


**A STUDY OF READERS OF THE
FREER AND SACKLER *CALENDAR***

 Smithsonian Institution

**OFFICE OF POLICY & ANALYSIS
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A Study of Readers of The Freer and Sackler *Calendar*

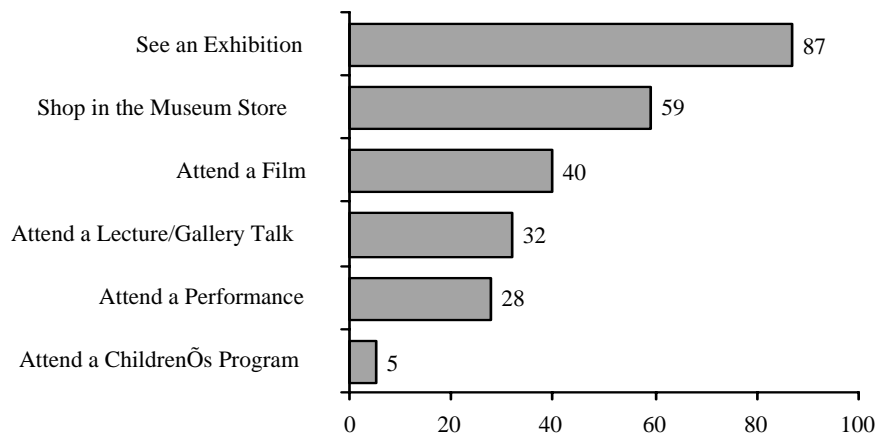
INTRODUCTION

The *Calendar* is a bimonthly publication of the Freer Gallery and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery that is not only available at the galleries' information desks, but also is mailed to 23,000 readers (18,000 in the DC metro area). The May/June 2001 mail edition contained a one-page questionnaire on the ways readers use the publication. This report presents the responses of 725 *Calendar* readers, just three percent of the *Calendar's* recipients.¹ This low response rate signals a significant lack of interest in communicating with the galleries.

WHO ARE THE *CALENDAR* READERS?

Readers² are recent visitors to the galleries; most have visited the galleries in the past six months and nearly all have visited in the past year (92%). Within the past year, most readers have been to the galleries to see an exhibition, and more than half have shopped in the museum store. Only a few readers attended a children's program in the past year.

Figure 1. Activities during Visits Made in the Past Year³
(Percent)

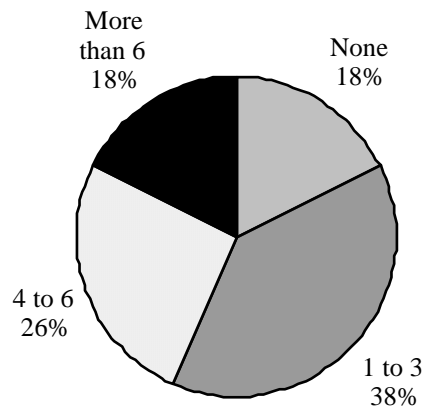


¹ Due to the 3% response rate, users of this report are cautioned against generalizing these data to all 23,000 recipients of the publication.

² The term "reader" is used throughout this report to refer to survey respondents. Readers who replied before the July 1 deadline received a gift certificate for 15% off their next purchase at gallery shops.

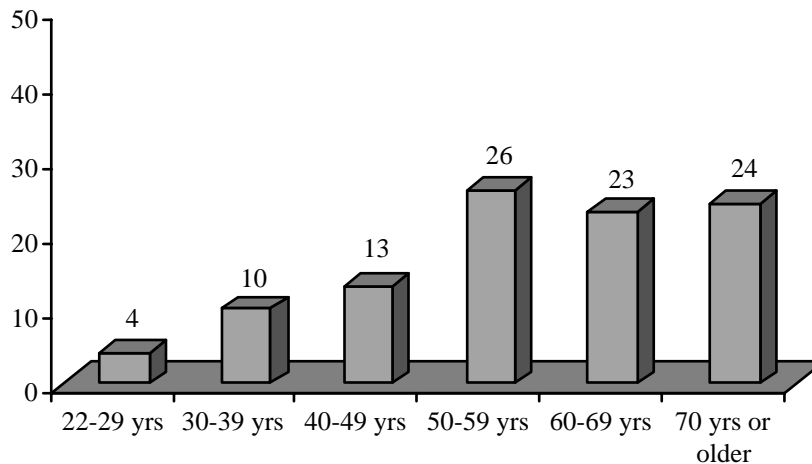
Readers are active attendees of Freer/Sackler programs, with two-fifths attending one to three programs during the past year and over three-fifths attending one to six programs. A few readers (19) specifically commented on the reasons that keep them from attending programs, including the use of Ticketmaster, residence outside the DC metro area, illness, and age.

Figure 2. Frequency of Program Attendance in the Past Year
(Percent)



Most readers are fifty years or older; just one-quarter are under fifty years of age.

Figure 3. Age of *Calendar* Readers
(Percent)

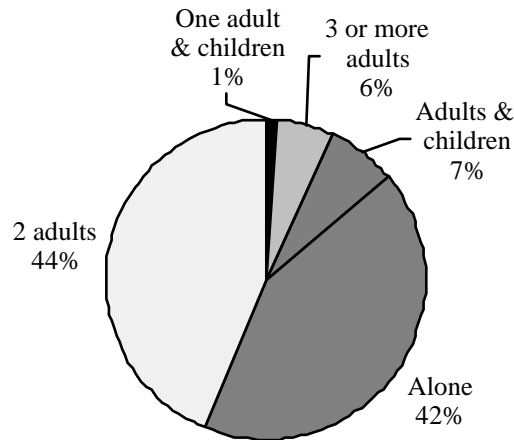


³ Total sums to more than 100% because respondents were asked to mark all of their activities in

the past year.

Readers most often visit the galleries with one other adult or by themselves; readers who often visit in a group with children are rare. This result may merely reflect the age of the readers; those over 50 are more likely to visit alone or with other adults (76%) than with children (44%).

Figure 4. Composition of Visit Groups
(Percent)

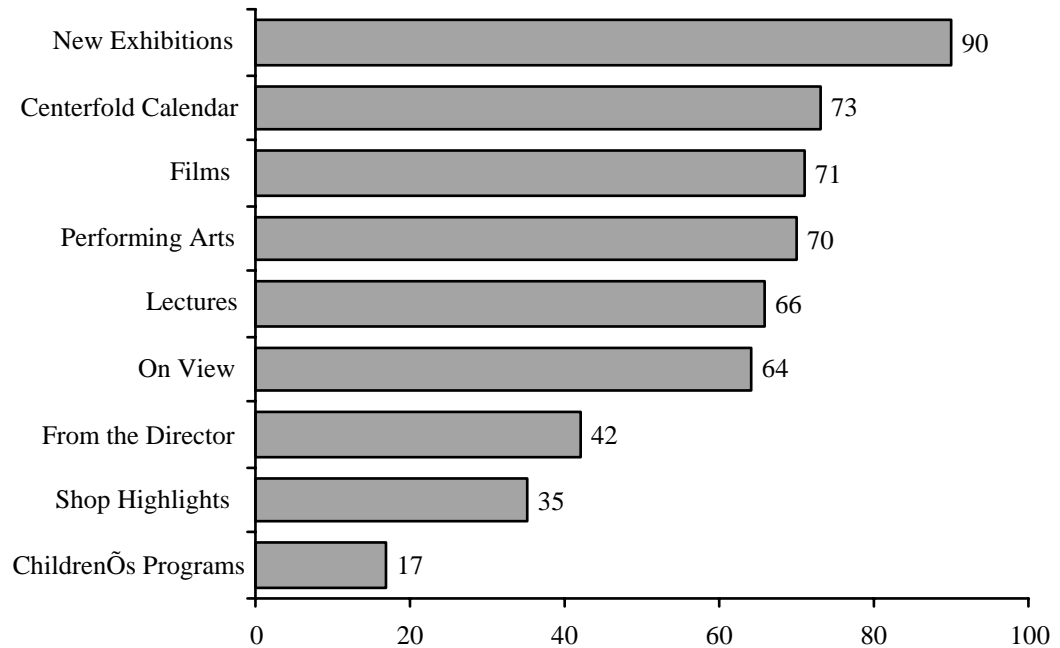


HOW DO READERS USE THE *CALENDAR*?

Nearly all of the readers report that their main source of information about programs at the Freer/Sackler is the *Calendar* (88%). *The Washington Post* and other newspapers were cited by only seven percent of readers as their main source of information.

“New Exhibitions” is the most widely read section of the *Calendar*, read by nine out of ten readers. Other often read sections are the Centerfold *Calendar*, “Films,” and “Performing Arts,” each engaging seven out of ten readers. The least read section is “Children’s Programs,” which draws one in six readers.

Figure 5. Which Sections of the *Calendar* Do You Read?⁴
(Percent)

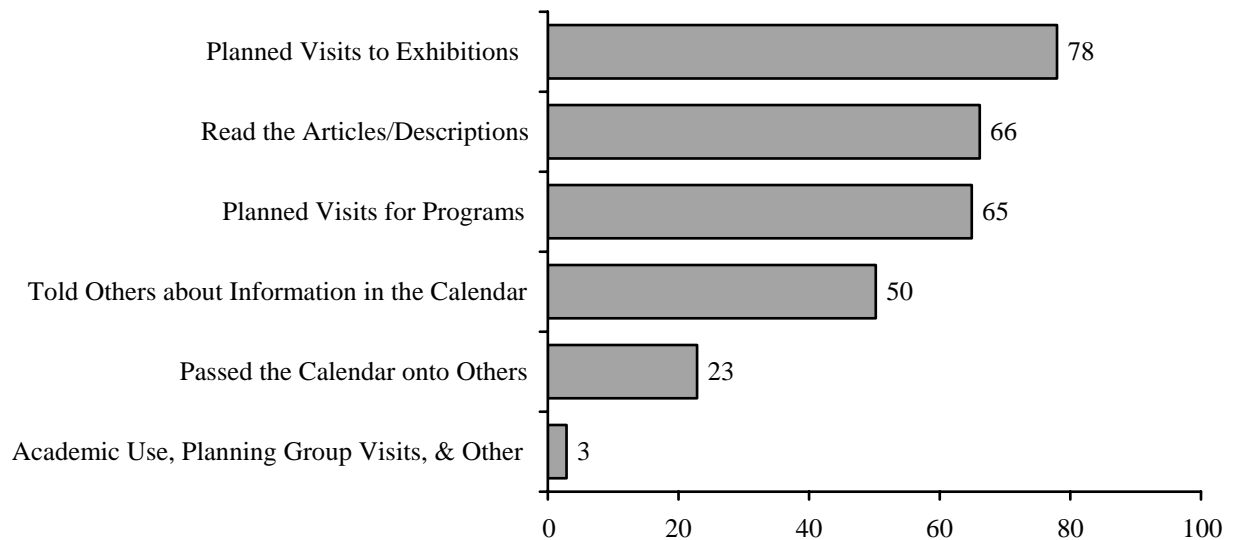


Readers described the Centerfold Calendar as easy to understand. In fact, 58 percent rated it “very easy to understand.”

The most popular use of the *Calendar* is to plan visits to exhibitions. Other popular uses are reading the articles and descriptions and planning visits for programs. Half of the readers tell other people about the information in the *Calendar*. Eleven percent of readers do not use the *Calendar* to plan visits to exhibitions or to plan visits to programs. Between one-third and one-fifth of readers read about films, lectures, and performances, but have not attended such programs in the past year.

⁴ Total does not equal 100%. Respondents were asked to mark all sections that they read.

Figure 6. In the Past Year, How Have You Used the *Calendar*?⁵
(Percent)



THE *CALENDAR* OF THE FUTURE

Readers were asked if a *Calendar* issued quarterly would be as useful to them as the current bimonthly one. Sentiment gravitated only slightly in favor of a quarterly publication (52%). In general, highly engaged readers, meaning those who attended several programs last year are less likely to favor the change (38% favored) than those who attend fewer programs (55% favored).

Few readers (24%) expressed interest in receiving program notices via e-mail; the idea was more popular with readers under age 40 (45% interested) than those over age 40 (20% interested).

⁵ Total does not equal 100%. Respondents were asked to mark all of their uses.

CONCLUSIONS

The response rate to this survey is very low in comparison to similar studies with a coupon incentive.

The *Calendar* does not engender reader interest in the galleries. This may indicate that the *Calendar* is unable to excite or to turn readers on to the activities of the galleries.

The most frequent uses of the *Calendar* revolve around exhibitions.

Readers use the *Calendar* to plan visits to exhibitions more often than to plan visits for programs.

The *Calendar* does not reach potential visitors with children.

The age of the majority of respondents limits participation in children's programs. Readers, who are older than the visiting audience of the galleries, do not use the *Calendar* to plan visits with children and rarely do they make visits with children.

Many readers are shoppers.

Many readers (59%) have made purchases at the museum shop in the past year, yet only one-third of these shoppers read "Shop Highlights".

Only the most engaged readers disapproved of a quarterly version of the *Calendar*.

Active visitors preferred the publication of a bi-monthly *Calendar*.

Email notices are popular with younger readers, but not older readers.

Older readers appear to be accustomed to and comfortable with information distributed by mail.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Information about children's programs should be provided through outlets other than the *Calendar*.
- Changing the publication schedule would have little impact on the average mail recipient who attends only a few programs each year. Public Affairs should weigh other factors, such as the *Calendar's* use by visitors picking it up at the galleries and production costs, before switching to a quarterly schedule.

- E-mail notices should not replace the *Calendar*, but rather be focused on specific programs and targeted to those programs' audiences.
- The money spent on the *Calendar* may be more effectively used on another communications device.