

MuseumExpert.org

A CASE TO BUILD COMMUNITY IN THE WORKPLACE

[Partner with Us](#)

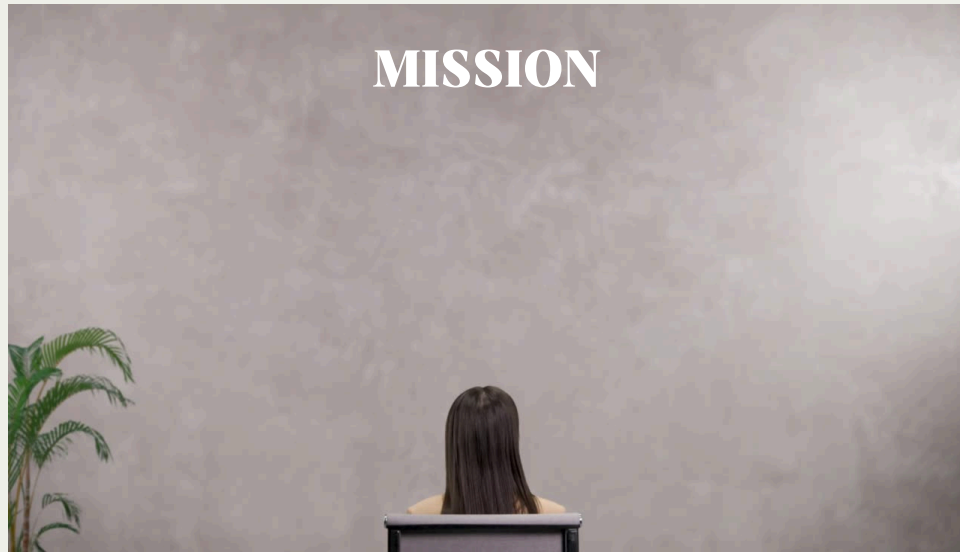
About MuseumExpert.org

MuseumExpert.org—founded and run by volunteers from all corners of the museum community—was created in 2020 to help museum professionals who had lost their jobs due to the COVID 19 pandemic reenter the workforce through practical advice and conversations about the future of the field.

When museums started to reopen, we observed that priorities notably sidestepped many previous employees, favored less experienced hires, and shifted to personnel from outside of the field. These trends, among others, have contributed to frustration, discouragement, burnout, and a general reduction of museum workers' sense of well-being.

Because people who choose careers in museums are passionate about their work and the positive impact that their efforts can have on their communities, the volunteers of MuseumExpert.org have decided to shift our efforts towards **enhancing museum workers' professional growth**, and helping the museum community at large understand **positive and effective ways to create and sustain human-centered workplaces** that nourish the museum workforce.

MISSION AND VISION



MuseumExpert.org exists to create a community that supports museum professionals in designing fulfilling careers.



We envision a future in which past, present, and future museum professionals have access to fulfilling careers, through which they can help organizations thrive and serve their communities in meaningful ways.

A survey about barriers to the creation of a “Human Centered Workplace”

Over the past year, during MuseumExpert.org’s webinars and conversations with many fellow museum professionals, we became intrigued by a significant appetite to create a supportive community within the workplace centered on the needs, aspirations, and goodwill of the people who make museums run.

We also sensed that very little progress is being made in realizing a truly human-centered workplace. So, we asked ourselves and the broad community of museum professionals: what is it that prevents all actors in museums from working together; **what are the barriers that prevent us from working together** on this crucial issue?



Do you want to know more about the results of the survey, discuss with us on how we plan to act on what we have learned, or meet with us to discuss how to start action in your museum?

Please contact MuseumExpert.org founder Walter Staveloz at walter.staveloz@museumexpert.org

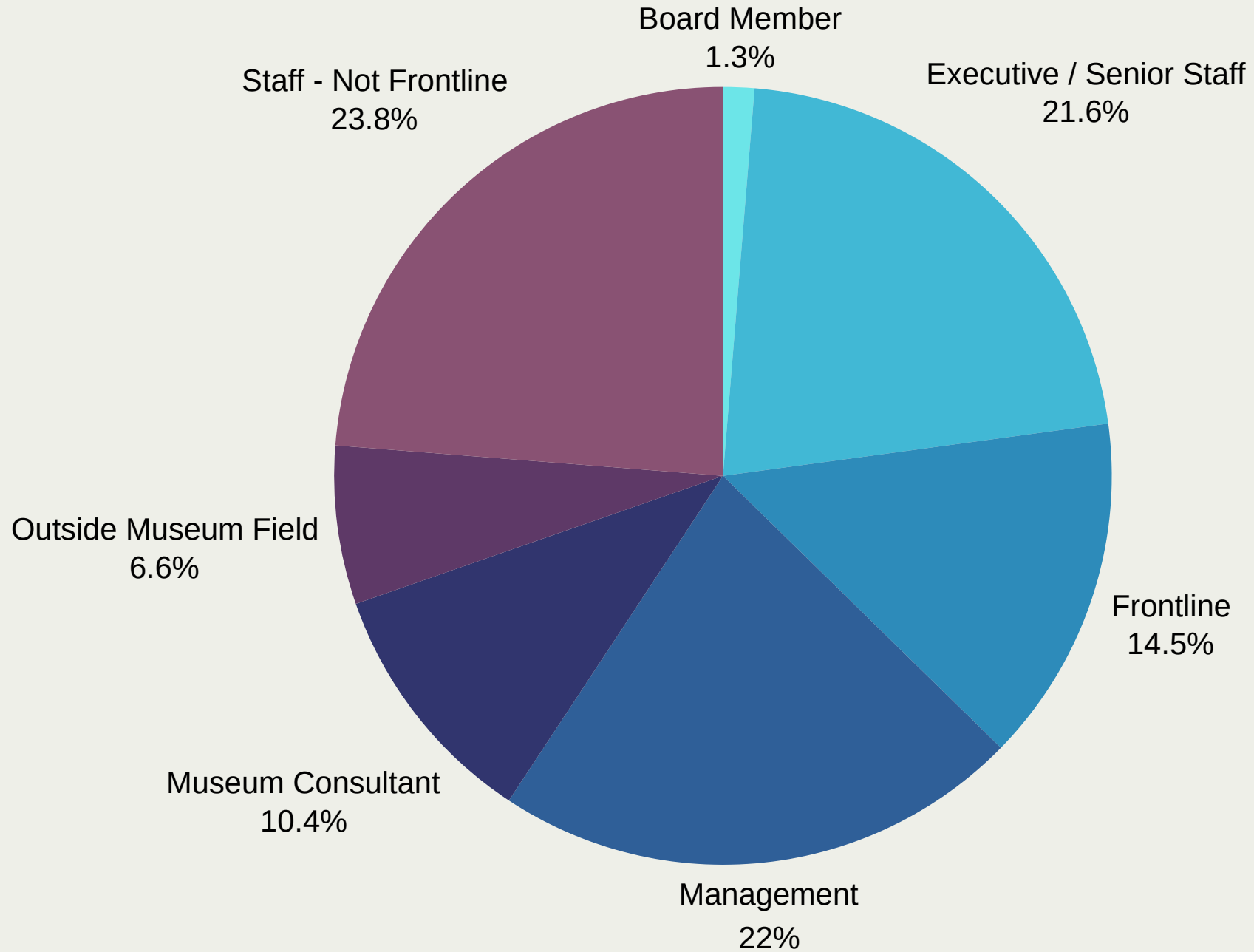
SURVEY OUTCOMES

[Find the full survey results here.](#)

In the spring of 2024, with the help of many webinar participants and conversations with experts, we were able to establish a first list of 20 “barriers”. But, how relevant did they feel to the field? Through a very simple single question: **“Which are the five most important barriers to you?”** we tested the professional field through our mailing list, social media, and the partner organizations of MuseumExpert.org. Respondents were also asked to self-identify their position in the field and to comment about missing options.

Here is what we found:

Respondents Self-Identified Roles



SURVEY OUTCOMES

When we closed the survey 562 professionals had answered the question “which are the five most important barriers to you?” and these were the top 5 answers:

We have always done it that way.

Disconnect between the leaders and daily reality of work.

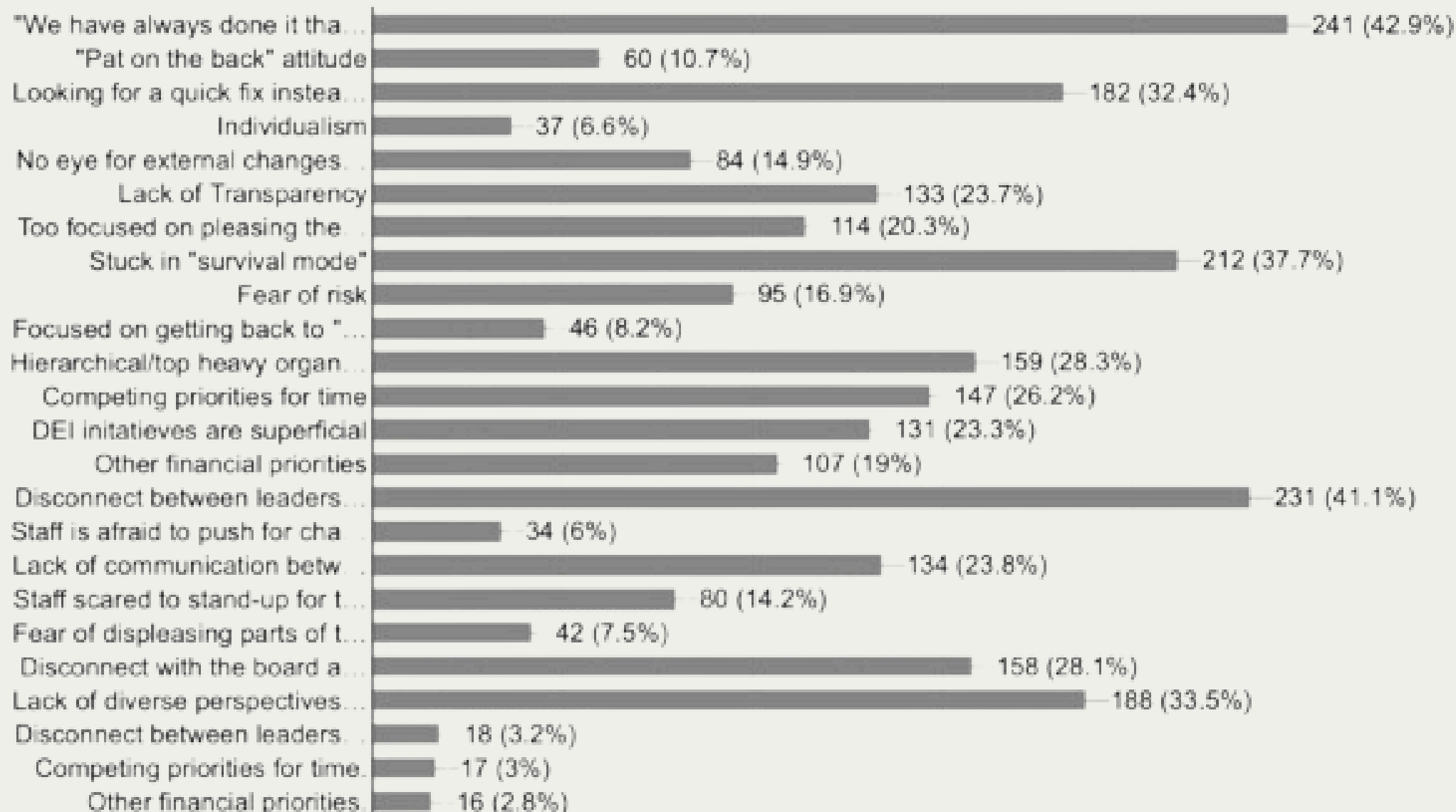
Stuck in survival mode.


Lack of diverse perspectives.

Looking for a quick fix instead of sustained effort.

What would you say are the top five barriers to equitable museum work from your perspective?

562 responses





MUSEUM

These results are significant on their own, but reveal a strongly divided field when we look at responses organized by role.

The main and quasi-unique answer from self-identified executive staff is:

We have always done it that way.

Other high ranking answers include:

- Looking for a quick fix
- Stuck in survival mode
- Lack of
- Pat on the back
- No eye for external

Executive respondents confirming the practice of looking for a quick fix rather than for a long-term solution, coupled with the fact that their museums are still in survival mode, illustrates that financial difficulties still dictate the actions.

[Find Full Results here](#)

That is not what the frontline workers think. Most of them believe that:

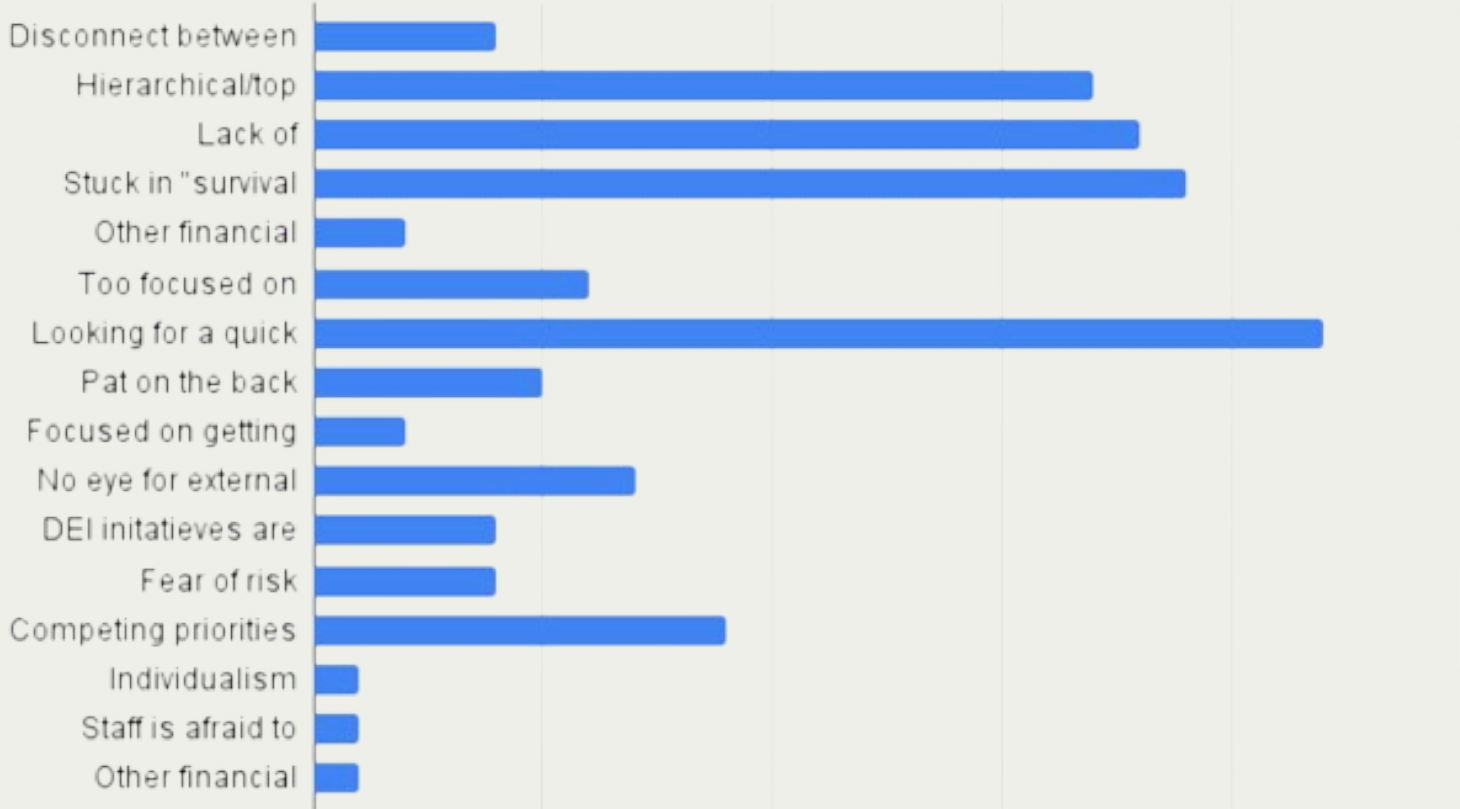
- **Hierarchy is paralyzing.**
- **The leadership is too focused on pleasing the board.**
- **There is a lack of transparency.**





Management feels that the most significant barriers are:

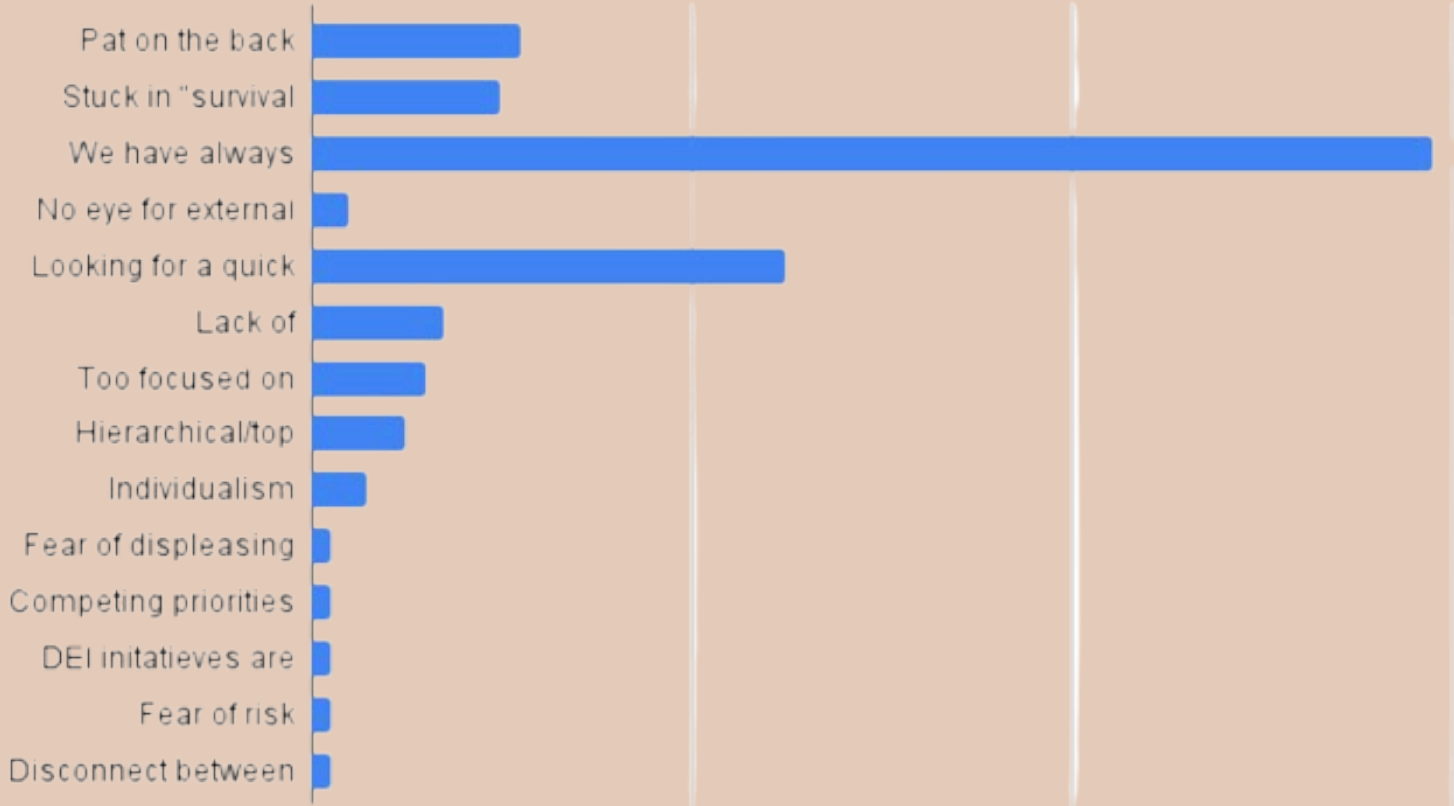
- Looking for a quick fix.
- Stuck in survival mode.



In addition, managers noted a lack of transparency, and that the hierarchy is paralyzing.

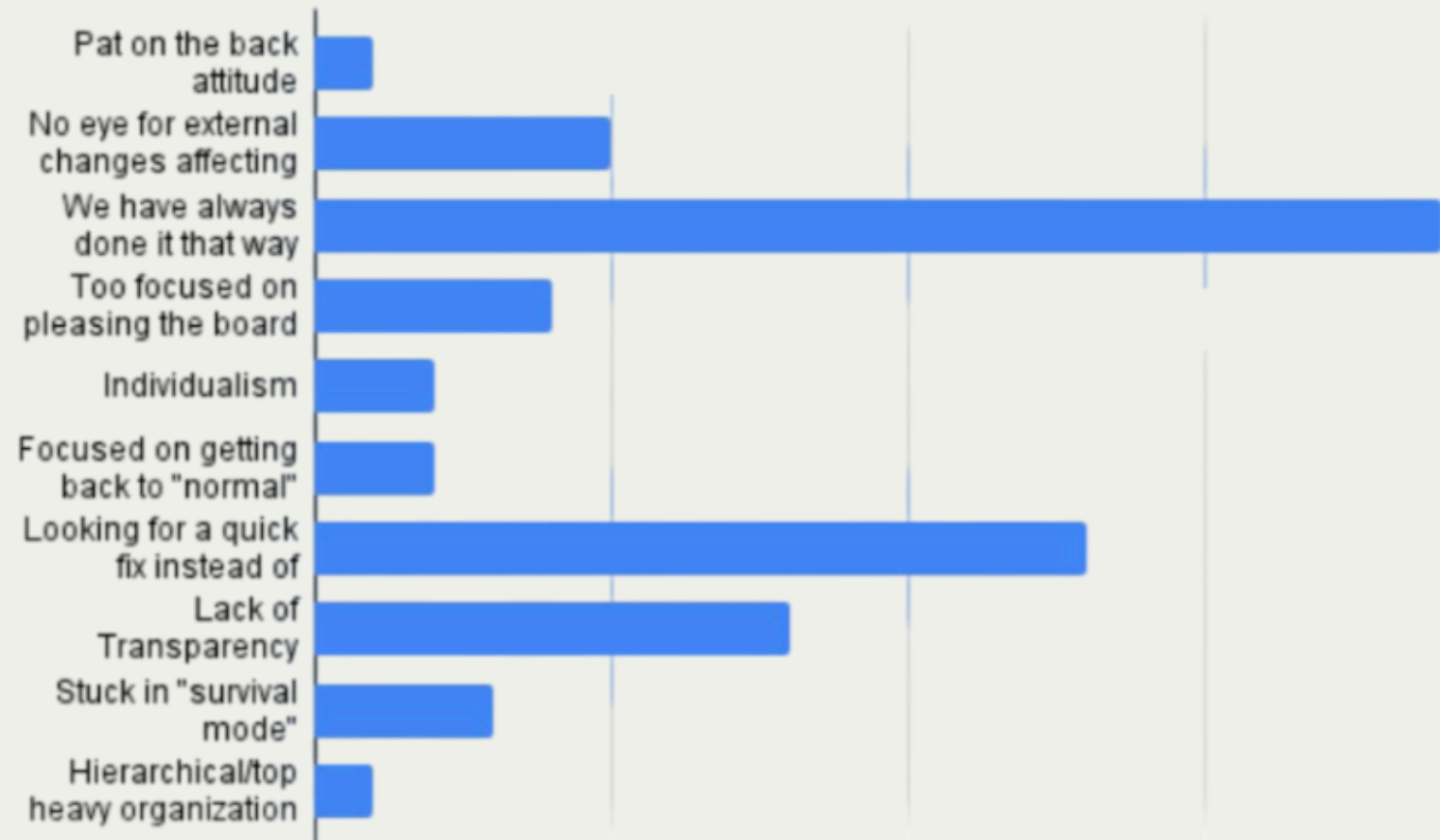
Staff (Not Front Line Workers) feel that the most significant barriers are:

“We have always done it that way” mentality and that museums are mostly looking for a quick fix instead of a long-term solution.



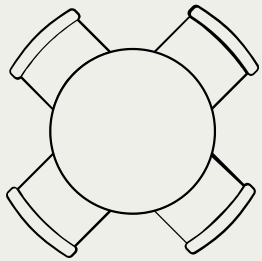
With their external perspective, consultants and contractors see that the biggest barrier is:

- **“We have always done it that way” mentality and that museums are mostly looking for a quick fix instead of a long-term solution.**
- **However, they also point to the lack of transparency and the fact that there is no eye for external changes that affect the institutions.**

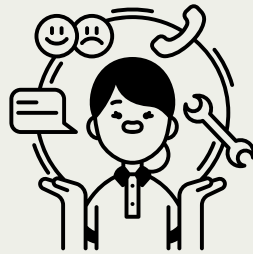




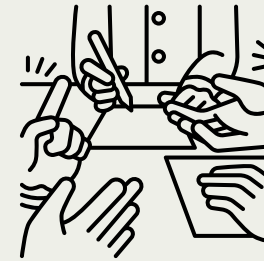
The answers we received to the open questions reveal what is behind the top responses.



Surprisingly, the executive staff respondents mention frustration about the quality of the staff they have to work with, mainly because of the lack of finances to hire qualified people, or being proactive in hiring a diverse workforce. There are also complaints about difficult relations with the board and the conflict between the mission and the necessary commercial operations.



There were no surprises from frontline worker comments. “We cannot give our best because of the low pay” is a major theme across responses here. But an equal one is lack of respect from leadership, sometimes leading to inhumane working conditions while a “sacrificial attitude is expected”.



Consultants and contractors expressed a host of ideas on what is going wrong. They point to a lack of vision of effective leadership and an over-arching a refusal of change. These respondents do, however, recognize that this may sometimes be because of the role of non-expert boards.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

from MuseumExpert.org webinar panelists

“I really feel strongly that if you change your board, you change your museum and that we have to start thinking in that mindset.”

**Micah Parzen, CEO
Museum of Us**

“I think one of my biggest concerns when I was leading AAM was the disconnect between the leadership of museums and the workers of museums...People asked me what kept me up at night, it was how do we bring this field together.”

**Laura Lott,
Administrator and Chief
Operating Officer,
National Gallery of Art**

“There are a lot of museums, I think, that have been in survival mode well before the pandemic, maybe from the time of their founding. So, this is the only way they know how to operate.”

**Anne W. Ackerson,
Independent Consultant**

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Individual Level

- **Don't be dismissive of your power to effect change.**
- **Start conversations.**
- **Contribute to the work culture that you want to see.**
- **Look for resources from outside organizations.**



OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutional Level

- **Include a commitment to workplace equity as a core value.**
- **Create budgets that prioritize values.**
- **Collaborate with local non-profit and business associations.**
- **Reconsider what a board of directors can look like and how it is asked to lead.**
- **Listen to what employees say they need.**
- **Be transparent about challenges.**
- **Realize that change is an iterative process.**
- **Shift away from part-time staffing models and towards more full-time positions.**





OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Field Level

- **Create a set of standards relating to workplace inclusion and equity.**
- **Find ways to acknowledge and reward institutions for outstanding achievements in practicing DEAI principles.**
- **Share information relating to successful human-centric initiatives.**

**Recommendations from
MuseumExpert.org**



INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Dedicate effort to improving internal communication and transparency.

Involve the whole staff in the conversations about strategic objectives of the museum.

Value the diverse voices in the organization by listening carefully and incorporating their perspectives in planning and programming.

Look for creative ways to increase salaries.

Explore fresh ways to align your museum with emerging post-pandemic trends in work patterns.

FIELD LEVEL

**Look for fresh inspiration and models
outside the field.**

**Encourage professional networks and museum
organizations to endorse, encourage, and
facilitate human-centered workplace efforts.**

**Establish benchmarks to measure progress
towards a human-centered workplace.**



MuseumExpert.org

Do you want to know more about the results of the survey, discuss with us on how we plan to act on what we have learned, or meet with us to discuss how to start action in your museum? Please contact MuseumExpert.org founder Walter Staveloz at walter.staveloz@museumexpert.org

WEBSITE

MuseumExpert.org

LINKEDIN

[museumexpert-org](https://www.linkedin.com/company/museumexpert-org)

Interested in volunteering with MuseumExpert.org? [Complete your application here.](#)