

An Evaluation Report

**ARTS FOR NEXGEN:  
LACMA'S FREE  
YOUTH MEMBERSHIP  
PROGRAM**

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## FOREWORD

Museums across the country are grappling with how to make themselves more accessible to children and families. With histories steeped in elitism, academia, and privilege, how can museums and their collections be relevant in today's world of diverse voices and experiences? How can museums transform themselves into institutions that are welcoming for all people and offer opportunities for different ways of learning?

In response to the need to better serve children and families, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) took a bold step in April 2003 and implemented a free youth membership program: Arts for NexGen LACMA.

## PROGRAM HISTORY

Initiated as a multi-departmental collaboration between Education, Membership, and Marketing, this unique membership program aimed to make the museum accessible to children and families and to foster a sense of connection with the institution. By offering a no-cost membership to everyone age 17 and under, the financial barrier of visiting the museum was eliminated, opening the doors to a more diverse socioeconomic community. By offering free general admission for one adult family member (or caregiver, friend, neighbor, etc.) per each NexGen member, museum entry expanded to include a family unit. And by offering, under the umbrella of NexGen, free or low-cost programs that valued the needs of children and families while focusing on making personal connections to art, attitudes about the museum and the museum experience changed.

**SINCE 2003, OVER  
130,000 CHILDREN  
HAVE JOINED  
NEXGEN.**





SINCE NEXGEN'S LAUNCH IN 2003, OVER 111,000 PEOPLE HAVE ATTENDED THE FAMILY SUNDAYS PROGRAM.

## OVERVIEW OF NEXGEN PROGRAMS

NEXGEN PROGRAMS ARE DESIGNED TO ENABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO MAKE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEIR LIVES AND ART. THE PROGRAMS EMPHASIZE LOOKING AT, TALKING ABOUT, AND MAKING ART.

### Andell Family Sundays

NexGen's highest-profile program, Family Sundays, is considered a gateway for discovering the museum as a family-friendly destination. Collection-based activities for families with children age 12 and under include artist-led workshops, bilingual (Spanish/English) tours, and in-gallery sketching. An outreach component provides free transportation to school and community groups from low-income neighborhoods.

### **Boone Children's Gallery**

This free, participatory space features changing exhibitions or experimental installations. Visitors of all ages are invited to join drop-in art-making activities or explore hands-on interactives. The current focus of the Boone Children's Gallery is East Asian brush painting, as the space is located in the Korean art galleries. Inspired by the Korean art collection, families sit at communal tables to paint side by side, creating works of art to take home or hang in the gallery.

### **Target® Free Holiday Mondays**

Visitors of all ages are invited to a free day at the museum on selected federal holidays. The day also includes live music, tours, and self-guided activities. An outreach component provides free transportation to school and community groups from low-income neighborhoods.



*“At LACMA the visit is centered around a joint experience.”*

—NexGen parent



### **After Dark**

A teen-only evening event co-organized by LACMA's high school interns and the Education Department, this program presents the museum as a creative and social destination offering artist-led workshops, teen-led tours, exhibition viewing, and live music or deejays.

**NEARLY 3,000 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TEENS, FROM SIMI VALLEY TO SAN PEDRO, HAVE PARTICIPATED IN AFTER DARK. SOME TRAVEL OVER THIRTY MILES TO ATTEND THIS EVENT WITH THEIR FRIENDS.**

### **Weekend Art Classes and Art Camps**

Weekend Art Classes and seasonal Art Camps offer unique opportunities to learn about the museum's collection through studio projects, gallery discussions, and, most importantly, the viewing of artworks in the museum's galleries. Summer Art for teens includes a one-month portfolio-building class and weeklong workshops focusing on specific media. Scholarships are available for children and teens to participate in these fee-based programs.

## EVALUATION: MEASURING IMPACT

As part of the Education Department's ongoing interest in learning more about museum visitors, educators conducted an intensive evaluation to find out what kind of impact the free youth membership program is having on its members, how attitudes are changing about the museum experience, and what types of learning families are experiencing in NexGen education programs. This report shares insights into how LACMA measures the social and learning impact of Arts for NexGen. The evaluation process speaks to the depth of the museum's commitment to the children and family audiences it serves.

LACMA's educators worked over the course of a year, June 2009 through May 2010, with the independent consultant and researcher Susy Watts to measure and evaluate NexGen's effectiveness. The educators chose a participatory evaluation method called "Theory of Change." The nature of this method allowed education staff to respond to

areas of needed improvement by adjusting the program goals and teaching practice during the evaluation period rather than waiting for the results to be analyzed. Education staff and gallery educators informed and participated in research throughout the course of the project.

**WITH AN INCREASED FAMILY PRESENCE AT THE MUSEUM, EDUCATORS INITIATED A QUARTERLY PROGRAM TO TRAIN THE SECURITY STAFF ON HOW BEST TO HELP FAMILIES AT THE MUSEUM.**



**86% OF THE FAMILIES CAME TO MAKE ART.  
71% OF THE FAMILIES LOOKED AT ART IN ADDITION TO  
MAKING ART.**

**50% OF THE FAMILIES INTERVIEWED HAD ATTENDED  
A FAMILY PROGRAM MORE THAN FIVE TIMES.  
30% OF THE FAMILIES WERE ATTENDING FOR THEIR  
FIRST TIME.**

## EVALUATION COMPONENTS

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach that included family interviews, member surveys, a family journal project, and gallery educator training and assessment. Throughout the evaluation process the learning and social goals of NexGen were refined and articulated.

### Family Interviews

Through family interviews, museum educators were able to hear from both parents and children about their museum experiences and ask follow-up questions to dig deeper into families' responses.

Families were randomly chosen in the outdoor plaza area of the museum and in the Boone Children's Gallery. Families were prompted to share their first as well as recent experiences with Andell Family Sundays. Special attention was focused on the balance families were striking between looking at, talking about, and making art.



**INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED ON FOUR SEPARATE OCCASIONS. FAMILIES HAD MORE TO SAY THE LONGER THEY HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN NEXGEN.**

### **Family Interview Findings**

- Families value both art-making workshops and bilingual family gallery tours.
- Families were first inspired to come to the museum for a variety of reasons (there were no strong trends).
- Once families attended a family program, they tended to repeat the experience because of their previous positive associations with the event.
- The majority of families feel that LACMA's family programs are different and more positive than other family experiences. All families interviewed spoke positively about their museum family experiences.
- Families said the greatest benefits of being a NexGen member were: 1) free museum access; 2) getting close to the art; and 3) working together as a family.

*“I think it started when I was a baby, 1 or 2. We’ve come a lot.”*

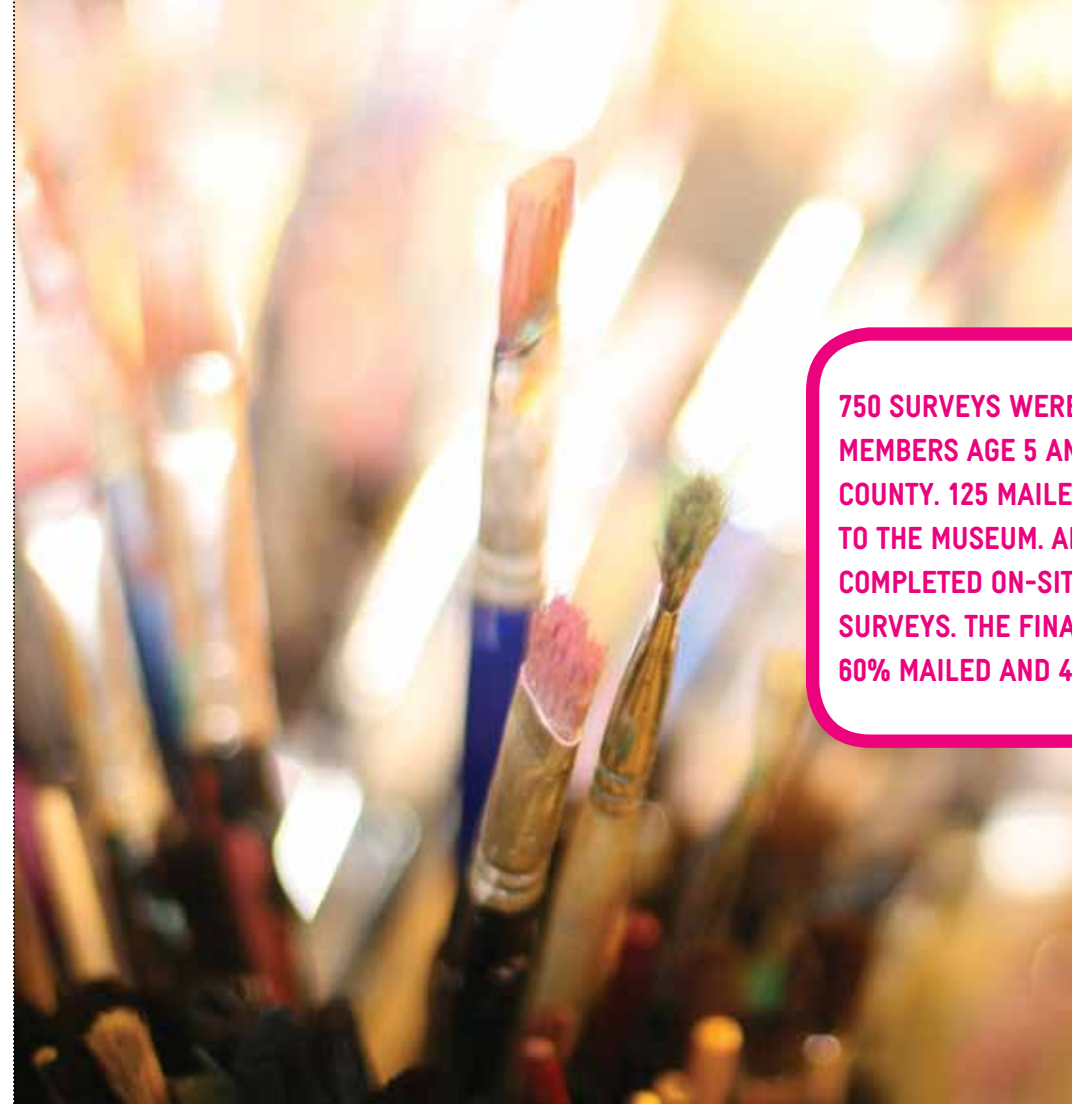
—11-year-old NexGen member

## Member Surveys

To deepen the museum's understandings about NexGen membership, children were asked to complete a written questionnaire. The bilingual (Spanish/English) multiple-choice survey asked members to share how they use their membership, what they feel the best part of being a NexGen member is, what they like best about LACMA, and what art-related activities they participate in. They were also asked to elaborate on their NexGen experience using their own words.

*"I love LACMA: my favorite museum of all time. I brought my family after going with friends. They loved it too."*

—17-year-old NexGen member



**750 SURVEYS WERE MAILED TO ARTS FOR NEXGEN MEMBERS AGE 5 AND UP LIVING IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY. 125 MAILED SURVEYS (17%) WERE RETURNED TO THE MUSEUM. AN ADDITIONAL 83 SURVEYS WERE COMPLETED ON-SITE FOR A TOTAL SAMPLE OF 208 SURVEYS. THE FINAL SURVEY TALLY REPRESENTED 60% MAILED AND 40% SITE-BASED RETURNS.**

## Member Survey Findings

- Arts for NexGen members confirm that their memberships are serving the primary goal of family programs: to look at, talk about, and make art.
- NexGen members attest that they engage with art in significant ways while at the museum.
- Socially, families come to the museum because it is a valued family resource.
- Families note the opportunity to come to the museum as a family unit as one of the greatest values of membership.
- NexGen members bring friends and neighbors to the museum, and those friends and neighbors often become members as well.

*“The best time to spend family time with my family.”*

—10-year-old NexGen member





**SURVEY RESPONDENTS VALUED LACMA AS A MUSEUM—EVEN CHILDREN AT RELATIVELY YOUNG AGES NOTED THE QUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE ART ITSELF. A NOTEWORTHY NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS MENTIONED THE BOONE CHILDREN'S GALLERY AS A VALUE-ADDED EXPERIENCE AND THE BREADTH OF ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE AT THE MUSEUM, INCLUDING MUSIC AND DANCE AS WELL AS ART-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES.**

*“We love this program! It’s a wonderful way for us to share our excitement about art with our son. He enjoys it too, and we look forward to many years of coming here.”*

—NexGen parent

### Family Journal Project

Four NexGen families were selected to participate in a family journal project. Through this evaluation component the educators were able to learn more in depth about the ways NexGen families think about LACMA, participate in the museum, place value on family activities, and experience the benefits of their memberships. Three of the families had relatively long personal and NexGen membership histories with the museum going back as far as the parents' childhood or early adulthood before their own children were born. One family was selected because they were relatively new to the museum, although they are an equally committed NexGen family who frequently visit and use the museum.

All four families participated in an entry and exit interview and kept a family journal for four months. The journals included pages with open-ended prompts specifically designed for adults and children, focusing on: 1) the family; 2) visiting LACMA as a family; 3) visiting other places as a family; and 4) at home as a family. There were also blank "free-choice" pages. All family members, from parents to the youngest child,

documented their associations with LACMA, family history, daily activities, and personal interests and thoughts.

While limited to only four families participating over a short period of time, the consistency of the responses gave validity and reliability to the project and the evaluation. All families completed every facet of the project and contributed responses significantly beyond what was asked, deepening the understandings of the evaluation.

**FAMILIES TOOK THEIR JOURNALS ON VACATIONS AND TO COMMUNITY EVENTS AND MADE FREQUENT ENTRIES AT HOME. "AT FIRST WE WERE WORRIED ABOUT FILLING IT UP, AND THEN WE RAN OUT OF PAGES." –NEXGEN PARENT**



One Sunday at LACMA  
We each explored the use of Color

### Family Journal Project Findings

- NexGen families value educational opportunities and view museum events as educational.
- NexGen families are committed members of the museum, making frequent visits and using the museum in a variety of ways.
- NexGen families participate in an array of family activities but rate the museum as a primary and valued resource.
- NexGen families view the museum as a parenting and “life resource” for their children.
- NexGen families consider LACMA a museum that serves the community and specific family needs.

*“We noticed that everybody is artistic in our family.”*

—10-year-old NexGen member

—NexGen parent, family journal excerpt



## BILINGUAL FAMILY GALLERY TOURS

By using the Theory of Change method, education staff was able to respond to findings during the evaluation process. One of the greatest areas identified for improvement early in the process was the bilingual family gallery tour, one of the hallmarks of Andell Family Sundays. Tours average thirty minutes, with additional travel time to a specific gallery followed by the opportunity after a tour to sketch in the galleries with a teaching artist. As part of the NexGen evaluation, specific learning and social outcomes were articulated to sharpen the purpose and achievements of these tours.

The goal was for 80% of child and adult participants to actively look at and talk about art on the family tour. Additionally, it was desired that families would voice a personal or familial connection between the art they viewed and their own lives. Socially, we wanted family members to engage with each other in talking about art in order to establish a life-long process of looking at and talking about art together.

Early observations of the tours showed less whole-family engagement than desired—often with adults as the more reticent participants. It was clear that in order to reach the targeted goals, the gallery educators would need more training, so, as part of the evaluation project, a new collegial gallery teacher training process was established.

**ALL ANDELL FAMILY SUNDAYS PROGRAMMING RESPONDS TO ONE COLLECTION AREA OR SPECIAL EXHIBITION FOR AN ENTIRE MONTH. TOURS AND ARTIST-LED WORKSHOPS REPEAT EVERY SUNDAY OVER THE COURSE OF THE MONTH.**

### Gallery Educator Training and Assessment

The gallery educator training was restructured to be a group process. Gallery teachers previously had worked alone or one-on-one with a museum educator to develop their tours. Museum staff and gallery educators developed a process to brainstorm ideas and teaching strategies collaboratively. Meeting on a quarterly basis, museum educators and gallery teachers selected works of art for upcoming tours.

*“We talk about how beautiful the art is and how amazing [that] the artist did the drawing.”*


—11-year-old NexGen member



Working together, the educators:

- Studied works of art in a permanent collection gallery.
- Narrowed their focus to one Big Idea.
- Selected three to four works of art to support the Big Idea.
- Discussed inquiry approaches and key questions for each work of art.
- Identified key information about the art.
- Discussed and developed a series of interactive gallery activities to support looking at and talking about art.

In addition, the gallery teachers were required to document and assess their tours, and the museum educators observed tours. The assessment format created a formal process for gallery educators to review their own teaching, assess the learning and social outcomes of their tours, and reflect on their practice.

A photograph showing a group of children and an adult in a gallery setting. They are looking at a framed artwork on the wall. The children are in the foreground, and the adult is slightly behind them. The scene is brightly lit, and the atmosphere appears to be one of focused observation.

**THE BIG IDEA IS THE OVERARCHING CONCEPT EXPLORED ON A TOUR THAT IS EXEMPLIFIED ACROSS TIME, CULTURE, AND GEOGRAPHY. ALL THE TOUR ELEMENTS SUPPORT GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIG IDEA.**



**OBSERVATION DURING TRAINING PROVIDED EVIDENCE THAT THE COLLECTIVE IDEAS OF THE TEACHING CORPS ENHANCED AND REFINED THE INITIAL IDEAS OF INDIVIDUAL GALLERY TEACHERS.**

### **Gallery Educator Training and Assessment Findings**

Museum educators successfully established a new strategy for training. The process established esprit de corps among the teaching staff. Gallery educators expanded their teaching strategies based on the ideas of their colleagues and museum education staff and confirmed that the new training strategy gave them confidence and refined their focus for leading gallery conversations.

By focusing intentions and changing the way gallery teachers worked with families, adult responses increased and family members engaged more fully in looking at and talking about art. Families participated in family interactive activities as a part of their tours. Over the course of the evaluation time period, gallery teachers lessened the amount of information they gave and increased the type and amount of prompts crafted to guide families to look at and talk about art. Participant voicing increased significantly during the course of this participatory evaluation period.

*“The art guides are friendly, open, ready to accommodate.”*  
—NexGen parent

Gallery educators formalized and documented their instruction and the levels of engagement and learning by families. Formal assessment of learning and social outcomes has given gallery teachers a better understanding of family learning and social participation as well as the quality and effects of their instruction.

One gallery educator, upon reflecting on a family gallery tour, stated on his assessment form that he “had fun [with] equal voicing activities. [They] make more people more willing to participate in them.” Another noted high success by pairing children during family activities and also documented that families said they would try out some of the family gallery activities at home. Documenting the success of interactive activities is important not only for each gallery educator’s own teaching but also for colleagues and program evaluators.

*“I really enjoy the art room. I like it when the people there talk to me about art.”*

—6-year-old NexGen member







**"THIS IS A PRIVILEGE TO BE A PART OF [LACMA]."  
—NEXGEN PARENT**

## CONCLUSION

NexGen is successful in sending the message that children and families belong to and at the museum. Families clearly view Arts for NexGen LACMA as not just a membership for their child but as a membership for the entire family. Families with NexGen members view LACMA as a parenting and “life resource” for their children. They value their time together at the museum and recognize that their experiences at LACMA are unique. They use the museum for learning and social development.

This review of NexGen’s social impact indicates that, through NexGen, LACMA is making itself relevant for the next generation of museumgoers. The program also demonstrates LACMA’s commitment to accessibility and the public’s embrace of the museum. Launched in 2003, NexGen is a relatively new program, and the evaluation shows the status of the program after just a few years. It will be interesting to learn if and how those children who have made the museum a regular part of their lives will continue their relationship with LACMA after they enter adulthood and possibly become parents themselves. Further research over time will reveal more about the long-term impact of NexGen on its members, on the future of LACMA, and perhaps even on other museums.

To contact the Education Department regarding **Arts for NexGen** or other education programs at LACMA, e-mail [educate@lacma.org](mailto:educate@lacma.org) or call 323-857-6512.

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The logo for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). It consists of the letters "LACMA" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below each letter is a short horizontal white line, creating a stylized underline effect. The logo is positioned in the bottom right corner of the image, which is a solid orange color.

**LACMA**