

Memorandum to OMB: Description of Changes to the 2026 National Museum Survey (OMB #3137-0142)

Background

The National Museum Survey (NMS) is an annual census of museums in the United States, conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The NMS provides national data used by policymakers, museum practitioners, researchers, and the public to assess museum services, resources, and infrastructure.

This memo describes changes to the previously approved NMS data elements and data collection instructions for the 2025 collection cycle. The changes are based on recommendations after reviewing 2025 NMS results in consultation with methodologists. The recommendations aim to improve the quality and clarity of data elements while maintaining stability in the overall collection. These changes do not alter the nature or intent of the information collection, change the respondent universe or collection frequency, or increase respondent burden.

2026 NMS Instrument Changes

OMB approved the 2025 collection materials in November 2025. In preparation for the 2026 cycle, IMLS evaluated potential changes for the collection scheduled to open in September 2026.

IMLS requests approval of the following changes to the 2026 NMS instrument and supporting materials:

- **REVISIONS** (Table 1): Eight questions for revisions based on 2025 responses to clarify reporting expectations and/or simplify reporting. There are also revisions to some wording throughout the survey instrument that are editorial in nature or are additional instructions to improve respondent's survey taking experience. Those are not specifically noted in the table but are tracked as part of the instrument attachment.
- **DELETIONS** (Table 2): Two questions are no longer necessary.
- **ADDITIONS** (Table 3): Two new questions related to selecting a primary discipline and reporting the time to complete the survey.

This memo includes:

- Appendix A – 2026 NMS Instrument (tracked changes version)

- Appendix B – 2026 NMS Instrument (clean version)

Table 1. Questions Proposed for Revision for the 2026 NMS

Question	Change Description	Justification
1-5/1-6	Parent institution questions moved earlier in Section 1 and renumbered in the survey to questions 1-5/1-6.	Clarifies reporting expectations for the survey so it's clearer not to report as the parent organization.
1-9	Revised response options for legal classifications. College/university response options were clarified, including combining for-profit college/university with for-profit company/business and revising the nonprofit/public college/university category.	Simplifies response categories to reduce confusion.
2-4	Include additional examples of non-living or objects collections (specimens, historic structures).	Clarifies reporting expectations.
2-6/2-7	Removed "other" response option for the question respondents receive if they select more than one discipline in 2-5. If they only select "other" in 2-5, they will receive a newly added question (2-7) that requests they pick the best representation for discipline.	Responses from the 2025 results, showed that often the "other, specify" write-ins could be classified back to a listed discipline. Removing other from the primary discipline questions, will provide a "clean" distribution of primary disciplines for analysis.
3-4	Remove response option "Facilities are unsatisfactory and/or not functional for their intended uses."	Option is unclear and will improve interpretability of response categories.
4-1	Add response categories for the sources respondents use to answer financial questions.	Four response options are added based on the "other (please specify)" responses from the 2025 results. This will simplify reporting to allow for more options.
7-2	Ask for range of website visits vs. open response for estimating website visits.	Majority of respondents did not know the answer to this question. Ranges may make it easier to respond and response categories are based on the 2025 results.

Table 2: Questions Proposed for Deletion from 2026 NMS

Question	Question Description	Justification
7-5	Asked for number of followers the museum had on each of the social media platforms they used.	This was often difficult for museums to provide this information and was not ultimately useful information; simplifies response.
8-3	Asked permission of museum to share their contact information (e.g., museum name, website, main phone number, address) with members of the public. The information was pre-filled from earlier responses and respondents were asked to uncheck any information they did not want shared.	No need to collect permission to share publicly available museum contact information; simplifies response.

Table 3: Questions Proposed for Addition for the 2026 NMS

Question	Question Text	Justification
2-7	Which of the following disciplines best represents [MUSEUM NAME], even if none are a perfect fit? Please select one.	As noted in table 1, responses from the 2025 results, showed that often the “other, specify” write-ins could be classified back to a listed discipline. Removing other from the primary discipline questions, will provide a “clean” distribution of primary disciplines for analysis.
8-3 (new)	Approximately how much time did it take you and your colleagues to complete the National Museum Survey? Include: • The time spent reading the instructions, working on the questions, and obtaining information. • The time spent by all staff collecting and providing this information.	Adds a measure to gather time spent completing the NMS.