Five Qualities of a Relevant History Experience
Historical Relevance Initiative 2020

Every Institution must remember: “Relevance is in the eye of the audience.” A relevant history experience is one in which the audience and institution connect through impactful and applicable programs that are both timely and rooted in historical quality. Consider these qualities when developing products for the public. A successful product does not need to include all of these.

- **Rooted in Historical Quality**
  - Frames the topic with historical context and perspective
  - Uses primary sources that are authentic evidence of the past
  - Inclusive of diverse historical participants and perspectives, and absent narratives
  - Relies on scholarly expertise from institution, community, and published sources
  - Evidence: Institution has done research to inform the historical narrative and perspectives.
  - Quote: “I trust this institution has provided valid interpretations of this topic.”

- **Applicable**
  - Can be applied in participants’ lives in some way
  - Teaches historical literacy/historical thinking skills such as critical thinking
  - Fosters change in the community
  - Makes visible the ways participants can use the experience afterwards
  - Evidence: Participant can identify how the topic will be useful in their lives; there is identifiable change in the community based on program outcomes.
  - Quote: “I will have an opportunity to use what I learned here today.”

- **Impactful**
  - Provokes new and profound pathways in the way the participant thinks about the topic
  - Uses unexpectedness and surprise to reinforce learning
  - Works to challenge familiar assumptions about the topic
  - Evidence: Participant recalls experiences related to program outcomes after time has passed.
  - Quote: “I thought about it in a way I hadn’t before.”

- **Current and Timely**
  - Select history topics that relate to discussions happening in the community or nationally
  - Provide historical background for current events
  - Evidence: Participant can identify the way in which a current event or discussion is informed by knowledge of the past.
  - Quote: “I think the history of this topic helps me understand the world today.”

- **Connected**
  - Relates to individual and collective identities through universal themes
  - Shows continuity between past, present, and future
  - Builds empathy for those who lived in the past, transferable to others in the present
  - Engages emotion to strengthen connections
  - Provide entry points to topics that are absent or marginalized in community dialogue; ones that are difficult for the audience to discuss.
  - Evidence: Participant can identify how a program topic relates to something personal and meaningful.
  - Quote: “I see how my experience in life relates to this topic.”

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1 https://go.sdsu.edu/education/projectcore/files/03252-6_Universal_Themes.pdf

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