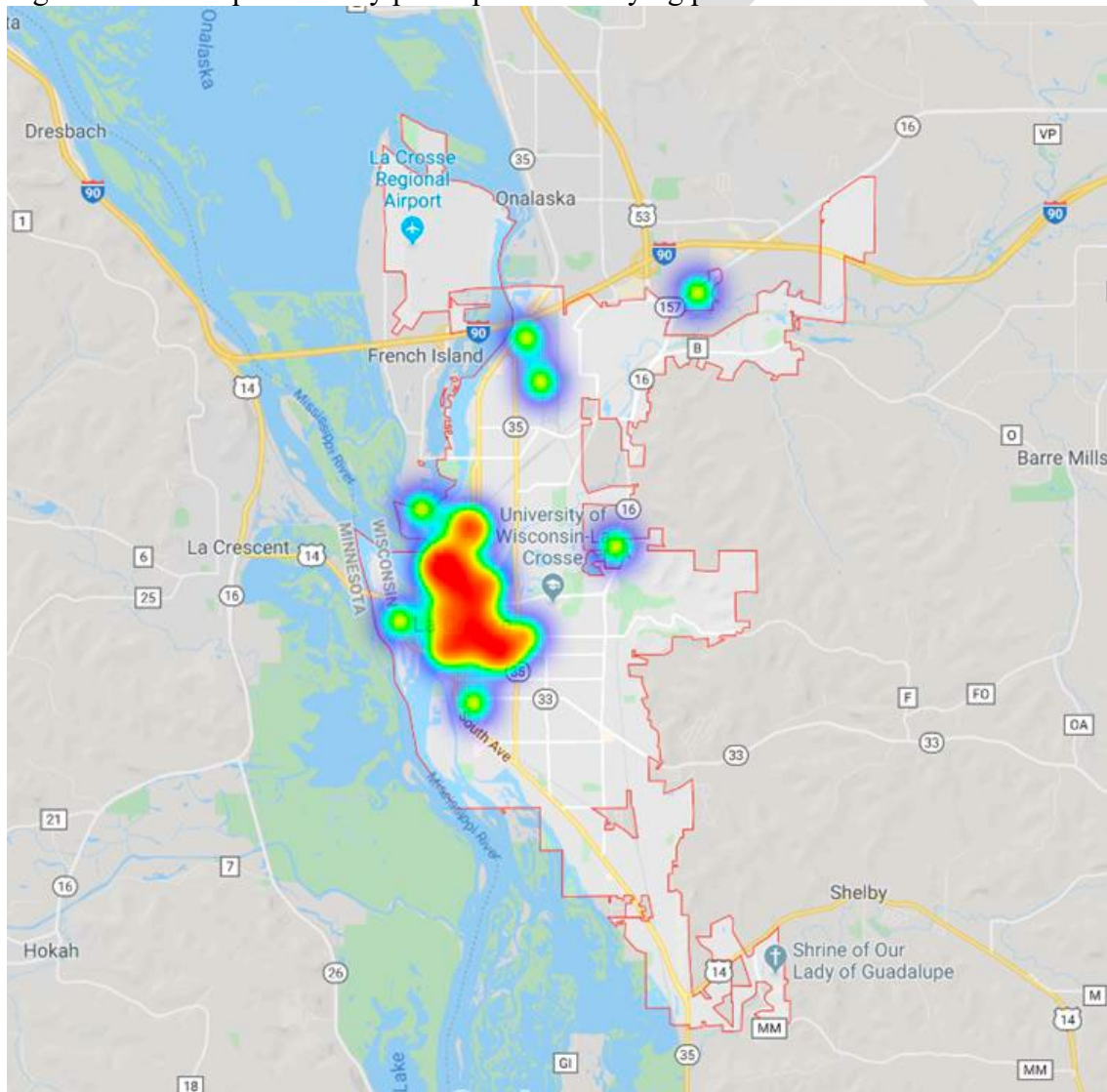
When stakeholders were asked to describe what they would like to see in the creation of a museum for the La Crosse area we encountered many ideas. Regarding the physical characteristics of the museum, many of the stakeholders felt that the museum should be large and aesthetically pleasing both inside and out. A museum that is visually striking provides the

opportunity for La Crosse to create a new landmark. A member of the Holmen Historical Society described the Milwaukee Public Art Museum as an icon for the city of Milwaukee, under the right circumstances, the La Crosse museum could have a similar effect. Using the natural environment as inspiration, the design could also push the underlying theme throughout the museum. For the interior, components like a versatile performance venue, an area to display the artwork of local creatives, and the ability to show large artifacts such as fire engines or delivery wagons were also discussed. For the museum exhibits themselves the stakeholders want to ensure the museum has something for everyone, offering kid friendly displays, and interactive exhibits help keep the visitors engaged while in the museum. When curating the exhibits themselves they should be a balance of technology, artifacts, and written content allowing the exhibits to feel current while allowing them to remain relevant as technology progresses. Additionally, there should be consistent displays and exhibits while also rotating exhibits to keep the content fresh. Along those same lines, many stakeholders were fond of the opportunity to host traveling exhibits from other museums.

Museum Location

For the location of the new museum the stakeholders identified dozens of potential locations for the museum. While keeping in mind the underlying themes and opportunities that exist within each space, participants largely believed the museum should have access to the downtown area, incorporate a view/ access to the river, and should be a newly constructed building (see Fig. #). To give the museum the best chance to fulfill its potential the location needs to have plenty of traffic and access to surrounding activities like those that exist in downtown La Crosse. Additionally, proximity to the river will emphasize its importance to the visitors. Lastly, a new building will give architects the ability to create a powerful and iconic building to celebrate the history of the La Crosse area. Keeping these criteria in mind a location in or near downtown La Crosse and adjacent to the Mississippi/Black River's is an ideal location for the museum.

Figure #. Heat map created by participants identifying potential new museum locations



Part 2 – Resources

The La Crosse County Historical Society current has a diverse collection of objects stored in a variety of spaced across multiple locations. In total they are currently stored in approximately 5,828 square feet of space, most of which is storage due to a lack of exhibit space.

Location	Sq. Footage	Contents
West Ave. garage	752	furniture, items too large to carry to basement
West Ave basement	2173	textiles, 2-D, small items
West Ave main floor	303	books, textiles, portraits
West Ave loft offices	188	furniture, furs, safe
West Ave balcony	152	oversize textiles, furniture
Off-site storage facility	1800	vehicles, boats, furniture
Other off-site	160	fire trucks, piano
Riverside storage needs	300	canoes, artifacts

5828 sqft

These objects only reflective the holdings of the LCHS, and not potential contributions from other area stakeholders. All considerations for a new museum should consider the need for exhibit and storage space for LCHS objects and additional objects provide by other stakeholders for permanent or temporary exhibits.

Part 3 – Desired experience

Building directly off the museum element preferences cited by participants of the fall data collection, a survey was created with examples of these preferred elements from existing museums. The goal of this round of data collection was to identify more specifically what should be in and around this potential new museum based on support for desired content and experiences. Specifically, the following elements were included:

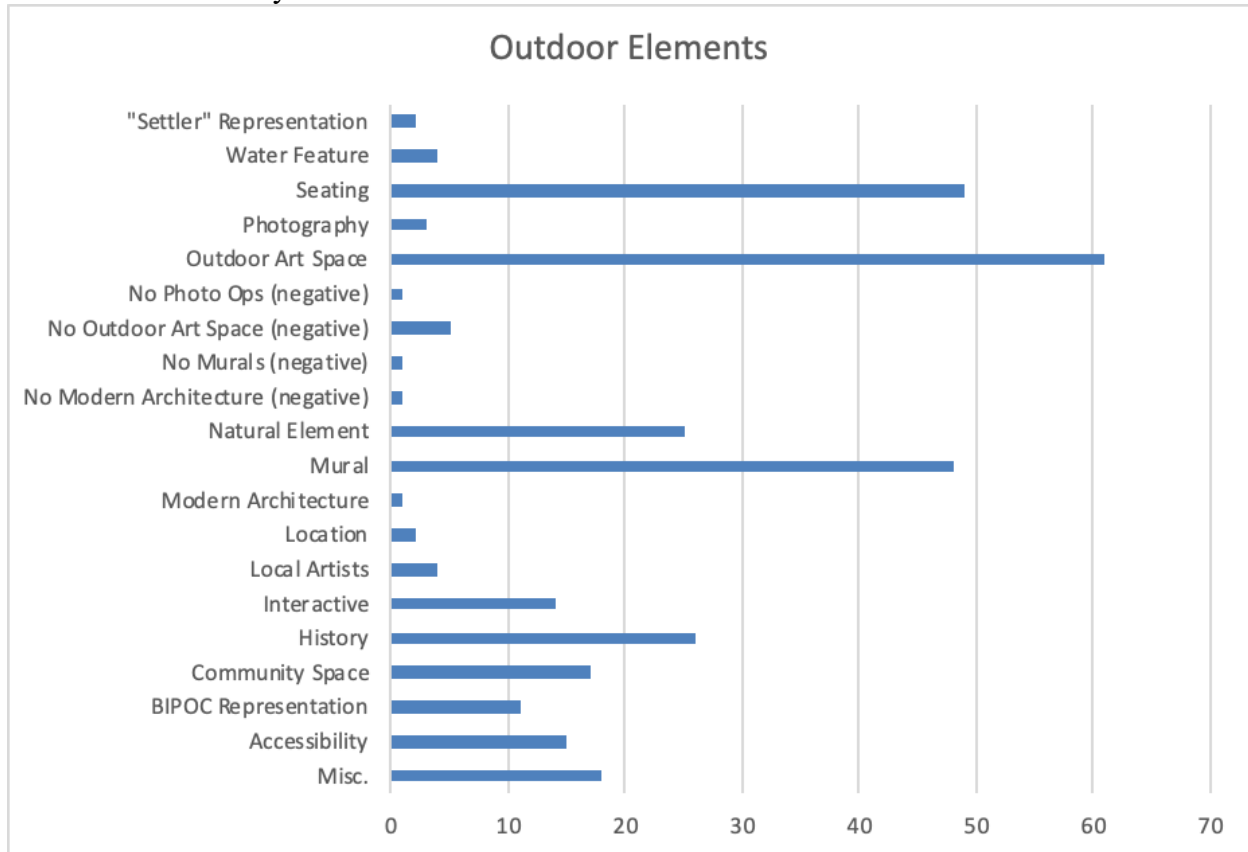
- Admissions
- Outdoor elements
- Visual exhibits
- Technological exhibits
- Non-technological exhibits
- Virtual elements
- Workshop space
- Youth workshop space
- Conference space

Survey participants were asked to view several images within each element and indicate which parts of the displayed experience they either liked or did not like. An open-ended question was also provided for each of the nine element sections so participants could expand on what, specifically, they liked or did not like related to the element. The results are presented by element below.

Outdoor Elements

In relation to desired outdoor elements, participants indicated a high level of interest in an outdoor art space or mural as well as seating and the inclusion of a natural element.

- An ideal location for a new museum will include outdoor space for congregating, and the ability to commission local artists to create pieces of artwork depicting the cultural and/or natural history of the area.



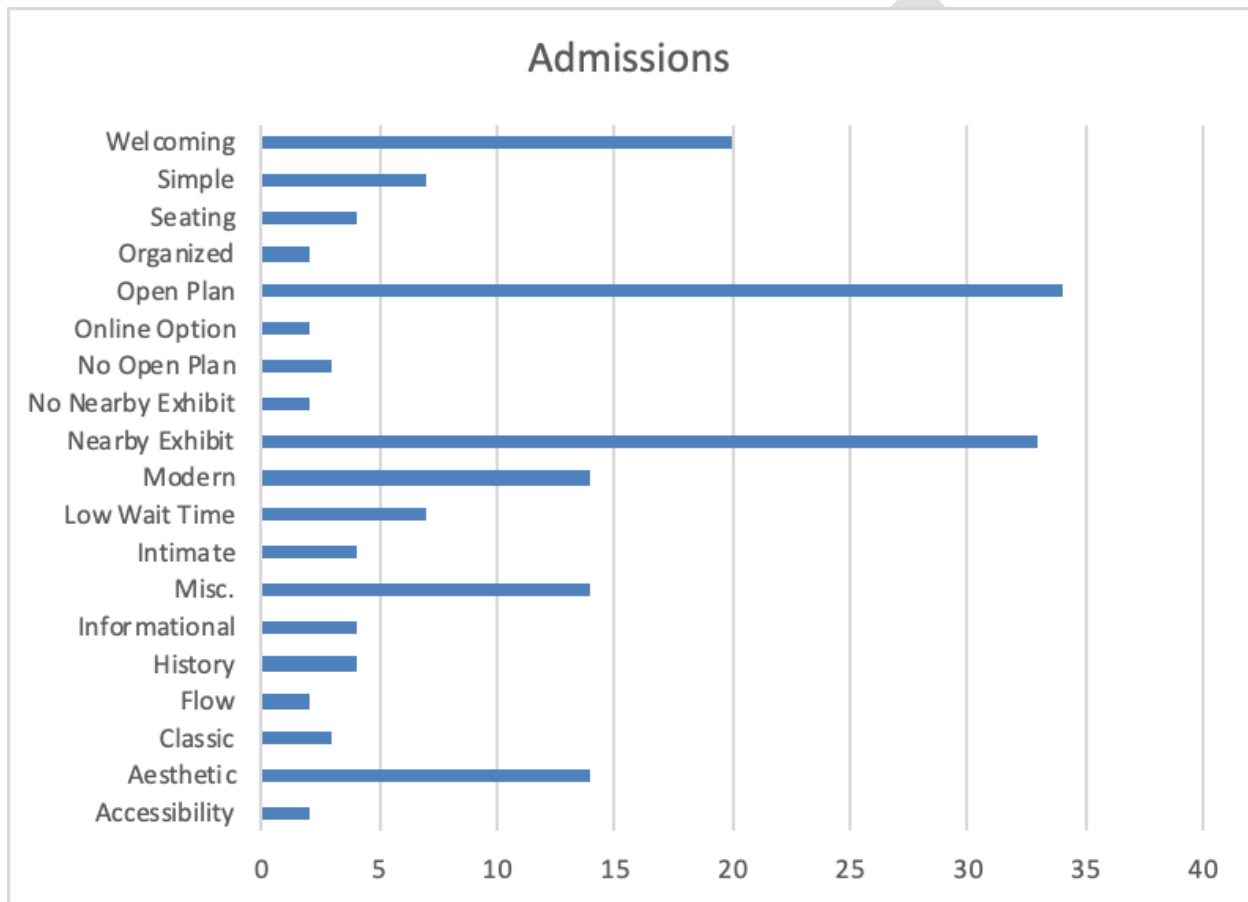
Open-ended response results still under analysis

Admissions

Participants indicated the importance of creating an admissions space that has an open plan and is nearby exhibits. This is consistent with prior research which has found that an open museum setting provides a more satisfying visitor experience than a closed setting (Kottasz, 2006).

Participants also indicated that a welcoming atmosphere was critical to the space as well as aesthetic appeal.

- A new La Crosse museum should have a large open entrance area with natural lighting that creates an inviting approach admissions staff.



Open-ended response results still under analysis

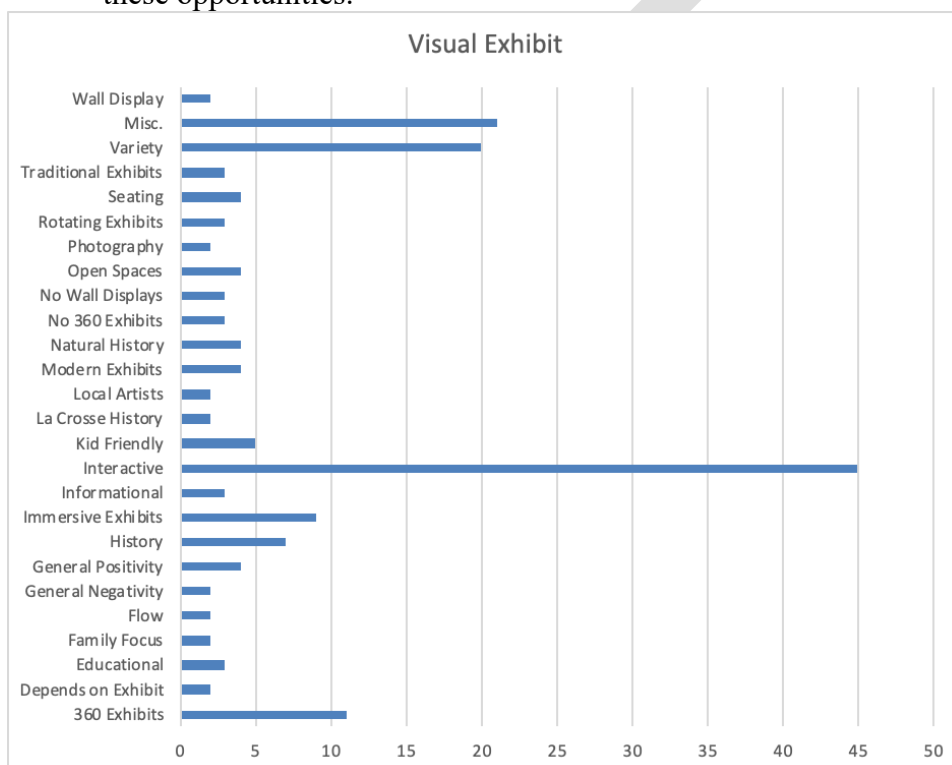
Visual Exhibits

For visual exhibits, participants indicated a strong preference for interactive elements as well as the ability to fully immerse in those exhibits. Interactive experiences that are most engaging will allow for creativity, productivity, and/or engagement in communication (Shedroff, 2000).

Participants also highlighted the importance of variation in the visual exhibits included in the space.

Prior research has shown that most museum visitors come in groups, and a fun group experience is an important element of a satisfying visit (see Hornecker & Stiftner, 2006).

- When design exhibits for a new museum it will be important that there is space and opportunities for groups to interact within those exhibits.
- When looking at prior research and comparable museums, individual exhibits may need thousands of square feet to create engaging interactive elements that can accommodate groups of people and offer the variation visitors desire. Existing facilities do not offer these opportunities.

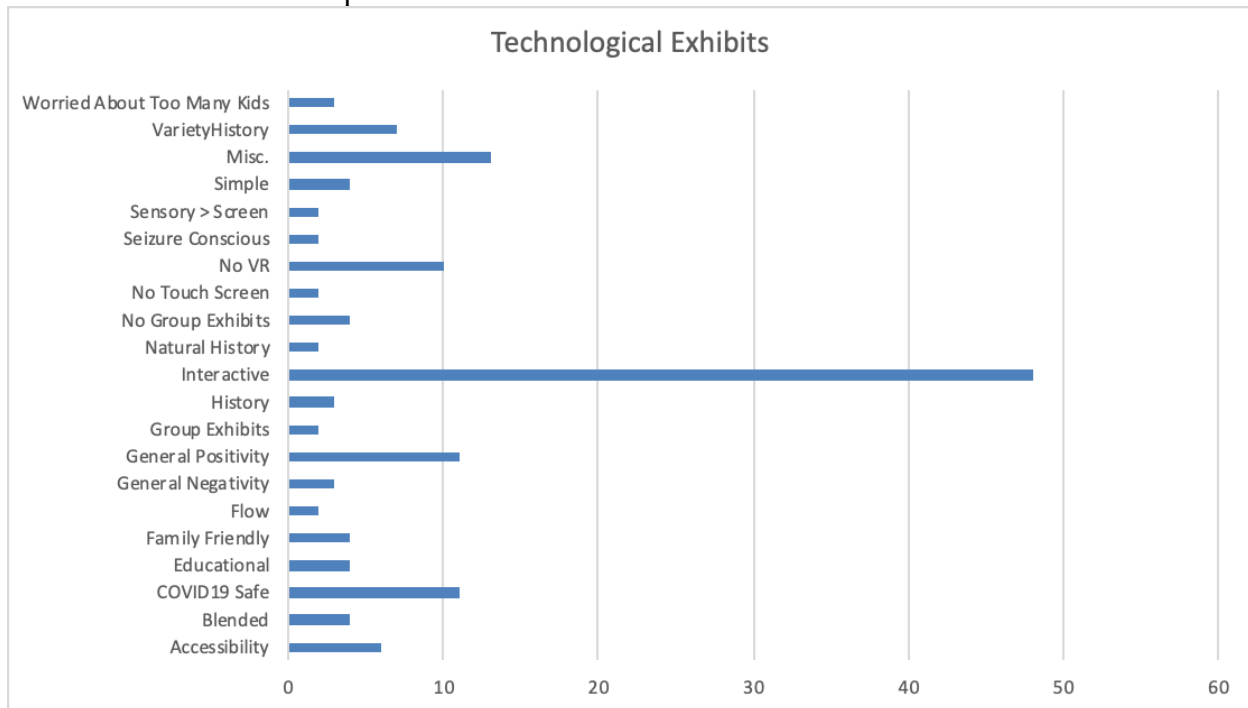


Open-ended response results still under analysis

Technological Exhibits

As indicated in the visual exhibit responses, participants also strongly preferred interactive elements. Prior research has shown that museum technologies can enhance learning when they provide an interactive experience and are easy to use (Pallud, 2017), but it is important to note that visitor experiences take different forms.

- A blend of technological enhancements with opportunities to interact with authentic artifacts will be important in a new museum to cater to diverse markets.

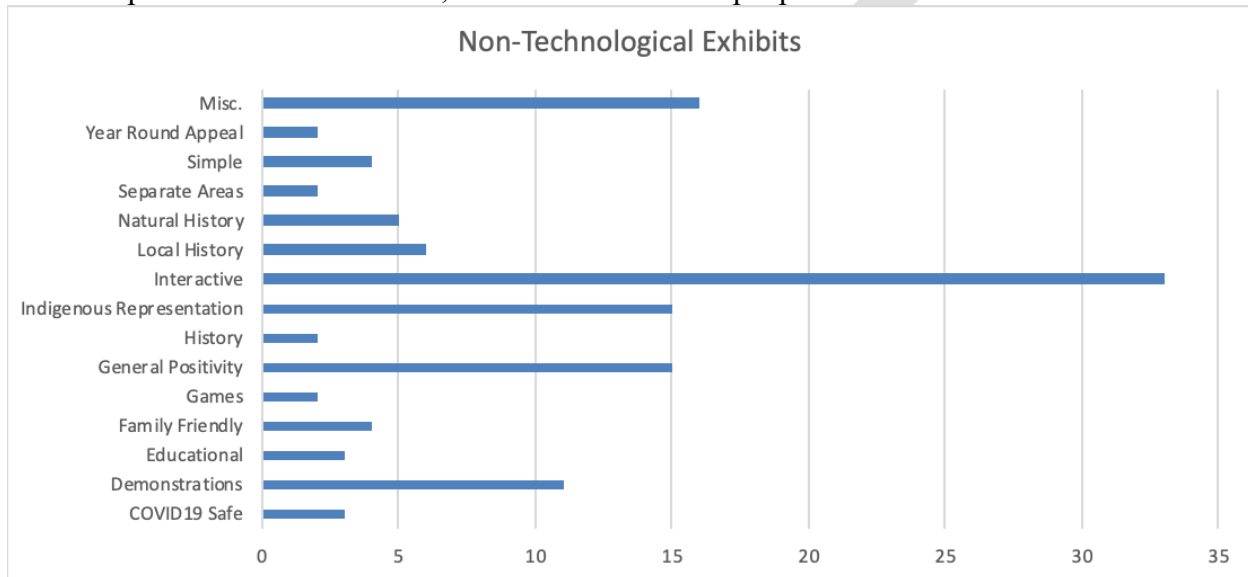


Open-ended response results still under analysis

Non-technological Exhibits

Again, interactive elements were the clear preference among respondents. Additionally, for non-technological exhibits, participants indicated a desire for authentic cultural representation and demonstrations correlating to the exhibits. Destination visitors' authentic experiences take different forms (Pallud, 2017). Particularly when it comes to cultural heritage attractions, visitors will look to engage in real-world experiences and direct interactions with local people, places, and artifacts.

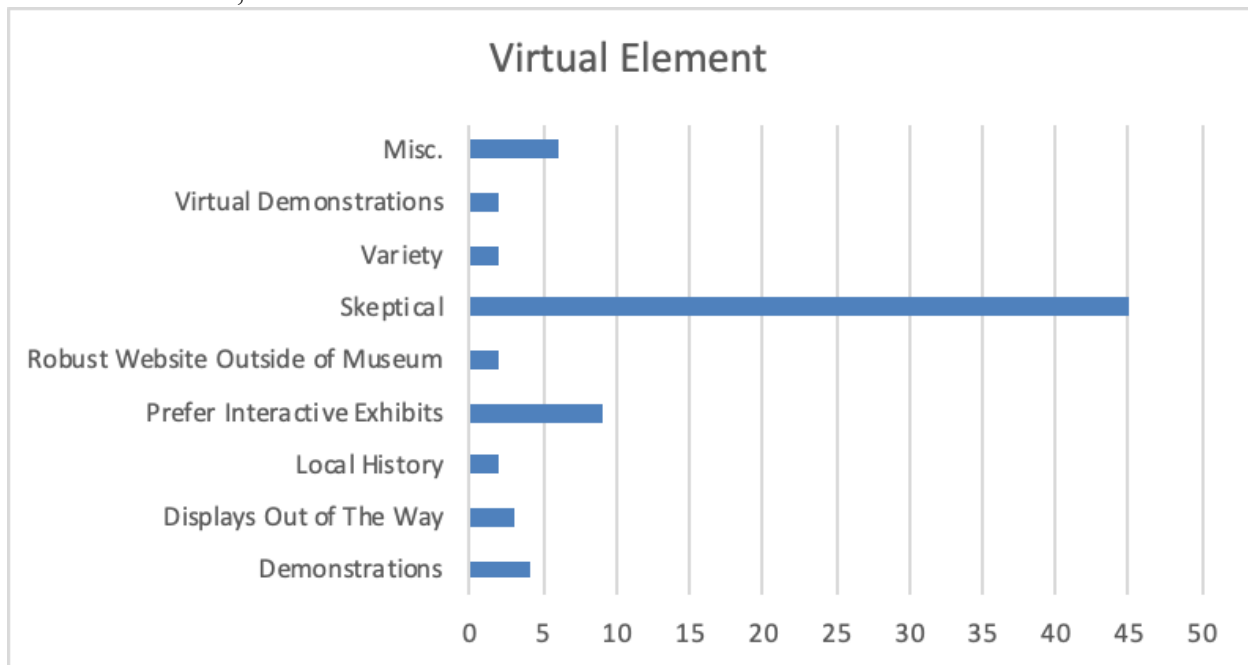
- While incorporating technology can create interactive and engaging opportunities, virtual and/or reproduced artifacts and activities need to be balanced real pieces of history, representations of cultures, and interactions with people from the area.



Open-ended response results still under analysis

Virtual Elements

The most common response of participants related to the inclusion of virtual elements was skepticism for the inclusion of such elements. They also indicated a preference for interactive, rather than virtual, elements.

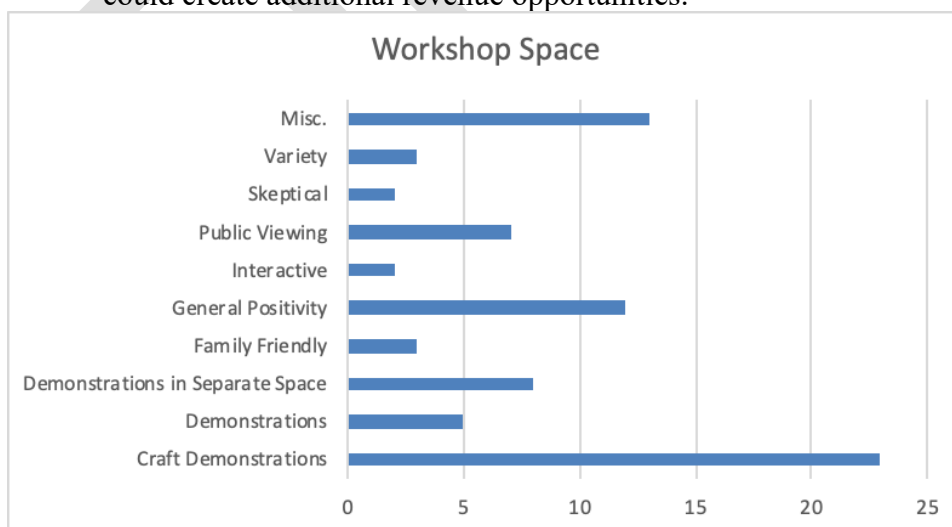


Open-ended response results still under analysis

Workshop Space

Participants felt the workshop spaces were a positive element and identified using the space for crafting as the most popular element, and indicated a preference for having a space separate from the exhibit area for demonstrations.

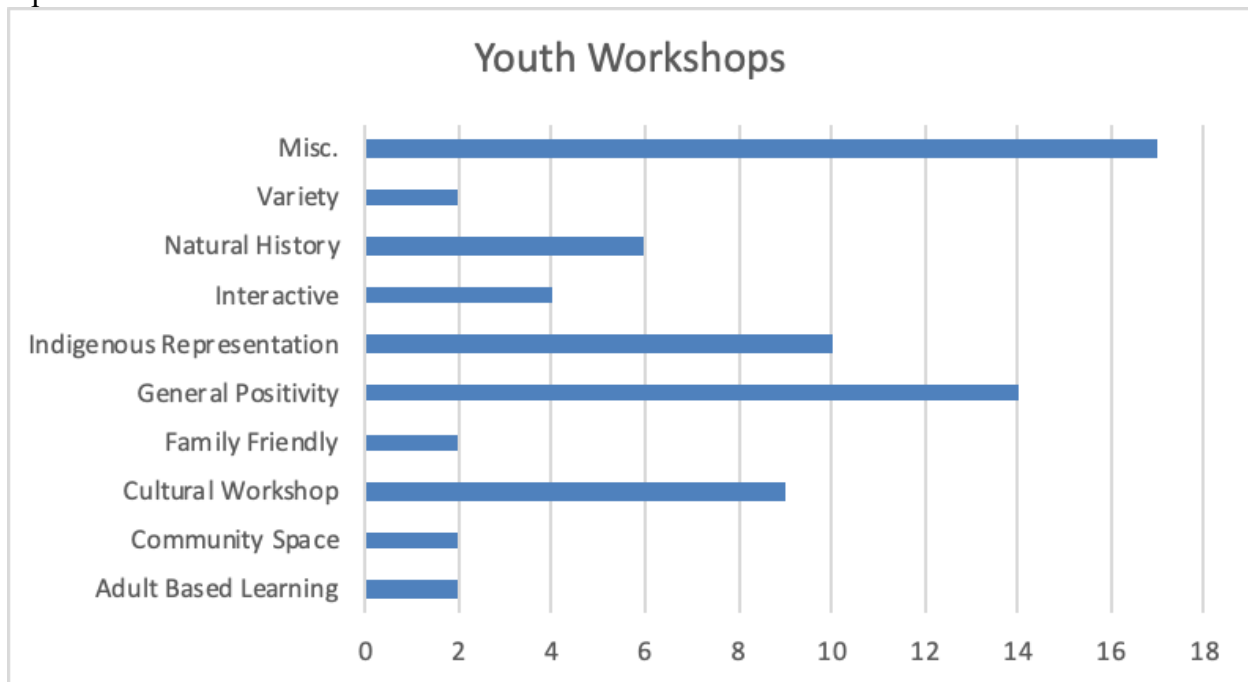
- A new museum needs space for programming. An area where participants can be exposed to demonstrations of local crafts or engage in hands-on workshops. Having this space could create additional revenue opportunities.



Open-ended response results still under analysis

Youth Workshop Space

Participants were, like the general workshop space, positive about the inclusion of a youth workshop space. For this element, the inclusion cultural workshops and authentic cultural representation were also most favorable.

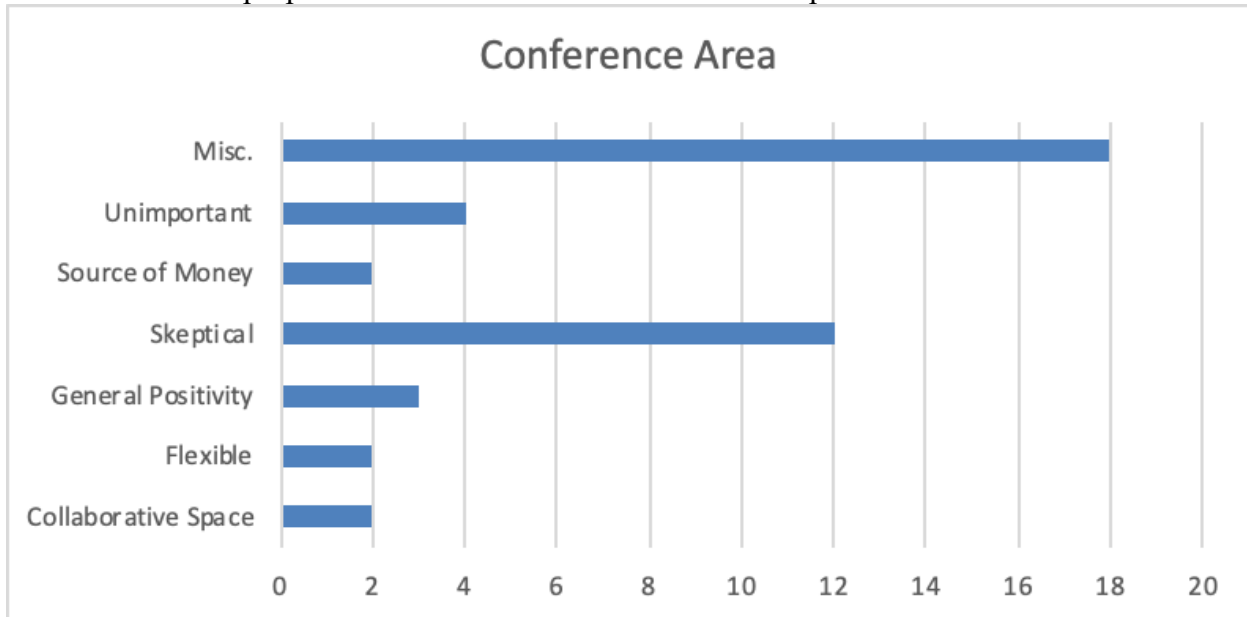


Open-ended response results still under analysis

Conference Space

For conference space, participants responded similar to virtual exhibits, skeptical of the need for the inclusion of dedicated conference space in the museum and indicated it may be unimportant to the new museum.

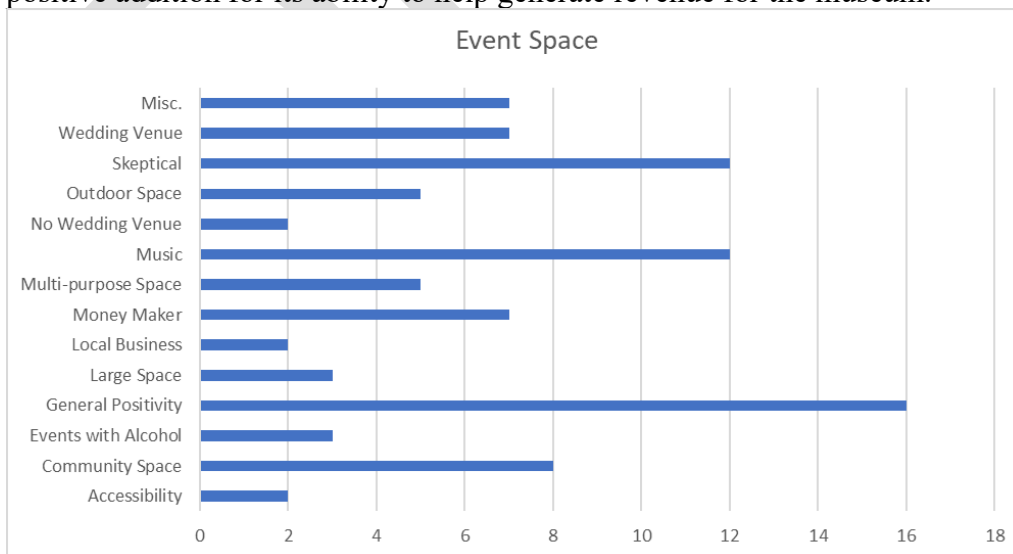
- A new museum will not necessarily need a separate conference space, but rather one or more multipurpose rooms that can be used for workshops or other events.



Open-ended response results still under analysis

Event Space

When asked for their opinions on event space in a potential new museum, participants were nearly split on their desire for the inclusion of event space. Those who indicated support for the event space identified general community use, music events, and weddings as the most popular uses for such a space. A similar number of respondents also felt an event space would be a positive addition for its ability to help generate revenue for the museum.



Open-ended response results still under analysis

Visitor Survey

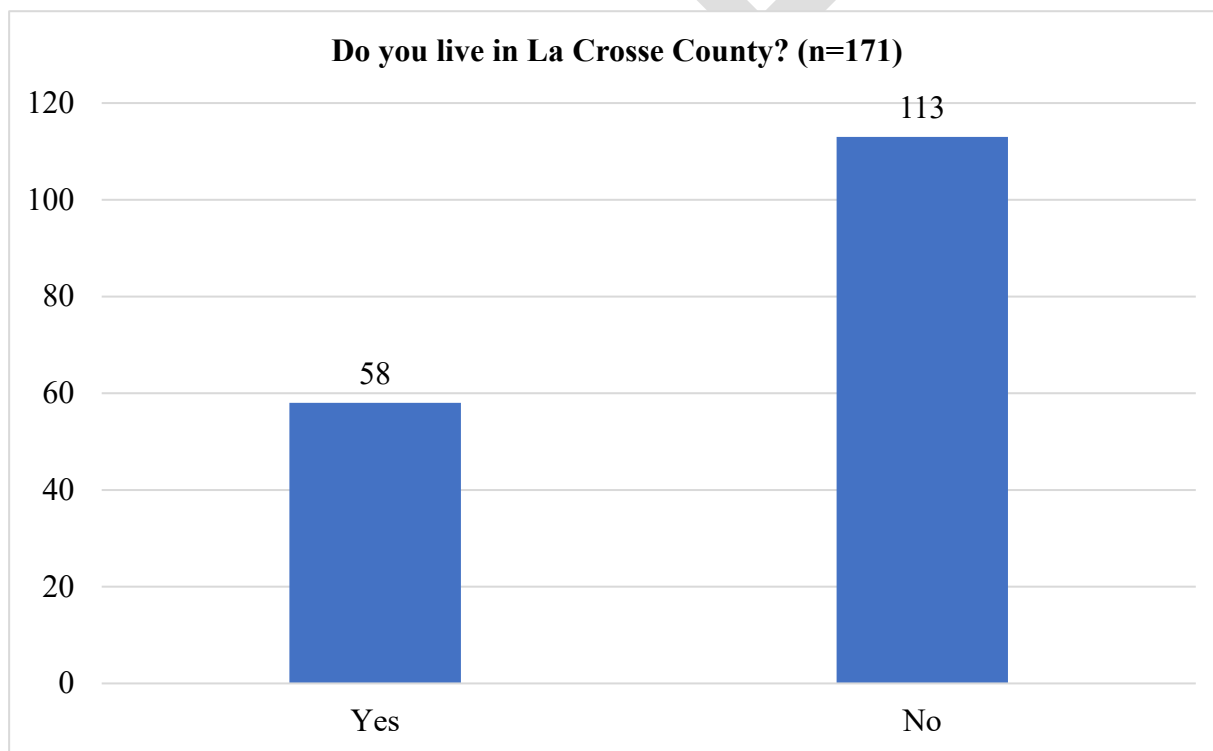
To understand perceptions of whether there would be interest in visiting a new area museum and what would motivate people to visit it a survey was conducted. This section provides the results of that survey.

Goal: Identify visitor (tourist) perceptions and attitudes towards museums

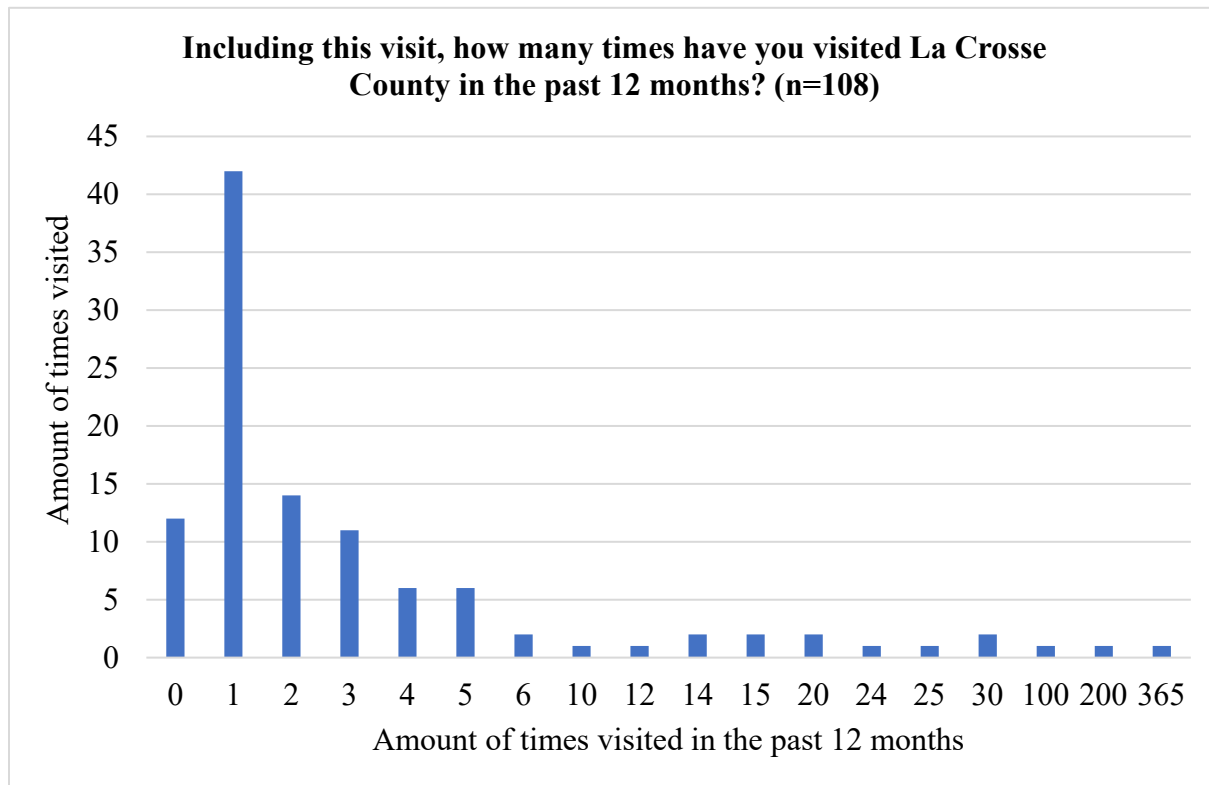
La Crosse Visitor Survey

A visitor study was conducted fall 2019 to further identify interest in and motivation to visit a potential new La Crosse area museum. Students from a UW-La Crosse Recreation Management evaluations course sampled visitors at Riverside Park and Granddads Bluff to ask about what they were doing while in La Crosse, and perceptions regarding visiting museums. In total 171 individuals participated in the survey.

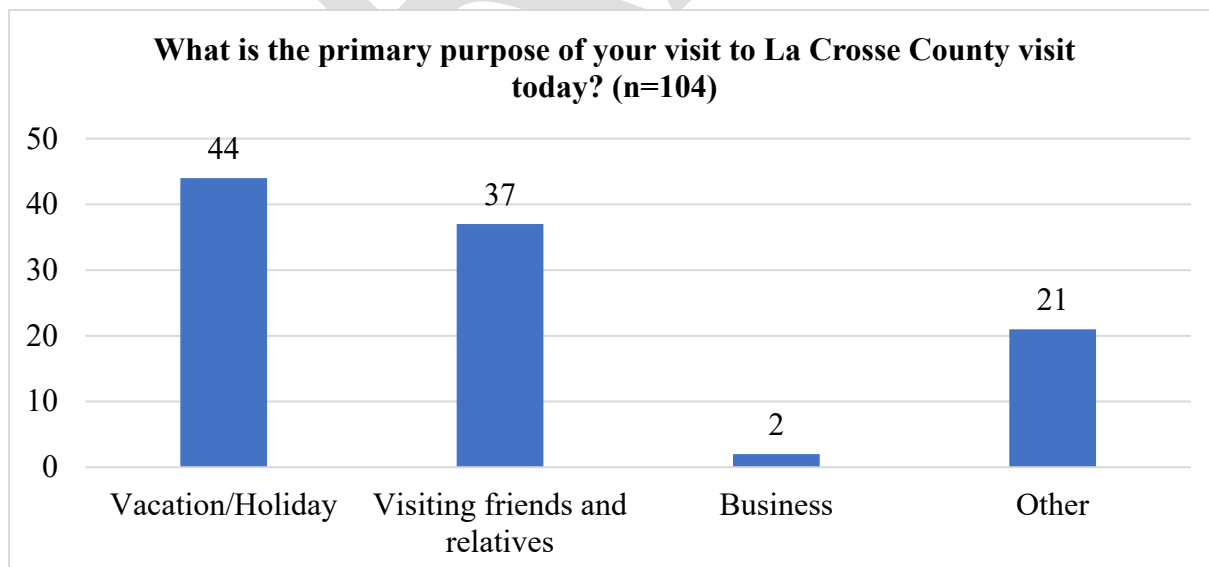
The majority of participants live outside of La Crosse County (66.1%).



The majority of visits to La Crosse county are one (38.9%) to two (13%) times within a 12-month period.

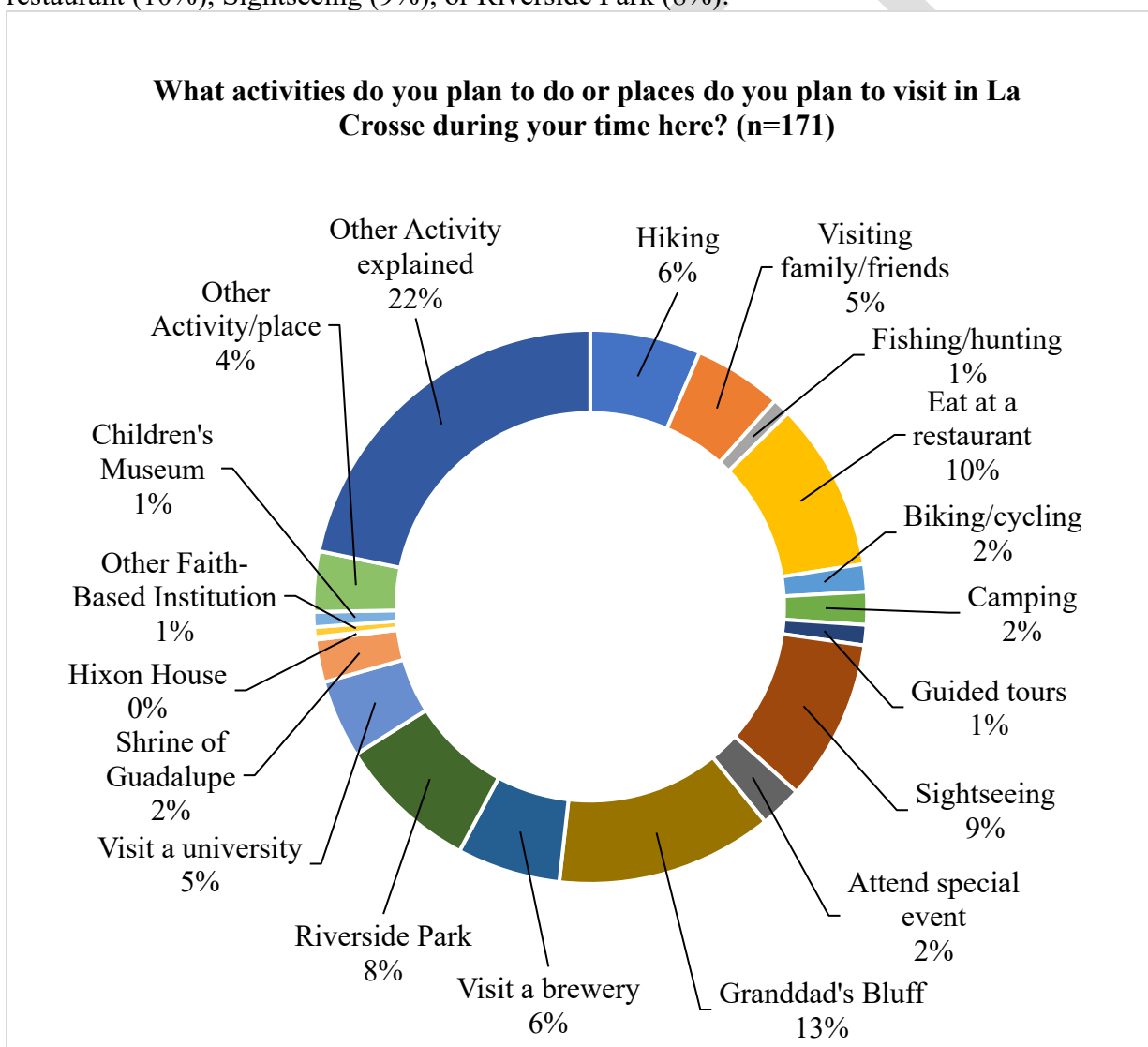


The majority of people visit the La Crosse County for a vacation/holiday (42.3%) or to visit friends and relatives (35.6%).



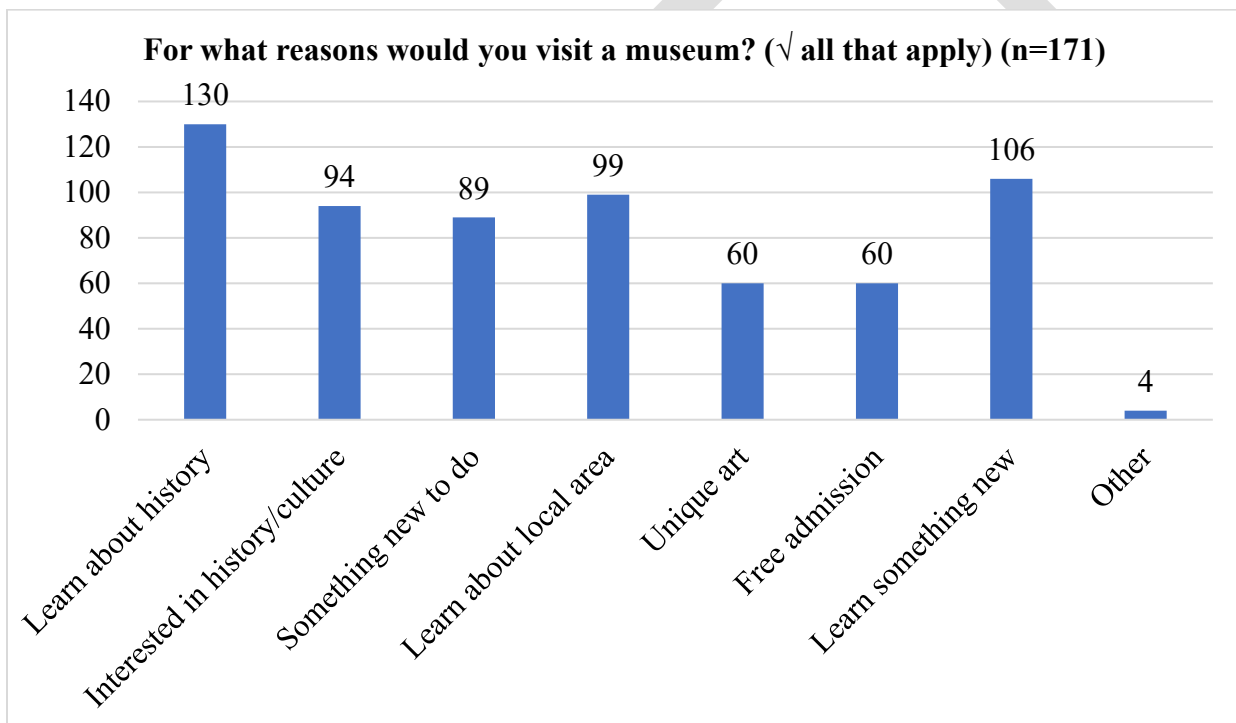
Other purpose explained:	
Boat trip	see a UW musical
college	soccer
Day out	soccer tourney
Fall colors	Saturday visit
getting a dog from Holmen, WI	Student visit
Mayo	visit UWL
railfanning	visiting students
road trip	walk & lunch
scenery	work

The main activities that people plan to do or places to visit are Granddad's Bluff (13%), Eat at a restaurant (10%), Sightseeing (9%), or Riverside Park (8%).



Other Activity explained:	
apple orchard	La Crosse Queen
bars, massage	La Crosse Queen Diner Cruise
Choose??	massage, bars
driving, winery	Movie
escape room	Railfanning
fam	river
football game	river boat
football game, family	theater
grounded	Wild Cat Mount
Hixon Park	work

The main reason for people visiting museums is to learn about history (76%), to learn something new (62%), or to learn about the local area (57.9%).



Other reason specified:

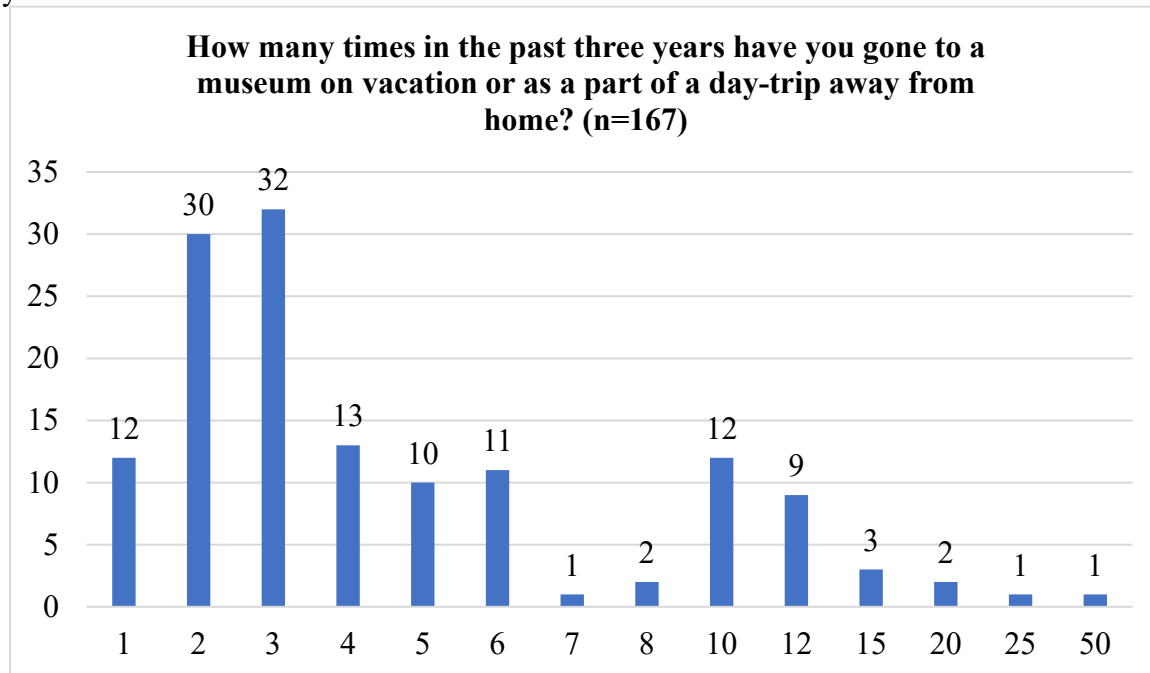
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children

different perspectives

interest in science, children

The majority of times visiting a museum is two (18%) to three (19.2%) times in the past three years.

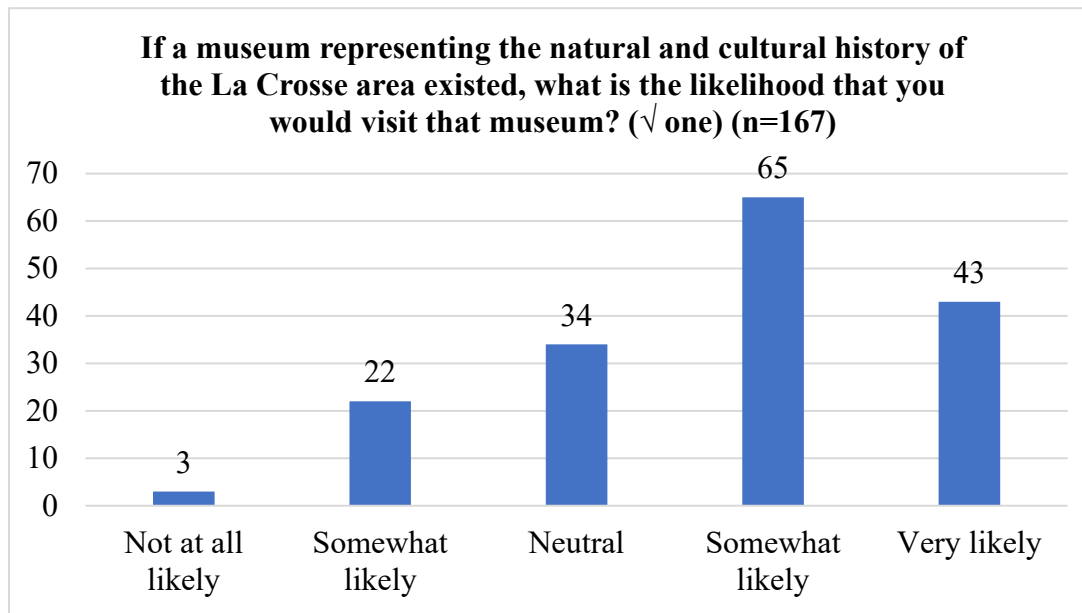


If you answered 1 or more to the previous question, what was the last museum you visited?
(n=132)

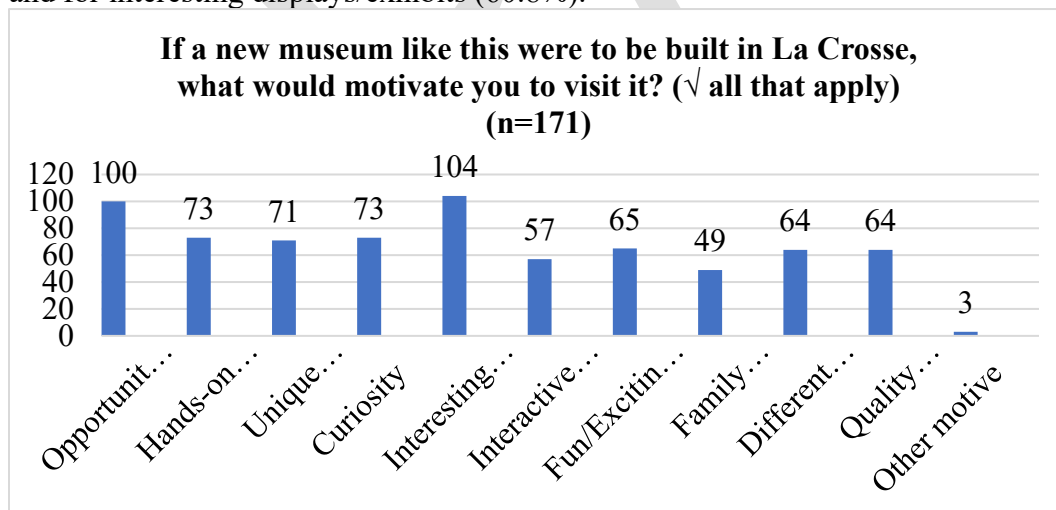
Museums Listed			
Aquarium	Field Museum Chicago	Milw Art Museum	Puerto Rico History
Art Institute	Freshing Fishing	Milw Public Museum	Riverside
Art institute Chicago	Ft Atkinson	Milwaukee	San Franz Alcatraz
Art Museum in Milwaukee	Fulton IL	Milwaukee mus	Savannah
Art museum in Winona	GB museum	Milwaukee Public Museum	Science & Industry
Cable Natural History	Geology Museum in Madison, WI	Milwaukee WI	Science Industry
Cairo (Egypt)	Gerard Ford Museum	Minnesota History	Science mus MN
Car	Glaire Park	Minnesota History Museum	Science Museum
Chicago Art Institute	Grand lareye	Minnesota Mining Museum	Shedd Aquarium
Chicago Art Museum	Grand Portage	Mississippi River Dubuque IA	Ship museum Sault Ste. Marie MI
Chicago Art, Music Hall of Fame DC/Smithsonian	Grand Rapids Art Mueseum	Mississippi River Museum	Smithsonian Air & Space
Chicago Industry	Harley Davidson Museum	Mke Public Museum	somewhere in Switzerland
Chicago Planetarium	Hermitage, St Petersburg Russia	MMA	SPAH Museum
Chihuly Garden & Glass in Seattle, WA	Historical	MMAM	St. Louis
children's	History Museum Kenosha	MN Science, Chicago Field	St. Louis Art Museum
Children's	holocaust	MPG Museum & Modern Art	St. Paul
Children's Museum La Crosse	in Florida	Mpls Hist	St. petersburg Hermitage
Children's Museum Madison, Field Museum Chicago	in Greece	Museum of Russian Art-Minneapolis	Titanic in Belfast
Children's museum of lax	in Mass.	Museum of the Rockies	Titanic-Belfast
Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center	Institute of Art in Chicago	Nashville at History of rock roll	Trade Exchange
Clingmans Dome Gatlinburg TN	John Michael Koiter Sheboygan	Natural History	Trolley Museum, Fort Smith History
Clingmans Dome Gattlenburg	Kansas City	Natural History Chicago	Vatican Museum
Cody-Wyoming	La Crosse Children's Museum	Natural History in Chicago	Walker Art Museum
Colorado Museum	La Crosse Historical Society	Natural History Museum, NY	War Eagle
D.C.	Lavendar Farm History Museum, WA	Neuille	WW1 in K.C.
Dahl Auto	Liberty Bell	New Orleans WW2	WW1 in Kansas City
Dall Remember	Liberty Bell Museum	Niagra Falls	Yawke Woodson Wausau
DC	Lincoln	Olympic Nat. Forest Visitor Center	
Discovery Milwaukee	Lincoln-Springfield	Onalaska Lib	
Duluth	Marine Museum	Paine Art Museum	
EAA	Marine Museum in Winona	Polish	
	McGregor, IA		

Overall, 64.6% of respondents indicated they would be somewhat (38.9%) or very (25.7%) likely to visit in new La Crosse area historic and cultural museum if it existed.

- 68.3% of La Crosse County residents indicated they were either somewhat or very likely to visit the new museum if it existed
- 62.6% of non-residents indicated they were either somewhat or very likely to visit the new museum if it existed



The main thing that would motivate visitors to visit a museum is the opportunity to learn (58.5%) and for interesting displays/exhibits (60.8%).



Other motive explained:
science
Under-represented perspectives

Participant Zip Code	Percent
<i>Wisconsin</i>	69%
<i>Illinois</i>	14.4%
<i>Minnesota</i>	9.6%
<i>Other</i>	7.2%

Demographics		
	Valid Percent	Mean
Gender Identification (n=169)		1.46
<i>Male</i>	56.2%	
<i>Female</i>	42.6%	
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	1.2%	
Age (n=170)		42.36
<i>17-23</i>	21.1%	
<i>24-34</i>	16%	
<i>35-44</i>	16%	
<i>45-54</i>	16.1%	
<i>55-64</i>	22.3%	
<i>65-74</i>	6.6%	
<i>75-83</i>	2.4%	

UW-La Crosse Student Survey

La Crosse area college students represent a potentially large interest group. A survey of UWL students was conducted to gauge their interest in visiting a new museum if it existed, and what would motivate them to visit. This analysis is of a student survey taken by 234 participants.

Most participants have Wisconsin zip codes but live outside of the La Crosse County. Most respondents are females, freshmen, and 20-years old. Most participants have had either friends or family visit them at some point in time when at school, with visits mostly ranging from two to three times within a 12-month span. Going out to eat, taking a hike, and visiting Granddad's Bluff are of the most popular things to do when visiting La Crosse and participants are looking for something new to do. They are somewhat likely to visit the museum, based upon their wants and within a new museum.

Participant Characteristics

An online survey was distributed in an email to students that attend the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse.

234 individuals participated in the survey.

19.2% of participants live in the La Crosse County.

80.8% of participants live outside the La Crosse County.

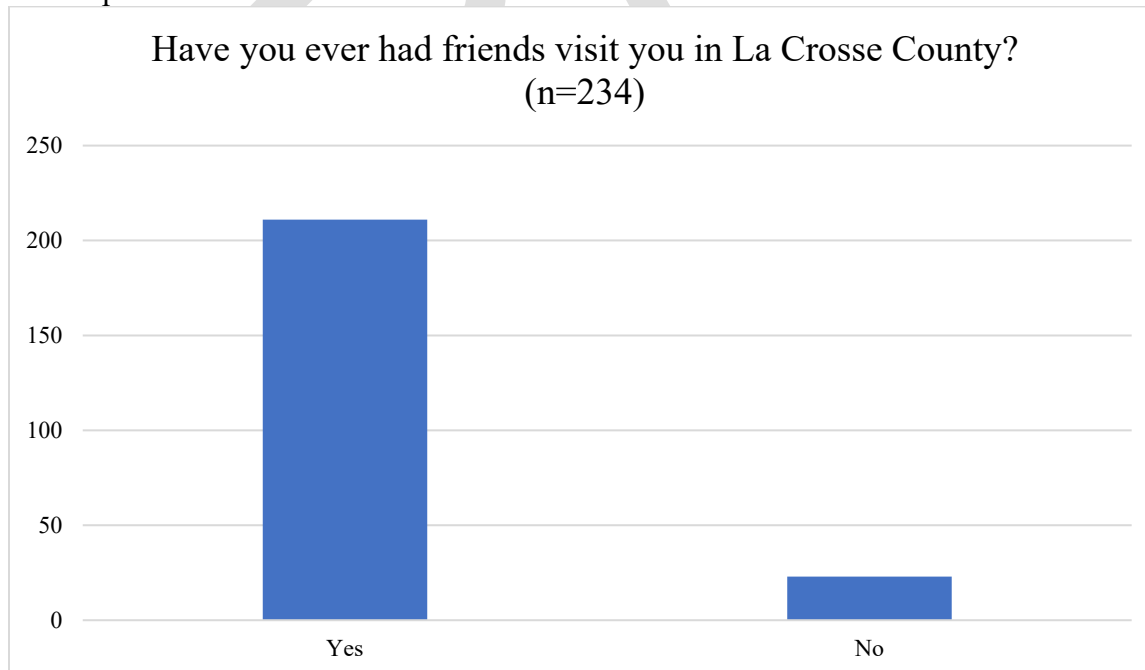
Participant Zip Code	Percent
<i>Wisconsin</i>	78%
<i>Minnesota</i>	17%
<i>Illinois</i>	4%
<i>Other</i>	1%

- There were participants from 140 different zip codes.
- Participants reside in 3 different states with one international participant from France.

Demographics

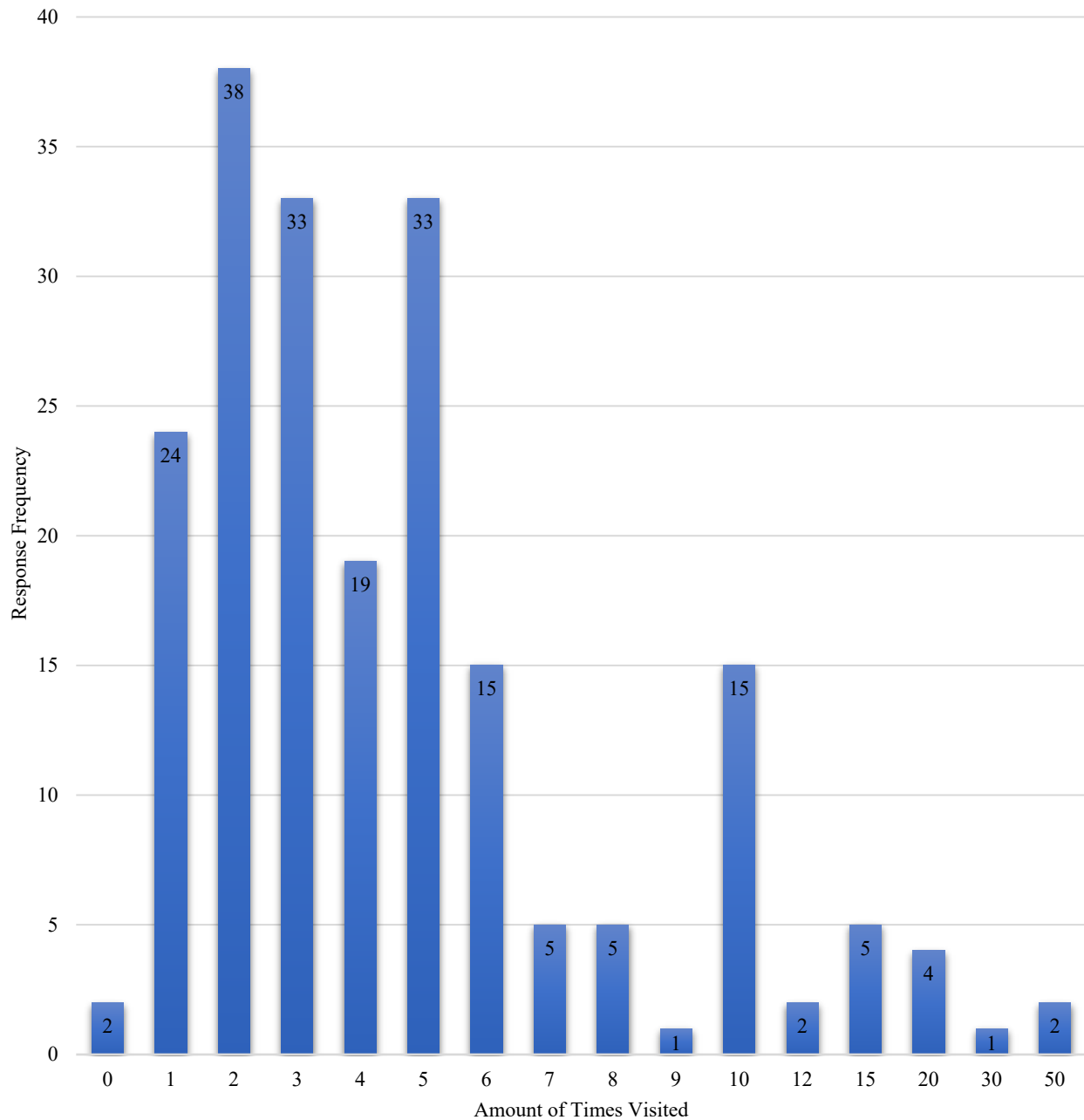
	Valid Percent	Mean
Year in School (n=233)		2.47
<i>Freshman</i>	29.6%	
<i>Sophomore</i>	22.7%	
<i>Junior</i>	21.9%	
<i>Senior</i>	22.7%	
<i>Grad Student</i>	2.6%	
<i>Other</i>	.4%	
Age (n=221)		20.45
<i>18</i>	9.5%	
<i>19</i>	29%	
<i>20</i>	21.7%	
<i>21</i>	19%	
<i>22</i>	14.5%	
<i>23</i>	2.7%	
<i>24-50</i>	3.8%	
Gender Identification (n=223)		1.38
<i>Male</i>	34.6%	
<i>Female</i>	60.3%	
<i>Prefer not to answer</i>	.4%	

The data in this sample of participants is fairly representative of the student demographics when on campus and when school is in session.

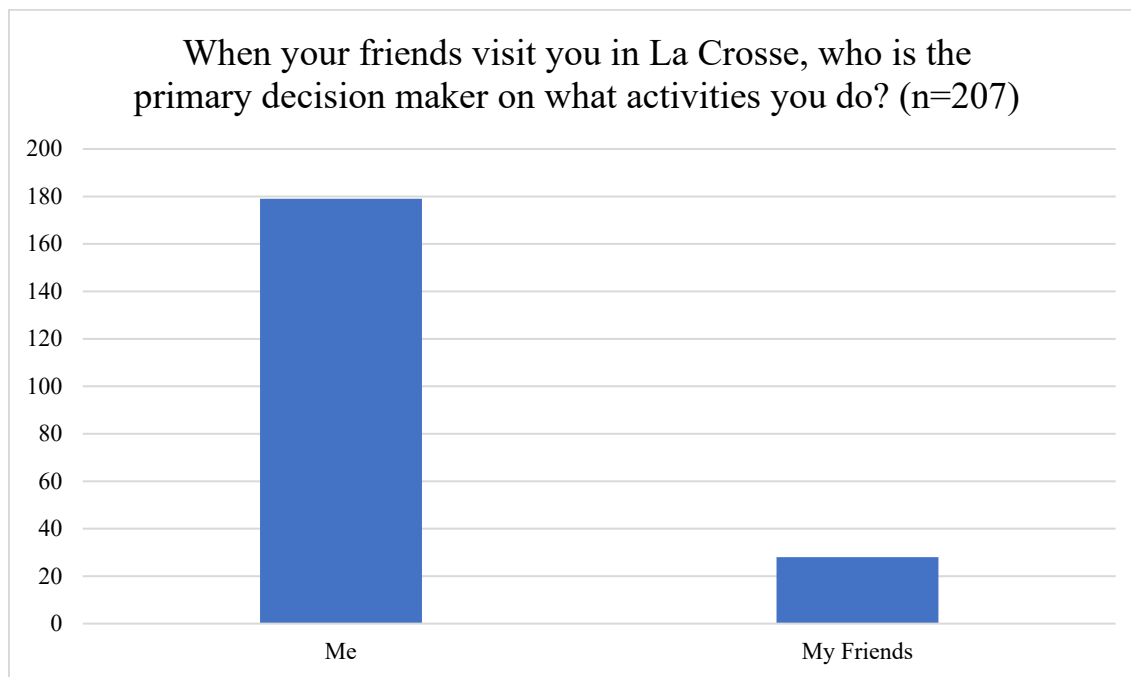


90.2% of students have had friends visit them in the La Crosse County.

How many times have friends visited you in La Crosse county in the past 12 months? (n=204)

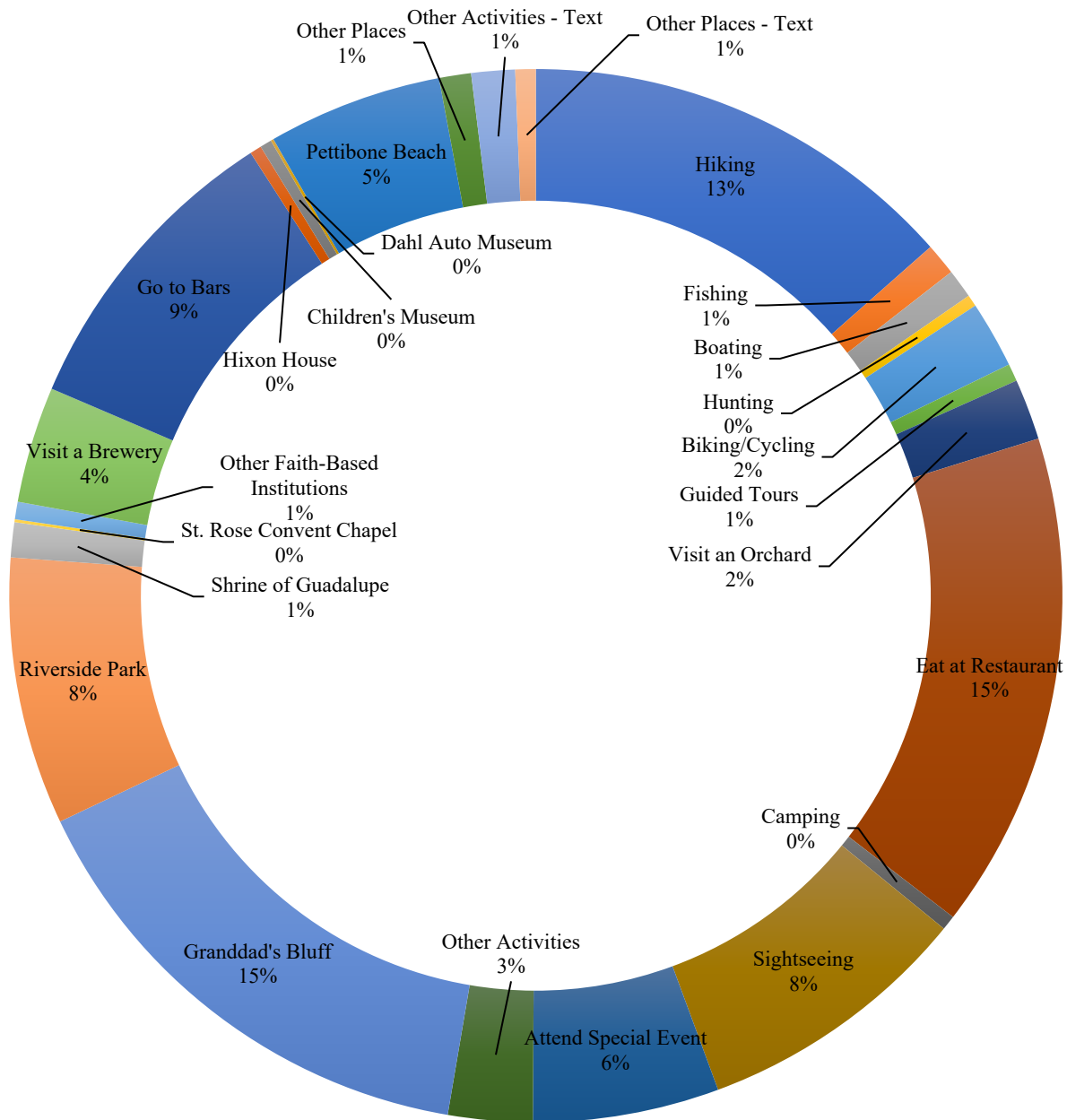


On average, students had friends visit them 5.26 times in the La Crosse County, with most people having their friends visit them from two to five times in a 12-month span.

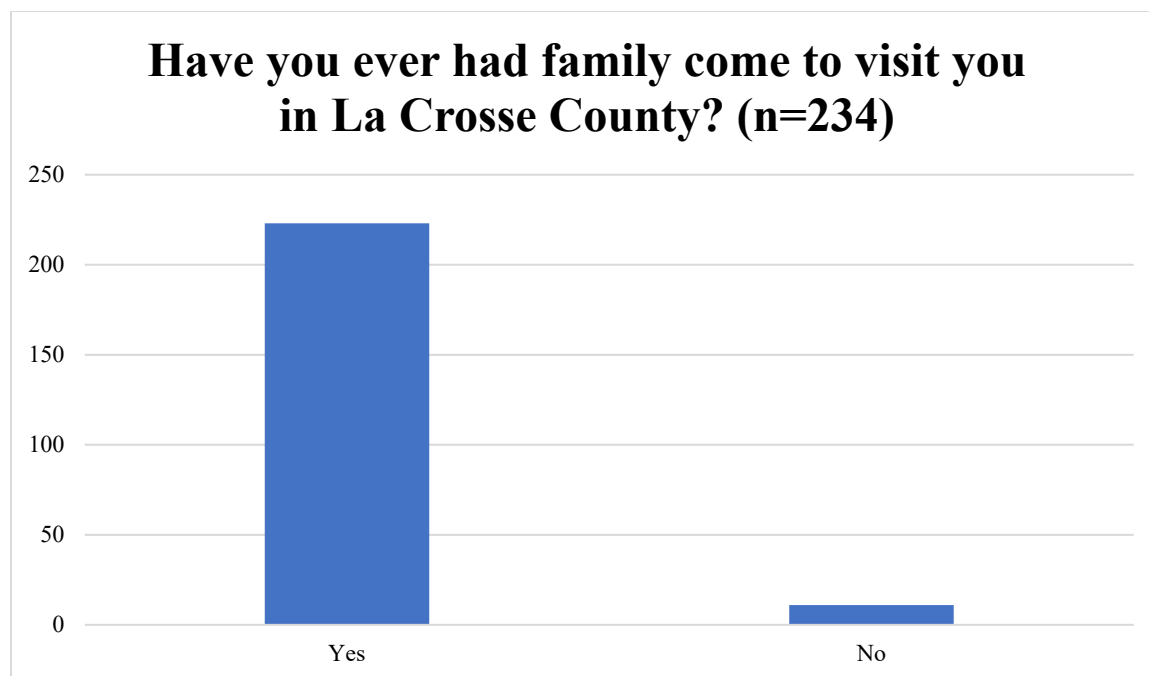


The students at UW – La Crosse are usually the decision makers with the percentage being 86.5% of choices being made.

What did you do with your friends when they visited? (Check all that apply) (n=234)

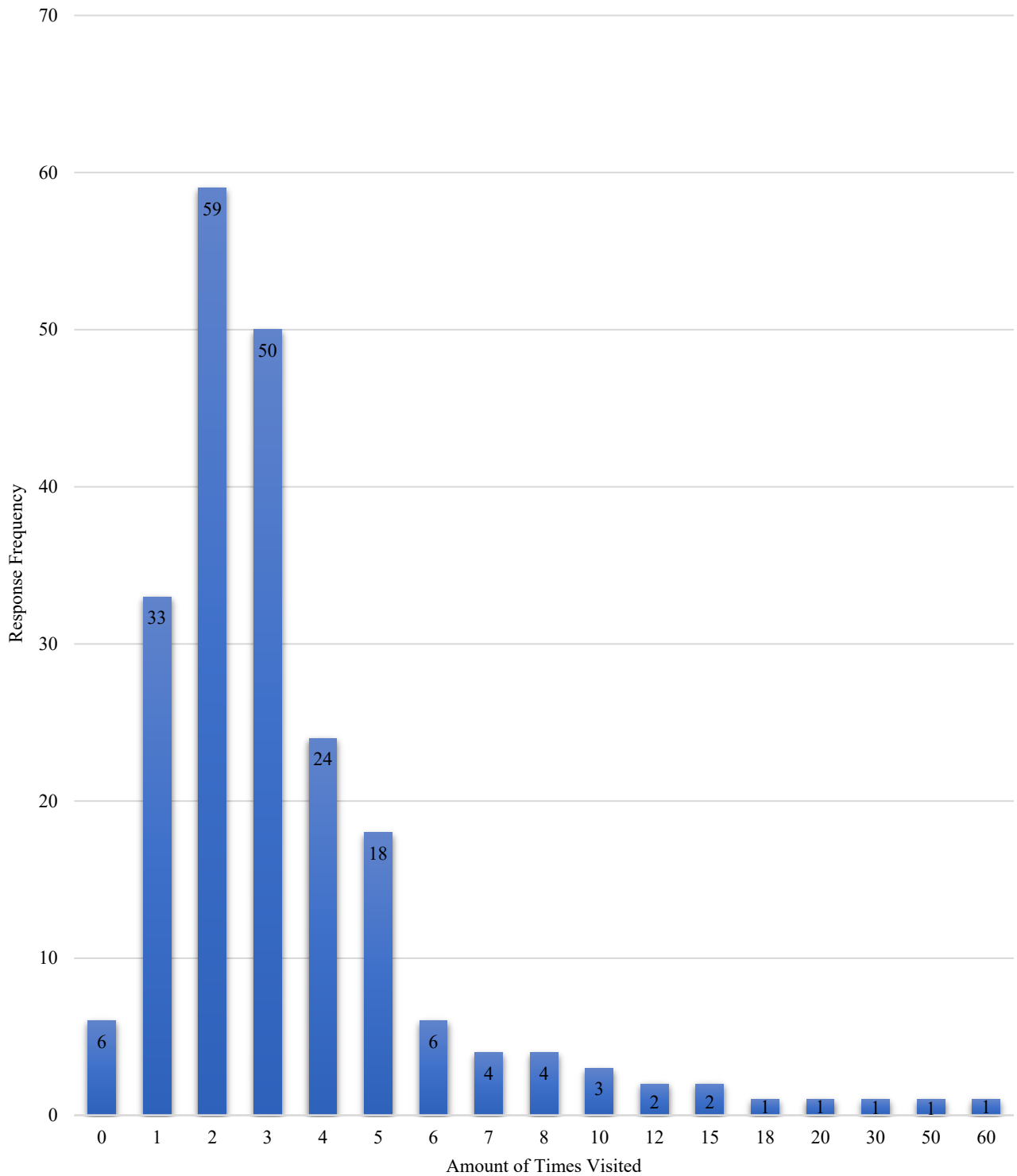


When friends visit students at UW – La Crosse, the popular activities include eating at a restaurant (15%), going to Granddad’s Bluff (15%), hiking (13%), and going to bars (9%).



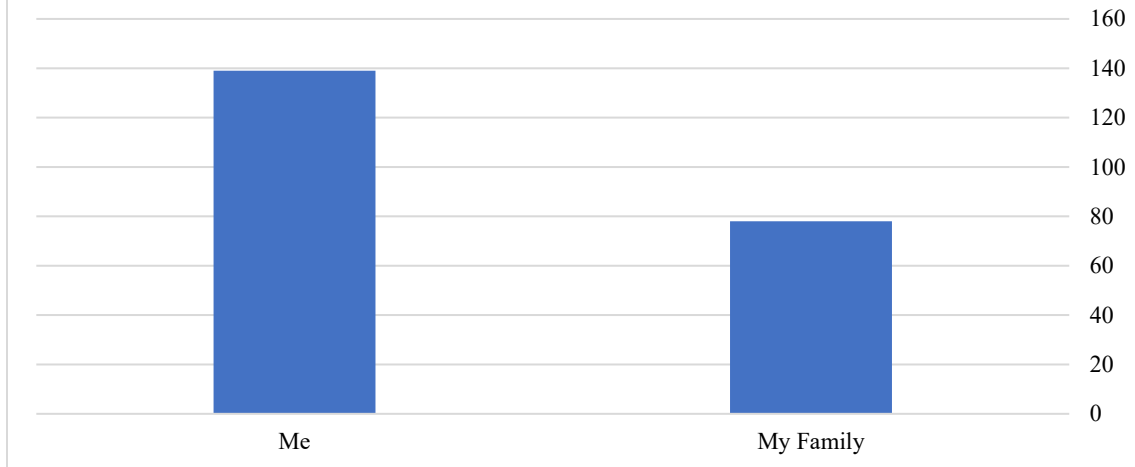
95.3% of students have had family visit them in the La Crosse county.

How many times has your family visited you in La Crosse county in the past 12 months? (n=216)



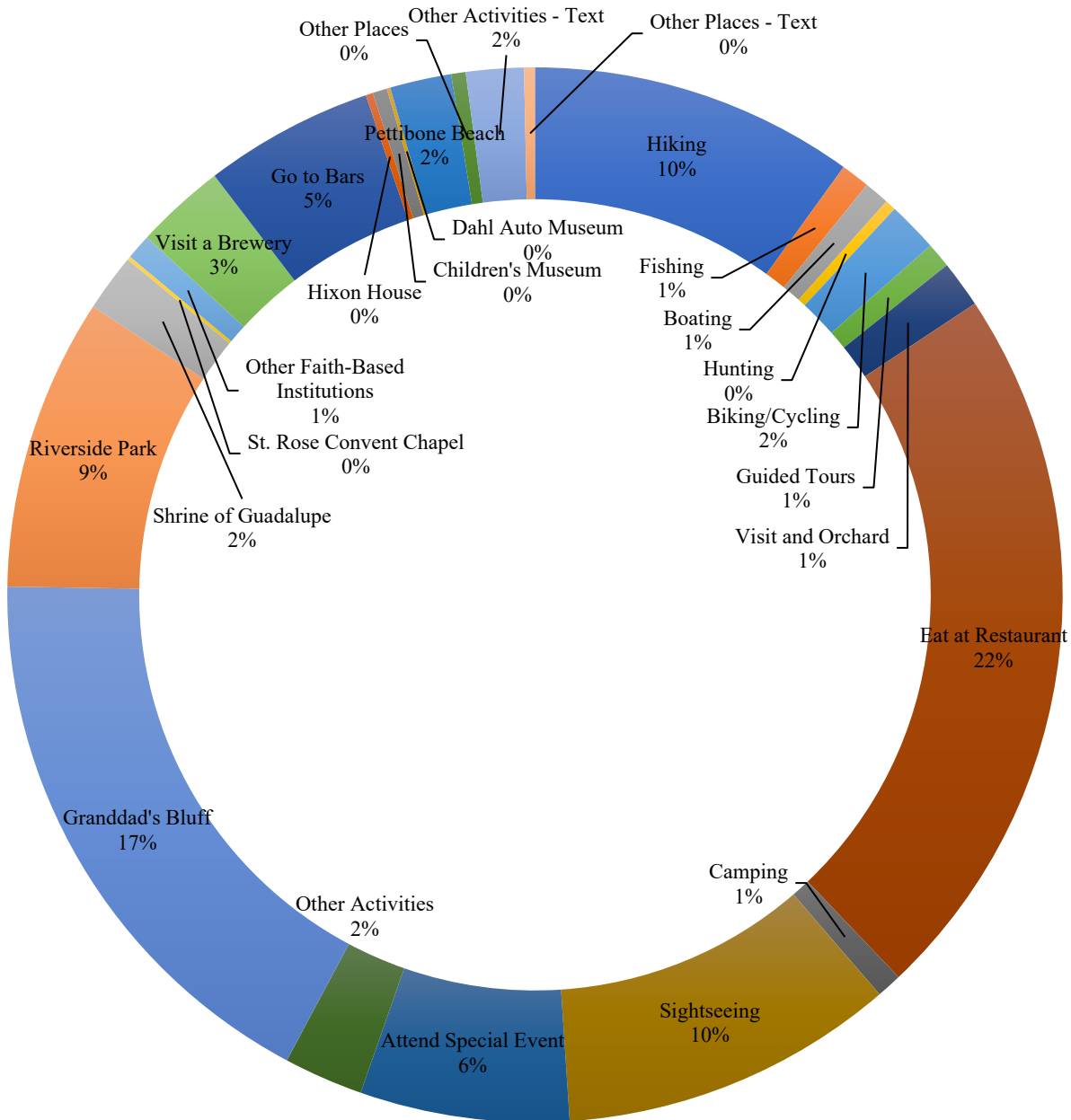
On average, students had family visit them 4 times ($m=3.91$) a year, with most people having their family visit them from one to four times in a 12-month span.

Q9 When your family visits you in La Crosse, who is the primary decision maker on what activities you do? (n=217)

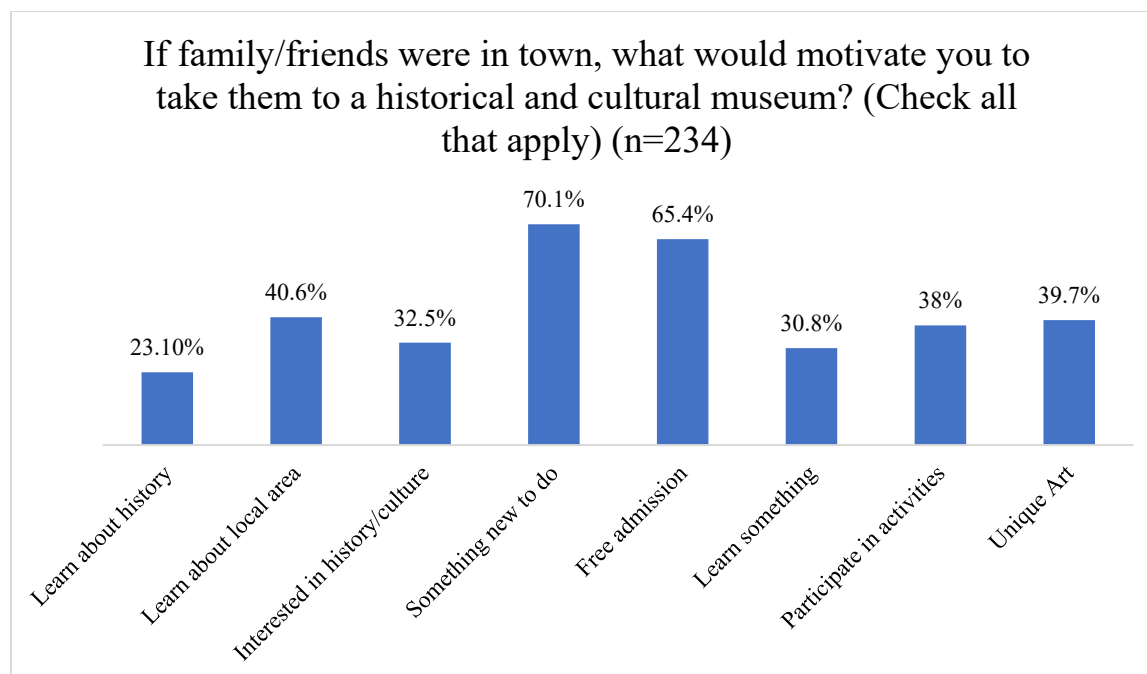


The students at UW – La Crosse are usually the decision makers with the percentage being 64.1% of choices being made. However, when students do have visitors come to town, visiting family (35.9%) are more likely to be activity decision makers than visiting friends (13.5%).

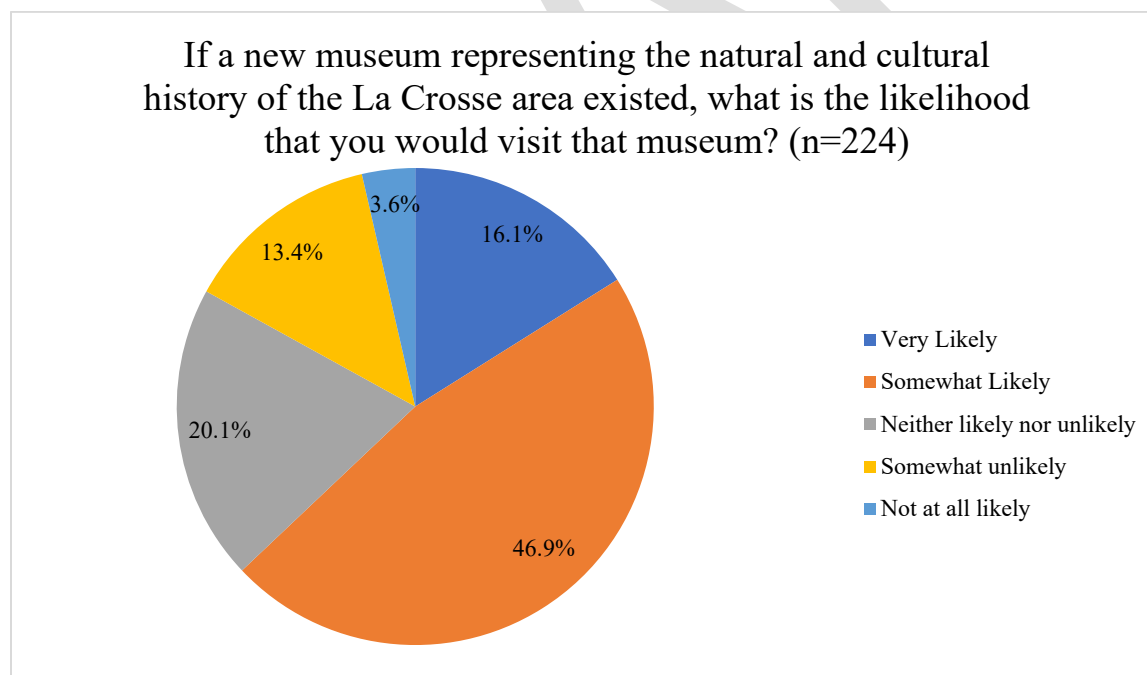
What did you do with your friends when they visited? (Check all that apply) (n=234)



When friends visit students at UW – La Crosse, the popular activities include eating at a restaurant (22%), going to Granddad’s Bluff (17%), taking a hike (10%), and sightseeing (10%).



The main motivators of participants visiting a museum would be something new to do, free admission, and learning about the local area.



63% of students surveyed were somewhat (46.9%) or very likely (16.1%) to visit a new museum if it existed (n=224)

Participants were given the opportunity to provide any comments they wanted to share regarding their interests. Their responses are provided unedited in no particular order.

If there was a new museum in La Crosse, what would you like to see in it or be able to do there? (n=234)

Majority wants within a new museum:

1. Art, Art Displays, and Artifacts
2. History and Development of La Crosse
3. Interactive and Hands-on exhibits
4. Educational and Learning opportunities
5. Geography and Natural History of La Crosse and the Driftless Region

Comparable Museum & City Data

This section presents information that was gathered from regional cities comparable to La Crosse, and museums within those cities.

Goal: Obtain information from other museums to assess feasibility of a new La Crosse Museum

The museum task force conducted three site visits to regional museums in 2019: 1) The Chippewa Valley Museum in Eau Claire, WI, the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium in Dubuque, IA, and Vesterheim – The National Norwegian-American Historical Museum & Heritage Center in Decorah, IA. An overview of information the task force was able to collect in addition community statistics are presented below.

In addition to the information collected by the task force research looked at museums in the region in cities comparable to La Crosse. According to [a New York Times search engine designed to find your city's twin based on job mix](#), Eau Claire, WI and Appleton, WI are the two most similar metro areas to La Crosse. Therefore, data is presented below looking at Appleton and the History Museum at the Castle. The Peer City Identification Tool (developed by the Chicago Fed) has La Crosse similar to Dubuque, IA and Cedar Rapids, IA in their areas of “Resilience” (Economic diversification and Labor force conditions). Therefore, we also examined the City of Cedar Rapids and the African American Museum of Iowa.

La Crosse, Wisconsin	
Population	51,866
Share of metropolitan area population	38%
Demographics	
% of families with children	44.5%
Median family income	\$64,193
Labor share (%) of manufacturing	11.1%
2019 County tourism direct spending	\$281,400,000

Chippewa Valley Museum - Eau Claire, Wisconsin

The Chippewa Valley Museum in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Eau Claire is one of the most comparable cities in the region to La Crosse and the Chippewa Valley Museum is close in size to a potential new La Crosse area museum.

According to their [website](#), the Chippewa Valley Museums income comes from the following sources: Earned income: 17 percent. Special gifts and grants: 29 percent. Membership: 20 percent. Local government (city and county combined): 22 percent. Investment return, fundraising, events, and other: 13 percent. This museum highlights the importance of adequate storage spaces. At any given time only 13% of their 23,000-object collection is on display at any given time.

According to their FY2019 annual report, “3,923 students from 81 school groups visit Chippewa Valley Museum on field trips...and...6,820 visitors took part in one or more of the museum’s 84 workshops, lectures, and other outreach offerings.”

Eau Claire, Wisconsin		Chippewa Valley Museum	
Population	68,086	Total square footage*	
Share of metropolitan area population	40.9%	Exhibit square footage*	32,000
Demographics		Storage space square footage*	4,000
		Initial funding*	\$1,000,000
% of families with children	48.7%	Standard adult admission fee	\$7.00
Median family income	\$73,313	Individual annual membership	\$30
Labor share (%) of manufacturing	12.2%	Annual visitors	21,244 (FY2019)
2019 County tourism direct spending	\$259,000,000	Full- & part-time staff	9
		# of volunteers(#hours)	332 (9,584)

*Exact numbers or estimates are provided if the information was available.

National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium – Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque, Iowa		National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium	
Population	58,340	Total square footage*	
Share of metropolitan area population	60.3%	Exhibit square footage*	80,000
Demographics		Storage space square footage*	12,000
		Initial funding*	\$25,000,000
% of families with children	44.4%	Standard adult admission fee	\$19.95
Median family income	\$67,436	Individual annual membership	\$55
Labor share (%) of manufacturing	14.1%	Annual visitors	250,000
2018 County tourism direct spending	\$365,750,000	Full- & part-time staff	40
		# of volunteers(#hours)	

*Exact numbers or estimates are provided if the information was available.

National Norwegian-American Historical Museum & Heritage Center – Decorah, Iowa

Decorah, Iowa**		National Norwegian-American Historical Museum & Heritage Center	
Population		Total square footage*	
Share of metropolitan area population		Exhibit square footage*	
Demographics		Storage space square footage*	
		Initial funding*	
% of families with children		Standard adult admission fee	
Median family income		Individual annual membership	
Labor share (%) of manufacturing		Annual visitors	
2018 County tourism direct spending	\$33,840,000	Full- & part-time staff	
		# of volunteers(#hours)	

*Exact numbers or estimates are provided if the information was available.

**Decorah, Iowa is not considered a peer city due to its much smaller population (~8,000).

History Museum at the Castle – Appleton, Wisconsin

Appleton, Wisconsin		History Museum at the Castle	
Population	74,234	Total square footage*	
Share of metropolitan area population	43.7%	Exhibit square footage*	
Demographics		Storage space square footage*	
		Initial funding*	
% of families with children	50.5%	Standard adult admission fee	
Median family income	\$72,253	Individual annual membership	
Labor share (%) of manufacturing	21.3%	Annual visitors	
2019 County tourism direct spending	\$375,200,000**	Full- & part-time staff	
		# of volunteers(#hours)	

*Exact numbers or estimates are provided if the information was available.

**City is also partial in Calumet, and Winnebago counties.

African American Museum of Iowa – Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Cedar Rapids, Iowa		African American Museum of Iowa	
Population	131,360	Total square footage*	
Share of metropolitan area population	49%	Exhibit square footage*	
Demographics		Storage space square footage*	
		Initial funding*	
% of families with children	50.5%	Standard adult admission fee	
Median family income	\$76,662	Individual annual membership	
Labor share (%) of manufacturing	15.7%	Annual visitors	
2018 County tourism direct spending	\$873,810,000	Full- & part-time staff	
		# of volunteers(#hours)	

*Exact numbers or estimates are provided if the information was available.

La Crosse Potential New Museum Site Analysis

Part 1 – New Museum Needs

Museum Needs [Initial estimates as data is still coming in and being analyzed – Would welcome task force thoughts feedback, and access to additional resources if relevant]

The La Crosse County Historical Society's current artifacts are stored in approximately 5,800 square feet of space in four different locations (including objects held at former Riverside Museum). On average, comparable museums examined in this study had approximately 6 feet of exhibit space to every one foot of storage space. Depending on the final design, a new museum may only have 12-20% of objects on display at any given time. Pending objects selected for permanent vs. temporary exhibits, optimal facility size would include an estimated 20,000-30,000 sqft of exhibit space, 4,000-6,000 sqft of storage space, 1,500-3,000 sqft additional event space (workshops, special events, etc.), and 300-1,000 sqft of administrative space. Adequate space at any one new site could range from 27,000-38,000 sqft. Additionally, an outdoor space providing the opportunity for visitors to congregate and additional objects to be displayed would be ideal.

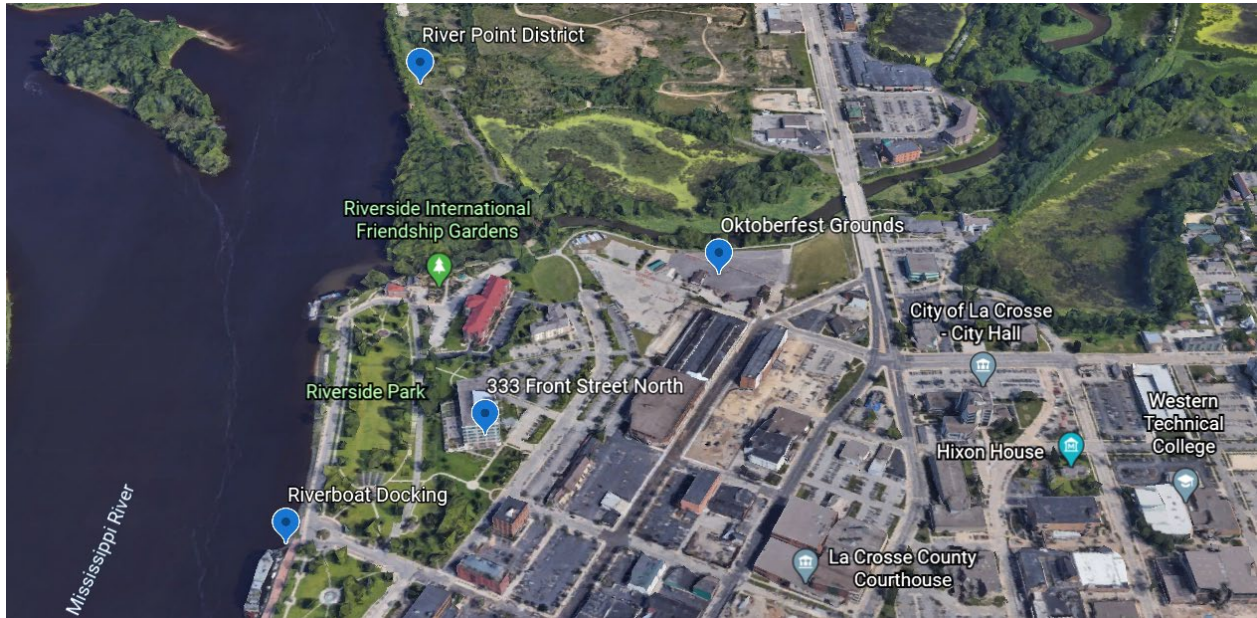
Part 2 – Site Analysis, Opportunities & Challenges

Site Analysis

The La Crosse Historical & Cultural Museum Task Force identified two existing sites near downtown La Crosse as having the potential to meet the needs of a new La Crosse museum: 1) an existing building at 333 Front Street North, and 2) new development in the River Point District

Site – 333 North Front Street

Most recently known as the CenturyLink Inc. office building, the seven-floor building was purchased by Weber Group, LLC January 2020. According to the [La Crosse Tribune \(2019\)](#), in the early 2000's CenturyLink had more than 500 employees working in the building, but less than 200 worked there immediately prior to the sale. At least four of the seven floors are or will be occupied by other tenants, including one floor still being leased by CenturyLink.



Opportunities & Strengths	Potential Challenges/Downside
Reuse of an existing building	Obtaining funding to acquire & develop space prior to other tenants moving in
< 5 minute walk from Riverside Park & Downtown La Crosse businesses. Greater opportunity to attract recreational visitors, riverboat travelers	Unknown renovation roadblocks and costs
Parking – Both onsite and nearby street and ramp parking.	Lacks historic charm – While an existing building, at only two decades old it does not have the historic architecture/design of other buildings in the downtown area.
Renovations are being made to make the building more energy efficient.	

Site – River Point District

According to the River Point District website the location is a “mixed-use waterfront neighborhood where abundant natural surroundings create opportunities for unique community amenities and inspiring development. Located in central La Crosse at the point where the Mississippi, Black and La Crosse Rivers meet, River Point District will establish a dynamic, inclusive neighborhood at the center point of the city’s urban districts and seamlessly connect the community to the rivers and downtown. The neighborhood will eventually provide 800+ residential units and dedicated locations for offices, shops and restaurants.”



Image Credit: Riverside North Planned Development document, September 2019, SEH

At the time of this report it was estimate that the River Point District would be ready for development in 2021. The area is currently in the early stages of Phase 1 – grading, erosion control, and placement of fill to raise above the floodplain.

Opportunities & Strengths	Potential Challenges/Downside
Near the Black River – Creates opportunities to better tie in natural history of the area, logging history, and in close proximity to where the War Eagle sank	Distance from Riverside Park – May be more difficult to attract short-term riverboat visitors
Programming – Nearby greenspace and the Black River create opportunities for outdoor programming	Parking – The district is being designed for increased walkability, which could increase walk-in traffic, but might limit parking availability and access for bus traffic.
Energy efficiency of new construction could lower annual operating costs	New construction – Does not represent the history of the area
New development of greenspace, store fronts, and boat access will draw visitors to the area	

Appendix: Study Proposal

Some appendices/additional data collected will be submitted electronically only. They include hundreds of additional pages worth of data.

Appendix: Fall Raw Data [to be submitted electronically only]

Appendix: Spring Public input raw data [to be submitted electronically only]

Appendix: Comparable museum visits raw data/notes [to be submitted electronically only]

DRAFT