

ART + WELLNESS TOOLKIT

Backed by peer-reviewed research, these well-being categories and scales offer reliable ways to understand how art experiences can support emotional, social, cognitive, and physical wellness.

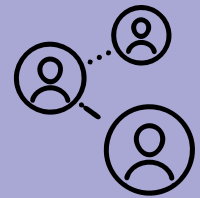
Emotional

Engaging with art can spark powerful emotional responses, from joy and wonder to peaceful reflection. Museum visits have been linked to improved mood, reduced stress, and an overall boost in emotional well-being (Mastandrea et al., 2019; Trupp et al., 2025). Having a short encounter with paintings or attending programs can lift spirits and leave visitors feeling more emotionally grounded.



Social

Art museums offer more than just visual experiences—they create spaces for connection. Research shows that museum visits can foster social inclusion, reduce feelings of loneliness, and even help people feel more connected to others (Cotter et al., 2024; Herron & Jamieson, 2020). Whether shared with a friend or experienced among strangers, art has the power to bring people together.



Cognitive

Viewing art encourages curiosity, reflection, and critical thinking. It also invites us to see through someone else's eyes and engage in perspective-taking that can deepen understanding and stimulate intellectual growth. Research shows that museum experiences can leave visitors feeling mentally engaged, inspired, and more open to new ways of thinking (Cotter et al., 2023; Trupp et al., 2025). Museums aren't just about looking—they are about expanding how we see the world.



Physical

Art experiences can have a calming effect on the body, helping to lower stress, ease tension, and support relaxation. Even brief visits to a gallery have been associated with lower blood pressure and reduced cortisol, a stress hormone (Clow & Fredhoi, 2006; Mastandrea et al., 2019). Engaging with art isn't just good for the mind—it can benefit the body, too.



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Disclaimer: The validated surveys listed below are recommended by the Art Bridges Research and Evaluation Team. While these scales are publicly available, we strongly encourage you to consult with the Evaluation Team before using them to discuss appropriate methods, implementation, analysis, and interpretation. Each scale offers unique insights into visitor behavior and well-being but also comes with its own advantages and limitations that should be carefully considered in context.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING SCALES

Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being

The Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being is a 29-item questionnaire that helps museums understand how visitors feel, including emotions like stress and empathy. It's flexible and can be used with exhibitions or programs. While it doesn't cover physical well-being, it pairs well with other short surveys that do.



Brief Mood Introspection Scale

The Brief Mood Introspection Scale is a quick 16-item survey that helps capture a visitor's mood, including feelings like calmness, energy, and positivity. It's especially useful for comparing how someone feels before and after a museum visit or program. While it's easy to use and offers flexible scoring, some of the word choices may feel too similar or unclear to some respondents.



State Trait Anxiety Inventory

The State Trait Anxiety Inventory is a 20-item survey that measures how anxious someone feels in the moment. It offers a more clinical perspective on how art experiences may reduce stress or anxiety. While helpful for studying emotional impact, some questions focus on negative feelings and may feel too personal for certain museum settings.



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SOCIAL WELL-BEING SCALES

Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being

The Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being is a 29-item questionnaire that helps museums understand how socially connected visitors feel. It's flexible and can be used with exhibitions or programs. While it doesn't cover physical well-being, it pairs well with other short surveys that do.



Flourishing Scale

The Flourishing Scale is an 8-item unidimensional measure that assesses overall flourishing and well-being. This scale is very brief and easy to analyze. The downside is that these questions can feel personally invasive given the museum context.



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COGNITIVE WELL-BEING SCALES

Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being

The Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being is a 29-item questionnaire that helps museums understand the inner mental states of visitors, such as positive self-regard. It's flexible and can be used with exhibitions or programs. While it doesn't cover physical well-being, it pairs well with other short surveys that do.



Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs

The Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs is an 18-item questionnaire that helps museums assess visitors' sense of competence (feeling capable and effective) and autonomy (feeling free and self-directed). These cognitive outcomes are linked to motivation, learning, and personal growth, which makes this scale especially useful for evaluating the impact of programming.



Aesthetic Experience Questionnaire

The Aesthetic Experience Questionnaire explores how visitors think and feel while engaging with art, including whether they experience flow, deep reflection, or emotional absorption. It's designed specifically for art contexts and includes several helpful subscales to offer rich insight into cognitive well-being and art engagement.



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PHYSICAL WELL-BEING SCALES

Subjective Vitality Scale

The Subjective Vitality Scale is a unidimensional 7-item questionnaire that can be used to assess the physical energy of visitors in the moment. This scale captures how energized, lively, and physically refreshed people feel during their museum or program experience. This scale is extremely accessible, quick to complete, and pairs well with other well-being measures.



Activation-Deactivation Adjective Check List

The Activation-Deactivation Adjective Check List is a 20-item adjective list that helps assess visitors' physical feelings, such as energy, tiredness, tension, and calmness. This scale offers a more nuanced perspective of how visitors physically feel during and after engaging with art or participating in programming.



CREATING A SURVEY: BEST PRACTICES PT.1

Below is a general guide outlining best practices to create surveys for museum visitors or program attendees. These tips are designed to help you collect meaningful feedback while ensuring the experience is respectful, accessible, and engaging for participants.

DECIDING WHICH SCALES TO USE

Each of the four categories (emotional, social, cognitive, and physical) includes several recommended scales. Take time to consider the pros and cons of each, or check in with the Evaluation Team if you'd like help deciding which ones are the best fit for your project. Use no more than one scale per category, or try the Core Art Museum Survey for Well-Being, which already covers emotional, social, and cognitive domains, and can be paired with one physical well-being scale if that fits your goals.

PAPER VS. DIGITAL SURVEY

Choosing between paper and digital surveys can make a big difference in your response rate. Think about factors like accessibility, mobility, and comfort with technology. For example, we recommend offering printed surveys for small program groups to complete before they leave. Paper surveys also tend to work best for older adults (65+) or for anyone who may not be able to scan a QR code. While digital surveys are convenient, platforms like Qualtrics or SurveyMonkey can be costly—Google Forms is a free and user-friendly alternative.

IDEAL LENGTH AND TIME

When creating surveys for museum visitors or program attendees, aim to keep the total completion time under 5–10 minutes. For surveys using only Likert-scale questions, this usually means including no more than 15–30 question stems. Keeping it brief helps ensure higher response rates and a better overall experience for participants.

SCALE USAGE AND CHANGES

It may be tempting, but don't alter the scale ranges of any items. All of the scales included in this toolkit have been rigorously validated using their original formats. Avoid using partial items from a scale. The only exception is when selecting a specific subscale or subfactor, be sure to include all items from that subscale.

In some cases, it's okay to adjust the verb tense to better reflect your context. For example, if you're using the "Flow" subscale from the Aesthetic Experience Questionnaire, the original item might say, "I lose track of time when I view the work of art." If you're asking visitors to reflect on a past experience, you could adjust it to: "I lost track of time when I viewed the work of art." Just keep the structure and meaning of the item intact.

CREATING A SURVEY: BEST PRACTICES

PT.2

SURVEY FLOW

Always begin your survey with an informed consent form. Participants must give consent in order for their responses to be used. If you're using a paper survey and someone selects "I decline," you must discard their data. For paper surveys, the consent form should appear on the very first page, and that page should only include the consent language.

For digital surveys, the consent form must also come first and be placed in its own separate block or section, with no other questions shown until consent is given. Consent is a required response.

CONSENT FORM EXAMPLE

Thank you for taking part in this survey! The purpose of this survey is to learn more about your personal experiences visiting the museum and taking part in the programming.

You will be asked to answer a variety of multiple choice questions related to your experiences. You can expect this survey to take 5 minutes or less. All questions are optional. You must be 18 years or older to take part.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and any responses will be anonymized. All responses will be reported in aggregate form. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and you may choose to stop or end the survey at any time without consequence. Please indicate whether you consent to continue the survey.

- I consent to continue.
- I decline.

INCENTIVES

While not required, offering a small incentive or thank you gift is a thoughtful way to show appreciation to museum visitors or program attendees who complete the survey. Participating takes time and effort, so a simple token—like a museum-branded sticker, pin, or magnet—can go a long way in expressing that you value their time and feedback.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you're surveying university students or anyone on a college campus, you must receive ethics approval from that institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before you begin recruitment or data collection. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

Also note that the scales in this toolkit are designed for adult respondents only. Children and teens under the age of 18 cannot legally provide ethical consent. If you plan to survey individuals under 18, please consult with the Evaluation Team to ensure your survey design and item selection meet ethical and legal guidelines.

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