

Considerations for Museum Reopenings

The American Alliance of Museums recommends that museums build flexible plans for reopening that are regularly reviewed and refined based on the latest science. This guidance is based on the best available information as of publication and is not intended to supersede guidance from public health officials, medical experts, and federal/state/local governments. Museums are encouraged to seek legal and other expert advice on their specific circumstances. Below are some considerations for reopening:

Develop a phased timeline

A gradual approach allows your museum to prioritize health and safety while taking progressive steps to restore regular operations. It also provides flexibility for regular monitoring and revision of your plan.

Prioritize health and safety

Follow [CDC](#) and [OSHA/HHS](#) guidance as well as orders and recommendations from federal/state/local governments and your [state](#) and [local](#) health officials. Review and incorporate into your plan relevant guidance for [communities, workplaces, and events](#) including:

- » **Protective equipment:** Staff, especially those who interact regularly with the public, should have access to personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks and gloves. Use barriers like protective panels to maintain distance between staff and visitors. In the case of PPE shortages, some museums are making branded masks, using collections equipment like nitrile or latex gloves, and reusing exhibition materials such as Plexiglas vitrines to create barriers.
- » **Physical distancing:** Take measures to ensure physical distancing for staff and visitors. If some staff are able to work from home, consider extending telework policies. Also consider how staff schedules can be staggered, workplaces reconfigured, and visitor capacity and access restricted to decrease contact (see below for additional recommendations).
- » **Reducing the spread:** Provide hand sanitizer for staff and, if possible, hand sanitizer stations throughout the museum for visitors. Encourage or require regular handwashing, the wearing of masks, temperature checks, etc. for staff and visitors.

Establish clear cleaning protocols

Update your museum's cleaning protocols based on [CDC recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting facilities](#) and [industry-recommended practices for collections care](#). If you operate a food-service area, follow [FDA best practices](#).

- » **Increase the frequency** of cleaning of high-touch areas such as payment stations, bathrooms, door handles, and railings. Conduct a full deep clean every evening.
- » **Train staff** to wipe down surfaces after every interaction and between timed-entry visitations.
- » **Allocate resources to cleaning:** these heightened cleaning protocols will add extra costs for cleaning supplies and for cleaning professionals.

Review and update your workplace policies

Policies for employee leave, telework, and compensation should be reviewed and updated to protect your staff, provide flexibility, and allow sick employees to stay home.

- » **Review the latest federal legislation** to ensure your museum is in compliance with provisions to support and protect employees. AAM has provided summaries of the legislation highlighting information relevant to museums and museum professionals on our [COVID-19 financial relief & resources page](#). Prominently display the required Department of Labor [poster](#) outlining employee rights mandated by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.
- » **Help employees stay healthy** with these tips about recommended [business policies and procedures](#) from the CDC.
- » **Keep equity in mind** when crafting policies and [financial considerations](#). AAM's [COVID-19 Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion \(DEAI\) Resource List](#) provides information to support individuals, teams, and institutions in centering DEAI in times of crisis.

Restrict contact, capacity, and access

As part of your museum's phased approach, consider how you will limit person-to-person contact, monitor the number of visitors, and restrict or prohibit access to certain areas of the museum. Your plan may include:

- » **Online ticket sales only** if this is an option for your museum. Alternatively, limit cash and paper receipt transactions. "Touchless" payment options are recommended.
- » **Providing digital visitor guides and materials** instead of physical copies at the museum.
- » **Regulating interactives** (e.g., touchscreens) by providing disposable stylus pens, or if unavailable, signage or physical barriers to prohibit use. As your plan progresses, you may consider installing hand sanitizing stations or offering gloves near these spaces for safer usage.
- » **Capacity restrictions for visitors** including timed tickets for entry and monitoring traffic flow (e.g., only allowing a certain number of visitors in a space at a given time).
- » **No or limited access** to theaters, cafés, high-traffic areas, and particularly tight spaces in the museum. If you have multiple entrances, consider limiting access to only one or two.
- » **Cancelling or restricting group visits, guided tours, public programs, and special or private events** until safe to offer them, and then limiting the number of participants.
- » **Using signage or barriers** to enforce physical distancing guidelines, including at ticketing and information desks, in shops/cafés, and for security guards.
- » **Establish one-way flow** through the museum and within galleries, to facilitate distancing.
- » **For outdoor spaces**, closing restroom facilities and picnic areas, marking trails to encourage one-way travel, and closing off parking on streets next to your facility.

Provide training for staff

Museums should provide training for staff to protect staff and promote safe interactions with visitors. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) offers [educational resources](#) intended for workers who are at greatest risk of exposure during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff should be given clear guidelines for how to respond if visitors are not following health and safety protocols, such as alerting museum security or a high-level supervisor.

Communicate clearly and frequently

Communicate proactively with both staff and the public about your plans and the protocols in place for their health and safety. [Research](#) from Edelman found that people consider employer communications the most credible source of information about COVID-19, and we know that museums are among the most trusted institutions in their communities (see “Museums are Trusted” section of AAM’s [Museum Facts and Data](#)). Our institutions can play an important role in assuring staff and educating the public about the science and facts of COVID-19.

- » **Provide education and training materials** for employees and the public, such as the CDC’s [fact sheets and posters](#). You may also consider adding a list of community resources and tip sheets on your website, on signage in the museum, and even in your programming.
- » **Display visible signage** and other indicators, such as floor decals and tape lines, to explain and enforce your policies on physical distancing, hand washing, and other requirements and recommendations.
- » **Share with the public** your cleaning protocols and steps you are taking to ensure their safety—both on your website and throughout the museum (e.g. main entrance, entrance to rooms, bathrooms).

Coordinate your approach and connect with the museum community

Connect with other museums in your community for consistency and supply sharing.

- » **Join the robust conversation** on [Museum Junction](#) to learn alongside your peers.
- » **Access additional guidance** on AAM’s [COVID-19 resource page](#) on [preparing to reopen](#).
- » **Participate in #AAMvirtual**, AAM’s [virtual convening](#) on May 18 and June 1-4, where the museum community will address how we can overcome the current threat and rebuild a more sustainable, inclusive, and powerful museum field for the future.

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Support Free COVID-19 Resources for the Museum Field

The current crisis is taking a distressing financial toll on cultural organizations, and AAM is no different. In these challenging times, we ask that if you can, consider supporting our [advocacy work](#) and making extensive [COVID-19 resources](#) freely available for our field, by [making a donation](#) or [becoming a member of AAM](#). Thank you for your much-needed support.