

Museum Curator

Decide what a museum collects, keeps and shows. A graduate degree, years of low pay, then a job very few people get.

TYPICAL PAY

\$63,420

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$40k to \$107k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

6 to 10 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Art, history and science museums, historical societies, universities, z...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
History, art, biology, chemistry, a foreign language and strong writing. Volunteer at any local museum that will take you.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
In the subject you want to curate: art history, history, anthropology, biology, geology. Take museum studies courses if the school offers them.
- 3 Internships and entry jobs** 1 to 3 years
Collections assistant, gallery attendant, education assistant, registrar. This is where you learn to actually handle objects and databases.
- 4 Master's degree** 2 years
Museum studies, museology, art history or a science. The University of Washington runs a well known Master of Arts in Museology; many other public universities run similar programs.
- 5 Curator** 2 to 5 more years
Assistant curator first, then associate, then curator. A doctorate is normal for art and science curators at large institutions.

Pros and cons

- + You work with real objects and real knowledge every day
- + Genuine public purpose, and the collection outlives you
- + Research, travel and conferences are part of the job
- Six to ten years of study for a median in the low sixties
- Unpaid internships push out anyone who cannot afford them
- Very few openings, and you will have to move for one

Good to know

Museums are a bigger industry than you think

The American Alliance of Museums counts about 35,000 museums across the United States, supporting roughly 726,000 jobs and contributing around \$50 billion a year to the economy. Most of them...

Almost nothing is on display

Large museums typically show only a small fraction of what they own. The rest sits in climate controlled storage, catalogued and checked, which is why collections work is most of the job and gallery work is th...

Optional boosts

Collections management software. Digital collections and imaging. Conservation. Grant writing.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Curators (25-4012.00)

American Alliance of Museums

University of Washington Information School: Master of Arts in Museology

Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/museum-curator>



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