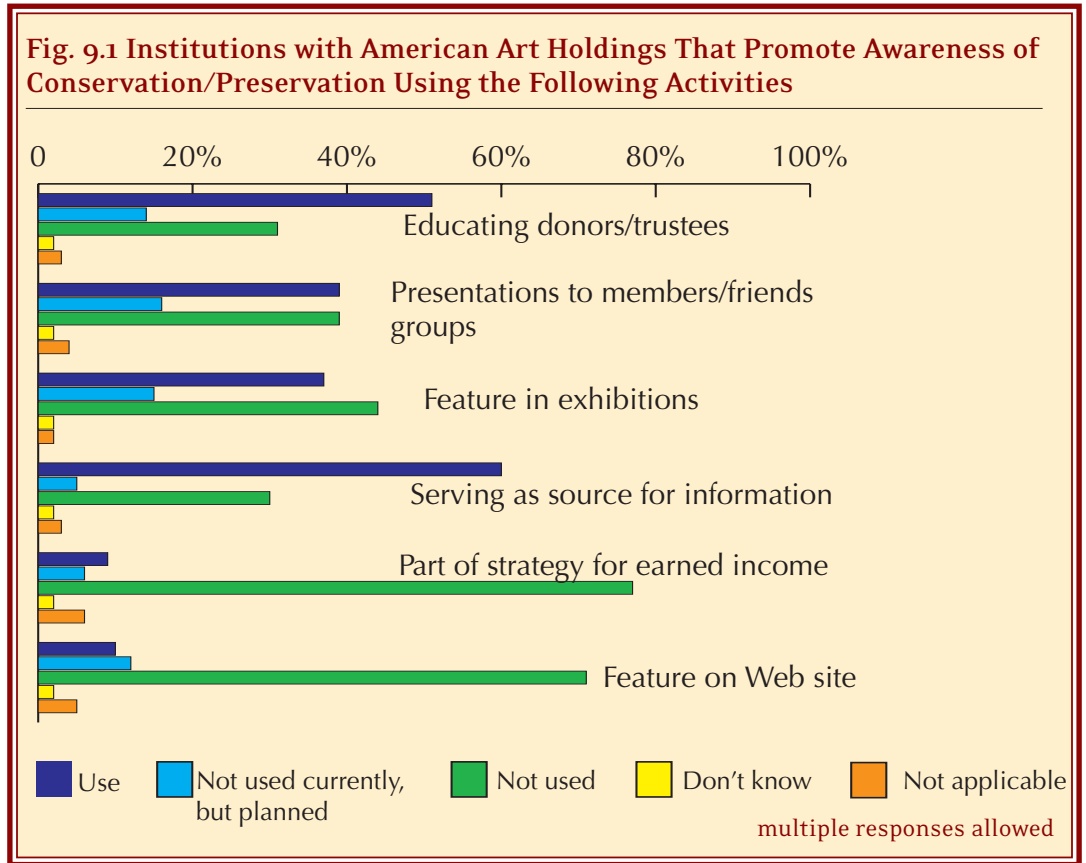


Chapter 9: Public Outreach

A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections emphasizes that collections care does not need to be a drain on institutional resources in order to be achieved. In fact, exposing the public to what conservation can do will help them connect to the institutions' collection, endear the museum's mission to them, and ideally provide a strong base of financial support. Conservation provides rich material for education programming, exhibitions, public events, and member benefits. Yet, institutions have not used conservation to its fullest benefit in attracting the public.

Fig. 9.1 Institutions with American Art Holdings That Promote Awareness of Conservation/Preservation Using the Following Activities



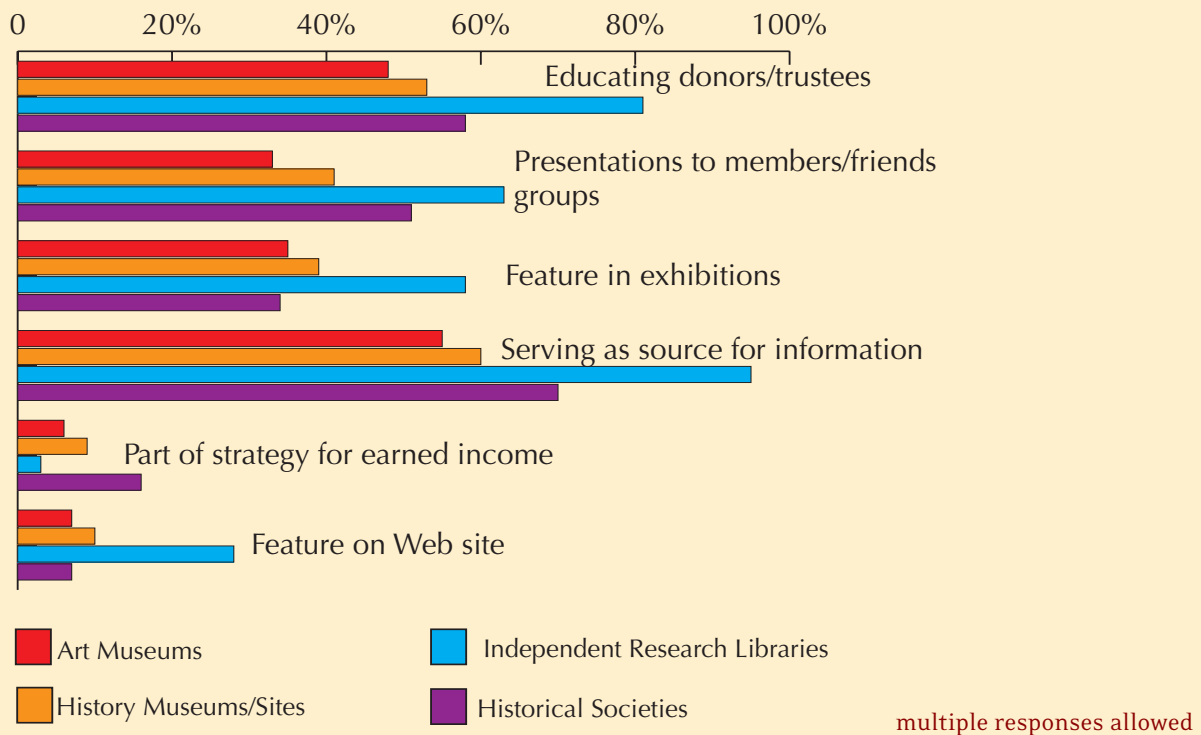
When asked how they were promoting awareness of conservation/preservation, most institutions

When people go behind the scenes, they gain a better appreciation of what collecting institutions do. The Brooklyn Museum's Luce Visible Storage Study Center has given the public the opportunity to see the breadth of the Brooklyn Museum's collection. Cases in the study center exhibit contemporary furniture by the likes of Isabelle Moore and Chris Lehrecke, Tiffany lamps and glass, and collections of colonial art from the Dutch and English settlements on the eastern seaboard, among other objects. Soon after the center opened, collections and conservation staff gave a special tour to upper level members, explaining the exhibit cases, object installation, and the importance of environmental controls. The museum has continued this practice of conducting member tours after the completion of various projects and has found it a useful way to impart to its members the necessity of funding for proper collections care.



A grouping of chairs from the Luce Center for American Art Visible Storage Study Center at the Brooklyn Museum gives visitors an indication of the breadth of the museum's collection.

Fig. 9.2 Institutions with the Largest Number of Art Holdings That Promote Awareness of Conservation/Preservation



said they provide conservation information (60%) and educate donors or trustees (51%) (figure 9.1). Fewer feature it in presentations to members or friends groups (39%) or in exhibitions (37%), and only 10% have spotlighted conserva-

tion on their institutional Web site.

Considering what institutions with the most art are doing, independent research libraries lead the way in promoting awareness of conservation/preservation, with 95% serving as a source

At the newly re-opened Smithsonian Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture, visitors experience the Lunder Conservation Center, offering a behind-the-scenes view of how art is conserved. A floor-to-ceiling glass wall allows visitors to watch conservation treatments taking place, and educational programs provide explanations of various treatment tools and techniques. Gallery observers have frequently overheard visitors remark on how incredible and informative the conservation center is. When the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery—the museums that make up the center—conducted focus groups to gauge the interests of the public, a visit to a conservation laboratory was the highest-rated attraction. The center's new Web site features videos about conservation in general and photographs and videos of objects being treated by museum conservators.

The Lunder Conservation Center at the Smithsonian Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art allows visitors to observe conservators at work.



for preservation information, 81% involved in educating donors and trustees, and 63% including preservation in presentations to members or friends groups (figure 9.2). Historical societies are next most likely to be engaged in these activities, followed by history museums and then art museums. Large institutions are more likely to be involved in these kinds of activities, but medium and small institutions do not tend to lag much behind them.

With some mainstream attention to preservation issues through television programs like the PBS's Antiques Roadshow and History Detectives and hobbies such as scrapbooking and genealogy, collecting institutions have a potential market for archivally safe materials or conservation workshops. However, overall only 9% use preservation as part of their strategy for earned

income, though the figure is 16% at historical societies.

The American art committee provided examples of how they are integrating conservation into public outreach activities of their institutions. At the Brooklyn Museum, conservation is incorporated into exhibits, such as detailing aspects of the object's materials and lifespan. SFMOMA is one of many institutions that are now offering behind-the-scenes tours of installations and storage as a perk for major donors. They report that the staff time on such tours is well spent because it is such an effective donor cultivation tool. Seeing how conservation fits into the institution's missions of education and development has also raised other staff members' appreciation of the department. ♦

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