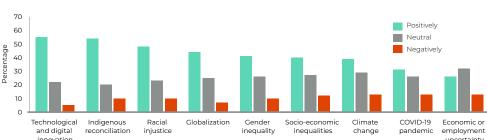
SOCIAL CHANGE, ACTIVISM, AND NEUTRALITY

A Museums for Me data story

The museum sector is currently grappling with the shifting role of museums as active

HOW HAVE THE FOLLOWING CURRENT SOCIAL ISSUES CHANGED **HOW YOU SEE THE ROLE AND VALUE OF MUSEUMS?**



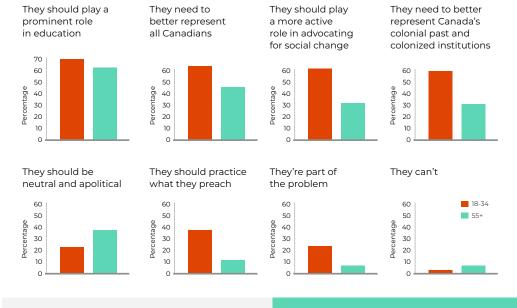
The question is not if museums should address societal issues, but how. When asked this question, Canadians selected education, better representation of all Canadians, and advocating for social change as the preferred ways for museums to respond. This echoes the public perception that museums are trusted institutions that excel in preservation, education, and storytelling, but could do more to represent their communities (see Getting to Relevance Through Accessibility and Representation and Telling the Truth: Trustworthiness, Learning, and Sharing Authority).

HOW CAN MUSEUMS ADDRESS THESE KINDS OF SOCIETAL ISSUES?

They should play a They need to They should play They need to better prominent role better represent a more active represent Canada's in education all Canadians role in advocating colonial past and colonized institutions for social change **65**% 44% They can't They should be They should practice They're part of neutral and apolitical what they preach the problem **31**% 23%

To understand the importance of this data for the future for museums, it is important to look at demographic shifts evident in the responses. The data shows that younger Canadians, aged 18 – 34, are more likely to think that museums should actively advocate for social change. This contrasts with older Canadians, aged 55+, who are more likely to think that museums should be neutral and apolitical.

HOW CAN MUSEUMS ADDRESS THESE KINDS OF SOCIETAL ISSUES?



the truth about Canada's shared history, to better represent the stories and experiences of all Canadians, and to play an active role in advocating for social change. They have an expectation that museums will not shy away from difficult histories, but that they will present them in a way that is fact-based, dispels misinformation, respects multiple perspectives, and seeks to uncover the truth. There is an increasing acknowledgment among museum workers that museums are not

Younger generations want museums to tell

place they will see and hear that."

neutral. However, the expectation of neutrality persists with 68% OF RESPONDENTS agreeing that museums should be neutral and unbiased in their presentation of material and exhibits. Neutrality implies impartiality and objectivity, but museum workers know that exhibits, collections, and programs are not objective. The work of museums is imbued with the biases of its staff, board, volunteers, funders, and other stakeholders. Even the visitor brings their own bias to the interpretation of the materials presented.

MUSEUMS SHOULD BE NEUTRAL AND UNBIASED IN THEIR PRESENTATION OF MATERIAL AND EXHIBITS.

Overall (Agree)

68%

18-34 (Agree)

60%

To counter the lack of agreement around the

term 'neutrality', museums should move away from the idea that museums are

neutral and instead highlight their role

role to play in educating their

as a credible advocate for societal issues.

Museums - What We Heard report The Alberta Museums Association gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through $the Canada \ Cultural \ Investment \ Fund \ and \ the \ Province \ of \ Alberta \ through \ the \ Community \ Initiatives \ Program \ for \ the \ Province \ of \ Alberta \ through \ the \ Community \ Initiatives \ Program \ for \ the \ Province \ of \ Alberta \ through \ the \ Community \ Initiatives \ Program \ for \ the \ Province \ of \ Alberta \ through \ the \ Community \ Initiatives \ Program \ for \ the \ Province \ of \ Alberta \ through \ the \ Province \ of \ Alberta \ through \ the \ Province \ of \ Alberta \ through \ through$

All data collected as part of a 2021 national survey, Museums for Me, undertaken as part of Reconsidering Museums. For detailed information on questions and responses, see the Museums For Me: Engaging Canadians on the Future of



Reconsidering Museums project.



