

American Experiments

Executive Summary of Evaluation Findings

PRODUCED BY:
AUDIENCE FOCUS
JULY 26TH, 2019



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Opened in 2017, "American Experiments," is a set of five activities designed to playfully engage the public in conversation about American civic life. Visitors are invited to explore experiments that bring to life the themes of the floor's signature exhibitions: participation, commitment, negotiation, voting, protest, and pluralism. Each station is designed to engage multiple visitors in a game-like activity that promotes conversation and discussion. Visitors are encouraged to reflect on the history of the nation we build together and consider their own role in creating the nation of tomorrow. "American Experiments" was developed by the National Museum of American History in collaboration with the Exploratorium of San Francisco, and was made possible by the generous support of The Julie and Greg Flynn Family Fund. In the summer of 2018, the first study of "American Experiments" was completed. Due to its summer timing, the first study did not capture the youth audience. The target audience of this study, conducted in the Spring of 2019, were teens 13-17 years old.

EVALUATION GOALS

The primary goals of this study were to:

- 1 Gather empirical evidence about what is happening in American Experiments in order to better understand its impact on **teens**
- 2 Make changes and improvements to the space based on findings
- 3 Share lessons learned with staff, stakeholders, and the field at large

METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

In 2018, Audience Focus conducted a summative evaluation of American Experiments. A total of 329 visitors participated in the evaluation. Data sources included observations, in-depth interviews, and a post-visit online questionnaire. Data were collected July-September of 2018. The target audience for the 2018 study was visitors of any age. In 2019, Audience Focus conducted a summative evaluation of the same exhibit, with a target audience of teens between 13-17 years of age. Data sources included observations and in-depth interviews. Data were collected March-May 2019. A total of **404 teens** participated in the evaluation.

ENGAGEMENT

Teens who stopped in American Experiments **were highly engaged**. The majority interacted socially with others, including NMAH facilitators. However, the percentage of teens that did not stop to engage with any activities in American Experiments (68%) was significantly higher than the percentage of visitors from the 2018 study that did not stop to engage (41%). It is unclear why teens stop to engage with American Experiments less frequently than general visitors. One possible explanation is that since many teens are there as part of larger groups, they are more likely to be on a stricter schedule and have less “free will” in deciding where they stop, or for how long they can stay. This question should be further investigated next spring during peak teen visitation.

**2018 STUDY -
329 VISITORS**

86%



Socially
interacted with
other people

**TEEN STUDY -
404 TEENS**

87%

62%

Interacted with
NMAH facilitators
when available



52%

**11
minutes**

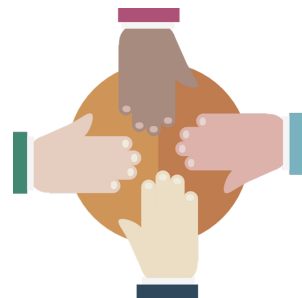


Average time
spent in space

**9
minutes**

**1-2
activities**

Average # of
activities in which
they engaged



**1-2
activities**

ENGAGEMENT

Teens who decided to stop at American Experiments were slightly less engaged with some of the activities than visitors from the 2018 study. Engagement at the 5 activities was measured by observing: 1) how many visitors stopped to engage, 2) how long they spent engaging, and 3) depth of engagement (measured on a scale of 1-4, where 1=glance, 2=minimal, 3=moderate, and 4=full). Observers noted some factors that contributed to lower levels of engagement among teens, including distractions, being forced to leave by adult chaperones, not finding anyone to do activities with, and appearing more "shy."

HEAD TO HEAD

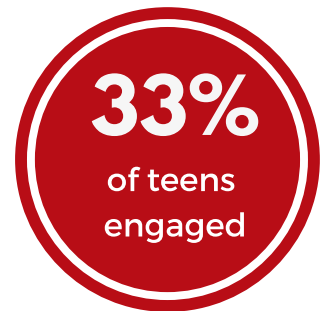
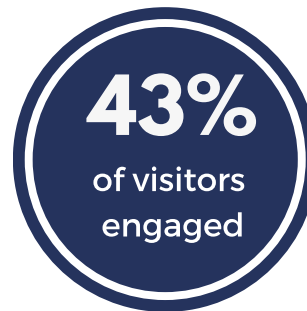
Teens were **less likely to engage** with Head to Head than visitors from the 2018 study.

Teens spent **less time engaging** with Head to Head than visitors from the 2018 study.

Teens were **slightly less engaged** when participating in Head to Head than visitors from the 2018 study.

2018 STUDY

TEEN STUDY



ENGAGEMENT

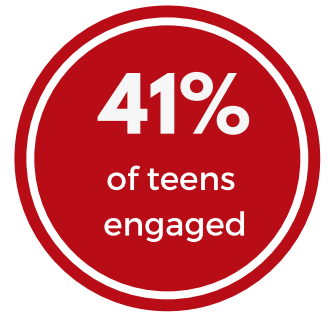
WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Teens were **equally as likely to engage** with Where do you stand? as visitors from the 2018 study.

2018 STUDY



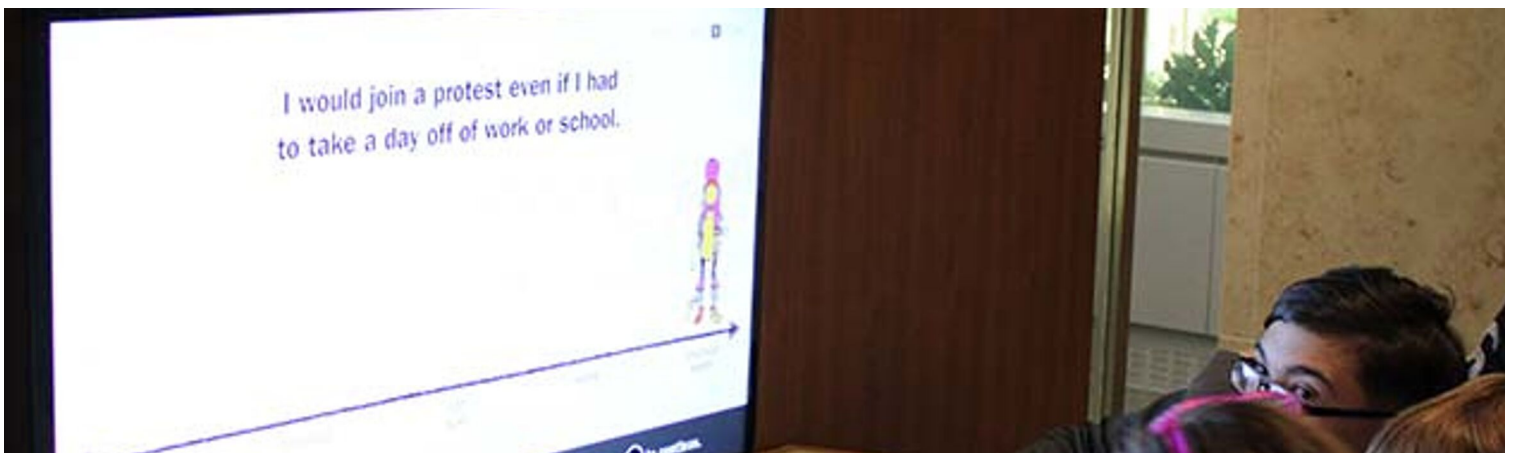
TEEN STUDY



Teens spent **less time engaging** with Where do you stand? than visitors from the 2018 study.



Teens were **less engaged** when participating in Where Do You Stand? than visitors from the 2018 study.



ENGAGEMENT

IDEALS & IMAGES

Teens were **significantly more likely to engage** with Ideals & Images than visitors from the 2018 study.

However, teens spent **less time engaging** with Ideals & Images than visitors from the 2018 study.

Teens were **less engaged** when participating in Ideals & Images than visitors from the 2018 study.

2018 STUDY



TEEN STUDY



ENGAGEMENT

PEOPLE POWER

Teens were **more likely to engage** with People Power than visitors from the 2018 study.

Teens spent **slightly more time engaging** with People Power than visitors from the 2018 study.

Teens were **less engaged** when participating in People Power than visitors from the 2018 study.

2018 STUDY



TEEN STUDY



ENGAGEMENT

MY FELLOW CITIZENS

Teens were **slightly less likely to engage** with My Fellow Citizens than visitors from the 2018 study.

2018 STUDY



TEEN STUDY



Teens spent **less time engaging** with My Fellow Citizens than visitors from the 2018 study.



Teens were **slightly less engaged** when participating in My Fellow Citizens than visitors from the 2018 study.



INFLUENCE OF FACILITATORS

Interacting with NMAH facilitators had a positive influence on teens' experience in American Experiments. Teens who interacted with facilitators stayed longer and engaged more deeply with the activities than teens who did not interact with a facilitator.

Teens who interacted with NMAH facilitators spent an average of 4 minutes longer in American Experiments than did teens who did not interact with facilitators. In the 2018 study, visitors stayed 5 minutes longer when interacting with NMAH facilitators.

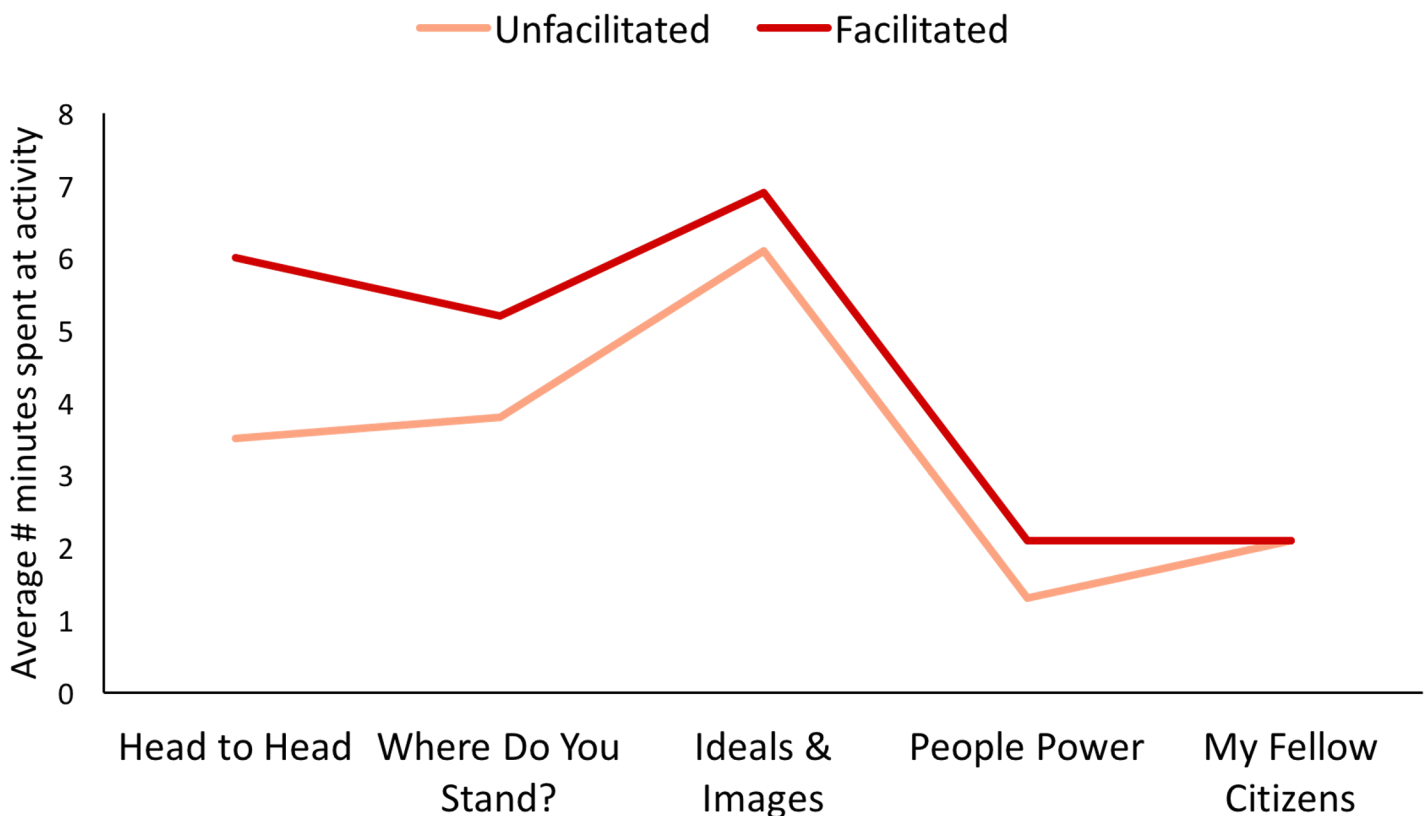


Figure 1 compares the average amount of time teens spent at the five activities within American Experiments when their experience was facilitated versus unfacilitated.

Observers recorded teens' level of engagement at the five activities within American Experiments, as well as instances when teens engaged in behaviors linked with civic engagement, like discussing and debating ideas, sharing personal beliefs and stories, actively listening to others, asking to hear others' perspectives, and using respectful language.



Teens who interacted with NMAH facilitators demonstrated significantly higher levels of engagement at all of the activities, engaging in more discussions, sharing more of their own personal stories or beliefs, and listening to others' perspectives more often than teens who did not interact with facilitators.

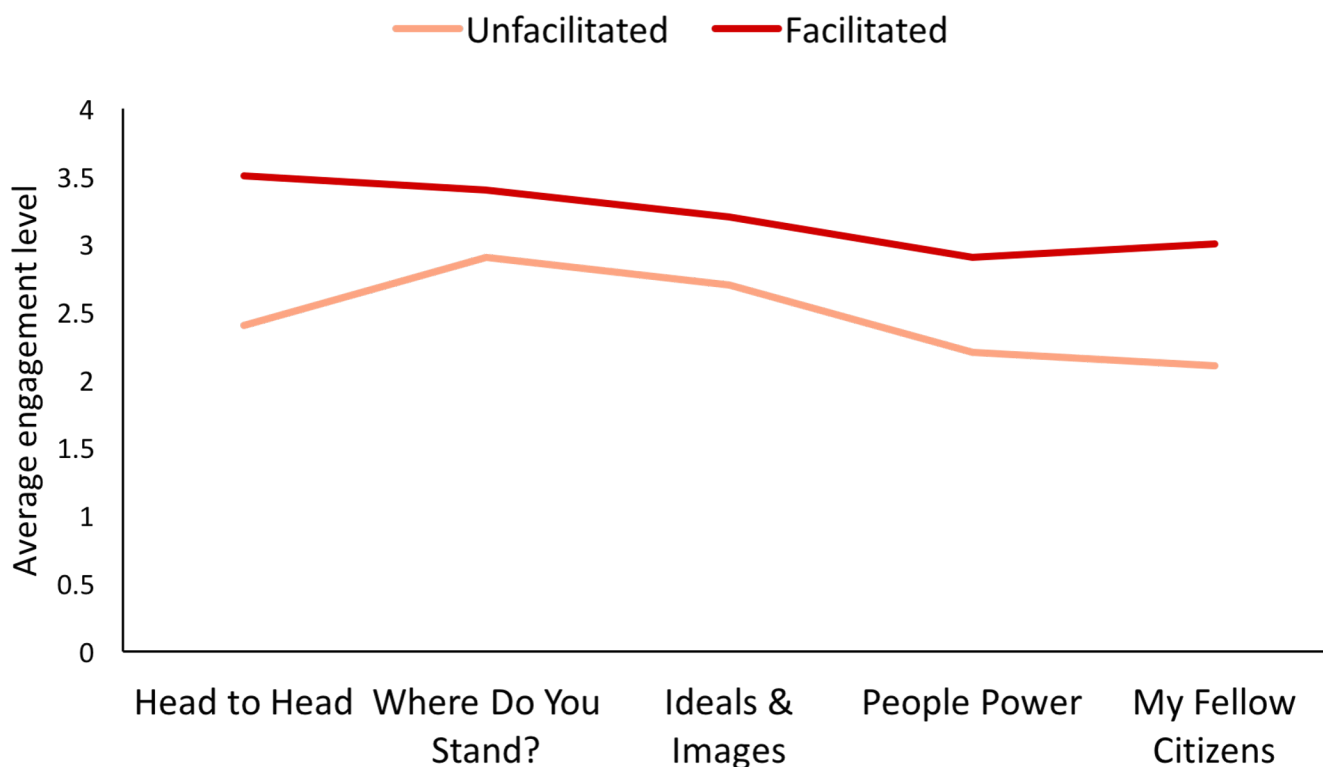


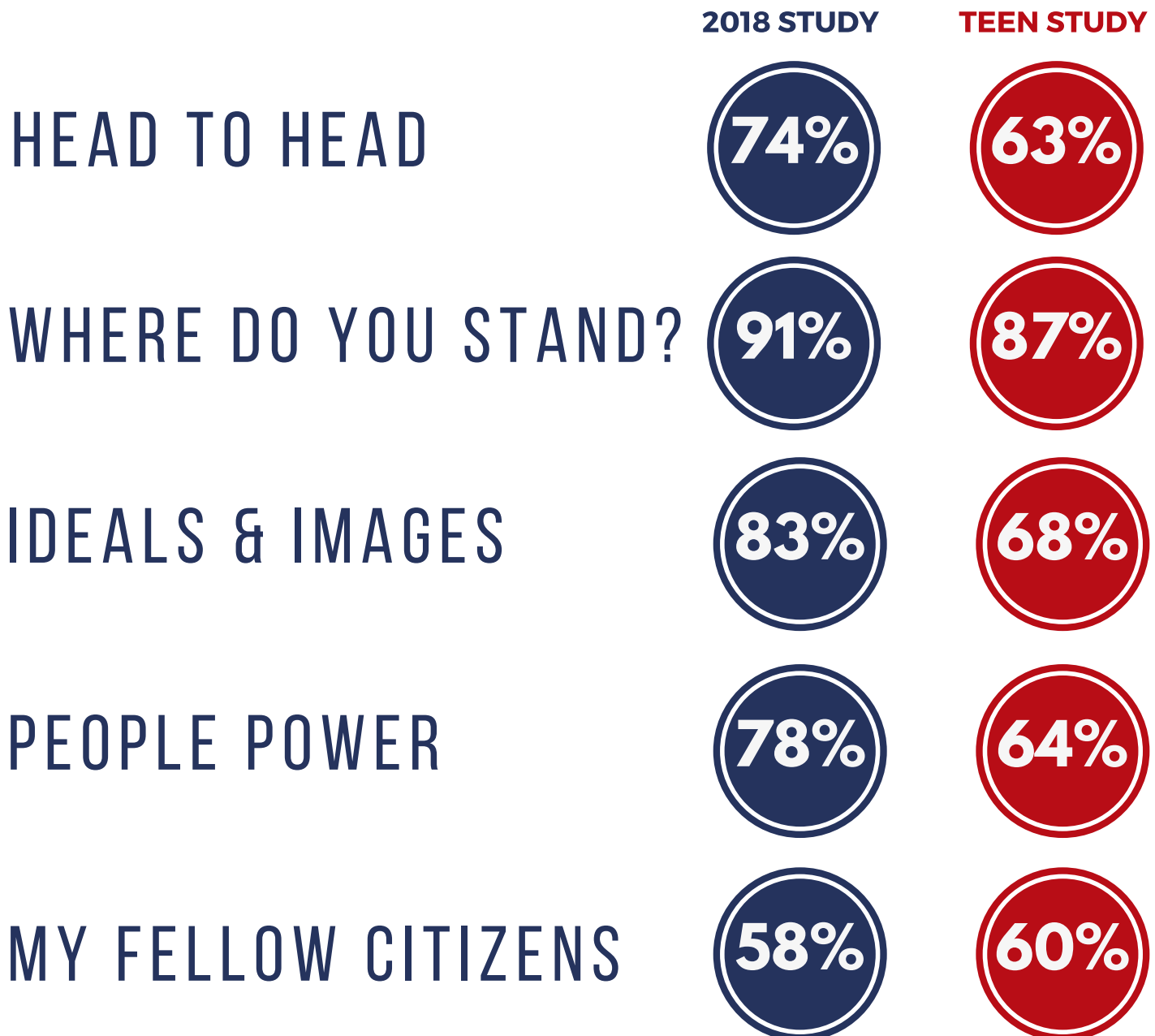
Figure 2 compares the mean levels of engagement at the five activities among teens who had a facilitated experience and those who did not (4-point scale where 1=glances, 2=minimal, 3=moderate, and 4=full).

IMPACT

Findings show that "American Experiments" had a positive impact on teens in four key areas: Civic Engagement, Empathy, Reflection and Perception, and Enjoyment.

IMPACT ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Overall, teens demonstrated slightly less evidence of civic behavior at 4 of the activities than did visitors in the 2018 study. The numbers below depict **the percentage of visitors from the 2018 study and teens that demonstrated civic engagement at each activity.**



IMPACT ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Overall, **teens demonstrated significantly less evidence of specific civic behaviors than did visitors in the 2018 study.** Observers took detailed notes about teens' behaviors and some help explain the lower evidence of civic engagement, including that some teens tried to get their peers to participate in the games with them, but no one responded, some seemed easily distracted (by phones, peers, or other activities), some were drawn away from the activity by a group leader saying they had to leave, and some seemed more "shy." The numbers below depict the percentage of visitors from the 2018 study and teens that demonstrated specific civic behaviors within American Experiments. Overall, these findings suggest many teens need additional support to build their civic engagement skills.



INFLUENCE OF FACILITATORS

While teens demonstrated less evidence of civic engagement than the general visitor overall, the fact that those who interacted with facilitators engaged closer to the rates seen in the 2018 study suggests there could be multiple opportunities for NMAH to use teaching and facilitation to further support teen engagement in American Experiments. Some suggestions already made by NMAH staff and supported by Audience Focus evaluators include initiating more teacher and facilitator training that models strategies for facilitating conversations and civic dialogue among students and inviting teen volunteers or interns to help facilitate engagement in the space.

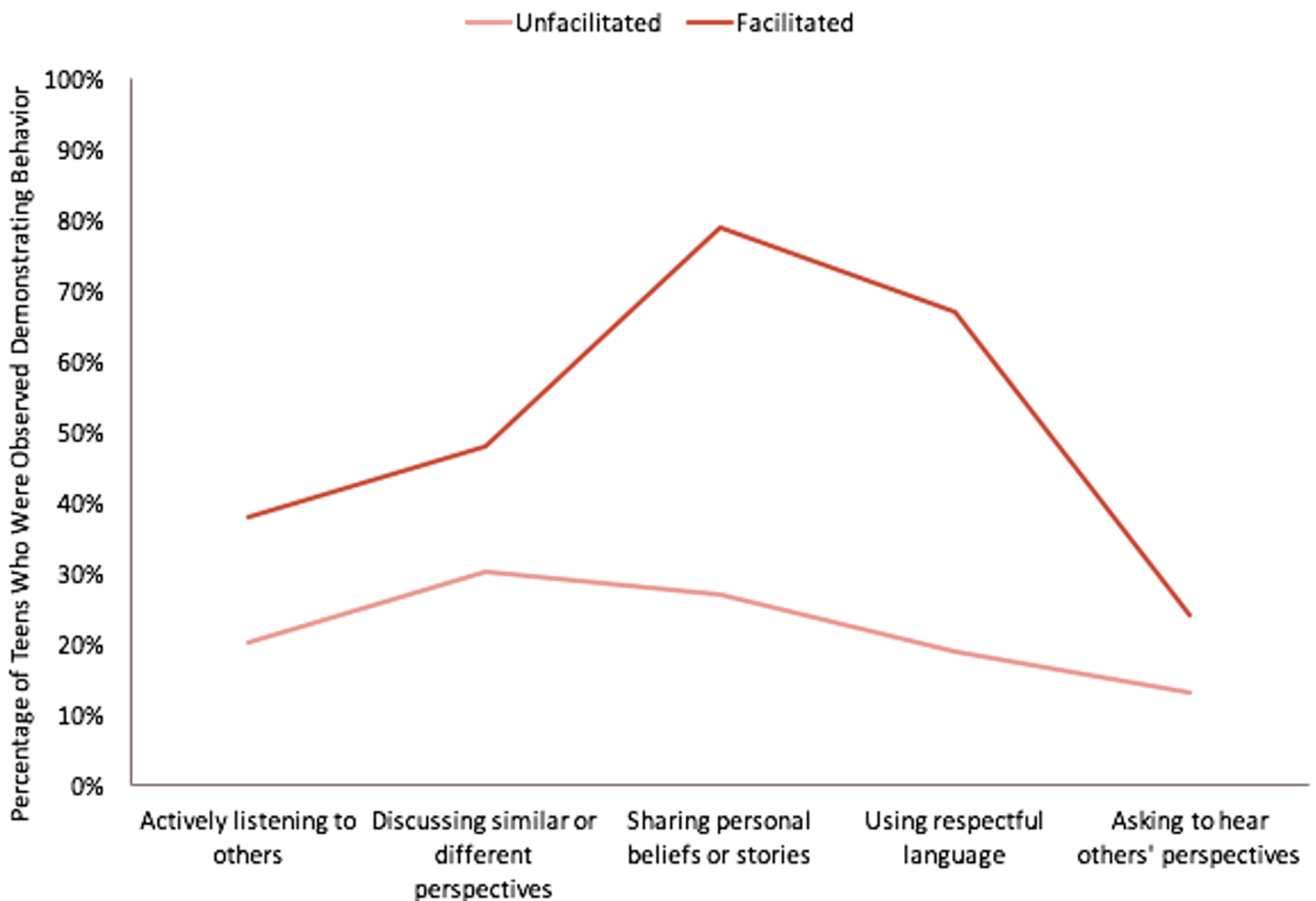
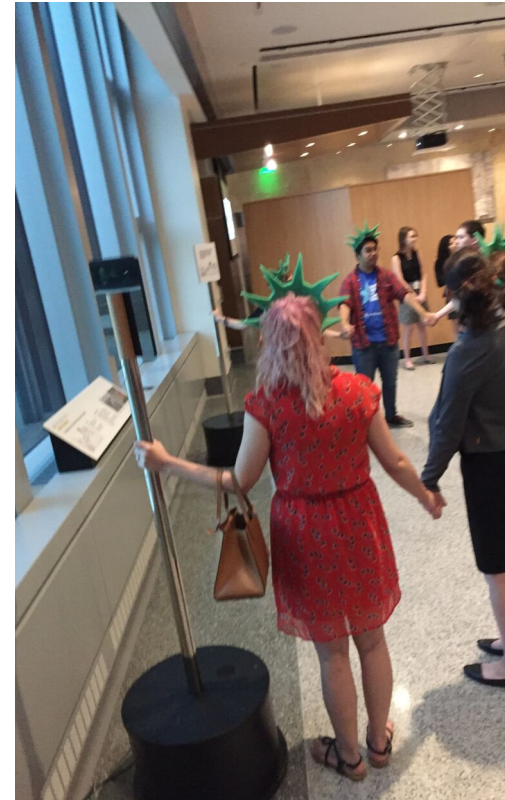


Figure 4 compares the percentage of teens who displayed civic engagement behaviors during facilitated experiences and unfacilitated experiences.

IMPACT ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

American Experiments had a **significantly higher influence on teens' intentions to participate in civic engagement** than it did on visitors in the 2018 study (mostly adults). Teens were less likely than visitors in the 2018 study to say they were already engaging in civic behaviors, indicating that American Experiments has a stronger influence on youths' motivation to engage in civic activities than it does on adult visitors. While teens have the motivation to engage in civic life, many still need support to build their civic engagement skills. NMAH might look for ways to support skill building opportunities for teens in the future, such as hosting targeted programs for youth at NMAH, partnering with teachers and schools, developing school-based resources, and/or partnering with other learning organizations who provide civic engagement opportunities for teens.



Do you think the experience you just had in American Experiments will influence you to do any of the following in real life?

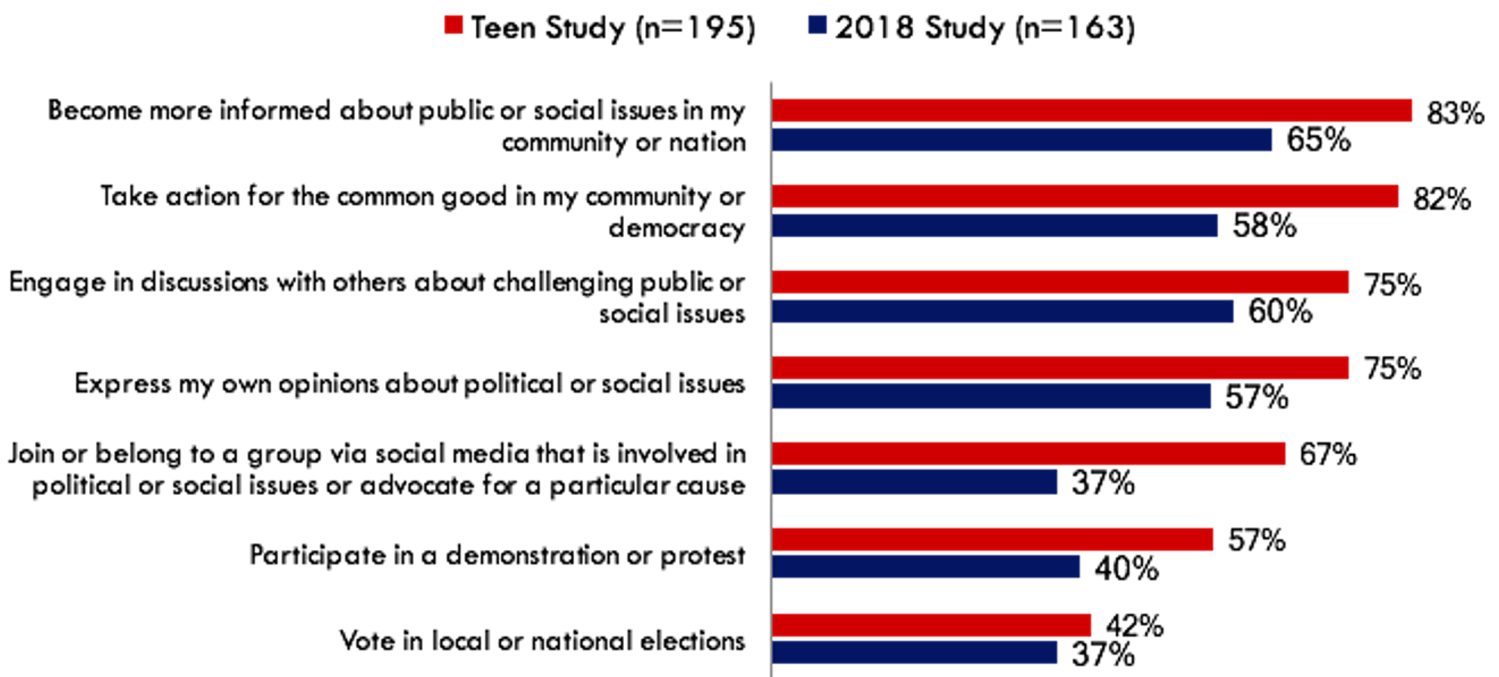


Figure 5 compares the responses of visitors from the 2018 study and teen study that answered that their experience visiting American Experiments was somewhat, very, or extremely influential for them to do the following in real life.

42%

Close to half of teens interviewed immediately following their experience reported that American Experiments **inspired them to vote** in upcoming national or local elections. **This is above the average** 39% of American youth (age 18-24) that voted in the 2016 presidential election. *Note that about half of teens said this question did not apply to them because they are ineligible to vote due to their age. With that said, many of the teens who said the exhibition inspired them to vote were also not old enough to vote. This question would need to be rephrased in future surveys to ensure greater reliability.

IMPACT ON REFLECTION & PERCEPTION / EMPATHY

An overwhelming majority of teens said they enjoyed having the opportunity to listen to other's ideas, opinions and stories

84%

76%

The vast majority of teens said they reflected on their own views and choices about social issues

EMPATHY EXAMPLE:

Being able to see my peers' different points of view; seeing how other people think about problems.

REFLECTION & PERCEPTION EXAMPLE:

I think the table (ideas and images) helped with knowing what I value in terms of freedom and happiness and just American values in general. I learned about my friends too.

IMPACT ON REFLECTION & PERCEPTION / EMPATHY

An overwhelming majority of teens said they enjoyed having the opportunity to listen to other's ideas, opinions and stories



The vast majority of teens said they reflected on their own views and choices about social issues

Over half of teens said they reconsidered some of their perspectives on a topic



EMPATHY EXAMPLE:

Being able to see my peers different points of view; seeing how other people think about problems.

REFLECTION & PERCEPTION EXAMPLE:

I think the table (ideas and images) helped with knowing what I value in terms of freedom and happiness and just American values in general. I learned about my friends too.

IMPACT ON ENJOYMENT

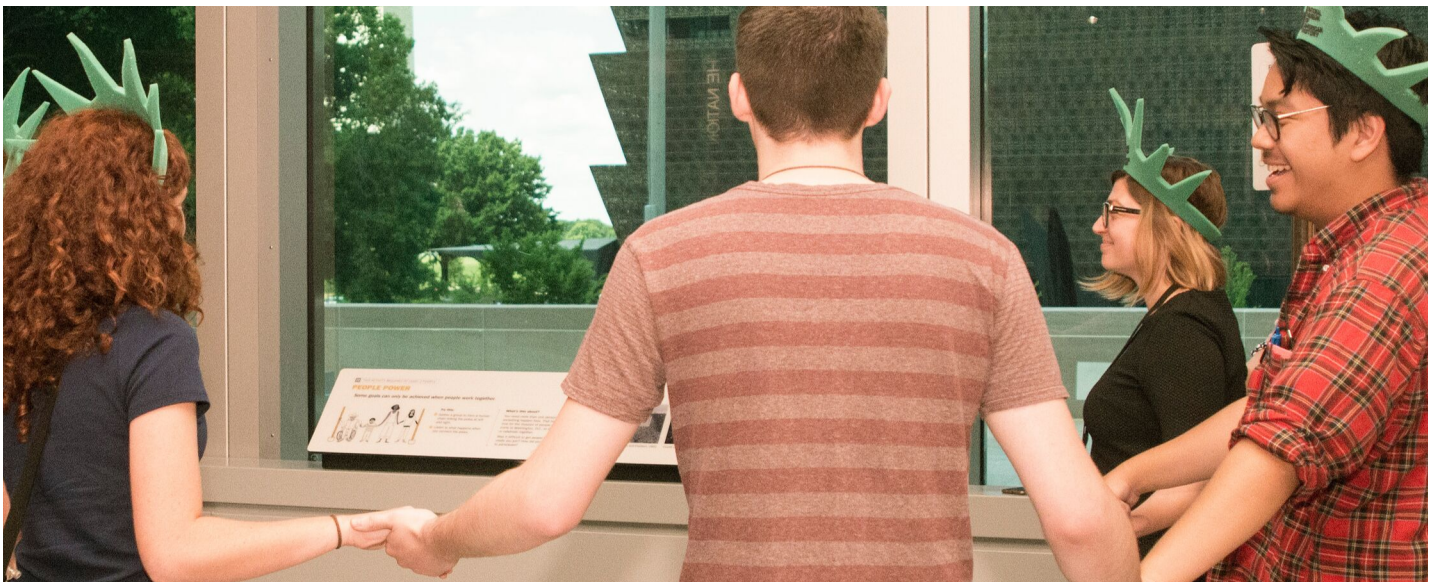
The majority of teens agreed that they benefitted from their experience in American Experiments, saying they had fun, enjoyed sharing their own views and listening to others' views, and learned something new.



of teens interviewed immediately following their experience reported that they **had a fun, memorable experience in American Experiments**. Another 84% said they enjoyed having the opportunity to listen to other's ideas, opinions, or stories.

ENJOYMENT EXAMPLE:

I think it was great to see an exhibit that involved more than 2 people. It gave me a wider perspective. I really enjoyed being able to learn from history and the people around me. It was a great way to connect.





The National Museum of American History wishes to thank it's staff, partners and supporters. "American Experiments" was developed in collaboration with the Exploratorium of San Francisco, and was made possible by a gift from the Julie and Greg Flynn Family Fund.