

impacts
experience

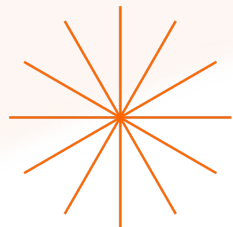
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For all inquiries, please contact Michelle Sills at msills@impacts-experience.com.

LOOKING AHEAD

MEMBERSHIP TRENDS AT HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

Heritage Chocolate Society Annual Meeting | 18 February 2026



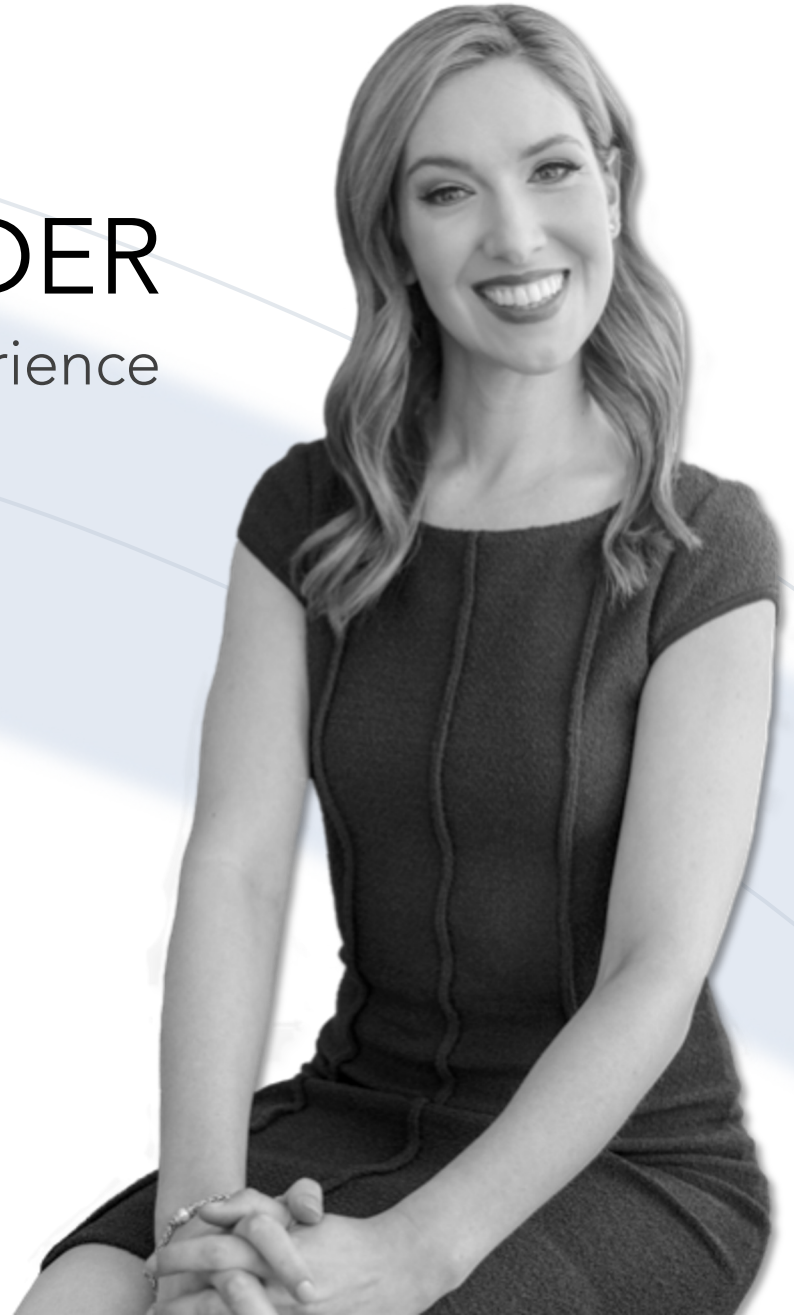
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COLLEEN DILENSCHNEIDER

Co-Founder, IMPACTS Experience

“Do what you love. **Know your own bone;** gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw at it still.”

- Henry David Thoreau



the David &
Lucile Packard
FOUNDATION

IMPACTS Experience has been granted permission to share extant contemporary research supported by key partners with interests in better understanding the world's visitor-serving organizations.

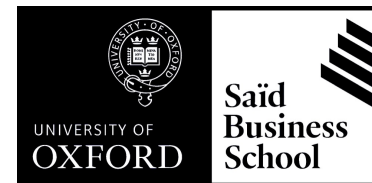
Google Caltech



Stanford

IAS

INSTITUTE FOR
ADVANCED STUDY



There's so much happening in the United States right now.

Why are we discussing membership?

Because data show that 2026
may represent a tipping point
for history organizations.



What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to US history organizations, EOY 2025, top five

RANK	BENEFIT	INDEX VALUE
1	Free admission	240.3
2	Priority access	132.7
3	Exclusive access	122.9
4	Reduced / free admission for member guests	94.5
5	Supporting the organization	94.2

Look at where things
are **changing**.



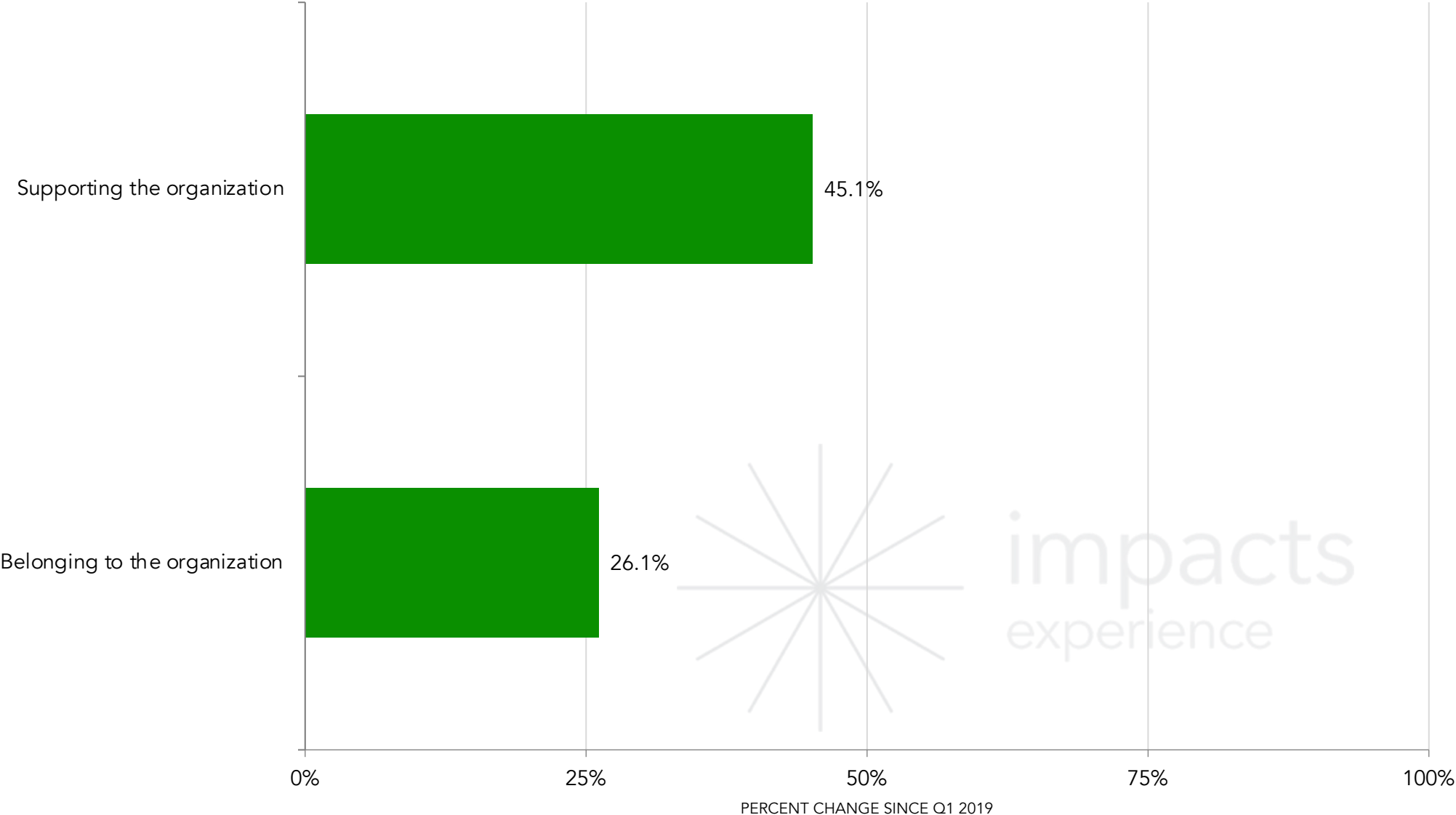
CONNECTION to your mission



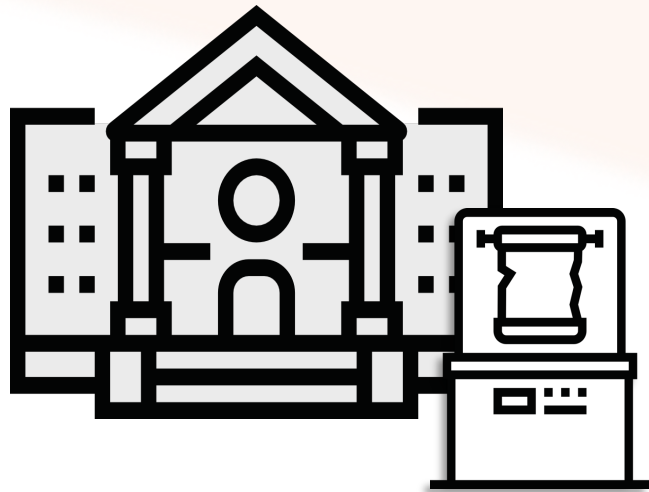
- Supporting the organization
- Belonging to the organization

What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to US history organizations, Percent change between EOY 2019 and EOY 2025



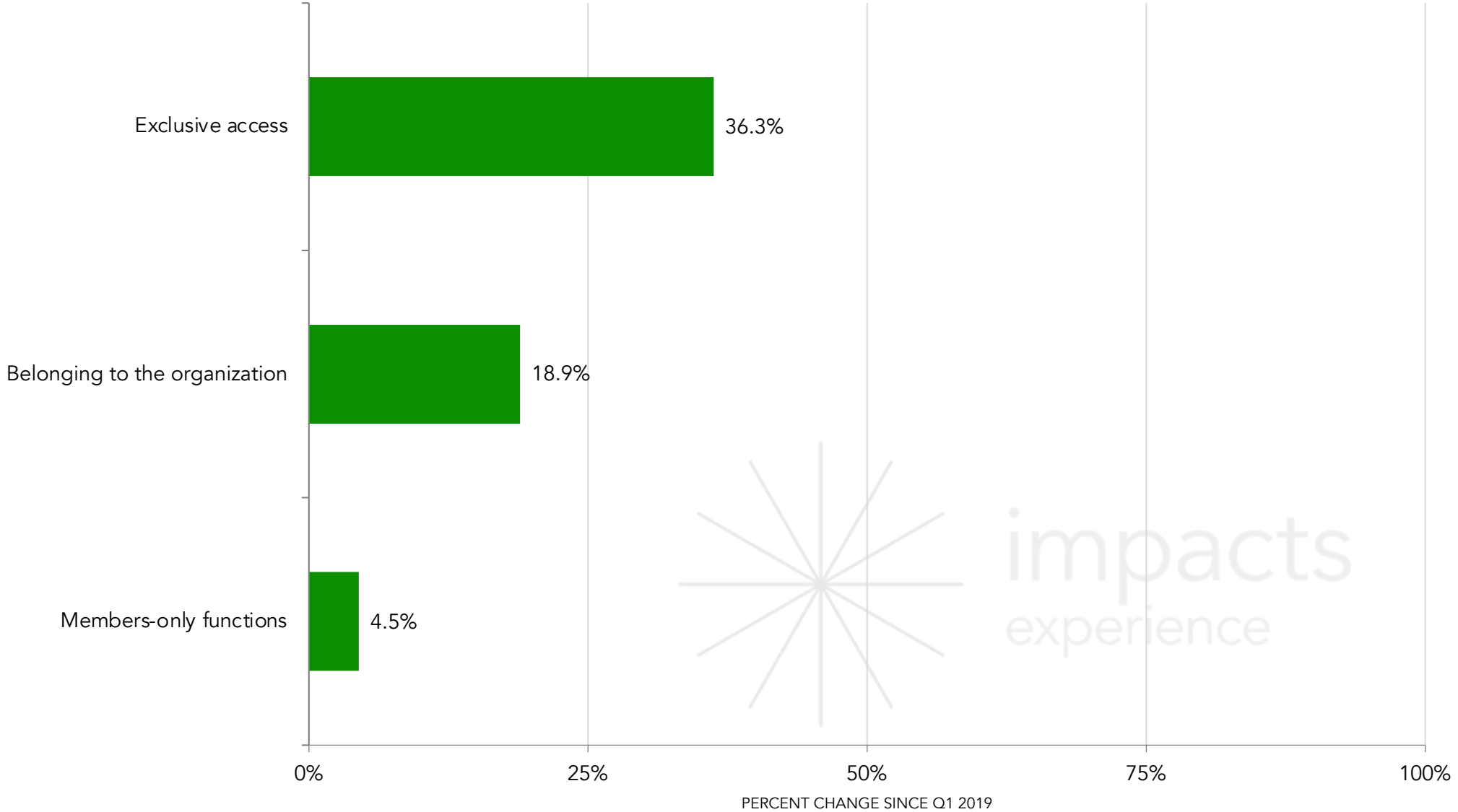
CONNECTION to your unique experiences



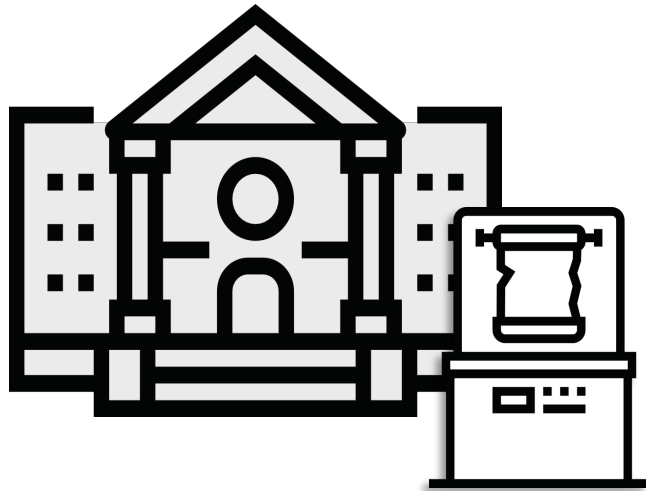
- **Exclusive access**
- **Priority access**
- **Members-only functions**

What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to US history organizations, Percent change between EOY 2019 and EOY 2025



Connection to your history organization's...

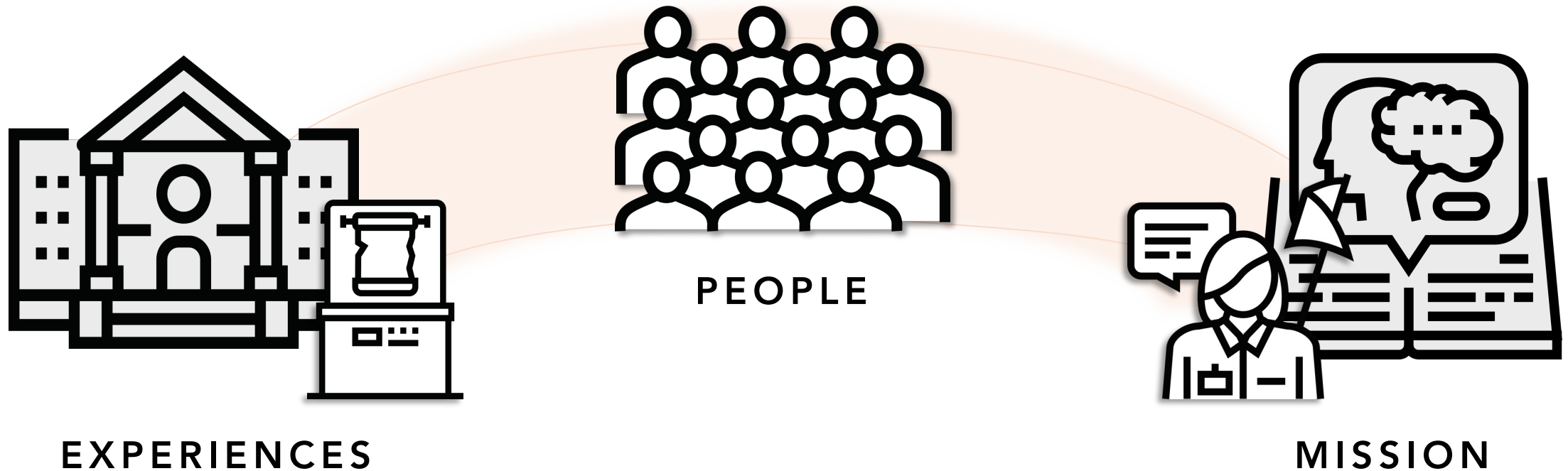


EXPERIENCES



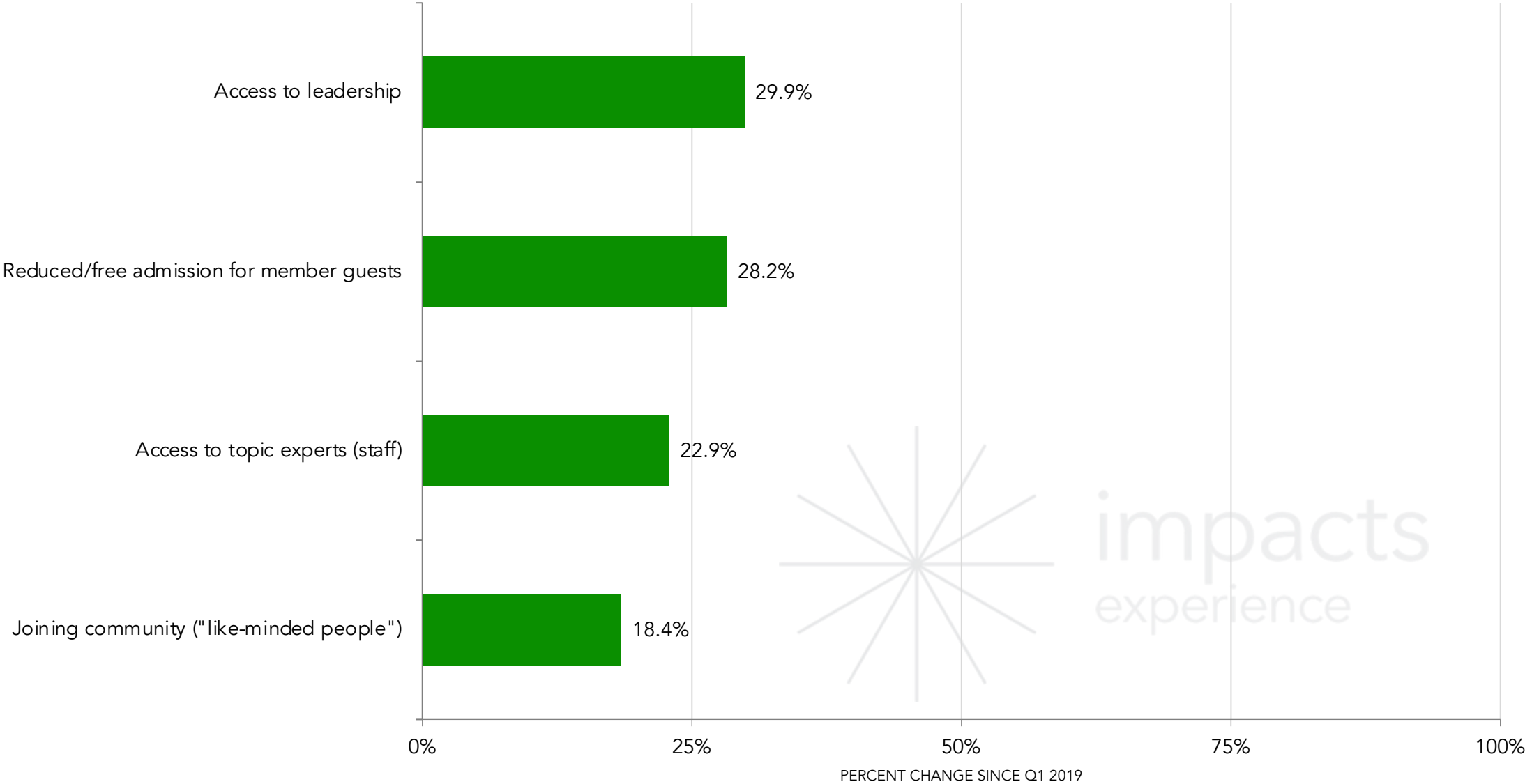
MISSION

Connection to your history organization's...



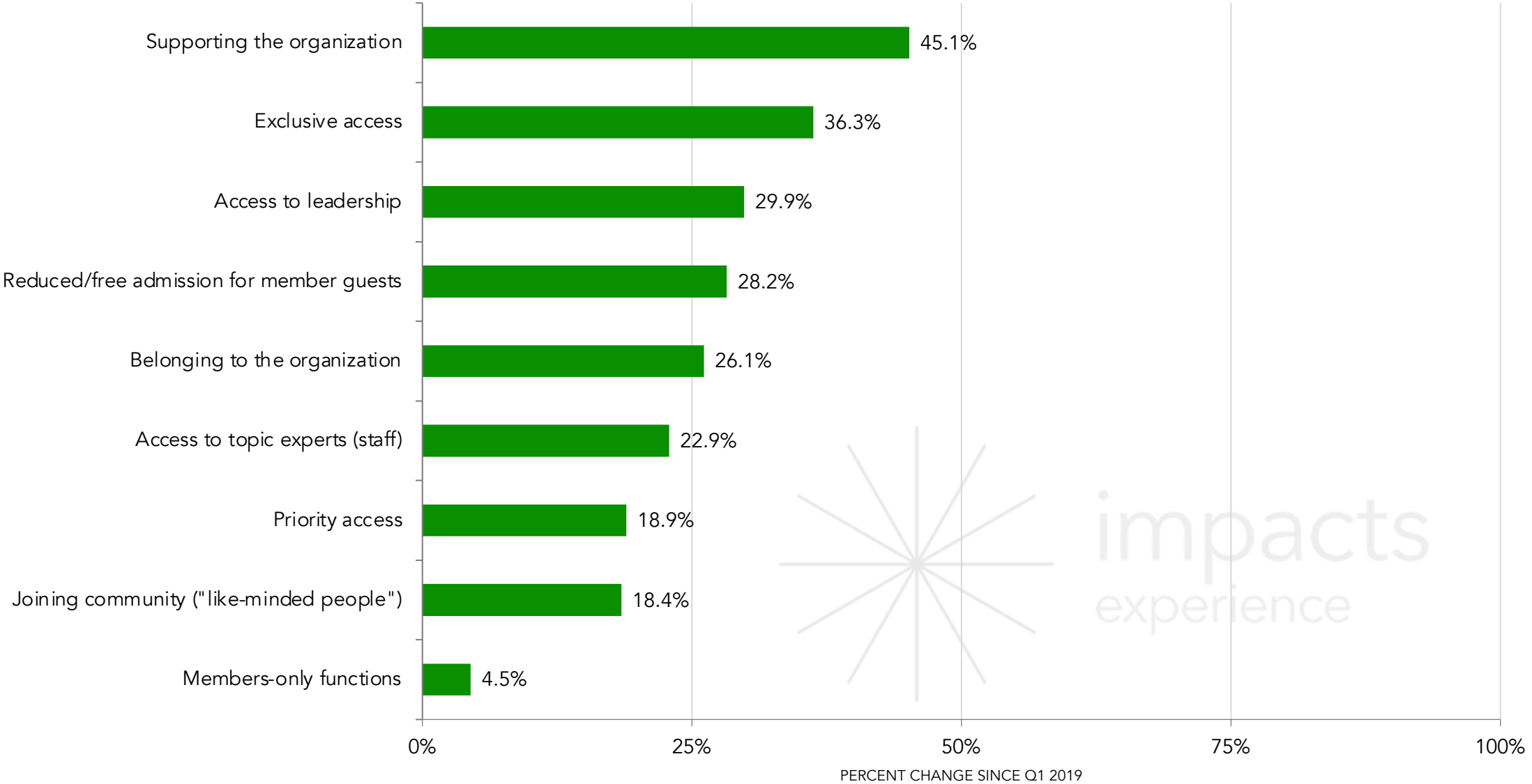
What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to US history organizations, Percent change between EOY 2019 and EOY 2025



What is the primary benefit of your membership?

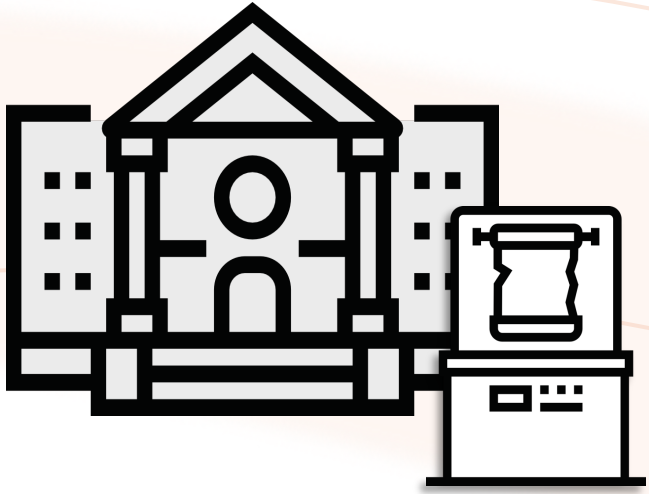
Self-identified members to US history organizations, Percent change between EOY 2019 and EOY 2025



For history organizations, the future of membership is not only **transactional**.

Your future is based in
CONNECTION.





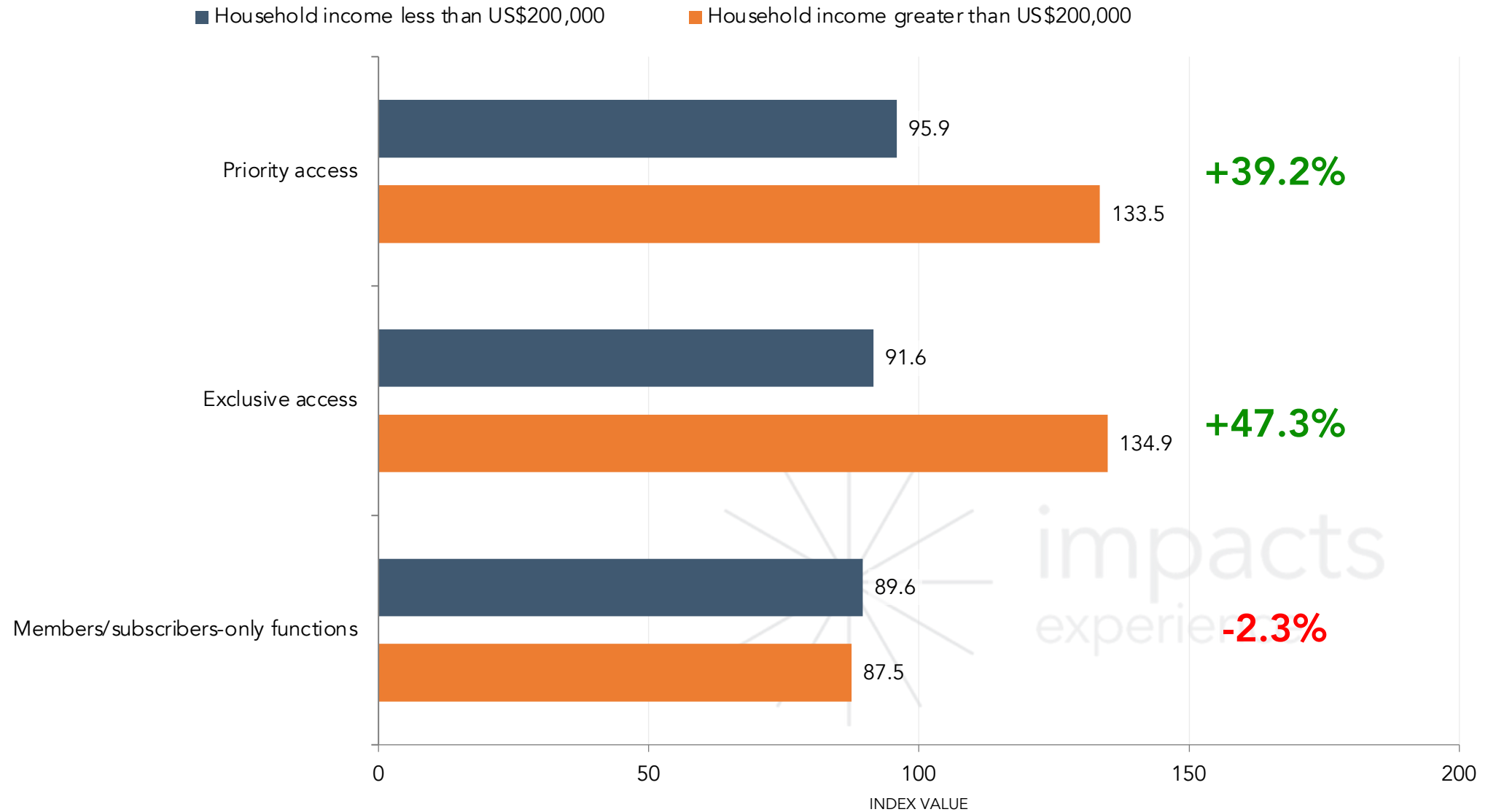
- **Exclusive access**
- **Priority access**

Experience-based
benefits

These benefits are particularly important to a **VALUABLE SUBSET** of members.

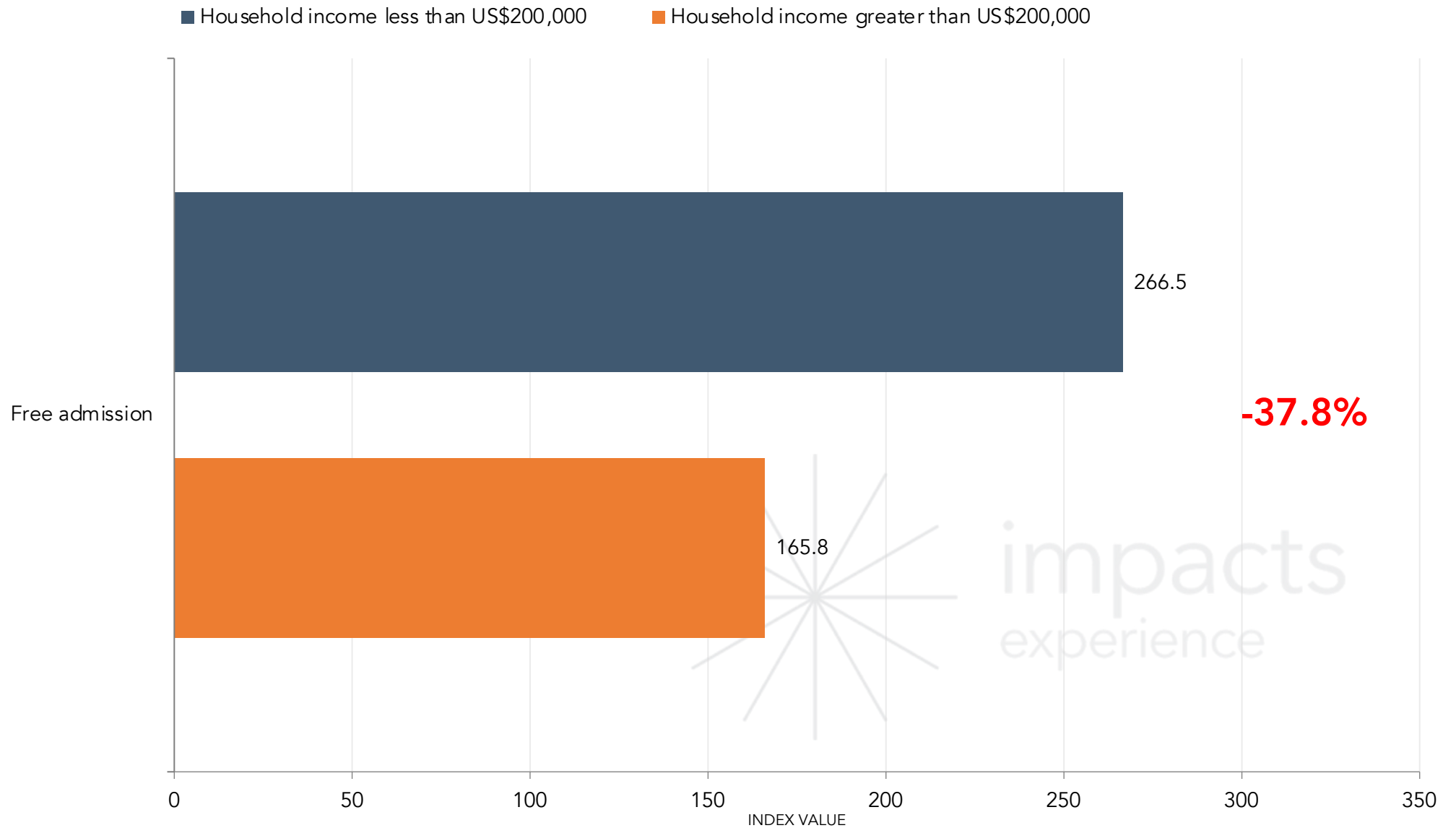
What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to US history organizations by annual household income, EOY 2025

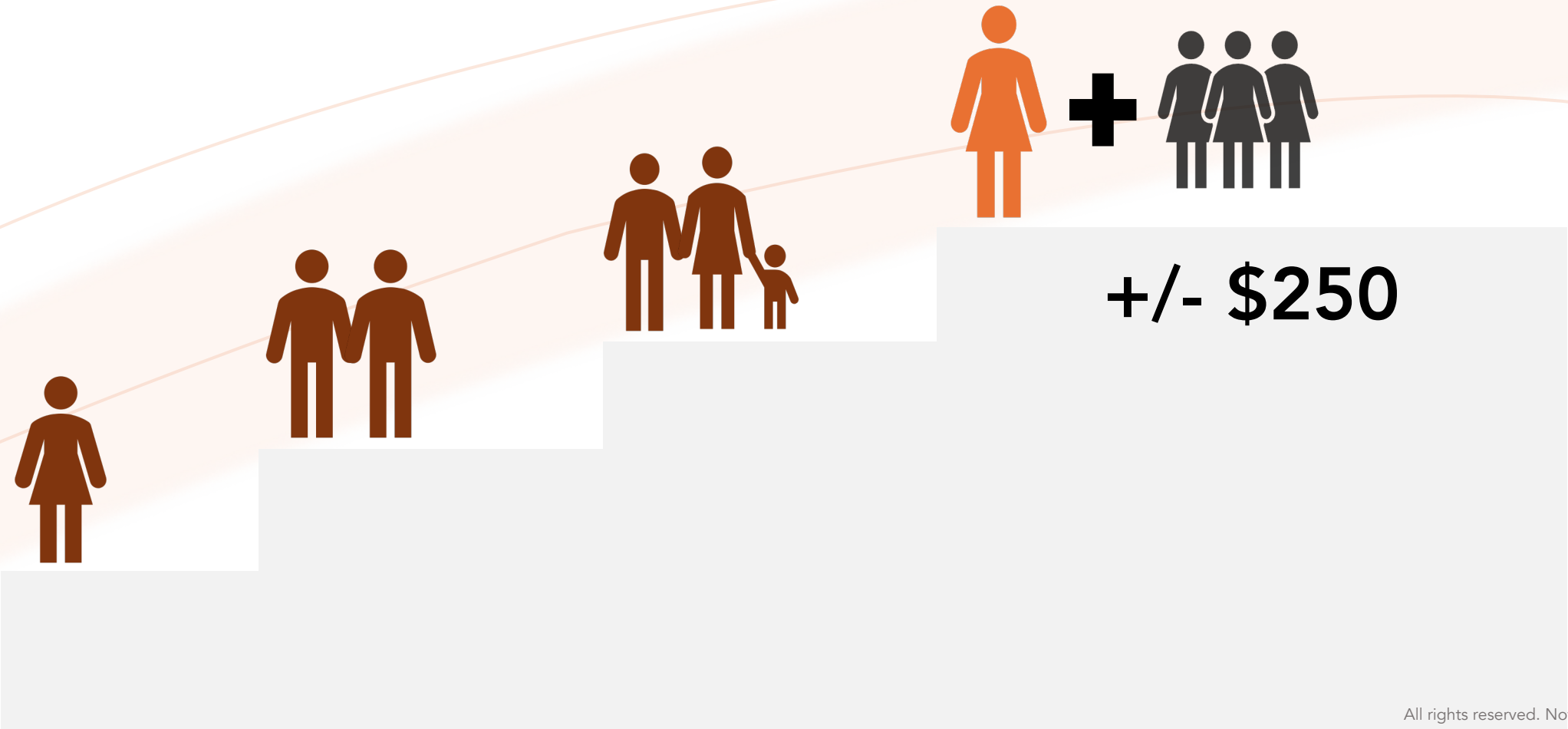


What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to US history organizations by annual household income, EOY 2025



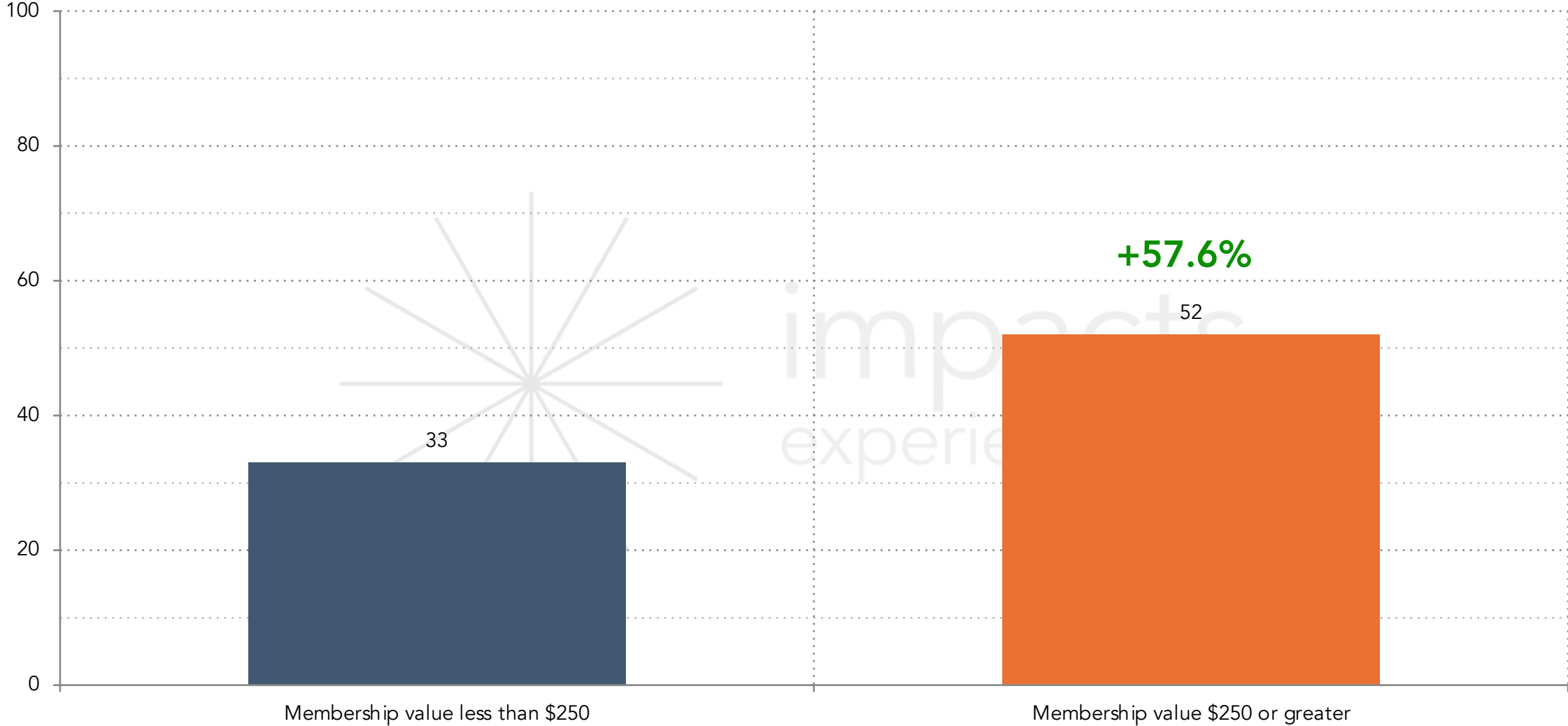
At what level does a **member** consider themselves to be primarily a **donor**?



Why are these members so
NOTEWORTHY?

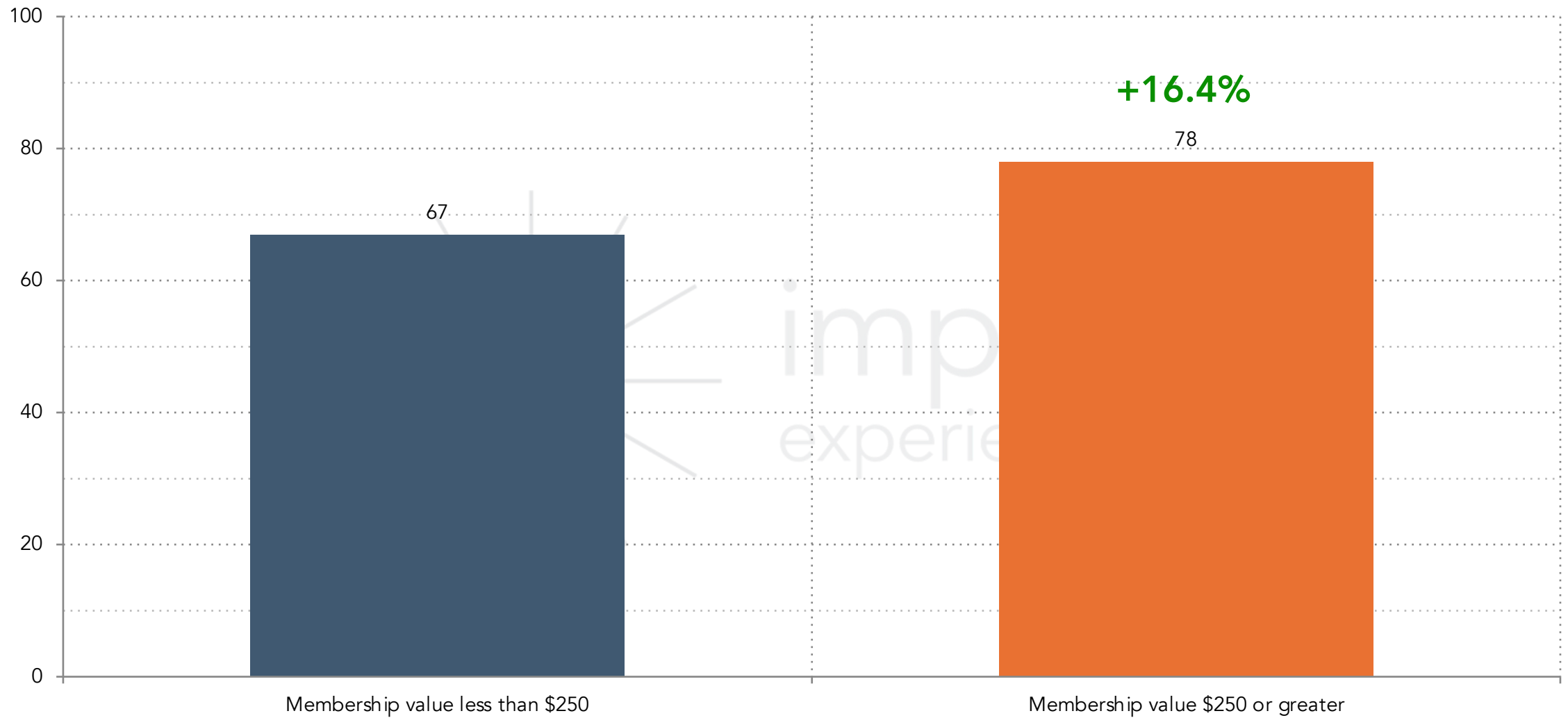
Propensity to **renew** by annual membership value

Self-identified US history member, EOY 2025



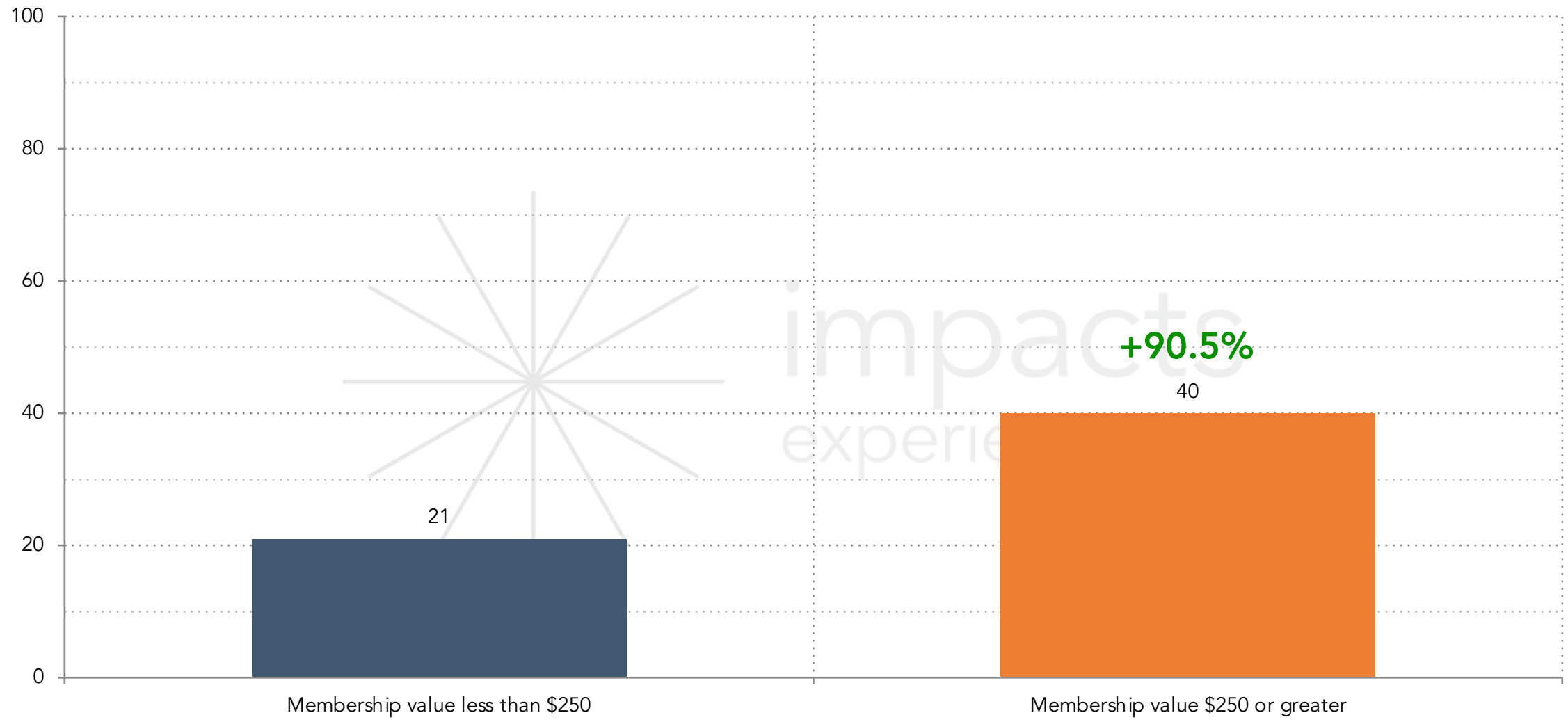
Propensity to endorse the museum by annual membership value

Self-identified US history member, EOY 2025



Propensity to **make an additional donation within one year** by annual membership value

Self-identified US history member, EOY 2025



TAKING DATA-INFORMED ACTION

Exclusive & priority access

- 1) Recognize that not all members/levels have the same motivations or level of expectations
- 2) Ease the pathway to philanthropic support
- 3) Are there enough benefits to encourage growth of your high-level membership base?
 - *Members-only hours, member lounges, etc. (exclusive access)*
 - *Member entrances, first access to tickets, etc. (priority access)*



- **Belonging to the organization**
- **Supporting the organization**

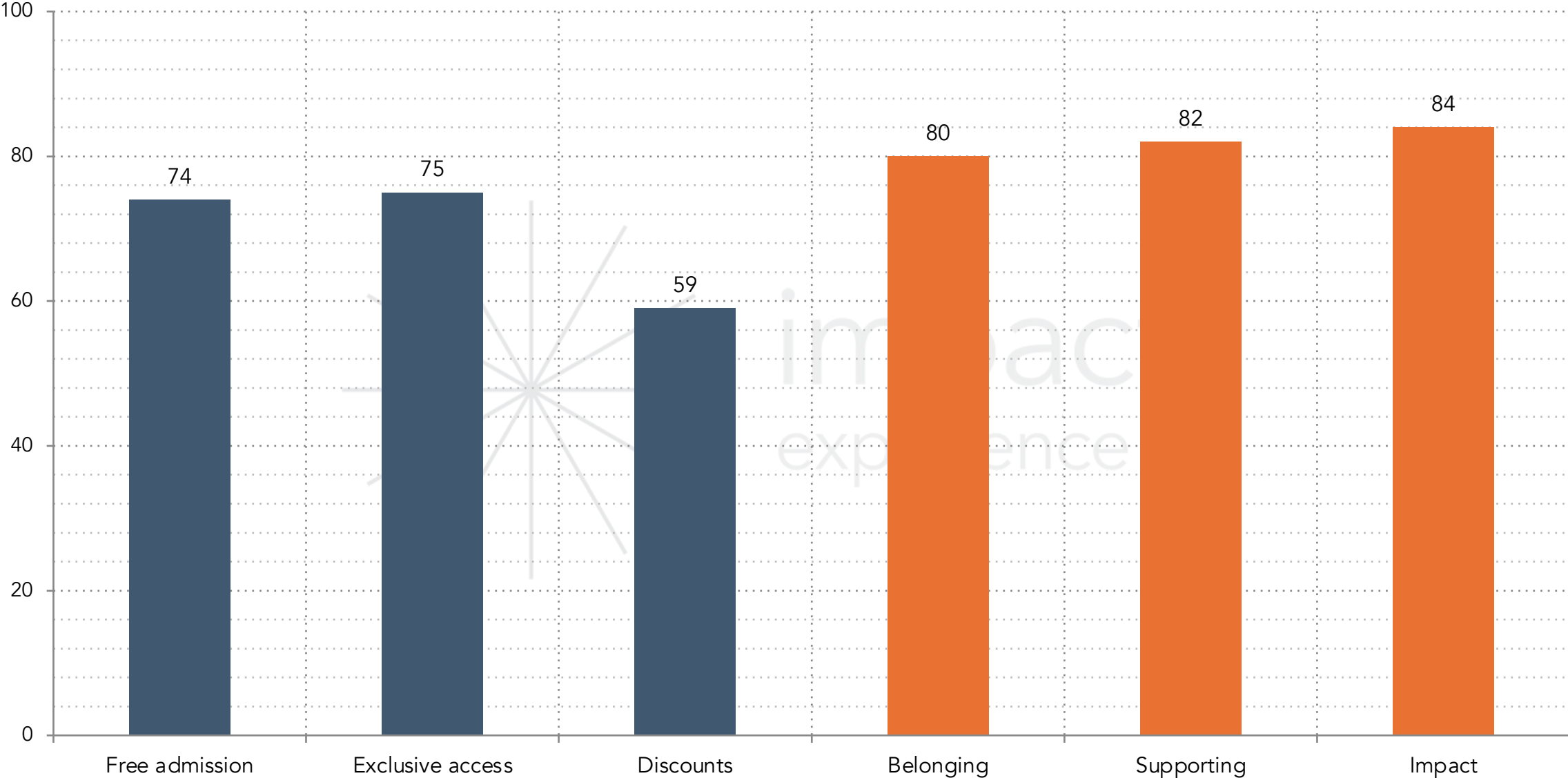
Mission-based benefits

MISSION-MOTIVATED MEMBERS
are among our most valuable.

Here's why.

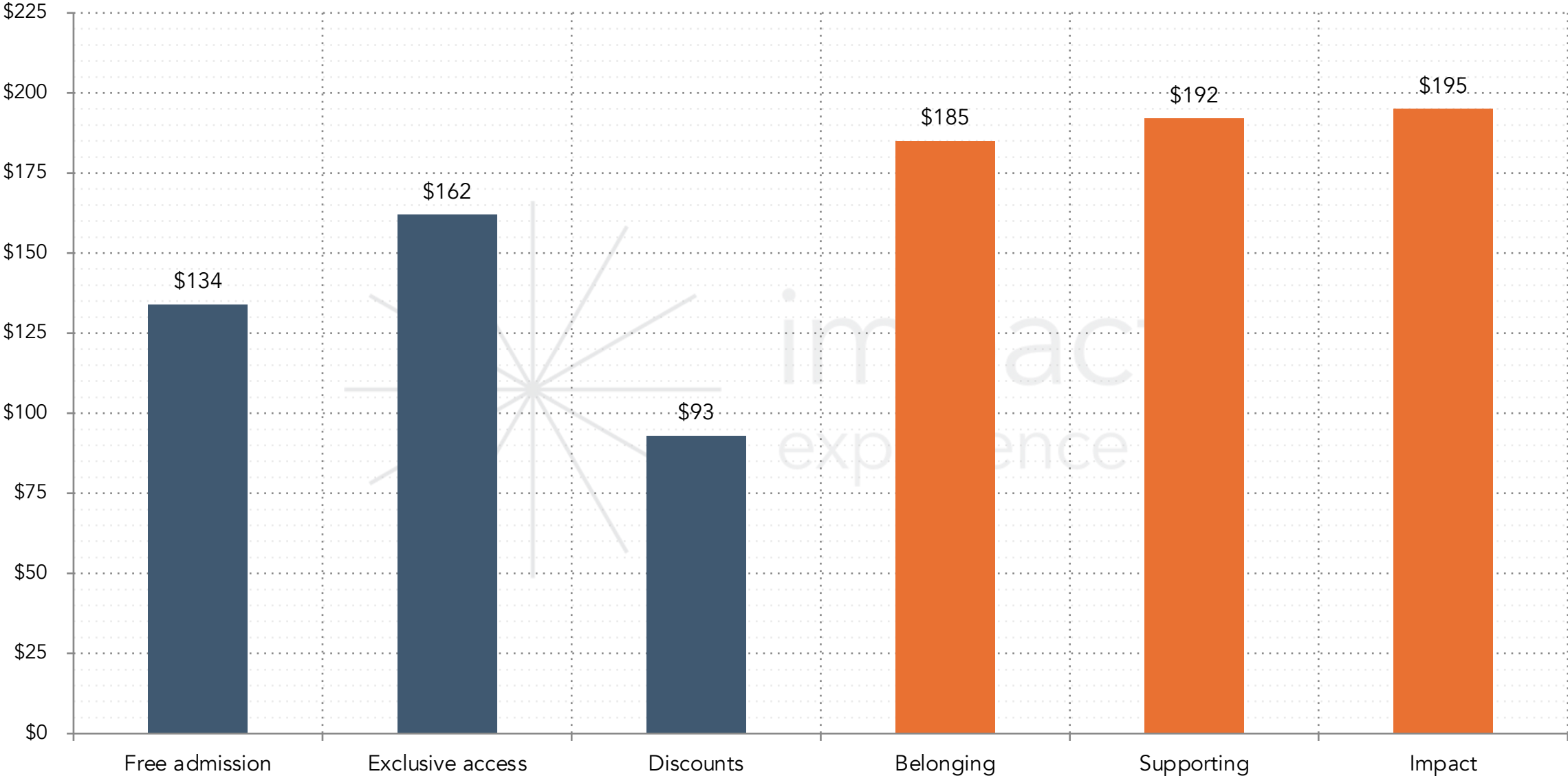
Value for membership cost by primary member benefit

Self-identified US history organization member, EOY 2025



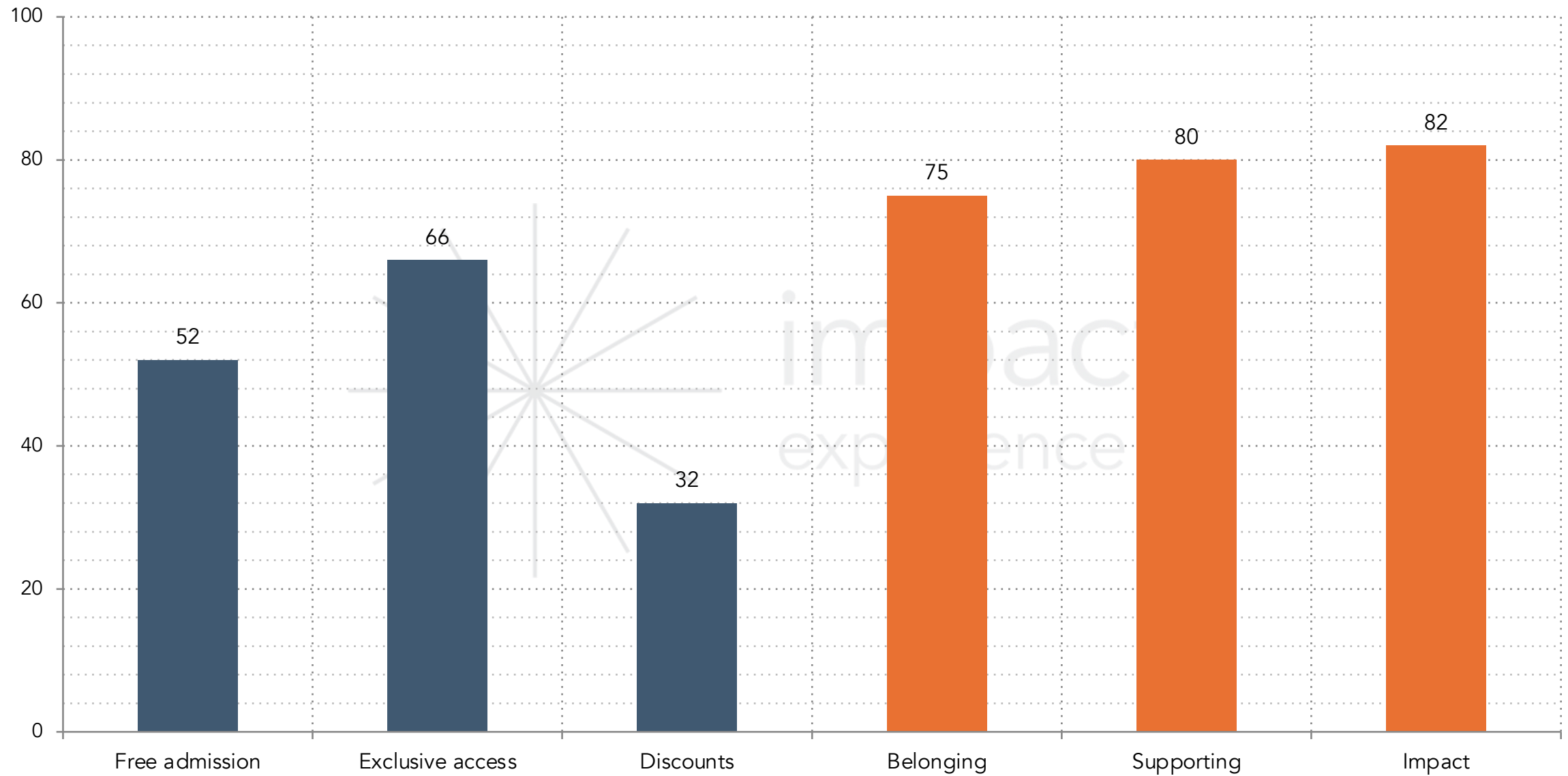
Average **annual membership cost** by primary member benefit

Self-identified US history organization member, EOY 2025



Propensity to renew by primary member benefit

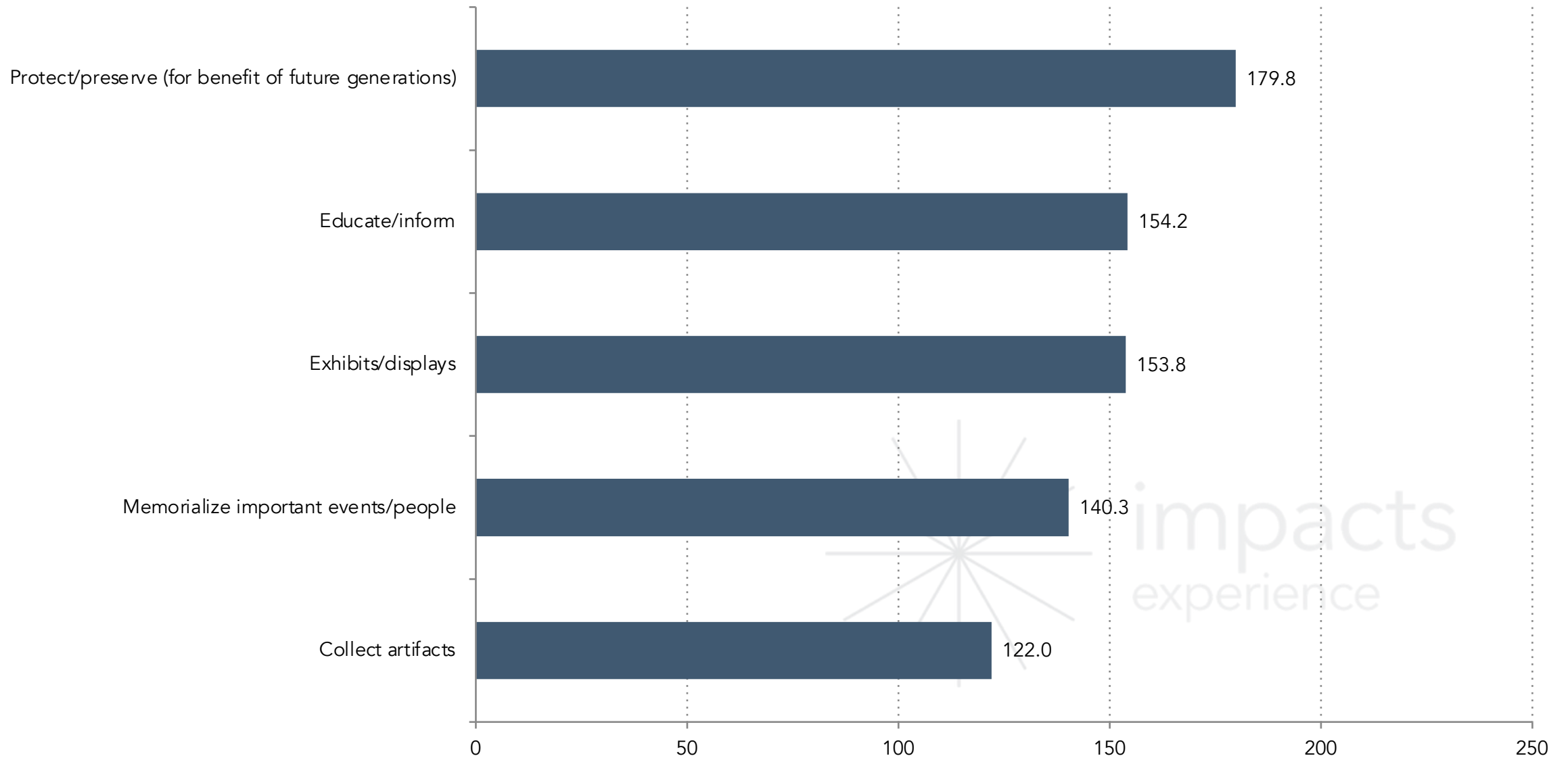
Self-identified US history organization member, EOY 2025



What **MEANINGFUL ACHIEVEMENTS**
do people associate with history organizations?

What meaningful actions or achievements do you associate with the [HISTORY ORGANIZATION]?

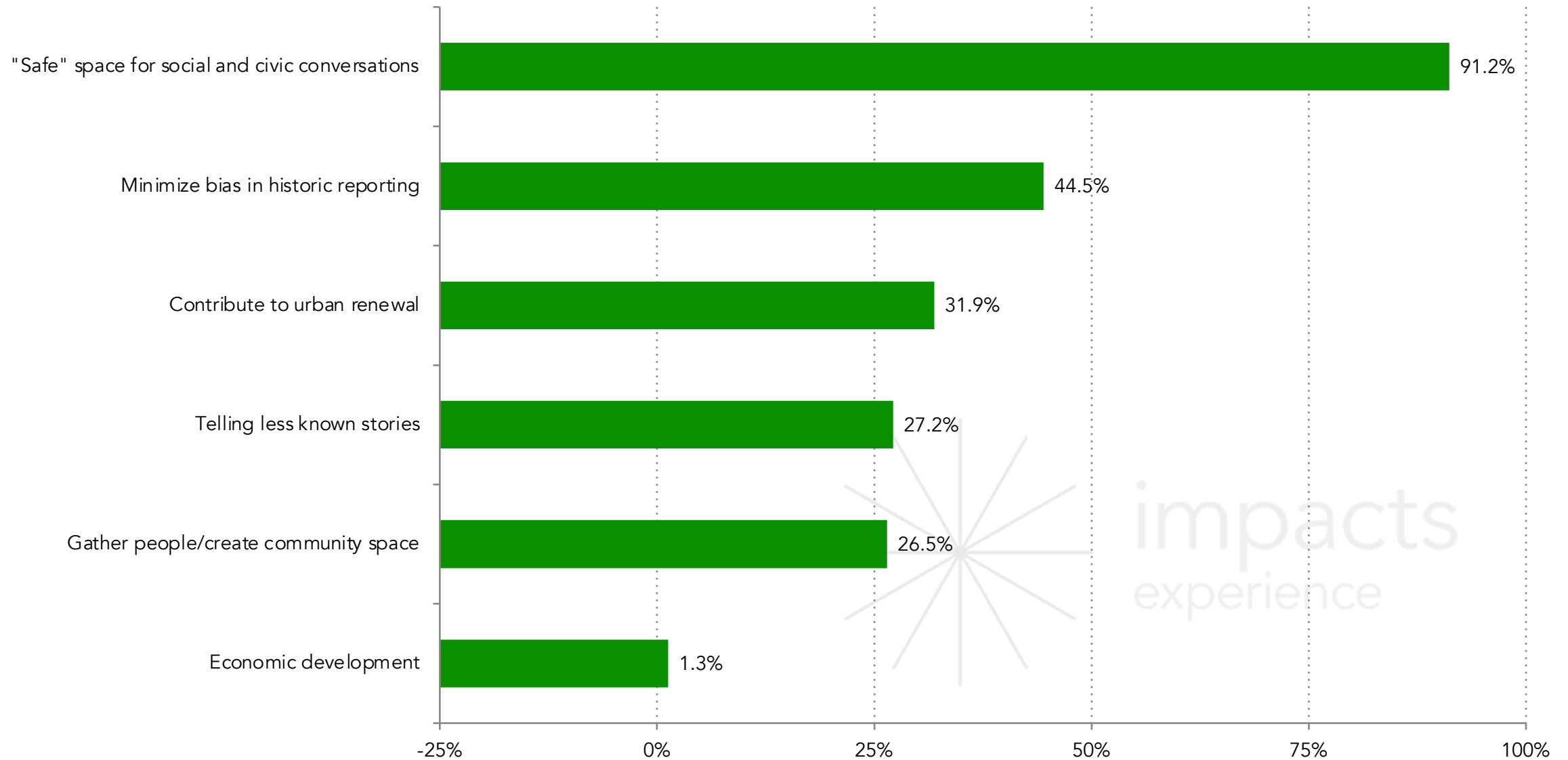
EOY 2025



Which **MEANINGFUL ACHIEVEMENTS**
have grown the most over the last three years?

What meaningful actions or achievements do you associate with the [HISTORY ORGANIZATION]?

Percent growth since 2023



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SAFE SPACE FOR SOCIAL AND CIVIC CONVERSATIONS:

Creating a **trusted place** to engage in **difficult topics respectfully** using civil discourse with clear norms (respectful, fact-based), and the ability to **hear multiple perspectives** without pressure or judgement.

What are the three best things that you can do to support the mission of the ... ?

US exhibit-based organization high-propensity visitors, Lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention

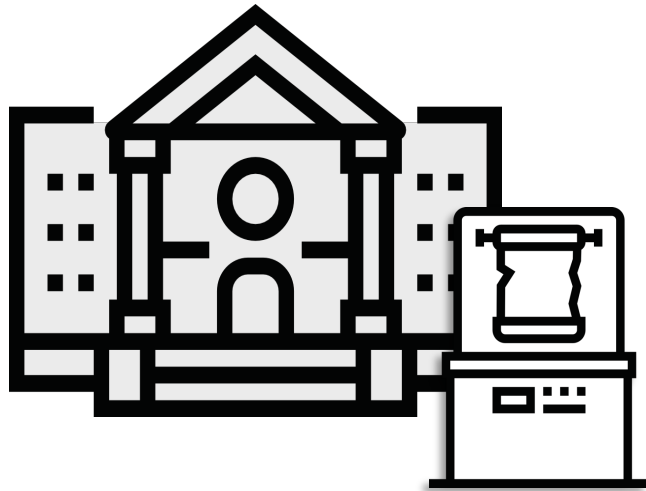
RANK	DESCRIPTION	EOY 2019 VALUE	EOY 2025 VALUE	PERCENT CHANGE
1	Join the organization/become a member	147.5	176.9	+19.9%
2	Donate to the organization	147.1	148.7	+1.1%
3	Buy a ticket to the organization	142.8	134.3	-6.0%

TAKING DATA-INFORMED ACTION

Belonging and supporting the organization's mission

- 1) Get clear on how you “show up” for your mission.
- 2) Highlight your mission as a top benefit of membership.
- 3) Thank members for supporting your mission and remind them of your *(and their)* ongoing impact.

Connection to your history organization's...

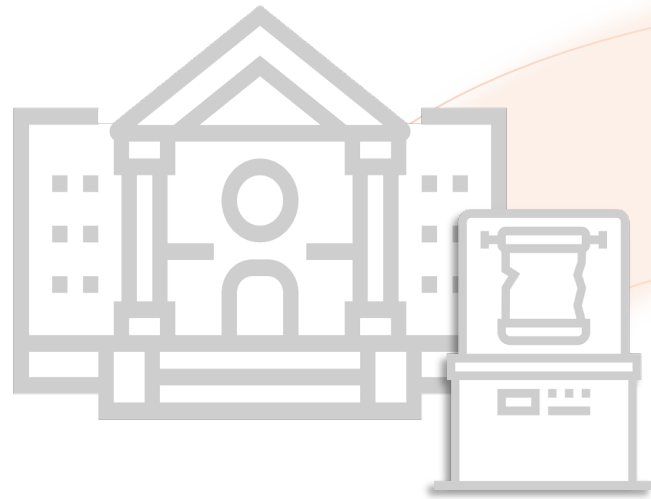


EXPERIENCES

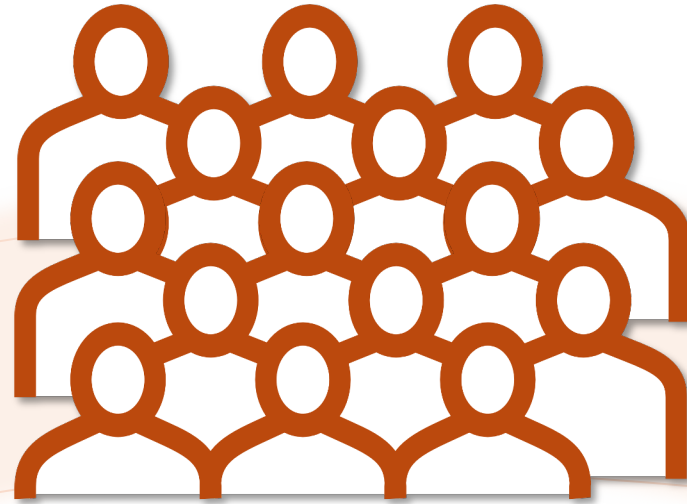
How can we
connect these?



MISSION



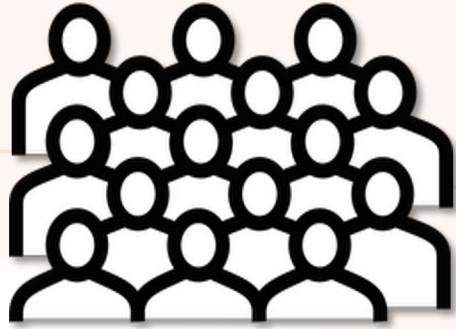
EXPERIENCES



PEOPLE
and
MEANING



MISSION



- **Reduced/free admission for member guests**
- **Joining a community (like-minded people)**
- **Access to leadership**
- **Access to topic experts (staff)**

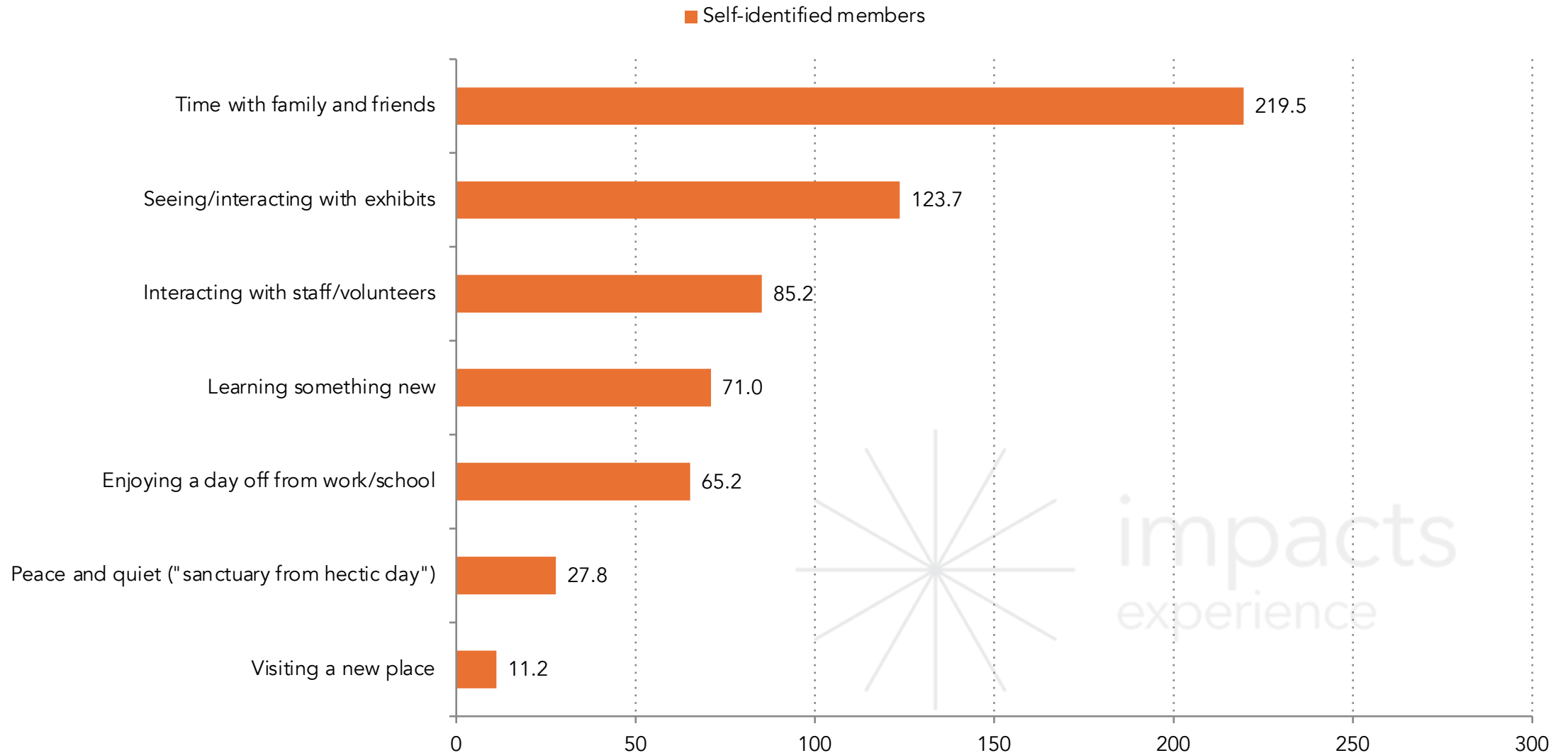
These benefits
are about
CONNECTING
to **EACH OTHER.**





What is the best thing about a visit to the museum?

Recent adult visitors to a history organization, EOY 2025, Members vs. non-members



You are facilitators of
SHARED EXPERIENCES.



What is the best thing about a visit to the museum?

Recent adult visitors to a history organization, EOY 2025, Members vs. non-members



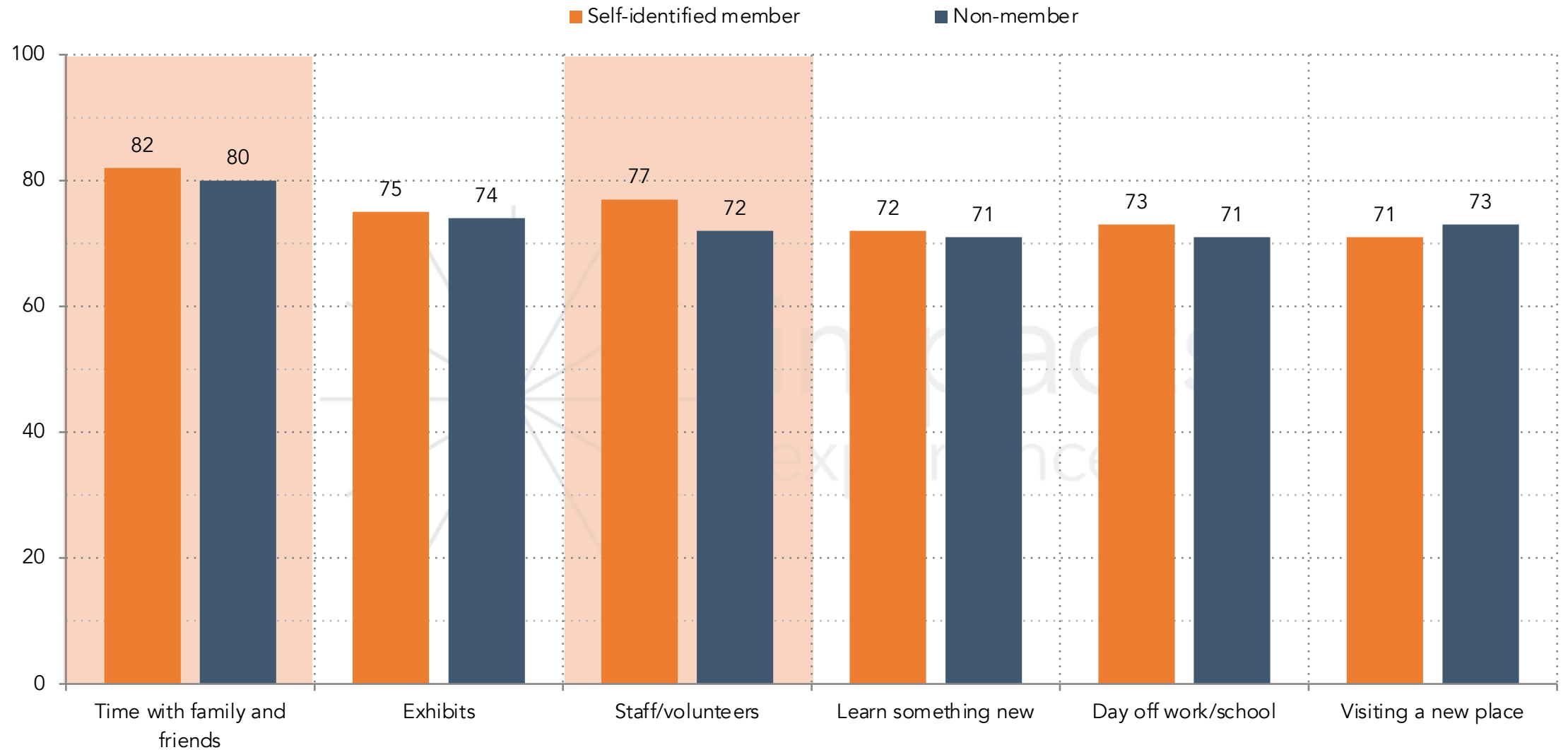
It's not only interactions between friends and family that matter.

It's also

INTERACTIONS WITH YOU.

Overall **satisfaction** by best visit attribute

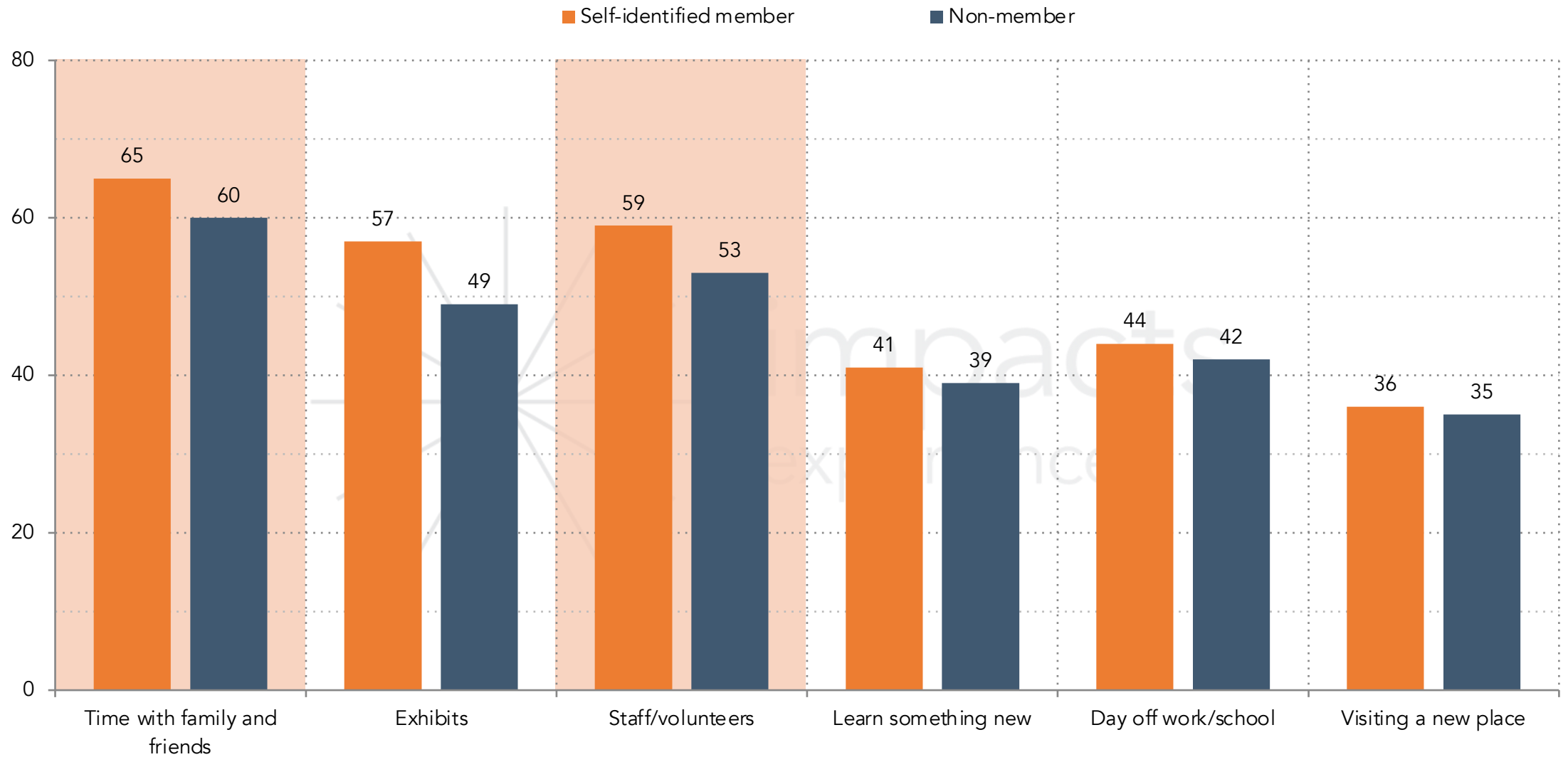
Recent adult visitors to a US history organization, EOY 2025



"THE BEST THING ABOUT A VISIT"

Intent to revisit within one year by best visit attribute

Recent adult visitors to a US history organization, EOY 2025



"THE BEST THING ABOUT A VISIT"

You don't only tell stories.

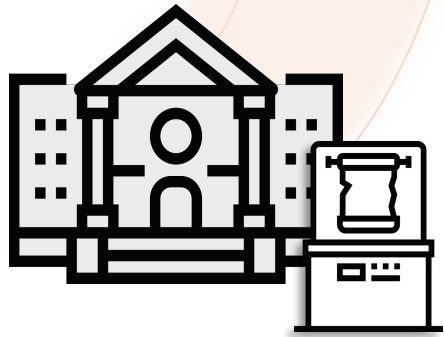
YOU MAKE STORIES.



You are facilitators of
SHARED EXPERIENCES.

And members want you to help
them **CONNECT** with others
around your important work.





The top growing membership benefits center around
CONNECTION
and **BELONGING.**

TAKING DATA-INFORMED ACTION

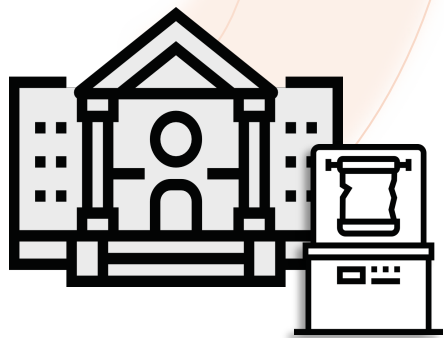
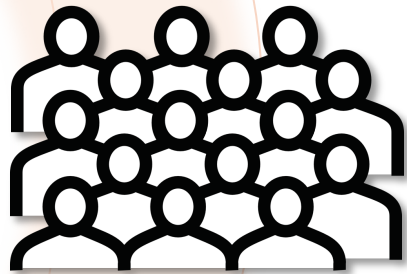
Access to leadership / topic experts; admission for member guests; joining community

- 1) Facilitate shared experiences.
 - Provide connection opportunities in exhibits and programs.
 - Assess when to stand back and when to interact.
- 2) Train **everyone** to be an advocate for your mission and onsite connection.
- 3) Highlight staff expertise.
- 4) Know your superpower: making stories.



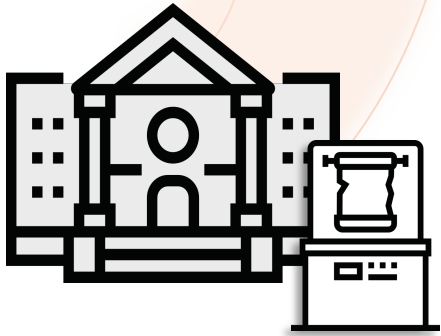




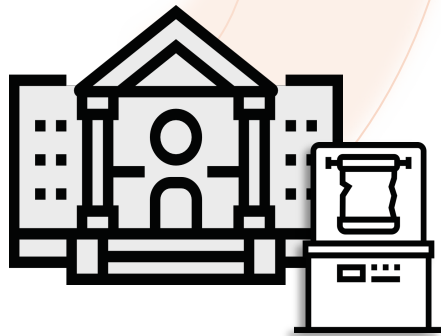


You are MAKING HISTORY and writing it.

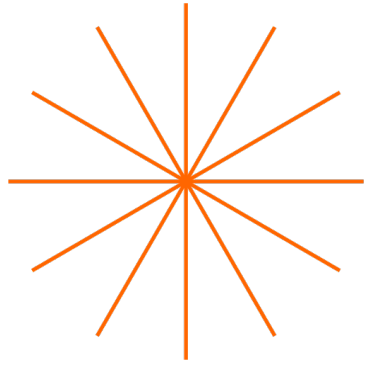
And **PEOPLE** are at
the center of this.



MEMBERS are at
the center of this.



YOU are at
the center of this.



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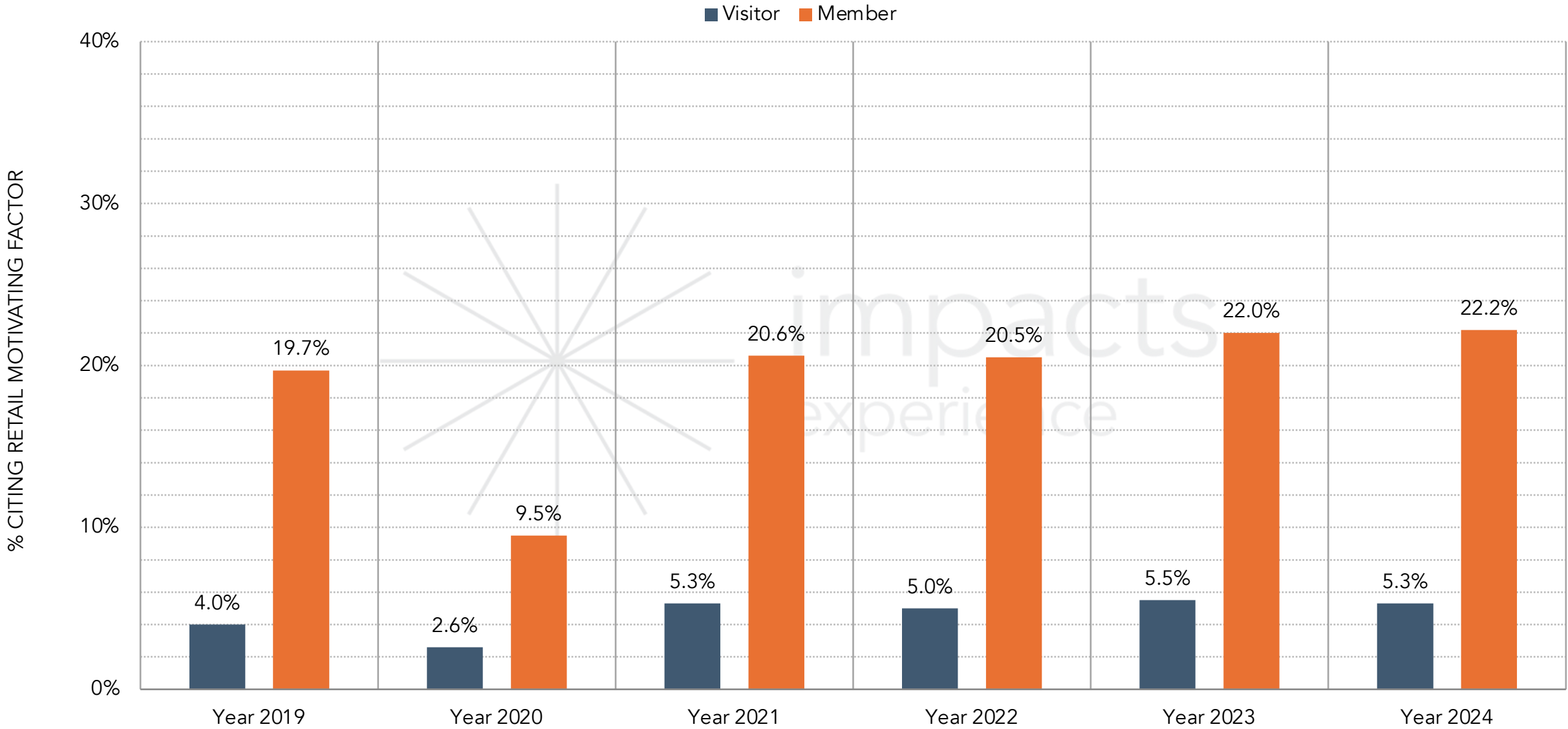
Connect with us!

INQUIRIES:

Michelle Sills | Administrative Coordinator
msills@impacts-experience.com

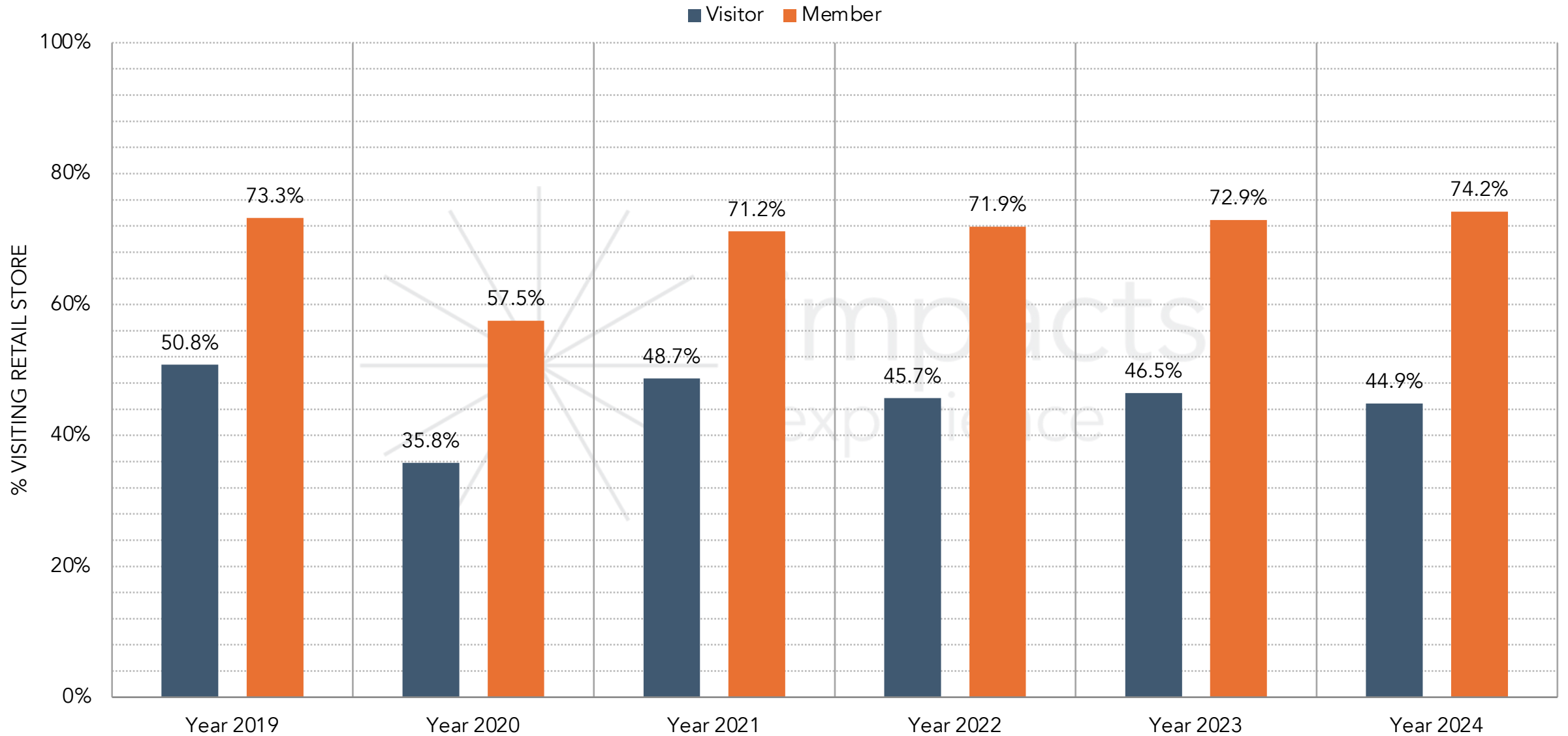
Museum retail motivates member visitation

Respondents citing retail-related factors motivating most recent visit
16 US visitor-serving cultural organizations



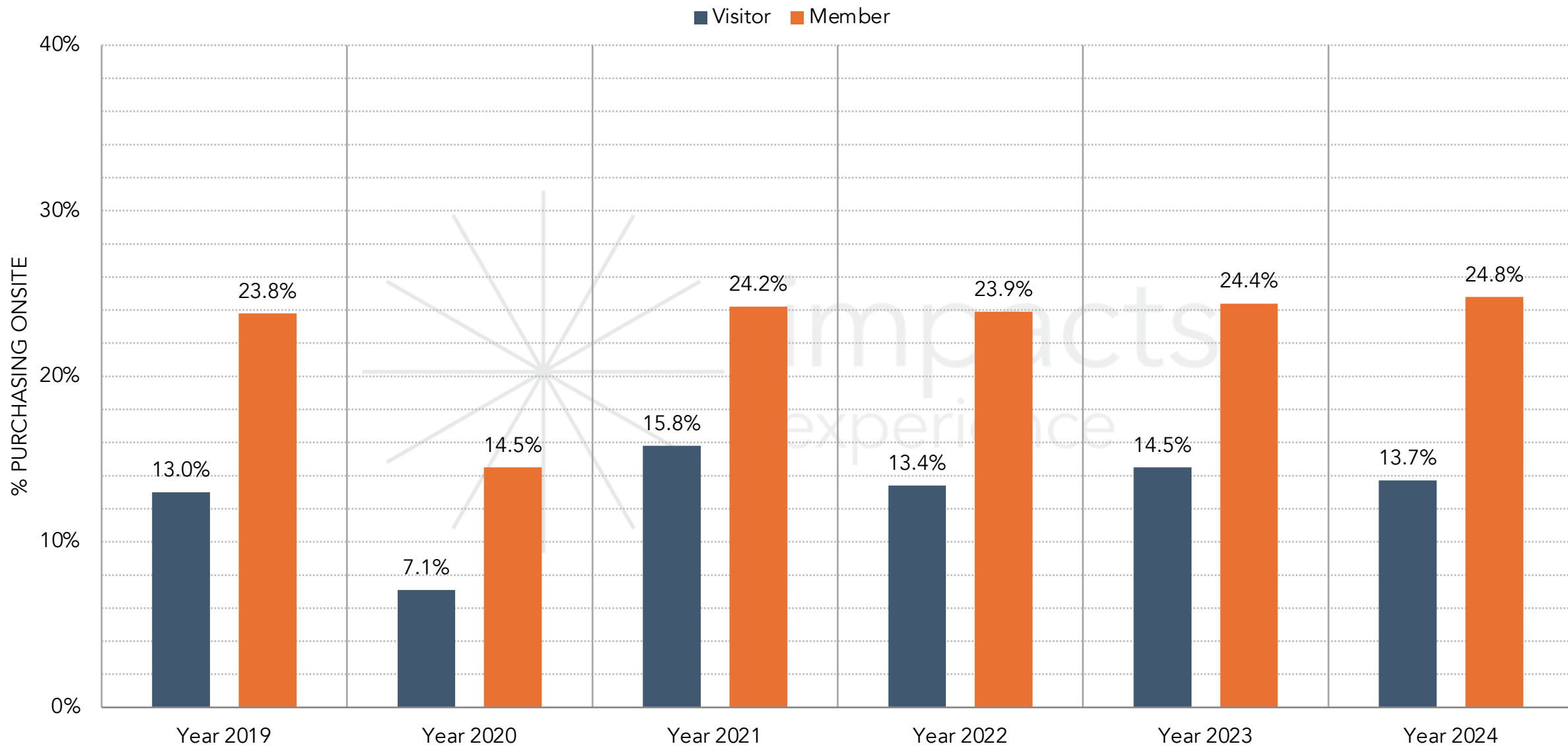
Museum members visit the museum store

Most recent visit onsite usage, 16 US visitor-serving cultural organizations



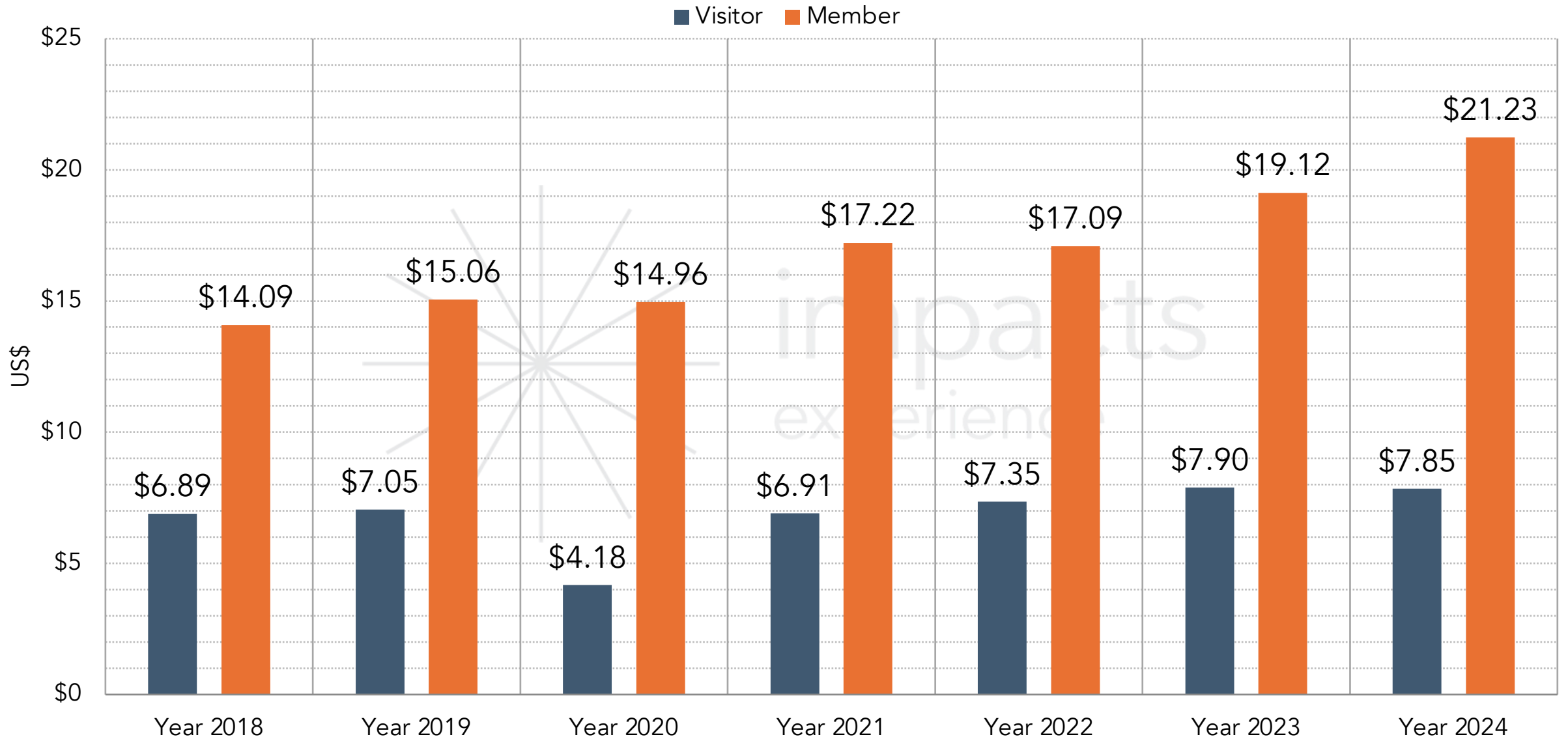
Museum members are more likely to make retail purchases

Most recent visit retail purchase, 16 US visitor-serving cultural organizations



Members spend more per transaction at museum stores

Per transaction onsite spending, 16 US visitor-serving cultural organizations



“What are the best things about the [museum retail experience]?”

Lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention
81 cultural organizations with retail stores, Q1 2024

RANK	DESCRIPTION	INDEX
1	Unique merchandise (only available at location)	229.8
2	Supporting the organization	125.6
3	Finding gifts for friends/family (adult)	118.5
4	Finding gifts for child	102.6
5	Friendly/helpful staff	101.9

Factors that comprise retail satisfaction

81 US cultural organizations with retail stores, EOY 2023

CONTRIBUTORY FACTOR	WEIGHTED VALUE
Design elements/aesthetic of the physical space ("atmosphere")	30.78%
Quality/uniqueness of merchandise	19.67%
Friendly/welcoming staff	9.87%
Clean/organized ("tidy")	6.32%
Sufficient staff ("no wait to pay" and "easy to find help")	6.01%
Ample space ("room to move" and "not crowded")	5.02%
Well-lit ("bright")	4.35%
Knowledgeable staff	4.02%
Availability/inventory of merchandise (not being "out" of item)	3.61%
Good value ("fair prices")	3.50%
Layout/wayfinding	3.48%
Sales and discounts ("deals" and "bargains")	2.35%
Ability to test/trial	1.02%
TOTAL	100.00%

What was the primary purpose of your visit to the ... store?

Lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention, Q1 2024

RANK	DESCRIPTION	VALUE
1	Browse (no purchase made)	216.0
2	Souvenir/keepsake	183.4
3	Personal purchase (purchase for self)	171.6
4	Purchase gift for adult	147.9
5	Purchase for family member	130.2
6	Holiday shopping	124.3
7	Based on recommendation from friend/family member	118.3
8	Purchase gift for child	115.4
9	Personal brand (show support, including branded merchandise)	97.6
10	Support the organization	91.7
11	Learn/see what is new/novel (merchandise)	47.3
12	Buy raincoat/umbrella (inclement weather purchase)	41.4
13	Visit/see favorite staff member/volunteer	35.5
14	Sign up for membership (join as retail transaction)	29.6
15	Buy guidebook	26.6
16	Sign up for program/event (enroll, purchase)	20.7