

History Cambridge

America250 Community Survey

Project Goal

To help History Cambridge gather information from the Cambridge community about the period surrounding the Revolutionary War that will inform the development of activities and programming to commemorate America 250.

Methods

Survey Design and Distribution

- A community survey was developed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.
- The survey instrument consisted of a combination of closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions to capture rich, descriptive responses from participants.

Data Collection

The data collection period spanned three months, from May to July 2024.

A multi-pronged approach aimed to capture a wide cross-section of the community. A variety of distribution channels were employed:

- Monthly e-newsletter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Cambridge Day website
- QR codes displayed at various pop-up events throughout Cambridge

Data Analysis

- Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and dispersion (standard deviation, range) where appropriate. Frequency distributions and percentages were calculated for categorical variables.
- Qualitative data from open-ended questions underwent an analysis process that included open coding of responses to identify key concepts and overarching themes.

Survey Results

People are saying positive things about History Cambridge, unprompted

I think that History Cambridge is doing a fantastic job of helping to unite Cambridge through our history.

Anything that helps raise understanding that history is essential to understanding both public events and political decisions and one's personal evolution.

I love this org!

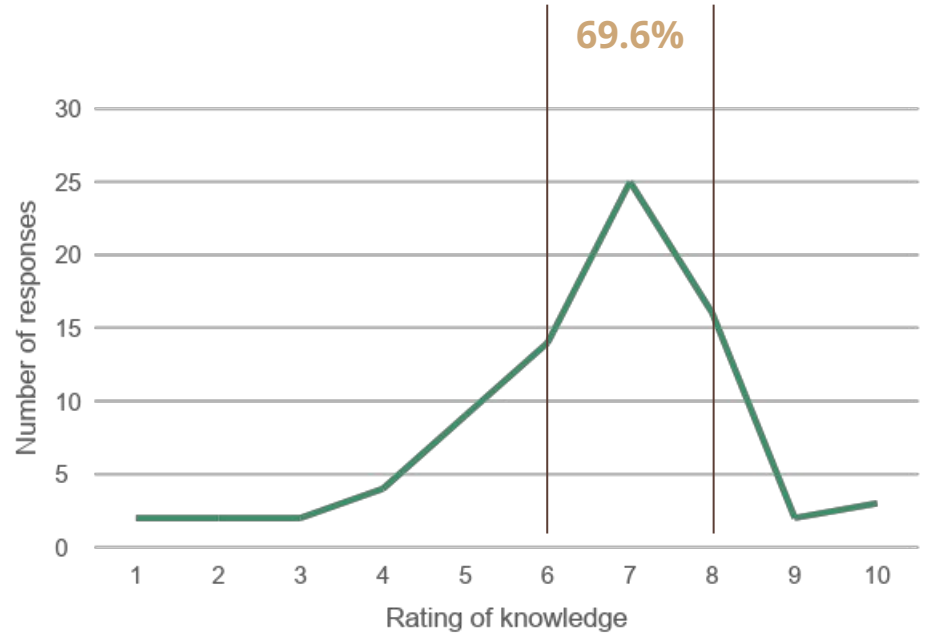
Thank you for sending this survey, I appreciate that you all want to know what people think and want.

History Cambridge can be a leader in the 250th celebration.

73%

Respondents who say that the 250th
anniversary of 1776 is
moderately or very important to them

Most respondents consider themselves **fairly knowledgeable** about the period surrounding the Revolutionary War



What does 1776 represent for you?

Independence

Democratic ideals

Founding of a nation

Freedom

Start

Revolutionary change

Foundational documents

National pride and patriotism

Why is it important to mark the 250th milestone?

Historical Significance

a pivotal year in American history; a crucial moment that shaped the nation's future

Educational Opportunity

a chance to learn more about history and educate others about the complexities of the period

Moment of Reflection

an opportunity to reflect on how far the country has come since its founding and what still needs improvement

Critical Perspective

a call to acknowledge the contradictions of the period alongside the ideals of freedom and democracy

Personal Connection

a strong personal or familial connection to the period, often through ancestry or membership in historical societies

Yet, 1776 is a **contested symbol** in American history

Traditional/Patriotic: positive concepts such as independence and freedom; emphasize the positive aspects of the American Revolution

- "The starting point of the most important democratic civilization in history."
- "The bravery, self-reliance and community-reliance to envision a different future."

Critical/Nuanced Views: acknowledge the complexities and contradictions of the period; emphasize the ongoing legacy of these historical events

- "And the enslaved population, what was their experience, being left out of this great and noble experiment?"
- "European colonizers stole this land, stole human beings and continue to benefit from stolen people and lands. It's disgusting, painful and horrific for my family and ancestors."
- "This anniversary is important to me only as a way for white folks particularly to take accountability for the injustices we've benefited from."

What respondents want to know more about

Experiences of marginalized groups

- Women's roles and experiences*
- Enslaved people and slavery
- Indigenous peoples
- People of color
- Children
- LGBTQ+ people

Everyday life of ordinary people

- Daily experiences during the war
- How average citizens viewed the revolution
- Living conditions
- Social and economic aspects of life

Cambridge-specific history

- Events and people in Cambridge during the revolution
- Specific battles
- Cambridge's role in the wider conflict

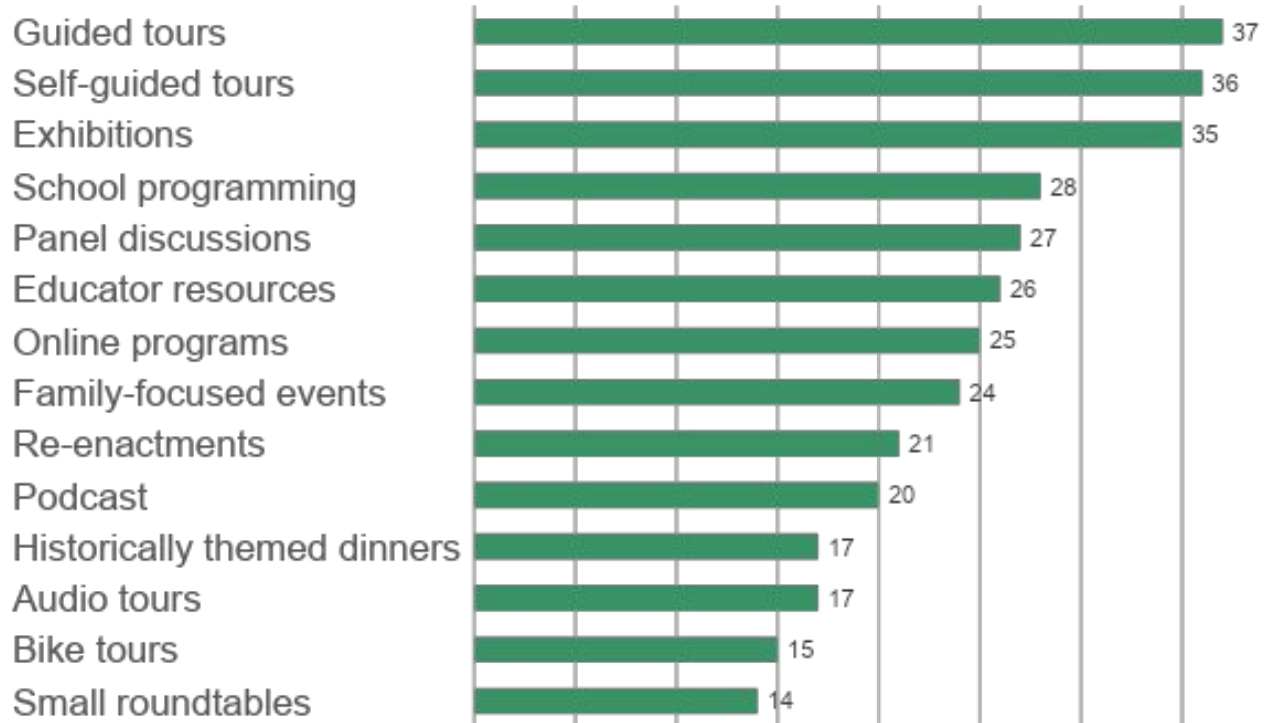
Loyalists and opposition

- Experiences of those who opposed the revolution
- Reasons for loyalist views
- What happened to loyalists after the war

Complex narratives

- Stories that go beyond the traditional patriotic narrative
- Lesser-known figures and events

Respondents are interested in a variety of activities and resources



Recommendations

1. Develop content and programming that focuses on:

- The daily experiences of ordinary people, including living conditions and social and economic aspects of life
- The perspectives of marginalized groups, including women, enslaved people, Indigenous peoples, people of color, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals
- Examples of specific events and battles that happened in Cambridge
- A connection between events in the past with current issues

2. Present complex narratives

- Acknowledge the contradictions inherent in the period surrounding the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence
- Offer historical accounts that go beyond traditional patriotic narratives
- Invite people to engage people in critical thought about the core principles of independence and freedom
- Include stories of loyalists and opposition to the revolution as well as lesser known historical figures

3. Make it personal

- Help people understand the ongoing relevance and impact of the Revolutionary period on contemporary society
- Encourage participants to reflect on the progress made since 1776 and the work they can do to address ongoing challenges related to equality and justice
- Challenge people to think about their lives at this historical moment

4. Engage a younger and more diverse demographic

- Connect this historic milestone to the current moment
- Continue pop-ups and other ways to bring history to people wherever they are
- Consider assembling a programming committee that includes community members, educators, and historians
- Use online resources and social media to reach a broader audience and provide accessible educational content

5. Incorporate feedback and evaluation into programs

- Continue to gather information from people online and through post-programming surveys
- Include measures that deepen an understanding of what people are learning from programs and what they would like more of
- Build feedback loops so data is used as part of continuous program planning and progress monitoring

Project Team

This project was co-constructed and designed by an advisory team that included History Cambridge staff and an external evaluator from [Reframe Evaluation](#). Marieke Van Damme, Executive Director, and Beth Folsom, Program Manager, were responsible for outreach and recruitment efforts. Luba Falk Feigenberg managed and analyzed the data as well as prepared the report on findings and recommendations.

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