

The following information has been assembled to assist and inspire you in developing local exhibitions and public humanities programs to complement the themes of the *Voices and Votes* exhibition. As the exhibition shows, a healthy and vibrant democracy depends upon an informed, welcomed, and engaged citizenry. Humanities, cultural, and historical organizations have an opportunity through programming and exhibitions for *Voices and Votes* to help create dialogue and avenues for understanding. Instead of further entrenching differences between us politically and socially, *Voices and Votes* presents a chance to bring people together to exchange ideas. They may tackle the same questions past Americans have faced: Who will be included? Whose voices will be heard? What does it mean to be a citizen? The ideas in **bold lettering** reflect topics from the script and include questions below that can be launching points for inspiring ideas and discussions.

Think Collaboratively!

Who are the best partners in your area to tell the story of democracy in your town? Potential collaborators could be: schools or universities, art and history museums, historical associations, civic organizations, political memorabilia collectors, elected officials, Census Bureau Regional Offices, and state department of elections. There are a vast number of books and films for children, young adults, and adults on the topics related to democracy so be in touch with your local library to see how they might want to collaborate.

The power of *Voices and Votes* are the rich opportunities to tell stories of how democracy has played out locally. While not every community may have connections to colonial history, other areas of the exhibition may recall local stories: do you have a connection to women's suffrage? Do you have local heroes from the civil rights movement? Are there prominent political figures from your town's history? Did your town have parades and celebrations to boost a political candidate? How has voting technology changed in your town? Did your town experience protests or other acts of civil disobedience? Do locals remember the first time they were able to vote? All of these topics and more can be the core of an engaging local exhibition(s) or programming events.

Exhibitions and Programs with Stories

What Does Democracy Mean to You? The exhibition opens with this important and personal question. Oral histories can be engaging and useful tools to bring multiple generations together to tell personal stories. Even before the exhibition arrives, take advantage of when national or local elections are happening to host events such as an oral history workshop or collection day. You could send a call out for photographs, video/film, objects, and stories related to voting, protest, national identity, campaigning, the presidency, diversity, citizenship, political parties or political symbolism, and civil rights. Be sure to include your community's young people in your planning and execution. All of these stories and voices can then be included in your local exhibition.

"Stories from Main Street" is Museum on Main Street's project for collecting stories from America's small towns and rural communities. "Stories from Main Street" is an effort to learn

about small-town American through stories told by rural people themselves. Think about how your local stories could be added to our collection on the "Stories from Main Street" website. Start considering your story planning early. The Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service prepared an oral history guide for free download. Contact your state humanities council or local universities to see if they may be interested in helping.

Performing Arts and Public Debate

The play's the thing - and some scholars even link plays to the development of democracy itself in ancient Greece. We even refer to the antics of politics as "political theater." Either way, whether it be a serious drama or a satirical comedy, theater can be a dynamic way to bring the exhibition themes to life. **Great Debates:** Students could take on various roles of the "founding fathers" to dive deeper into why some wanted to amend, ratify, or reject portions of the Constitution. Reenact the great debates in a modern-day setting. **Join the Debate:** Debate as early Americans did about who should have the right to vote? How democratic will we be? Consider who may be excellent moderators for balanced conversations about issues that may be affecting your town. How would your community members like to address their grievances? Are there opportunities to include a [Chautauqua](#) performance of a historical figure? Can democracy be represented in dance? Connect with local high schools or universities that have dance programs. Are there opportunities to connect schools to the themes of the exhibition and inspire original pieces, such as the civil rights movement, the excitement of a political campaign, the story of a particular historical figure, or the excitement of a protest or historic march for a cause?

Writing

Power of the Press: Freedom of the press is a cornerstone of our democracy. How did the colonial writers find ways to print and distribute their news? Consider investigating newspapers, journals, and other primary documents from important moments in your local history to unveil forgotten stories or train community members in resource with primary sources. Use this helpful guide from the National Museum of American History called [Engaging Students with Primary Sources](#) to help young (and old) members of your community gain valuable research skills. Consider events in which professional journalists are invited to lead media literacy training and help community members include their voice in the public dialogue. **Petitioning:** Although not necessarily known as being "creative" writing pieces, the petitioning section of the exhibition does highlight the power of the pen and collective action. Could programs include youth in the community to take a new look at issues they would like to change. What petitions to their representatives would they choose to write? Include creative writing projects for visitors of all ages. Programming may include readings from the founding fathers all the way to today. **Creating the Constitution:** If you had a chance to write your own Constitution, what would it include? Could some of these creative pieces be woven into your local exhibition or a storytelling kiosk?

Music

Democracy has a soundtrack. From campaign jingles, music of the early republic, and the civil rights movement to songs about military service, patriotism, and protest - many themes of democracy and citizenship can be touch upon through music. Refer to the music resource sheet in this notebook for information on themed box sheets from Smithsonian Folkways Recordings that may be incorporated into your exhibition, local programming, or educational events. Consider hosting a concert or song-writing workshop.

Visual Arts

Campaigning and Party Symbols: The visual arts have played a central role in the history of our democracy. Artistic creativity is vital to everything from campaign posters and buttons to political advertisements. **The Candidates in Your Living Room:** We also may decorate our homes with political symbolism or images of candidates we support. Or, we display patriotic symbols in our home, work places, schools, and other important areas for community gatherings. In this way, politics and national symbols have entered into our everyday lives and consciousness. **Do We Need a Shared National Identity?** How does all of this imagery reflect our views of a national identity? Are there local holidays that bring everyone in your community out to celebrate your town or shared heritage? What opportunities can be created to celebrate the diversity in your community through visual art? **Sketches and Skirmishes:** Since the iconic “Join or Die” cartoon published in 1754 by Benjamin Franklin, political cartoons have played an important role in offering commentary on political events, leaders, and policies. Consider an exhibition of art inspired by politics to encourage open discussion on important issues in your community.

Fashion Design

Protest Fashion: How does our clothes reflect democracy? We wear shirts, buttons, hats, scarfs and any number of other items that reflect perhaps a movement, cause, protest, getting out the vote, or support for a favorite candidate for office. Exhibitions of such objects and clothes can reveal stories of how democracy has played out locally and nationally. Pin-back buttons were introduced in the late 1800s and quickly gained popularity. Torchlight parades required marchers to wear special oilcloth hats and capes. Gather people to tell stories about their favorite clothing or items or objects they have collected. Are there items in your local collection that need additional research or could be digitized? Involve members of your community who design clothing or other graphic material to think about, design, and create political fashion of the future. Put these new, creative designs on display!

Film and Video

The Campaign on the Screen: Politics and participation in democracy has been represented in numerous fiction and non-fiction films, short videos, political advertisements, and archival films. See the included filmography for just a slice of possible films that could be shown during movie discussion night at a local institution. Consider shaping a film series around topics such as the revolution, civil rights, suffrage, or immigration. Or analyze how political advertisements have changed over time locally and nationally. **Why Do You Vote?** Involve local filmmakers to develop programming and workshops to film local stories and community members about why they vote and if they remember the first time they voted.

Political and Social Engagement

Great Leap: Just how revolutionary was the American Revolution? What were the sources of inspiration that the founders looked to when creating the new government? Did the Iroquois “Great League of Peace” influence the formation of our government and our constitution? Consider organizing a book club that delves into some of the fascinating biographies of the founding fathers and other lesser known but pivotal people and groups of the colonial era.

Grievances and Protesting with Your Feet: Have you ever stepped out to protest for a cause? What was the experience like and did it change you? Consider a community forum or town hall to bring people together to talk about a current issue of importance to your community today.

The Gerry-Mander: Are there politically charged issues happening today in your community? How can there be opportunities to let diverse voices and viewpoints in your community be

heard, but also welcomed? Guest speakers and moderators may be able to provide context and balance to a community forum.

Photograph and object storytelling days at your venue could connect to any number of the stories from the exhibition highlighting regular citizens deciding to stand up for a cause, including: **Raising Banner for Ballots:** Women suffragettes were the first to picket the White House, but not every leader in the suffrage movement agreed on such tactics. Research if similar acts of women in civil disobedience took place in your town for the vote. Consider an exhibition that explores their lives and struggles.

Who Could Vote? Are you a fan of genealogy research? Consider the timeline of voting rights in America with regards to specific family histories - gender, property ownership, and age. Invite genealogy specialists and amateurs to a workshop on genealogy research with a focus on determining the voting history of your town. Or use archival records of the census to paint a picture of who may have been voting in pivotal local elections. **Get Out the Vote:** After you may have examined who can vote, take it to the streets - and consider hosting a voter registration drive. **Why Do You Vote?** Are you an engaged voter or choose to not go to the ballot? Bring together community members for open conversations about why people in your community choose to vote or not. Consider recording some of these responses and stories for inclusion in our Stories from Main Street initiative.

Creating Citizens: Could you pass the citizenship test? Do local organizations perform naturalization ceremonies? Are you interested in becoming qualified to host a naturalization ceremony? Find lesson guides for studying for the citizenship test and information for hosting a ceremony through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services: USCIS-IGAOutreach@uscis.dhs.gov. Work with your local library, community center, adult education sites, and other facilities to create a [Citizenship Corner](#). Immigrants in your community can use this special space to study information about becoming a U.S. citizen such as the Civics and Citizenship Toolkit available from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. How have the standards for becoming a citizen changed over time?