



"I struggle with the 'how' of it."

For most museum-goers, museums are a natural place for encouraging and fostering civic engagement.¹



But how can museums work toward promoting shared community ideals and civic involvement?

Fortunately, respondents to the 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers from all demographic backgrounds and spanning all political identities, suggested practical ways museums can integrate civics content. Their suggestions included everything from voter registration to community sports team participation.



They even suggested that museums intrinsically embody and promote civic ideals!

The suggestions offered by respondents break down into four categories, each of which reference ideals many museum professionals already strive to exemplify on a daily basis.



Facilitation:


By hosting and promoting civics activities, museums can connect and unify the community for good.



"Become a polling location. That way people come and vote, they'd see the museum, and possibly spark curiosity."

-  Offer voting information, registration opportunities, or even become a polling place
-  Promote community volunteer opportunities to strengthen civic ties and encourage neighborly cooperation
-  Be a part of community celebrations, like parades, parties, and festivals

"I like when museums have voter registration drives or provide activities I can participate in that would further societal good—like volunteering."




Discussion:

Museums might propose face-to-face dialogues, philosophical talks, and debates including neighbors, scholars, and community leaders.

"Museums could ... provide a space for open discussions. Museums are a place where people from the community with different viewpoints and ideals come together. It could be a common ground for the community."



-  Present multiple viewpoints because issues typically have more than two sides
-  Invite open-mindedness and empathy by including discussants of varying experience and knowledge
-  Host in-person dialogues: in person we are far more likely to be respectful, even when we vehemently disagree

"Museum should encourage people to come together to discuss important topics in a democratic and constructive manner, encouraging understanding of differences and different cultural perspectives."







Illustrating and Contextualizing:

Every museum has abundant opportunities for illustrating important civil events and providing context for how they impact and potentially mirror our lives today.

"Spotlight unsung heroes and their contributions, how even a perceived small action can have important impacts."



-  Use artifacts, artwork, and other collections as evidence to explore civics issues, conflicts, and victories
-  Present stories of how communities formed and people overcame hardships
-  Show how civic leaders of the past improved our civil society, and provide context for the ways these events affect us today

"Wherever possible, show historical connections between past events and current events that might indicate where those past events led and the effects and consequences as they may reoccur today."




Education:

Many respondents commented that civics education was a foundational part of school curriculum in generations past, but not so much today.

"Civics' is no longer part of school curricula, or if so, has not been effectively taught. We could all use a 'primer' apparently."



- Might museums become that primer?**
-  Inform people of all ages and viewpoints how to contact political representatives if they think something needs to change
 -  Provide examples of how these communications have been effective in the past
 -  Host in person educational programs, events, and discussions to mitigate divisive and misleading internet misinformation, reducing feelings of powerlessness while encouraging belonging

"Museums can partner with the local public institutions to bring knowledge to those who might not otherwise seek it out. Knowledge and education are a gateway to becoming a productive member of society. One could argue that museums have an obligation to better humanity."



If you think about it, as non-partisan educational community assets, museums are poised to also be active and effective promoters of civics in our communities. With a bit of concerted effort, museums might foster civic and personal connectivity, education, and potentially inspire community celebration as well.

