

Americans, Our History, and the 250th

 Wilkening Consulting

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Initial Question:

Will Americans want to celebrate
the 250th anniversary of the
signing of the Declaration of
Independence?

And if so ... how?

1 Our values, attitudes, and beliefs affect how we approach the past ... and the divisions in our country extend to history.

2 That history is highly valued ... but a lack of inclusion is a barrier to engagement.

3 Yet the majority hold values about our country that they honor and respect ... and will want to acknowledge in 2026.

TRADITIONALS: More likely to have these traits



* Exception: small segment of "history buffs" that are heavily engaged in history

NEOTERIC:

More likely to have these traits

Inclusive
(some status quo)

Politically/socially liberal

Somewhat more engaged with history

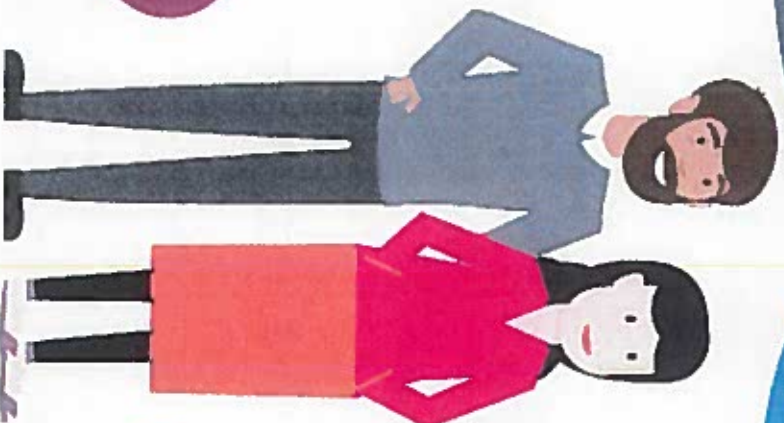
Generally more engagement with community, broader world

Symbolic Patriot
(some not patriotic at all)

Additive approach to history

More curious
(especially eudaemonic curiosity)

Demographically: tend to be younger, more female, more educational attainment



TYPES OF AMERICAN PATRIOTISM (OR NOT)



BLIND PATRIOTISM:

- A concrete and uncritical support of national policies and practices
- *Can be rooted in American nationalism*
- Increases affection for in-groups
- *“The United States is the best country on earth.”*



SYMBOLIC PATRIOTISM:

- More abstract and affective attachment to nation and its core values
- Separates out affection for country from support for its institutions and policies
- Increases affection for out-groups
- *“The United States is a great country ... but so are others.”*



MINIMAL/NO PATRIOTIC IDENTITY:

- Not part of their identity ... or feel betrayed by the United States
- Generally feel that other countries are better

AMERICAN PATRIOTISM – HISTORY MUSEUM-GOERS

The U.S. stands above all other countries in the world



The U.S. is one of the greatest countries in the world, along with some others



There are other countries/most other countries are better than the U.S.

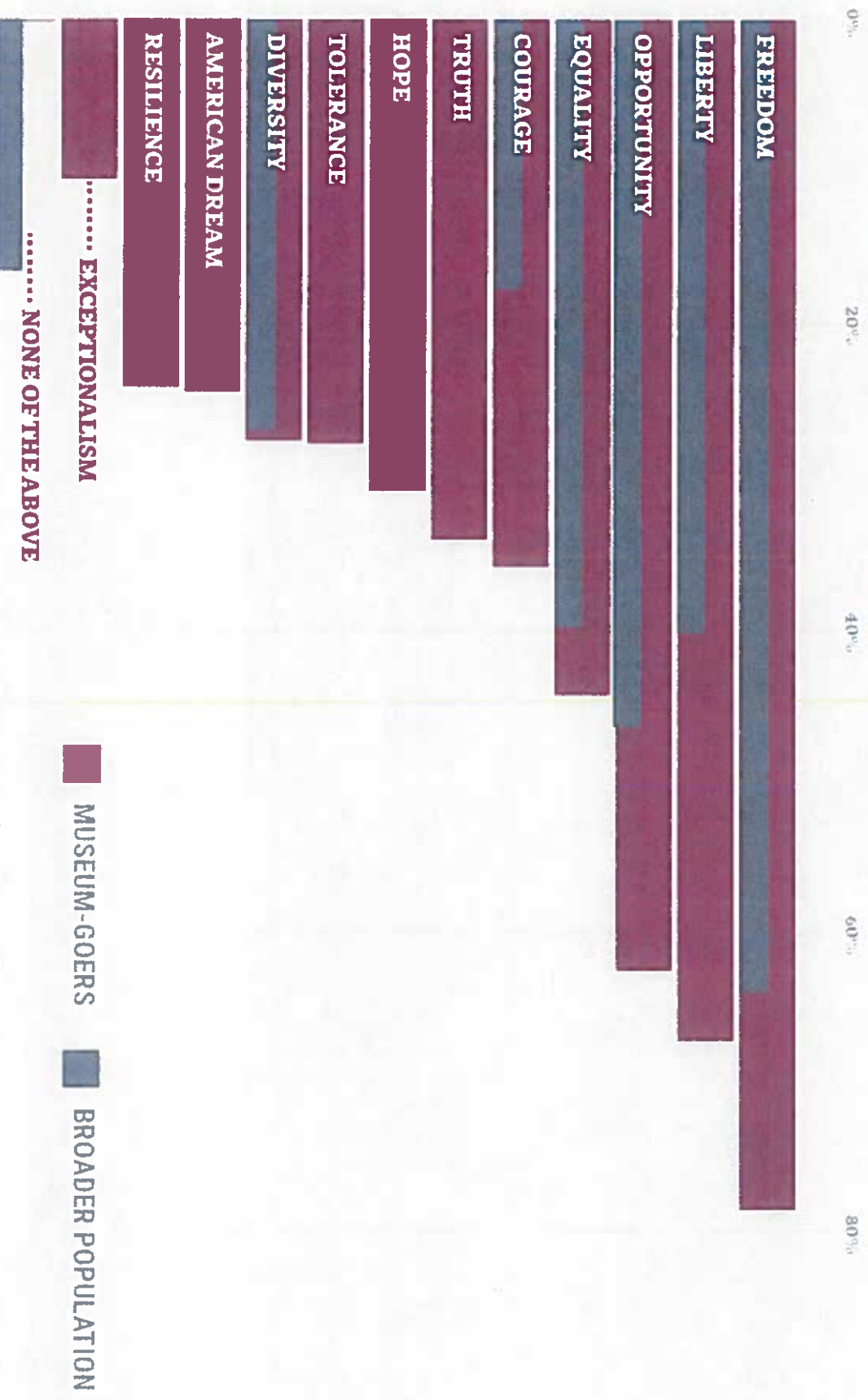


HISTORY MUSEUM-GOERS



PEW/BROADER

Which of America's Founding Ideals are Most Important to You? (Choose 5)



Note: the broader population only received the following choices: freedom, liberty, equality, diversity, courage, and opportunity, and were limited to 3 choices

● TRADITIONAL CLUSTER VALUES

LIBERTY

COURAGE

AMERICAN DREAM

EXCEPTIONALISM

OPPORTUNITY

- In quantitative analysis, this word appears as a rather uniting value
- BUT ... the way this word was used in written-in comments was not uniting, but instead used by some in the Traditional Cluster to explain inequality

● NEOTERIC CLUSTER VALUES

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY

TOLERANCE

Written-in addition:

IDEA THAT AMERICA DOES NOT LIVE UP TO OUR FOUNDING VALUES

"It was stated this country was founded with all people being created equal, but America, and Americans have failed at that. The founding documents must be held to the language it contains for all Americans. We need to honor those documents to make all peoples equal."

- MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

There was also pushback within this cluster about American founding values in the first place

"There are not any particular values that I would associate with being uniquely American. For example concepts such as courage, honor, duty, freedom, ingenuity, creativity, etc. can be found in many people, no matter what country they live in."

- ANCATDUBH1980 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

AMERICAN IDENTITY: TAKEAWAYS

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER

- Prefers an America that aligns with their more traditional values ... which tends to make them Blind Patriots
- Most desired what they perceive as a benign status quo, which can include:
 - Tolerance is something you put up with
 - We are not hyphenated Americans
 - People of color should assimilate into existing mainstream culture
 - Desire for unity and a common story ... which tends to be celebratory and not that inclusive
- But some are fighting hard for a celebratory white history ... and deliberately avoiding or loudly condemning more inclusive stories
- In broader population, the Traditional Cluster is less likely to visit history museums
 - But a significant segment of history museum-goers are Traditional

NEOTERIC CLUSTER

- Prefers an America that promotes equality and diversity ... which tends to make them Symbolic Patriots or to not have patriotic identity
- Most desired a more inclusive America, as they felt it aligned with ideals of our country
 - Tolerance means acceptance
 - We are all our own cultures/identities
 - There are many stories that contribute to our country's story
 - Equity matters
- More likely to visit history museums, casually or regularly

America: 2026



Consensus that everyone wants
what is best for our families,
communities, and country in 2026.

And many wished for a less
polarized and divisive public
discourse.

But there were strong differences in
opinion about what that means.

Some point to the past as the ideal
to go *back* to.

Others point to a more equitable
society they hope to find *in the*
future.



HOPES FOR 2026

MORE TRADITIONAL

Focus on greatness, pride, maintaining rights and liberty, honoring the past, and, for some, religion

“Return to the values that made this country strong: self-independence, acknowledging God as the Divine inspiration for our founding documents and the need for our culture to return to a moral society, emphasizing standards of truth, virtue, liberty and freedom.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

MORE NEOTERIC

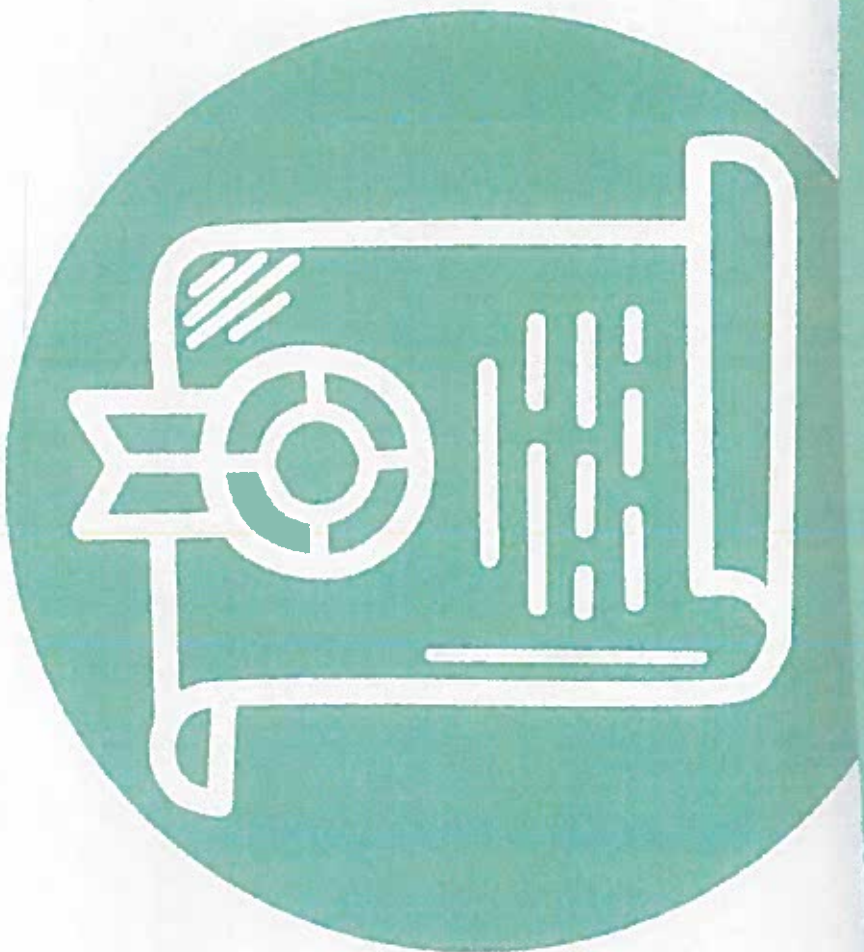
Focus on inclusion, diversity, equity, with a number also commenting on fighting climate change and fair elections

“More equality for all. More universal care for citizens and acceptance and appreciation of diversity and its beneficial effects to our society.”

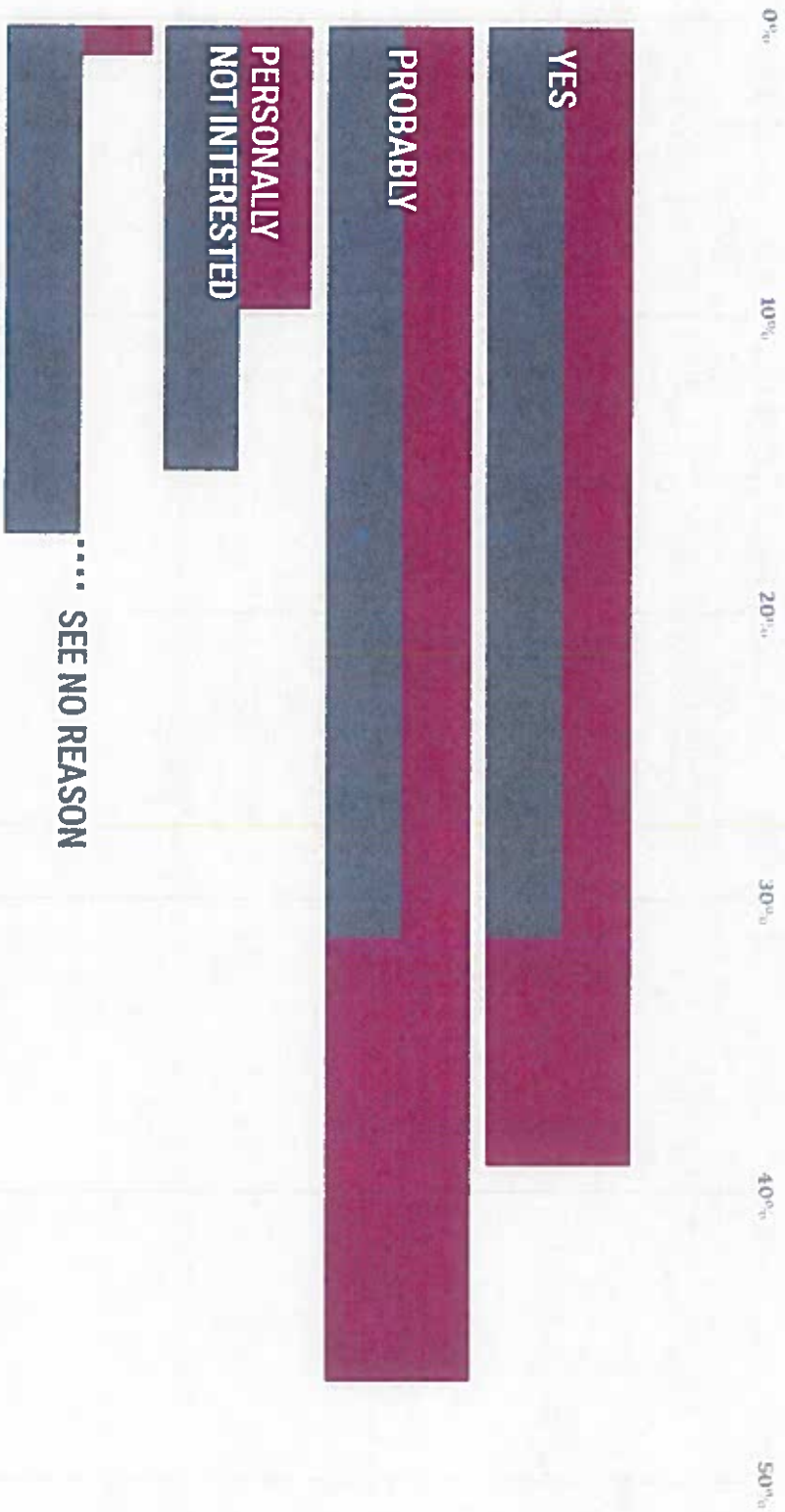
– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

If we are envisioning such different
Americas ... how can we come
together to commemorate the
250th?

The
250th



Will You Do Anything to Celebrate the 250th?



MUSEUM-GOERS BROADER POPULATION

86% of museum-goers, and 2/3 of the broader population, reported they are likely to want to celebrate the 250th



ENTHUSIASM DIFFERENCES

Traditionals were much more enthusiastic

“ **Let's throw
a big party!**

– MUD WINTER (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

**I would love to see
grand celebrations
throughout the year.**

– DAKOTA2265 (BROADER PANEL)

”

Neoterics had a more muted response

“ **Willing to entertain
options presented.** ”

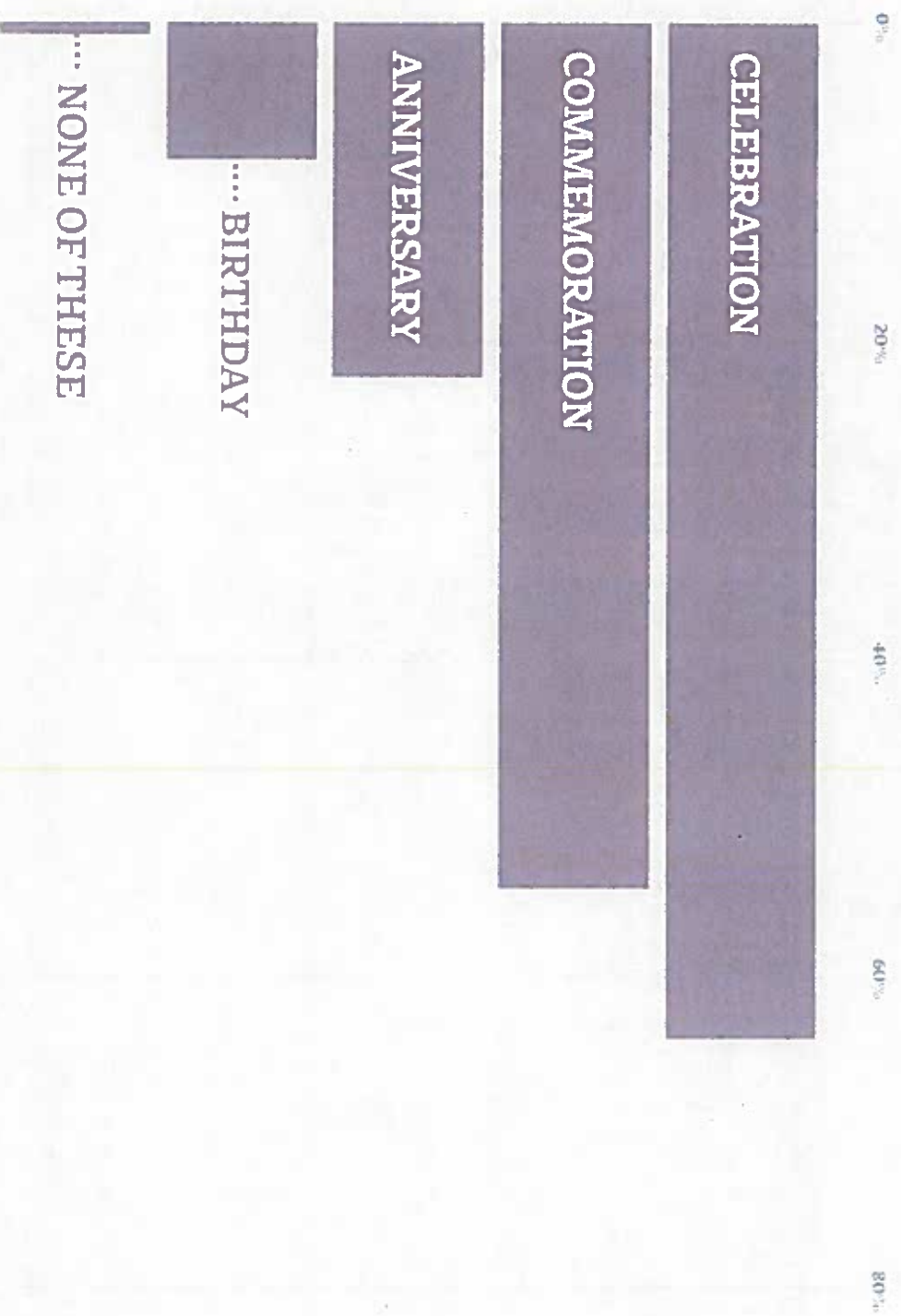
– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Or to approach it with more wariness
Especially broader panelists

“ **I really am not that
interested in this as a piece of
history, so I wouldn't really care
if it is commemorated in my
local community.** ”

– A B (BROADER PANEL)

What Best Describes the Potential Events Surrounding the 250th?



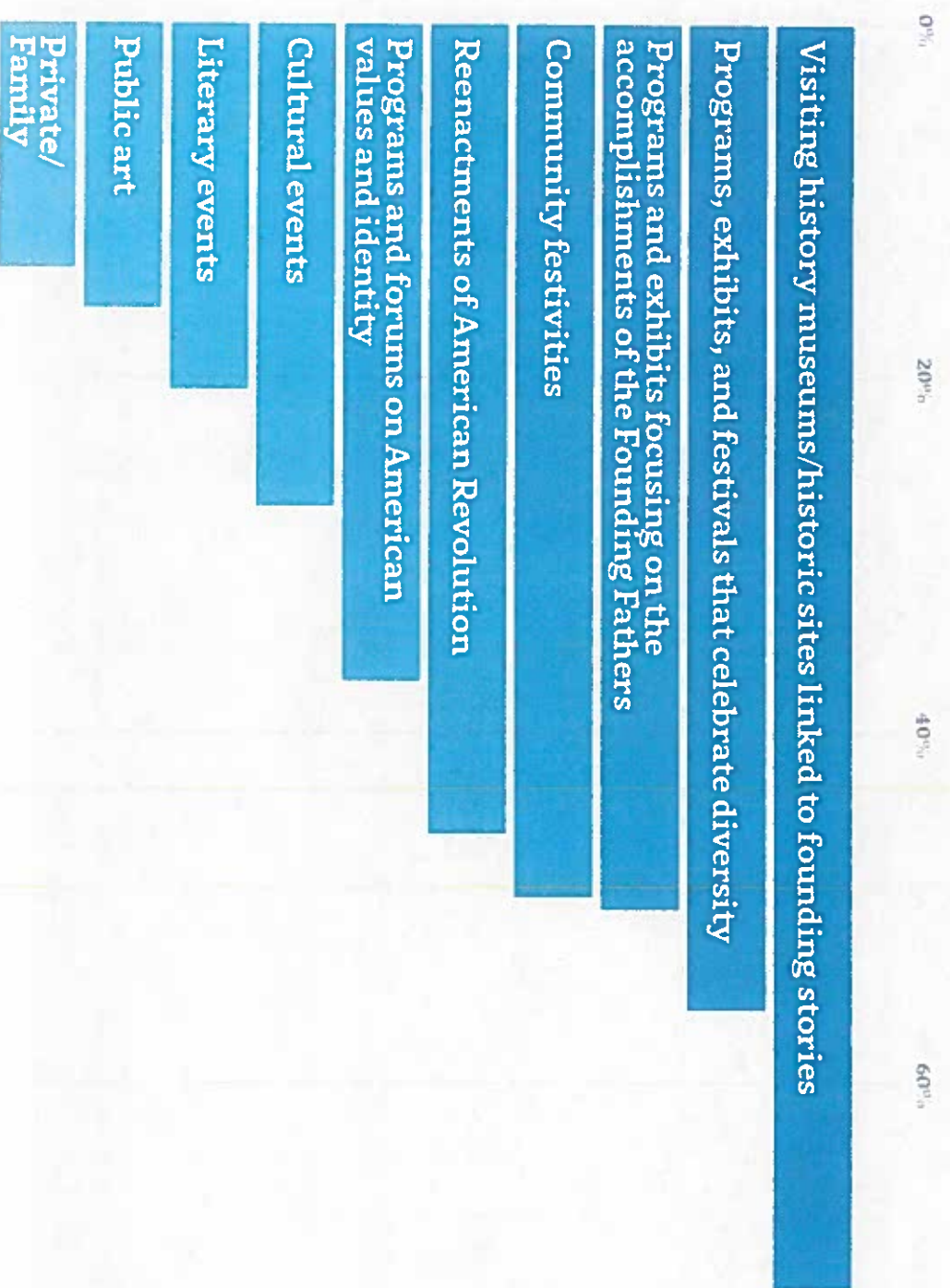
At first glance, it looks like
“celebration” is the right word ...

... but it skewed toward the
Traditional Cluster, and the Neoteric
Cluster was less enthusiastic.

And for those who had significant concerns about how inclusive events will be, or that the U.S. hasn't lived up to its values, the word "celebration" can appear to be tone-deaf (or worse).

Thus, “commemoration” is recommended for broader engagement.

If Yes, How Will You Acknowledge the 250th?



* Question not asked of broader population.

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER AND THE 250TH

★ **MUCH MORE ENTHUSIASTIC**

★ **IT IS A CELEBRATION, FOCUSING ON POSITIVE STORIES OF OUR FOUNDING AND VALUES**

★ **DEVELOPING PRIDE**

"One word comes to mind: PRIDE! Yes, our country struggles with many of today's issues, but that is nothing new. There have always been struggles, and we have always had differing opinions. But, with the 250th anniversary of this pivotal event in our history, we need to focus on bringing all Americans together through pride in their country. This anniversary is further proof that the USA is here to stay, and our approach to existence works. Freedom works." – LOLLIE S (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ **HONORING FOUNDING FATHERS**

"I'd like to see special parades and community pride reignited and our Founding Fathers once again revered." – CHASINGHAWK (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ **SENSE OF SACRIFICE**

"For history museums and historic sites, I would like to see programs that are full of the American Spirit ! I would put in place exhibits that show the great men and women who fought so bravely to achieve our Independence!" – POTTERYLOVE (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ **UNITY**

"I would like the outcome of the events associated with this celebrations to bring about unity of our nation." – AMILLEROH (BROADER PANEL)

NEOTERIC CLUSTER AND THE 250TH

★ **WANT A MORE THOUGHTFUL, INCLUSIVE COMMEMORATION**

★ **NOT JUST FOUNDING FATHERS**

"I think we should broaden it, and not just focus on the Founding Fathers." - LYNN (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ **EMBRACING DIFFERENCES**

"I would like the United States to be different. I would like to see more positivity and also to respect and embrace each other's differences." - RENEET1984 (BROADER PANEL)

★ **DIVERSE HISTORY**

"I would immediately restructure to hire staff of color and hire consultants and experts to bring in Native, Black, and Latinx voices. I would like to see other stories told." - CRAMIREZ (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

"I'd also get input from Native American communities on how to communicate the cost of forming this country to them and their legacy; nobody should go through the 250th thinking wow, there was this win-win situation when the nation was born." - WOODBA (BROADER PANEL)

★ **A LOT OF "WORK IN PROGRESS"**

"I would hope the outcome of these events would help us all focus more on who we are as a nation and whether we are reflecting the values championed and authored by our founders. Quite simply, are we practicing what our Founding Fathers preached?" - FELICITY R. BIJOU (BROADER PANEL)

THE 250TH TAKEAWAYS

The Traditional Cluster is excited and enthusiastic about the 250th

- So long as some of your programming engages them, they will likely be satisfied

This means positive, celebratory things that focus on things that *do* unite us

- Freedom
- Value of history
- And things we all enjoy ... food, fireworks, family

THE 250TH TAKEAWAYS

But there are many in the Neoteric cluster, which includes a significant part of the broader population, that want to see more inclusive, even meaningful content as well

- Ways that encourage critical assessment of how our country is doing in fulfilling our values
- And ways that are inclusive of a diverse population
- For them, a *purely* superficial celebration will read as tone-deaf
- They are seeking a more thoughtful balance of fun and inclusive activities



POTENTIAL MESSAGING THEMES



The 250th as a “Commemoration”



Exploration of freedom



Sense we are striving to achieve freedom and equality of opportunity for all in America



But we have to know history to achieve those values



And Americans can help be part of that process of making that better American future... through history



Inclusion of all stories



POTENTIAL MESSAGING

Because the Traditional Cluster is all in anyway for the 250th ...

- **And Traditional non-visitors are least likely to become visitors**

While growth can be found with the Neoteric cluster in the broader

population ... who want that inclusive history and admission that we are

still striving for a more perfect union