

Exploring the Public Value of Ohio's History

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is this report and what does it say?

The *Exploring the Public Value of Ohio's History* report, as its name suggests, is a detailed study of how people think of and use history from multiple perspectives. The report was researched and written by a project team from The University of Toledo's Urban Affairs Center in partnership with the Ohio Historical Society. The report summarizes survey data from four different points of view: 1) historic site administrators, 2) visitors to historic sites and museums, 3) social studies teachers and 4) the general public. In all, 2,341 people (almost all of them Ohio residents) responded to surveys either by phone, in person or online during the fall of 2008. The goal was to capture the extent to which people from varying perspectives care about and perceive of the public value of history in their daily lives. The report helps answer basic questions such as what events, memories and timeframes do people consider history? Do people care about their own past or that of their community? How do people prefer to use history or learn from it? Do those who say they value history differ in any way from those who say they do not? Finally, the report discusses the value of historic preservation, offers recommendations for linking history with public policy opportunities as well as 10 vignettes, or examples of how history and historic preservation activities today are strengthening communities and adding value to the public.

Why was this report written?

The report was initiated by the Ohio Historical Society in an effort to help better define how the public perceives the value of history, if at all. As Harvard's Mark H. Moore, a pioneer in the study of public value, has put it: "Public value is what the public values." *Exploring the Public Value of History* was conceived to do just as the title suggests for the benefit of decision makers – everyone from state policymakers to the staff and board members of state and local history organizations to educators – and for the benefit of the public who benefit from having access in tangible ways to the items, information and memories that make up our collective past.

What conclusions does the report make?

Several, based largely on survey input from more than 2,300 people. In summary:

- Ohioans view history in surprisingly broad and inclusive ways. Ohioans are more likely to cite personal examples of history they lived through or remember (even as recent as Hurricane Katrina) before citing more distant historical examples such as Ancient Rome or World War II.
- People who visit Ohio's historic sites express overwhelming satisfaction with the learning or entertainment opportunity provided by the historic site or museum. The visiting public thinks more should be done to promote the state's history and historic sites. While Ohioans perceive that Ohio spends the same or less on history than its neighboring states, they are inclined to think that the public sector should invest more.
- Ohio social studies teachers echo these findings, asserting that neither society nor the government puts enough value in teaching history, especially the history of their own communities. Educators said they turn to local history organizations to obtain primary source materials, but want an even deeper integration of Ohio's history in their classrooms. One teacher observed that "no one bled on the field or bravely stood up to

tyranny because X=5; children grow into responsible citizens inspired by serious study of their history.”

- Connecting with history clearly allows people to connect with feelings of civic pride and responsibility – 97 percent of survey respondents said their visit to an Ohio site made them proud to be an American. Additionally, there is a clear tie between those who say that history is important and civic participation – they are 23 percent more likely to do things like vote, join community organizations and find other avenues for civic engagement – than those who say they do not think history is important.
- Ohio would benefit by capitalizing on public policy opportunities that integrate Ohio history and historic preservation. Ohio’s school reform efforts, the upcoming Civil War sesquicentennial, investing a portion of federal stimulus funds for infrastructure and energy efficiency on historic preservation projects throughout the state and the demand to create a competitive matching grants program for local history-related organizations are a few examples of opportunities for Ohio’s leaders to connect meaningfully Ohio’s history with its future.

Why did you choose the 10 vignettes in the report?

The project team chose the 10 vignettes, or case studies, based on several factors. The programs, organizations and sites chosen have successfully utilized history as their primary mission or motivation, coupled with the capacity to have demonstrated an economic impact. The 10 examples are not intended to be exhaustive, but a reflection of the abundance of successful historic sites, organizations and programs that showcase Ohio’s history in all its diversity.

How was the report funded?

Exploring the Public Value of Ohio’s History was funded by a private endowment of the Ohio Historical Society with assistance from the Ohio Division of Travel. The total cost of the report was \$70,850.

How will the information in the report be used?

Although the report was completed for the Ohio Historical Society, the findings and all supplementary data in the report are available to the general public. The full report and the associated research can be found online at www.ohiohistory.org. A full explanation of the methodology for the surveys conducted can be found at <http://uac.utoledo.edu/Publications/OhioHistory.htm>. The Ohio Historical Society and the authors of the report share the hope that decision makers throughout Ohio will have a deeper understanding of how the public perceives the value of history and will make better decisions based on the information presented in the report. Hopefully, Ohio’s state and local history organizations can also make better decisions about their organizations or how to serve the needs of their customers and stakeholders based on the information in this report. Perhaps Ohio’s history organizations will use the information presented in this report to help write stronger grant applications, improve their marketing efforts, generate more private donations or convince others that the public does, indeed, value history. Ultimately, the input gathered from multiple perspectives in this report is unequivocal: Ohioans express a deep appreciation for history and want their state to do more to demonstrate that it, too, shares their enthusiasm for history as both an educational tool and a force for stronger civic engagement.