



Office of  
Historic Alexandria

We are participating in

# Museum Social Impact in Practice!

Learn more about the MSIIP  
project at: [bit.ly/msiip](https://bit.ly/msiip)

Project of:



American  
Alliance of  
Museums

Made possible by:



INSTITUTE of  
Museum and Library  
SERVICES



# Background



# Mission and Vision

## Mission

The Office of Historic Alexandria preserves and shares Alexandria's past to enrich the present and inspire the future.

## Vision

To infuse Alexandria's rich and complex history into the fabric of the community.





# Strategic Goals

- **Embrace the diversity of our community, both past and present**
  - ▶ *We are committed to sharing the diverse stories of our past in meaningful ways with our changing community.*
- **Instill a sense of place**
  - ▶ *We contribute to the unique character that makes Alexandria attractive to residents, visitors, and businesses.*
- **Use history to spark curiosity and reflection**
  - ▶ *We encourage life-long learning for all ages.*
- **Uphold and advance Historic Alexandria as a resource for local history, historic preservation, and museum management**
  - ▶ *We share our expertise and skills for the good of the community.*







# Data in Historic Alexandria

- ▶ Museum Specific Surveys
- ▶ AAM Museum Goer Surveys
- ▶ Resident Surveys
- ▶ Staff and Volunteer Feedback





**Social impact** refers to the effects that your organization has on individual people, communities, and societal conditions or issues.









# Social Impact Data



## ▶ City Staff

- ▶ Mary Bramley, Historic Alexandria
- ▶ Jacqueline Cozma, Communications & Community Engagement
- ▶ Lauren Gleason, Historic Alexandria
- ▶ Michele Longo, Historic Alexandria
- ▶ Robert Stackhouse, Performance Analytics





# The Process

## ► Participants were asked to:

1. Visit three museums at three different times.
2. Visits are focused on regular museum operations, which can include guided tours but no special events.
3. Visits need to happen during the survey window.
4. Two weeks after last visit, complete a 30-minute survey.





# Survey Questions



## LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

I wonder about how things work.  
I experiment to create new ways of doing things.  
I can see how exploration leads to learning.  
I regularly ask thought-provoking questions to get at the root of the problem.  
I ask insightful 'what if' questions that provoke exploration of new possibilities.  
My mind is actively engaged in new ideas.  
I challenge the way things are currently done.  
I regularly visit local museums (could also include zoos, gardens, and aquariums).  
I incorporate recently learned information into my day-to-day life.  
I appreciate the value of museums (could also include zoos, gardens, and aquariums).

## VALUING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

I learn new things from people who are different from me.  
I am able to see things from the point of view of others.  
I am concerned for the well-being of others.  
When interacting with others, I recognize their deeply held beliefs.  
My values are based on the collective well-being and not on my own gains.  
I am open to multiple perspectives.  
I understand how cultures are similar and different.  
I can adapt when working with others of different cultural backgrounds.  
I am aware of the challenges faced by others with backgrounds different than my own.  
I enjoy meeting people who are different from me.



## STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS

I build strong and supportive relationships with a variety of people.  
I keep my commitments to others.  
I make it a point to spend time with my friends and/or family.  
I often engage in meaningful conversations with my friends and/or family members.  
I help my friends and/or family members explore their hopes and dreams.  
I am aware of the challenges my friends and/or family members face.  
I turn to my friends and/or family when I face challenges.  
I learn new things from my friends and/or family members.  
I recognize the importance of my friends and/or family members in my life.  
I am excited when something good happens to a friend and/or family member.  
I get upset at friends and/or family members when they make mistakes.  
It is easy for me to develop social relationships.



## HEALTH & WELL-BEING

I manage my emotions effectively.  
I am able to bounce back from adversity.  
I regularly volunteer in my community.  
I am open to new ideas.  
I am content with my life.  
I often contemplate the positive aspects of my life.  
I am confident in my ability to generate creative ideas.  
My life feels in control.  
I am motivated to maintain my physical health.  
I take time to relax.  
I often feel the stress of life.  
I have difficulty concentrating.  
I often compare myself to others.  
I become defensive when others try to give me feedback.  
I often criticize others.  
I am confident in contributing my opinion to a conversation.

## History Appreciation





# Survey Questions

Why didn't you ask me before questions *before* I visited and after questions *after* I visited?

The museum social impact survey is a **retrospective pre-then-post test (RPT)** design.

- **Benefits:**
  - only one survey so less burden on and time required from participants
  - minimizes pretest sensitivity
  - avoids shift bias (regrading yourself on a new scale after)
- **Limitations:** most people are not used to this kind of questioning in surveys and inaccuracies in memory over longer periods of time

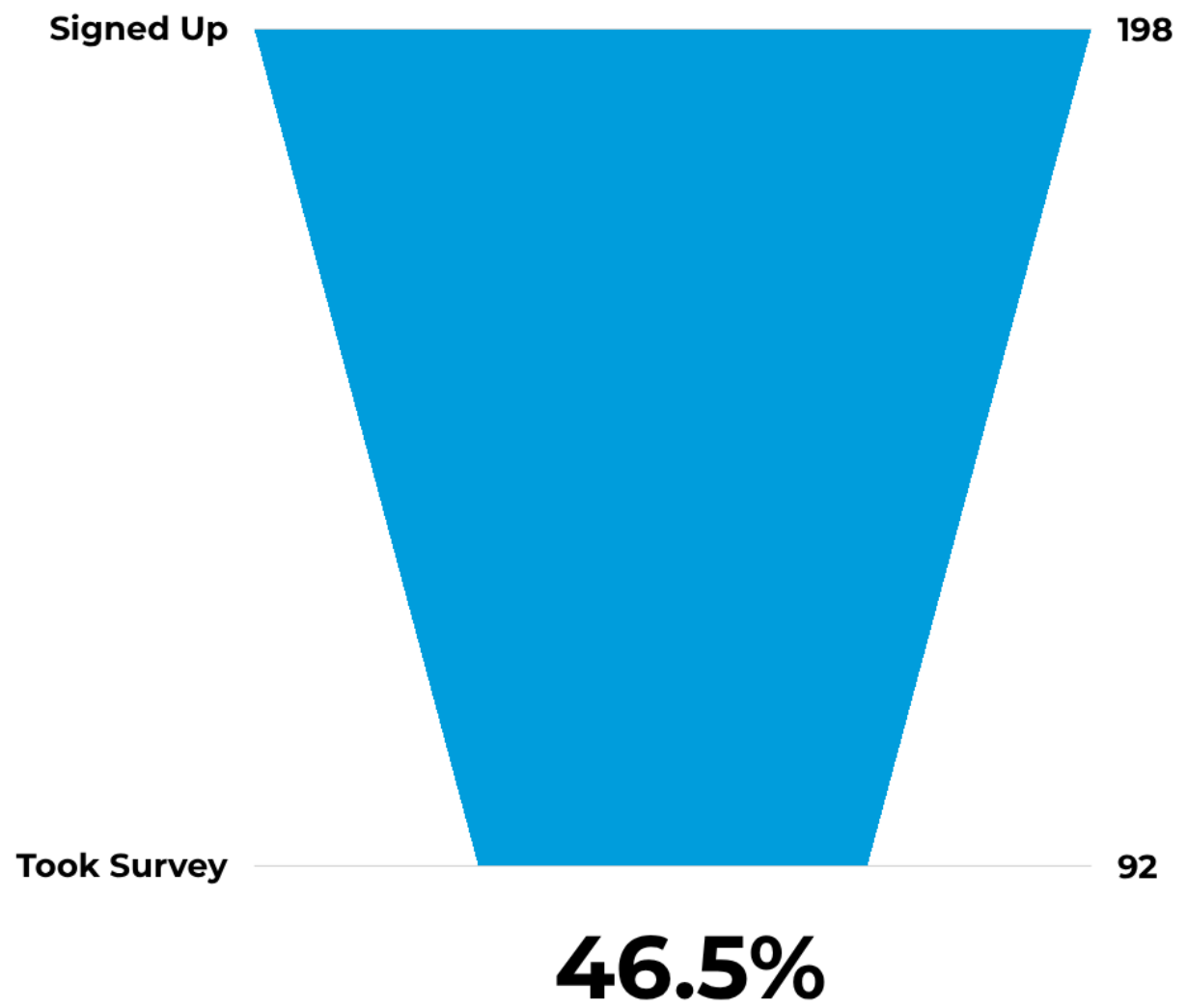


# What We Learned



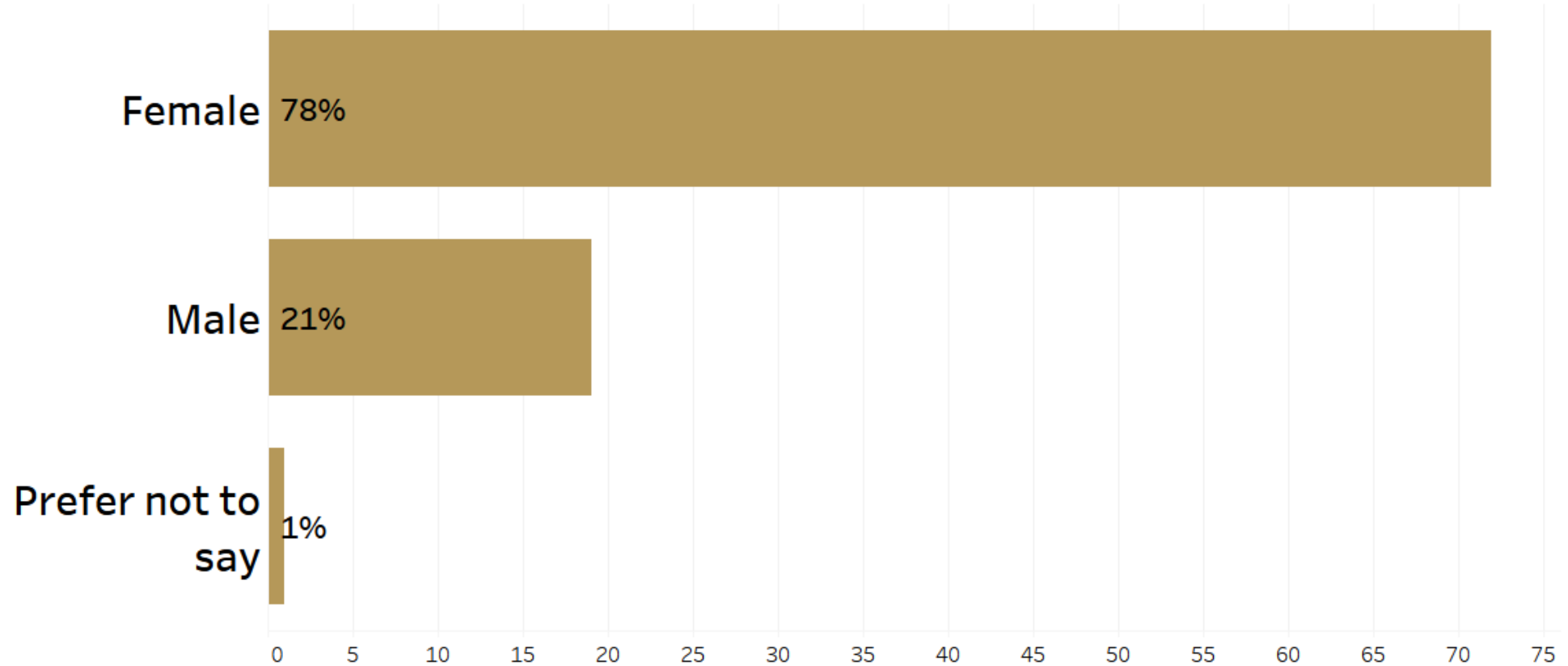


# Participants





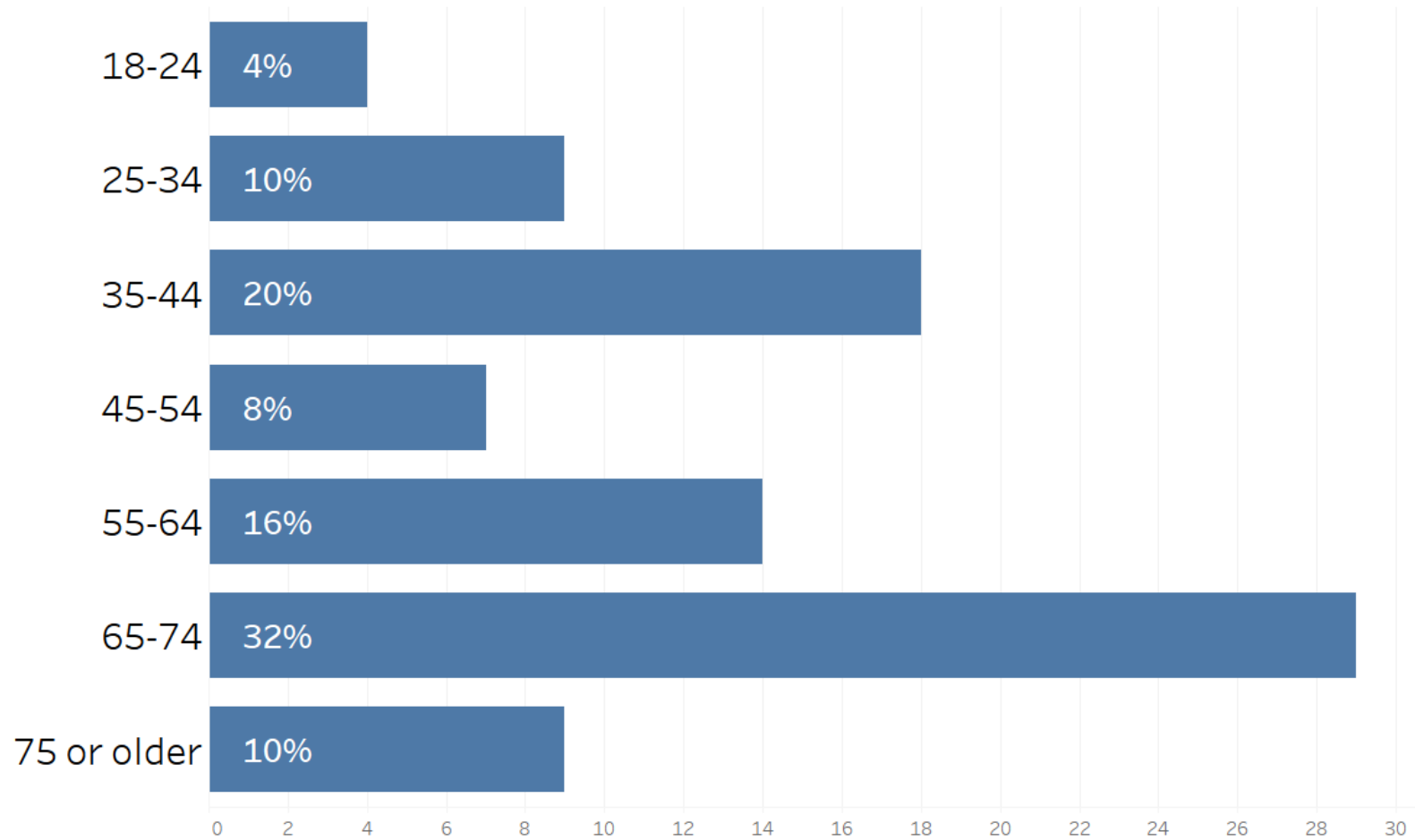
# Demographics: Gender



(n = 92)



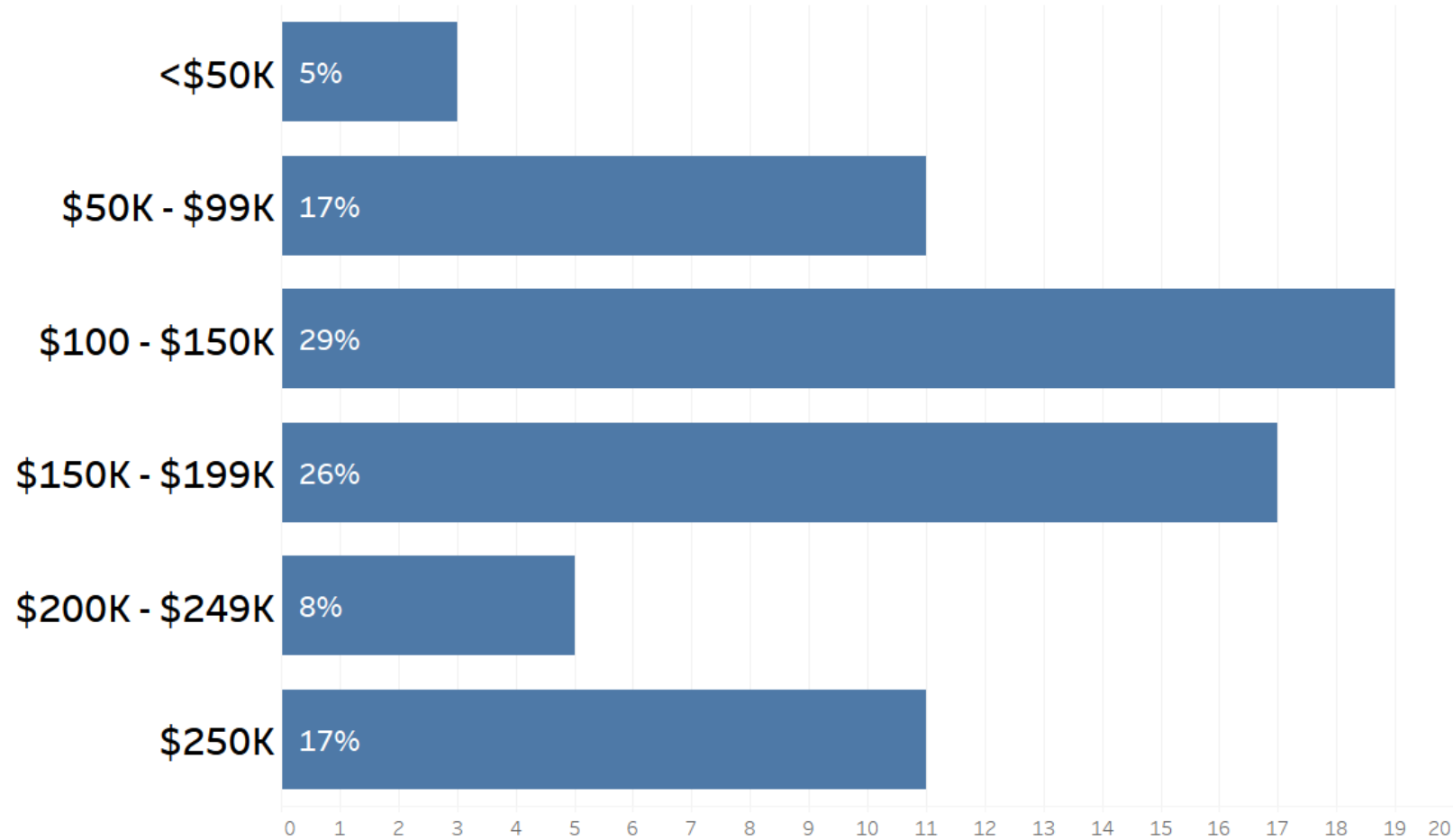
# Demographics: Age



*(n = 89; 2 respondents did not provide)*



# Demographics: Income

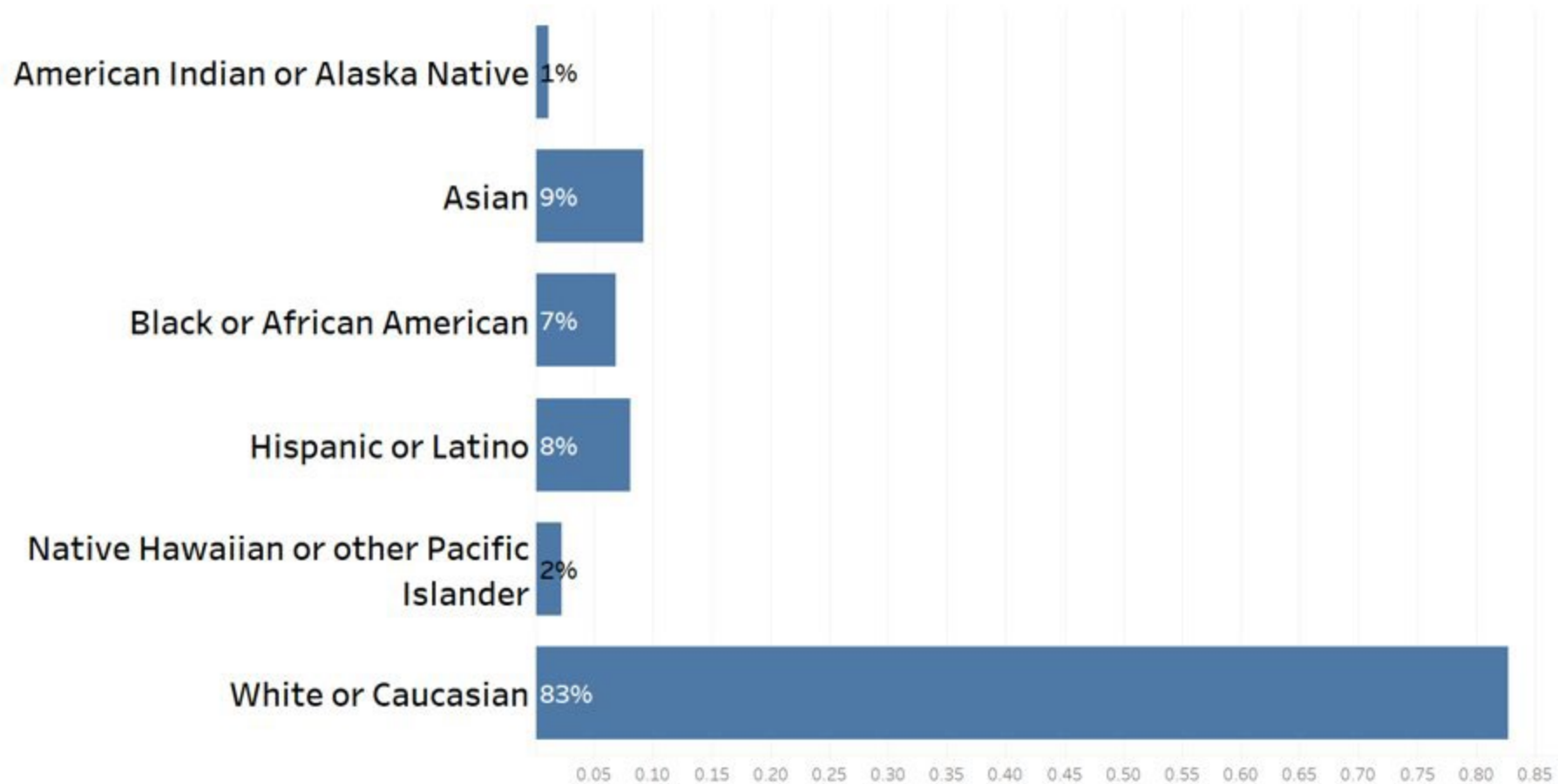


*(n = 66; 26 respondents did not provide)*





# Demographics: Racial/Ethnic Groups

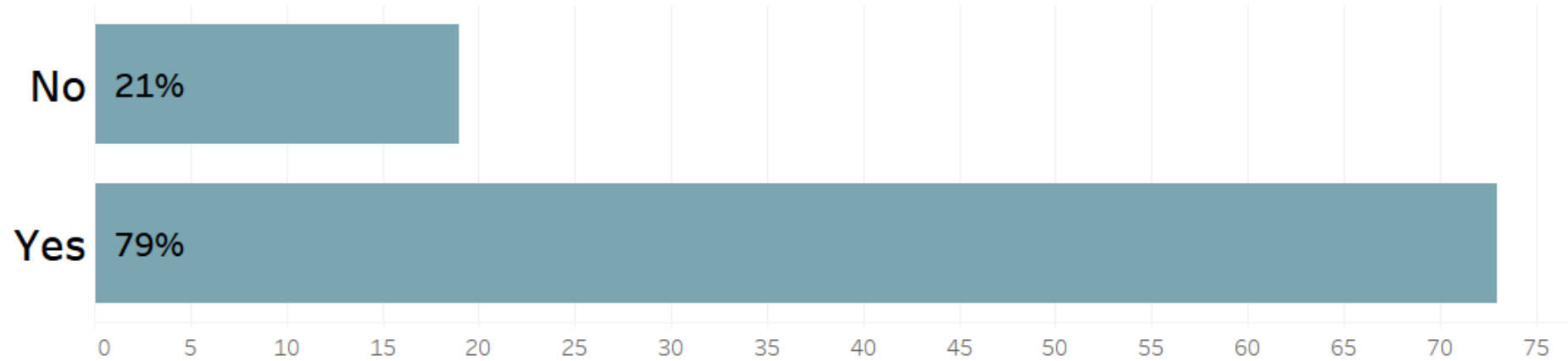


*(n = 87; 5 respondents did not provide; totals greater than 100% due to multi-selection options)*



# Visits

Did you visit a Historic Alexandria museum or attend a program prior to your participation in this project?



(n = 92)



# Meaningful Change **Before** and **After**

## Statistically Significant Outcomes by Section

Questions where before and after differences are statistically different at the p-value of 0.05.

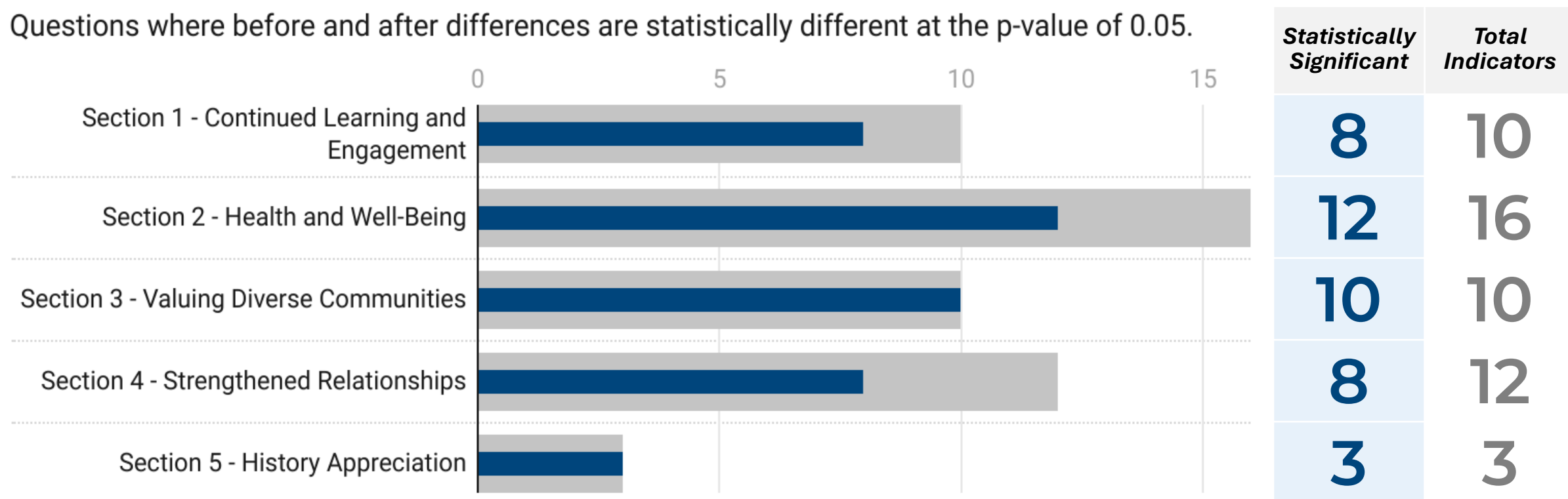


Chart: Office of Historic Alexandria • Source: OHA Social Impact Survey 2025 • Created with Datawrapper



# Tracking Change **Before** and **After**

**Before**

→ **After**

***Higher average score***

***(+ change) indicates stronger agreement with the statement after the three visits***

**After** ←

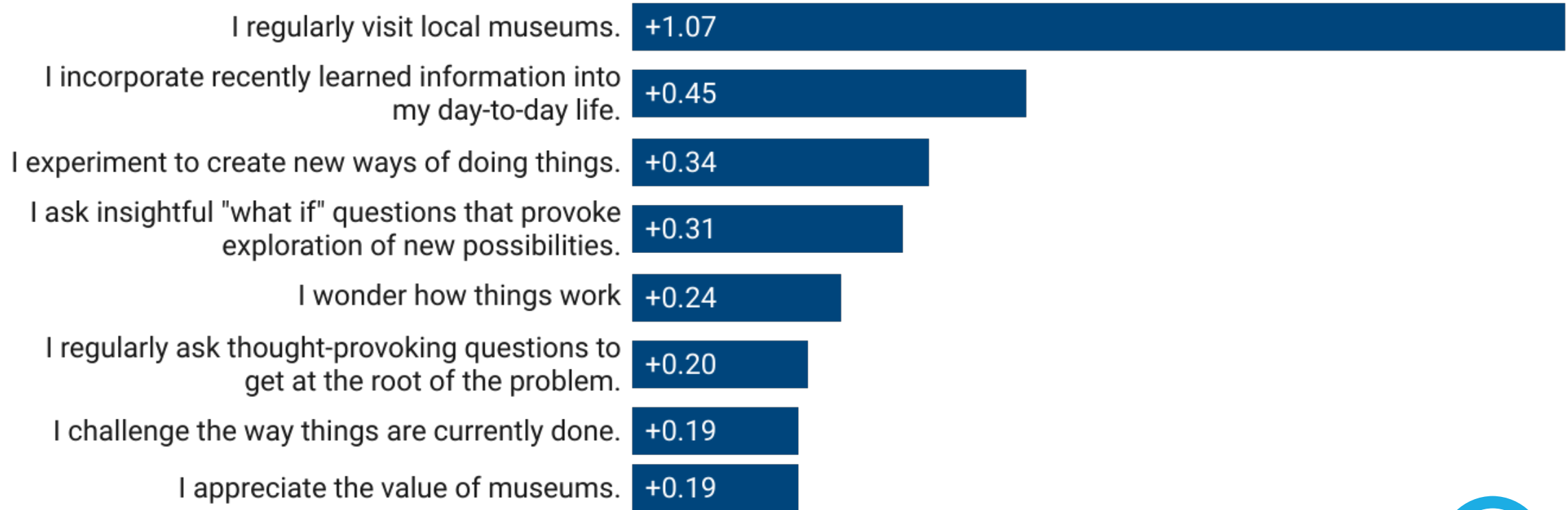
***Lower average score***

***(- change) indicates weaker agreement with the statement after the three visits***



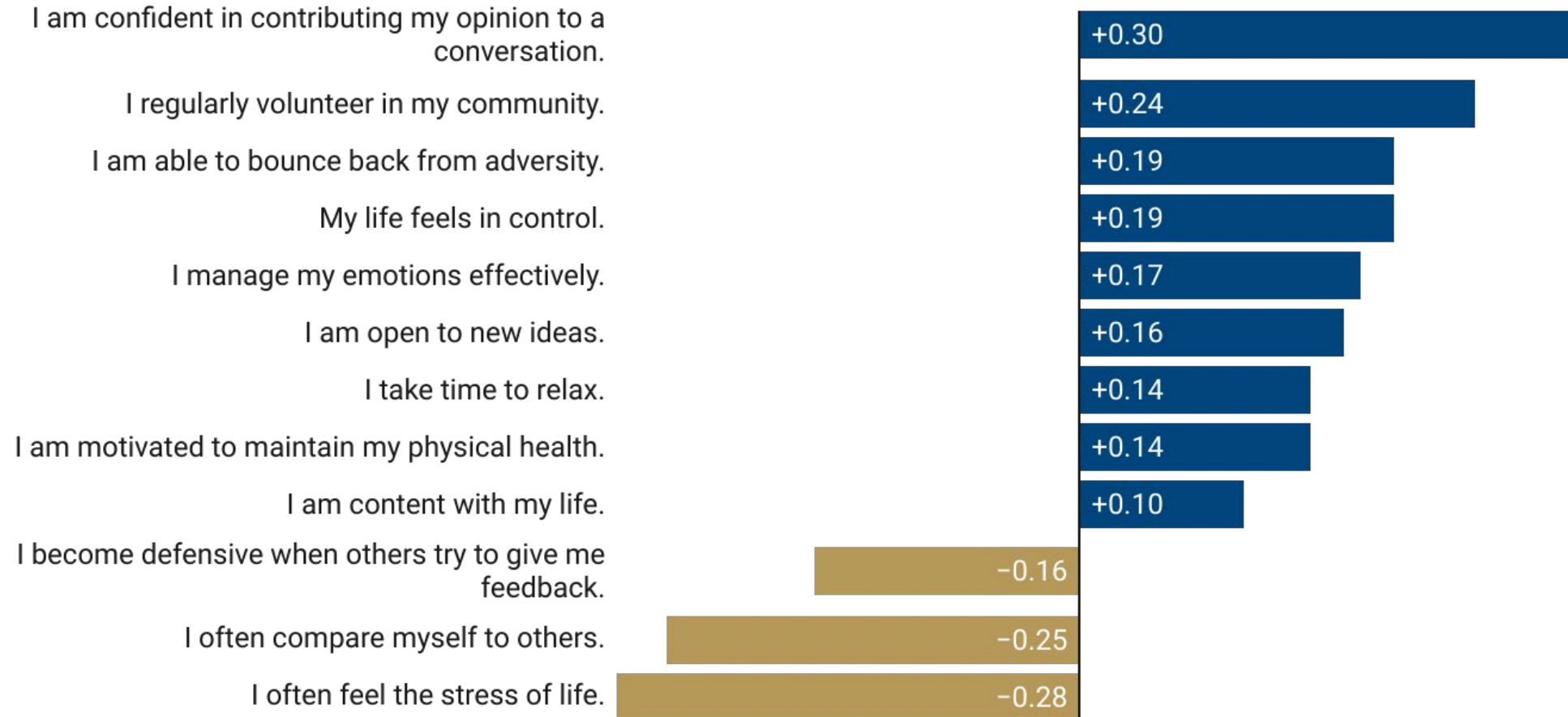
# Learning and Engagement Questions

Differences in average scores before and after by question from 7-point Likert scale. Positive increases mean shifts towards agreement.



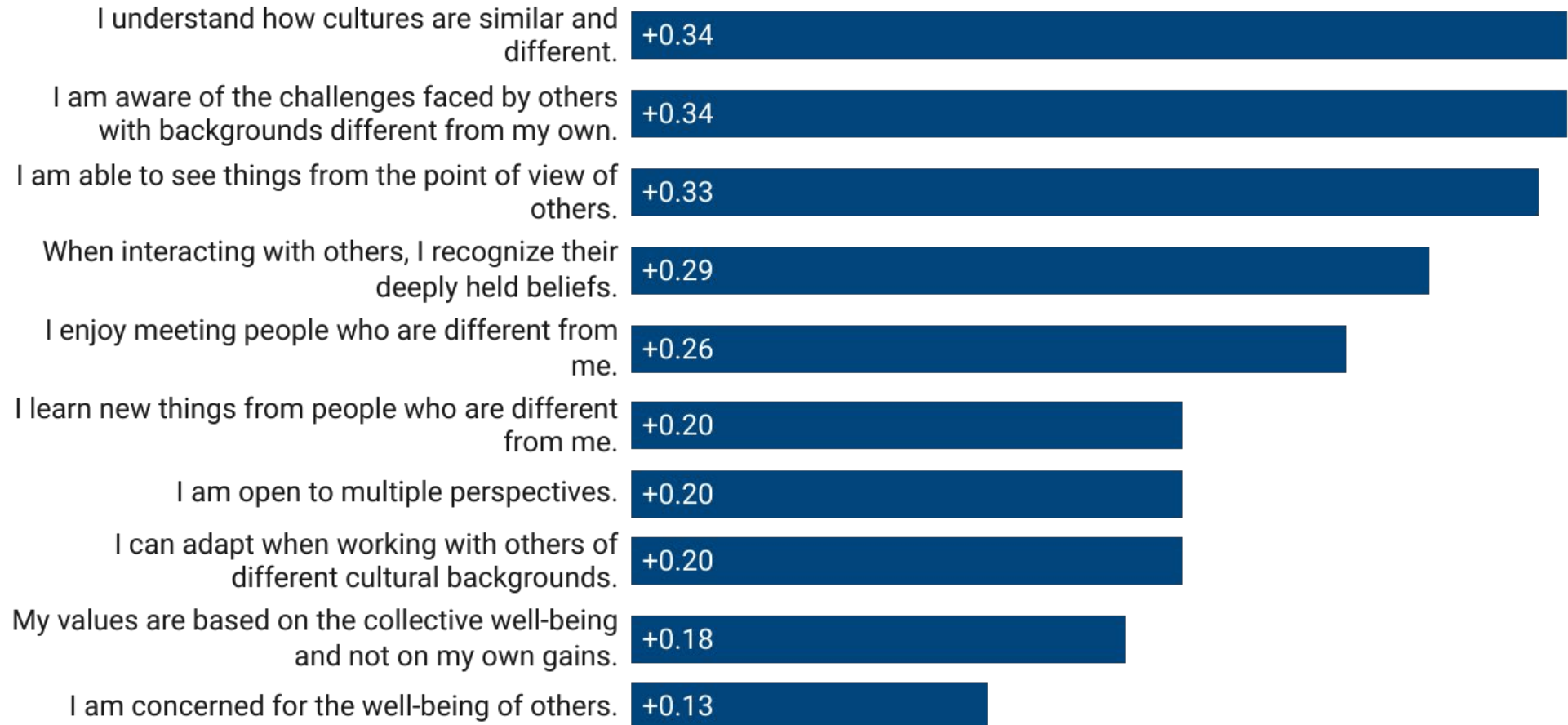
# Health and Well-Being Questions

Differences in average scores before and after by question from 7-point Likert scale. Positive increases mean shifts towards agreement.



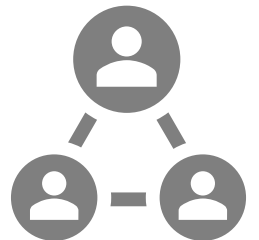
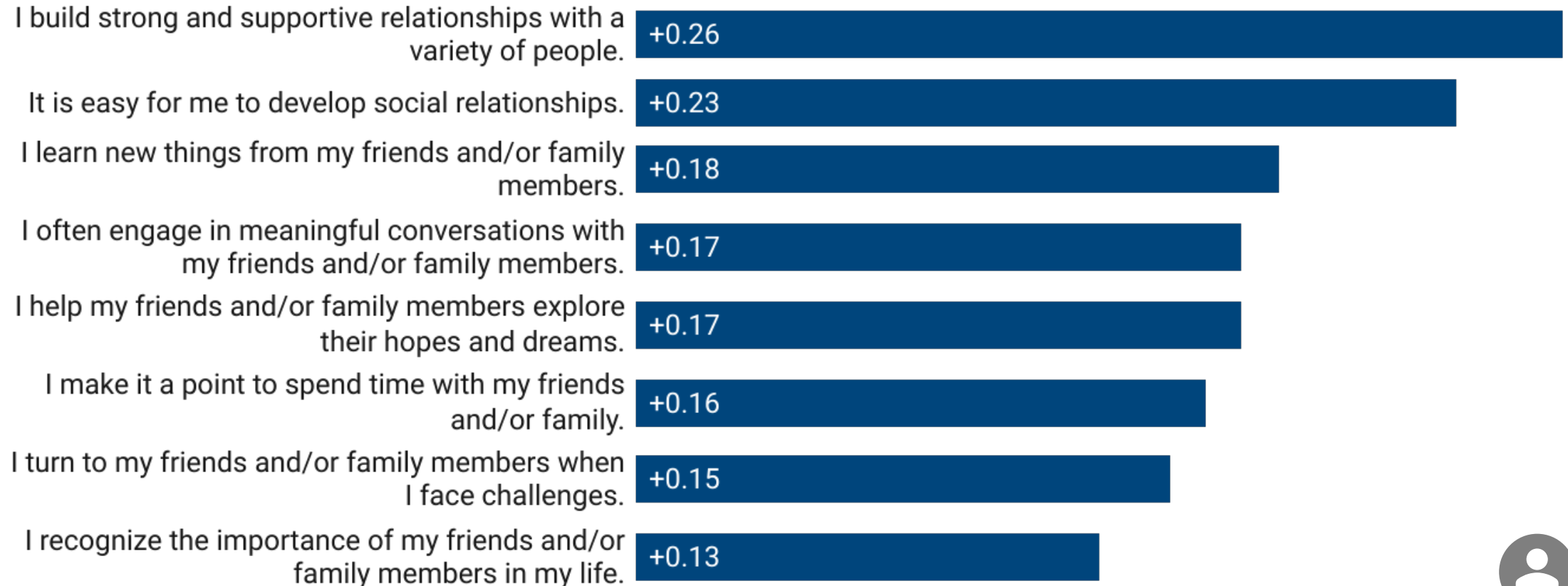
# Valuing Diverse Communities Questions

Differences in average scores before and after by question from 7-point Likert scale. Positive increases mean shifts towards agreement.



# Strengthened Relationships Questions

Differences in average scores before and after by question from 7-point Likert scale. Positive increases mean shifts towards agreement.





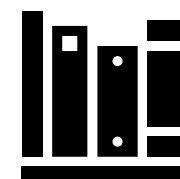
# History Appreciation Questions

Differences in average scores before and after by question from 7-point Likert scale. Positive increases mean shifts towards agreement.



*Only shows questions where difference was statistically significant.*

Chart: Office of Historic Alexandria • Source: OHA Social Impact Survey 2025 • Created with Datawrapper





# Open-Ended Questions

- ▶ What about your visits surprised you?
- ▶ How do these museums benefit your community?
- ▶ How did participating in this study change your perspective of museums/cultural sites?
- ▶ What, if anything, did you dislike about your experience at Historic Alexandria museums?
- ▶ In what ways, if any, did Historic Alexandria museums change the way you interact with others?





# What surprised you?



## ▶ Survey Respondent

- ▶ First Time Visitors (7) ▲
- ▶ Repeat Visitors (5) ◆

## ▶ Content

- ▶ High Quality (40) ◆
- ▶ Specific Fact/Theme (25) ◆
- ▶ Variety of Perspectives (19) ●
- ▶ Tough Conversations (7) ●
- ▶ Younger Audiences (5) ●

## ▶ Layout/Logistics

- ▶ Volunteers/Staff (14) ▲
- ▶ Intimate (7) ▲
- ▶ Free (2)



89/92 responses



# Survey Respondent



- ▶ “That I **had not been to these places before** – I know they exist, **I live nearby, I love history**....was also a bit suprised [sic] by some of the facts I learned in the Black History Museum that I had not heard before.”
- ▶ “How, even though I’ve **visited the museums numerous times** over the years, I **almost always learn** new things.”



# Content



- ▶ “I was surprised by the **breadth of topics that are covered**. I liked that some had a broad set of themes and some were more focused.”
- ▶ “I was really positively surprised by **how frank and honest the sites were** about the history of enslavement in the area and the efforts to be able to rediscover and share the stories of enslaved people.”



# Content



- ▶ “When I think of Alexandria's history, I used to think mostly about people like George Washington, but it was interesting to **learn how people who are very different from him (and me) lived** hundreds of years ago and to learn from their stories.”
- ▶ “**High quality** of exhibits and staff.”





# Layout/Logistics



- ▶ “The **intimate** feel of the museums. They are **authentic** spaces where you can feel history happened there.”
- ▶ “The **amount of information** in these small museums.”



# Layout/Logistics



- ▶ “The **variety of museums**. I was surprised at how different my experiences with self-guided tours were in three smaller **museums in the same area**. Even though the basic concept was the same – read the information, ask for help if needed, explore on your own – each museum I visited **felt different** and I felt able to complete those tasks differently at each of the museums.”



# Benefits to your community?



## ▶ Educational Mission

- ▶ Education (26) ◆
- ▶ “Doomed to repeat it” (21) ◆
- ▶ Approachable (17) ◆
- ▶ Interactive (9) ◆
- ▶ Full History (8) ●

## ▶ Regional/Local/National

- ▶ Preserving History (50) ◆
- ▶ National Connection (11) ◆

## ▶ Community Building

- ▶ Cultural Awareness (36) ● ▲
- ▶ Engagement (28) ● ▲



91/92 responses



# Educational Mission



- ▶ “They are learning institutions that **make history and knowledge accessible** to all ages and diverse cultures.”
- ▶ "These museums **exposed me to untold stories** of different people and how they struggled and succeeded to make Alexandria what it is today."



# Educational Mission



- ▶ “Provide **education** on the history of Alexandria.”
- ▶ “They highlight events, people and places that I **hadn't known about**. The museums invite visitors to consider a wealth of experiences and perspectives that happened in our city which **enriches our community**.”



# Local to National



- ▶ “They keep our history alive, encourage an appreciation of Alexandria's rich history, they reflect the stories of our citizens and highlight **the connection between Alexandria's history and our nation's history.**”
- ▶ “These museums are a crucial part of **connecting the past, present, and future** of Alexandria. And because Alexandria had such a **crucial role in the early development of this country**, learning about our history is tied to knowing our present and shaping the future of the nation.”





# Community Building



- ▶ “They make it one of the **best places** in the world to live.”
- ▶ “...I find I can **better engage with my community** because I can share what I've learned, recommend museums, and get others interested. I feel so much more **kinship for Alexandria** than I do for my original hometown (of course I've lived here longer).”



# Community Building



- ▶ “These museums give us **better understandings of our communities**, in a very real contemporary sense. The more I understand the **rich, complicated, and varied history** of Alexandria, the more empathy and curiosity I have for present day-Alexandria and Alexandrians and their well-being...”
- ▶ "I learned so much about who would have been **my neighbors**, lesser known stories, and **the history beneath my feet**. It put in perspective that we are here for a short time and that the tapestry of our history is always being woven."



# Local and Visitors



- ▶ “It's a wonderful way for **locals and visitors alike** to learn about US history. The good & the bad.”
- ▶ “What a great resource to preserve local history - both the parts we are proud of and the uncomfortable but important pieces. It makes it so that **generations will learn about Alexandria's history** and is especially valuable for folks who move here **from different parts of the country/world.**”



# Change in perspective of museums?



## ▶ **Appreciation**

- ▶ Appreciation for OHA (44) ▲
- ▶ Appreciation for Alexandria (42) ▲

## ▶ **Sense of Urgency**

- ▶ Urgency of mission (27) ● ▲
- ▶ Reminder to visit more often (25) ◆
- ▶ More interesting (10) ◆

## ▶ **Curation**

- ▶ Consideration of curation (22) ◆

## ▶ **Topic/Theme**

- ▶ Piqued Interest (7) ◆



92/92 responses



# Appreciation



- ▶ “...from a city resident I am awfully **proud of how the City tells the story about Alexandria**. The people, the places, the events. It also made me realize the **depth of the collection** of artifacts that the city has...”
- ▶ “...deeper **appreciation of the staff** who are extremely knowledgeable and good at public history. It gave me an appreciation of the preciousness of the museums/cultural sites and **imperative and challenges** around their preservation and interpretation. It reminded me of the many stories the city has to tell and the importance of providing the museums/cultural sites with the resources to robustly promote and **share our history in traditional**, and also **new and innovative ways**...”



# Appreciation



- ▶ That museums can be **more local and part of the neighborhood** and not separate in big buildings.
- ▶ "My visits **broadened what I might consider to count as "History."** The everyday experience of common Alexandrians can have just as much importance and interest as the major events that shaped our nation's history."





# Urgency



- ▶ “I've lived in Alexandria for over 20 years and **had never gone to any of the Alexandria museums** even though I go to museums regularly when I travel. However I found them to be more interesting than I expected and plan to **continue to visit and bring friends and family.**”
- ▶ “I often go to various museums in D.C., but had **neglected to visit those in Alexandria.** Alexandria's history is worth exploring.”



# Urgency



- ▶ “...It reminded me of the **urgency of now** – that we need these sites and museums now more than ever to push back against censorship, and the movement to take us backwards not forward in terms of exhibits and programs that **embrace the whole truth, evolving research, and inclusive perspectives.**”
- ▶ One thing that changed was that I put off going to some museums because "I can just go whenever" and decided to make "whenever" be **NOW**.



# Curation



- ▶ “It forced me to think more critically of museums (not in the negative); to gain a better understanding of **how each individual museum is managed**, and comparing how **each museum/site differs** in doing so.”
- ▶ “...made me think about how **museums are not homogenous** and how differently museums can cater to their audiences, ... museums are much **more than just the information** they provide, but the **people that work** in them and how the people in the museum and the **people you visit with** can **impact your experience** outside of just the actual museum content.”



# Change in how you interact with others?



## ▶ Communal Experience

- ▶ Communal Experience (37) ● ▲
- ▶ Content Came Up Later (25) ◆ ▲

## ▶ Museum Booster

- ▶ Headed back/bringing others (13) ◆ ▲



87/92 responses



# Communal Experience



- ▶ “The **staff at every museum** were super **welcoming and insightful/informative**. I appreciated their **engagement with our tour groups** and answering [sic] my silly questions. Therefore, they've made me a bit **less shy in gabbing about history**.”
- ▶ “I spent some **time in quiet reflection with an old friend** while visiting the Black History Museum. We don't typically visit museums together, but I am so glad we did because **we both got to learn and then talk about what we saw**...I hope to repeat this visit with many more friends.”



# Museum Booster

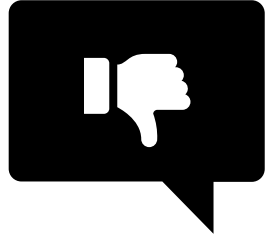


- ▶ "I won't stop talking about all the **cool stuff** that happened in Alexandria! And the **cool people** that live here!"
- ▶ "More focused on reminding our friends about the museums. **They should go.** Take family and friends."





# What did you dislike?



## ▶ **None (37)**

## ▶ **Flow/Exhibits**

- ▶ Flow/Exhibits (19)
- ▶ Signage (6)
- ▶ Size (3)

## ▶ **Getting There**

- ▶ Hours of Operation (16)
- ▶ Cost (2)
- ▶ Parking (1)

## ▶ **Content**

- ▶ Content Criticism (10)
- ▶ Stale Content (6)

## ▶ **Museum Visit Specific**

- ▶ Museum-Specific (12)



# Next Steps



# Action from Data

## Process

- Better explain what social impact is
- Tracking of visits
- Sending survey out within 2 weeks

## Opportunities for Improvement

- Exhibit Upgrades
- Analyze hours of operation
- Enhance Accessibility

## Sharing with the Community

- Executive Summary to City Council
- Data in Grant Applications
- Expand Marketing Avenues