What is Civic Engagement?

Actions that allow us to collectively work towards a future where our reality is more in line with our aspirations. They can strengthen an existing value or asset or work to solve a problem or address an issue we identify.

That which someone does often through work with others to solve public problems.

- Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Tufts University
Why Civic Engagement?

Americans are eager to engage in the civic process right now.

Source: Rutgers Online Blog
Why Civic Engagement?

Museums are Trusted:

Source: Know Your Own Bone/Colleen Dilenschneider
Why Civic Engagement?

Museums are Trusted:

... is a highly credible source of information.

Mean response by organization type

Source: Know Your Own Bone/Colleen Dilenschneider
Two Points on Bias

How far do we take our audiences?
Do we just want to talk, present them with tools for critical thinking and let them choose their own path or do we want to be more prescriptive than that?

We are not neutral
We have a mission and so we have an agenda.
Why Civic Engagement?

Moving towards facilitators of dialogue vs. deployers of knowledge as a field

Let’s Talk Symposium
Dialogue-Based Programming in Museums
Participant Materials

| July 27-29, 2015 | IslandWood | Bainbridge Island |

A Community Dialogue Guide

Jennifer Jocz (Education Development Center), Anne Holland (Space Science Institute), Keliann LaConte (Space Science Institute), and Sarah Post (Cornerstones of Science)
Why Civic Engagement?

Opportunity to align with formal education:

- MA has created a requirement that students need civics education.
- State of RI currently being sued by students to get more civics into their formal education.
Civic Engagement in the Museum

- How do interpreters talk about civic issues?
- How are our exhibits or programs designed to engage in the civic process?
- Should we facilitate the civic process? E.g. register visitors to vote?
- Should the institution [president/CEO, social media] make overt statements about political issues, events or policies?
How do You Navigate Potential Challenges?

- Institution/board/president/leadership nervous about being seen as “controversial.”
- Hesitancy from front line staff/interpreters.
- Lack of funding
- Just not a priority/everyone too busy
- Lack of training/PD
- Some civic conversations seen as “more partisan” than others
- Organization or department is seen as doing one thing so this is a deviation from our audiences’ expectations
  - Or a deviation from our expectations: moving from holders of objects and knowledge to conveners of conversation means we have to cede some authority to our audiences
  - We might not be providing the expected experience to our audience.
- History-based institutions reluctant to talk about contemporary issues.
What Do You Love About Boston?
Hello, I am a constituent of ___________ and I’m [calling/writing] to express my concern for strong climate action in Massachusetts.

We are off to a great start in moving our energy mix towards more renewable energy. Can you help us create the conditions so we can accelerate the pace of adding more renewable energy to our electrical grid?

Hello, I am a constituent of ___________ and I’m [calling/writing] to express my concern for strong climate action in Massachusetts.

We are off to a great start in developing cleaner, more energy efficient buildings in Massachusetts. Can you help us create the conditions to accelerate these efforts so we can be sure to reach or exceed the emissions targets articulated by the City of Boston?

Hello, I am a constituent of ___________ and I’m [calling/writing] to express my concern for strong climate action in Boston.

I want to thank you for playing a part in making sure Boston has lots of public green space and trees. Can you help us continue to move in this direction by supporting efforts to plant more trees in the city of Boston. Trees are valuable carbon sinks but will also help manage urban heat island effect as the city warms.

Hello, I am a constituent of ___________ and I’m [calling/writing] to express my concern for strong climate action in Boston.

I want to thank you for helping Boston act towards reducing our carbon footprint as well as infrastructure that will make us more resilient to extreme storms and flooding. I want to encourage you to consider more salt marsh restoration in your plan: salt marshes absorb and sequester considerable amounts of carbon dioxide while also providing a natural buffer to flooding and storm surge.
1. State Senator or Councilor Name:

____________________________
Contact Information:

____________________________

2. State Representative or Councilor Name:

____________________________
Contact Information:

____________________________

1. Councilor Name:

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Contact Information:

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2. Councilor Name:

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Contact Information:

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1. State Senator Name:

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Contact Information:

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2. State Representative Name:

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Contact Information:

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1. Councilor Name:

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Contact Information:

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2. Councilor Name:

____________________________
Contact Information:

____________________________
Find Your Representatives

Here you can find your representatives, how to contact them, bills they've introduced, committees they serve on, and political contributions they've received. Enter your full address below to get started.

Search Places...

Submit

This tool is made possible with data from the Google Civic API, Open States, ProPublica, and the Center for Responsive Politics.
Dear Member of Congress,
Our country is a leader in science-based fisheries management, and as a result, species such as Acadian redfish are now thriving.

Please stay the course and keep our national fisheries policies strong, not only for the future of Acadian redfish, but for the health of the economy, our local communities, and the ocean as a whole.

Acadian Redfish (Sebastes fasciatus)

New England Aquarium
Protecting the blue planet
New Bedford Whaling Museum
Civic Education and Beyond
Civic Education in Massachusetts

The 2018 Massachusetts Framework includes new components designed to strengthen students’ skills for informed citizenship and political participation.

Education for Civic Life in a Democracy
The primary purpose of a history and social science education is to prepare students to have the knowledge and skills to become thoughtful and active participants in a democratic society and a complex world.
Civic Education in Massachusetts

1. An effective history and social science education teaches students about the legacy of democratic government, recognizing its challenges and inherent dilemmas.

2. An effective history and social science education incorporates diverse perspectives and acknowledges that perceptions of events are affected by race, ethnicity, culture, religion, education, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and personal experience.

3. An effective history and social science education teaches students to think historically.

4. An effective history and social science education incorporates the study of current events and news/media literacy.
Whales Today

An exhibition dedicated to the science and behavior of whales, their cultural impact, the current threats to their survival, and empowering all to support conservation efforts.

- *Whales Today* provides an introduction to and an examination of the status of whales in today’s oceans and their historic and current interactions with humankind.

- Through an exploration of whale biology, behavior, and habitat, visitors explore challenges currently facing whales - ship strikes, entanglements, and noise pollution - while learning about conservation efforts and eco-tourism as a way to create positive change.

- This includes information on current news and legislation, and ways people can have an impact - from recycling to writing elected officials.
High School Apprenticeship Program

Provides access to resources and experiences that deepen community engagement, promote personal and professional development, and cultivate college and career success.

- Apprentices learn about whales and whale biology, the history of their city and the stories of the people whose culture, language, and accomplishments contribute to their community.

- Students connect their learning to real-world experiences - visiting cultural sites, planning and hosting events, developing and executing multidisciplinary projects

2016 - Cultures w/Connections project
2019 - It has no name, but it has an aim!
Lighting the Way Vision/Impact Statement:
SouthCoast community members will understand and celebrate the contributions of women to our community and have a stronger sense of collective identity and civic pride.

- School Program
- Walking Tours
- Young Artist Showcase
- Event - Centennial & its Legacies
  - Humanities forum
  - Resource fair
- Educator Workshop (June)
- Election Forum on Women’s Issues
  - Panel of women’s leaders talking about key issues in the state and federal elections
How do you drive civic engagement when you are literally stuck in the past?
Small & Large Steps

- Programmatic examples:
  - Naturalization Ceremony on Independence Day
  - Knitting for Soldiers program
  - My Voice, My Vote: Town Meeting school program
  - Partnership programming: Mass Audubon for Earth Day
  - Updated our hands-on workshops for schools

- Community connections:
  - Voting location for town of Sturbridge
  - Solar field and public commitment to renewable energy
  - Opening a public charter school

The success of these initiatives energized us and left us wanting to make a broader institutional shift.
What does civic engagement look like at a living history museum?

- Visitors leave wanting to take action in some way.
How do we get there?

- People driven interpretation. There was already a lot of conversation happening, but is it the type of conversation that inspires action? (not really) How do we know?
  - Visitor surveys
  - Focus groups
  - Staff meetings
  - Observations

- What do our very best interpreters and museum educators do?
  - Make connections between the past and the present easily
  - Find the points of relevance to visitors lives
  - Proactively engage visitors and ask them questions
  - Lean in to the flexible, dialogue driven, third person interpretation environment
New Interpretive and Education Plan

- National Endowment for the Humanities Planning Grant (currently writing implementation grant)
- Collaboration between Interpretation, Education, and Collections Department
- Engaged scholars, consultants, outside evaluator, community groups, and staff working groups
So, what’s the plan?

- Creating goals (content, social, and emotional) for all interpretative spaces, programs, and exhibitions
- Shift focus from staff as deliverers of content to facilitators of dialogue through a rigorous training and education plan
- Institutional commitment to connecting the past and the present and to 3rd person interpretation
- Defining institutional core values
- Creating a thoughtful beginning and ending plan for visitors
  - Setting the stage for dialogue and action through better visitor orientation
  - Call to action concluding experience
Case Study: Fisheries policy messaging with visitors
Fishing for Public Engagement Goals

1. Raise visitor awareness of seafood issues
2. Document visitor support for science-based fisheries management policies
3. Increase recognition of the role of aquariums in conservation
4. Maintain, if not enhance, the overall quality of the visitor experience
5. Strengthen regional collaboration (NEAq-specific goal)
Fishing for Public Engagement Participants

- Seattle Aquarium
- New England Aquarium
- Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center
- Texas State Aquarium
- Mystic Aquarium
- The Florida Aquarium
- The Ocean Project

Protecting the blue planet
Fishing for Public Engagement

The Plan

Six Aquariums, Same Story

1. Begin with the story of a local fish species that is recovering
2. Connect that story to sustainable seafood choices and national fisheries management policy
3. Include carryover benefits to surrounding environment and local community
4. Relay urgency, and ask for a show of support by signing a comment card to Congress
Fishing for Public Engagement Evaluation

1. Tracked response rates for comment cards
2. Collected 2500 randomly sampled exit surveys total from all six participating aquariums to compare responses from visitors that were exposed to message versus those that were not (~400 surveys from NEAq)
3. Collected qualitative staff feedback
# Fishing for Public Engagement

## Results from All Aquariums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Visitors</td>
<td>112,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given the Messaging</td>
<td>23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had Access to a Card</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed a Card</td>
<td>3,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Response Rate</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Lessons Learned

1. Higher participation when signing visible to others
2. Higher participation (50% vs 23%) when handed a card
Fishing for Public Engagement
Results from New England Aquarium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11,555 TOTAL VISITORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4265 GIVEN THE MESSAGING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1046 HAD ACCESS TO A CARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>510 SIGNED A CARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49% OVERALL RESPONSE RATE!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lessons Learned
1. Higher participation when signing visible to others
2. Higher participation (50% vs 23%) when handed a card

Dear Member of Congress,
Our country is a leader in science-based fisheries management, and as a result, species such as Acadian redfish are now thriving. Please stay the course and keep our national fisheries policies strong, not only for the future of Acadian redfish, but for the health of the economy, our local communities, and the ocean as a whole.

[Signature]
[Date]
[ZIP Code]
Fishing for Public Engagement
Results

How likely is it that you would recommend the New England Aquarium to a friend or colleague?

If they didn’t see the Public Service Announcement: 75%

If they did see the Public Service Announcement: 83%

OVERALL ACROSS ALL AQUARIUMS: 61% → 81%
Fishing for Public Engagement
Takeaways

Yes! We Can!

✅ Our visitors were very willing to sign the cards

✅ Engaged visitors consistently expressed higher awareness and support for the issues (along with a greater sense that their actions mattered)

✅ Engaged visitors consistently expressed more recognitions and appreciation for the aquarium and the engagement enhanced the quality of visitor experience
In my opinion I feel the PSA was a big success for spreading awareness; by the end of the campaign we were able to collect hundreds of signatures towards helping the Acadian Redfish ecosystem. We had our hosts hand out the PSA postcards and after every film as we were collecting them all back, patrons would come up to the hosts and myself asking what else they could do to help, and those who weren't able to get a postcard beforehand asked how they could get one so they could join and help the cause.

I truly found the turn out of this campaign pretty incredible. The usual fear people face when running a campaign like this is the patrons on the receiving end may feel pressured to join or uneasy to add their names. Yet everyone I spoke with throughout the whole process was so ready to join the AQ's side and help where they can! Watching it from start to finish really made me want to help the next mission the Aquarium takes on!
And now, it’s your turn!