

# Council of Australasian Museum Directors

Guardians of our Civic Culture:  
What Museums Could and Should  
Do

Mark Evans and Ipsos Public Affairs



GAME CHANGERS



# Acknowledgements

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# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
Contents .....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
1. Research Context.....	8
1.1 Background and Research Aims .....	8
2. Methodology .....	8
2.1 Sample Composition .....	8
2.2 Weighting.....	10
3 Analysis .....	10
3.1 Significance testing .....	10
3.2 How to interpret this report .....	11
4 Survey Sample.....	11
4.1 Demographics.....	11
5 Findings .....	13
5.1 Trust in General .....	13
5.1.1 Satisfaction with Democracy.....	13
5.1.2 Trust in Others.....	14
5.1.3 Trust in Media and Science Sources .....	16
5.2 Trust in Museums.....	18
5.2.1 Trust in Institutions .....	18
5.2.2 Why Trust is Placed in Museums .....	21
5.2.3 How Trust in Museums Could be Increased .....	25
5.3 The Purpose of Museums .....	27
5.3.1 Role of Museums in Society .....	27
5.4 Museums and Civic Action .....	30
5.4.1 What Museums Should Be .....	30
5.4.2 Impact of Loss of Museums.....	33
6. Trust in Australian Museums in Comparative Perspective.....	35
7. In Conclusion – Museums as Guardians of the Civic Culture .....	37
8. Appendix.....	39
Appendix A: Questionnaire .....	39
a. Appendix B: Detailed tables .....	46

# Executive Summary

In October 2021, an online survey of Australians (n=1184) was conducted to explore the level of public trust in museums in the context of declining public trust in other institutions; to understand citizens' views on the purpose and role of museums; and, to assess citizens' views on the role, real and potential, for museums in civic action. The survey questionnaire was designed by the Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD) and Professor Mark Evans and administered by Ipsos Public Affairs. The survey was approximately 10 minutes in length and was undertaken via an online panel, with minimum quotas set to ensure a robust sample of Australians by age, gender, state and household income in line with population statistics obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## Trust in General

We began with a set of contextual questions to help us get a general measure of public attitudes towards democratic arrangements in Australia to allow comparison with museums.

47% of respondents were satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia.

## Satisfaction with Democracy

Approximately half of survey respondents were satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia. Satisfaction tended to increase with age, with baby boomers significantly more satisfied than other generations. Men were significantly more likely to report being satisfied than women, as were retirees and those with a bachelor degree as their highest level of educational attainment. Homemakers and individuals with the highest educational attainment of year 10 or below expressed significantly lower levels of satisfaction.

56% of respondents believed you need to be very careful when dealing with other people

## Trust in Others

In general, survey participants reported caution in their interactions: more than half (56%) believed you need to be very careful when dealing with others. Baby boomers were the most trusting generation, and were found to be significantly more trusting than any other generation. Men, retirees and those earning \$100,000 or more per year were significantly less cautious, whereas women, those earning less than \$50,000 per year and those who were unemployed were significantly more likely to say you need to be very careful when dealing with people.

79% of respondents trusted science and experts

15% trusted social media

## Trust in Media and Science

Of a list of five sources, the most trusted for 'honest and objective information about Covid-19' were scientists and experts, with 8 in 10 agreeing to this statement. The least trusted source was social media, with significantly fewer people agreeing they trust this source compared to all others. Television, radio and newspaper media were considered comparable sources of information, with little variation between levels of trust.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples were significantly more likely to trust social media sources than those who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

89% of respondents agreed museums can care for and hold collections and mount displays

40% agreed museums can help the vulnerable and promote social justice.

## Trust in Museums

### Trust in Institutions

Our findings suggest that institutions viewed as extending the protective power of democracy in a time of fear – safeguarding Australia’s civic culture and heritage, community security, health and wellbeing – are most trusted. Among the institutions listed, trust was highest for libraries (82%), medicare (80%), and museums (78%) and lowest for the press and political parties.

82% trusted libraries

80% trusted Medicare

78% trusted museums

76% trusted the police

73% trusted the army

30% trusted the press

20% trusted political parties

Institutions deemed to be acting in self-interest or bringing politics into disrepute fared worst such as political parties (20%) or social media (15%).

Trust in community sector and service organisations tended to increase with age, whereas trust in government and public service tended to decrease with age.

87% trusted museums because as experts they are highly credible sources of information

87% trusted museums because they are experienced public educators

From a list of 17 organisations, museums received the third highest trust rating, with around 8 in 10 respondents placing ‘quite a lot’, or ‘a great deal’ of trust in the organisation. Millennials were significantly less likely to trust museums than other generations.

### Why Trust is Placed in Museums

Most commonly, respondents who trusted museums agreed that this was because as experts, they are highly credible sources of information and because they are experienced public educators. Significantly, fewer people trusted museums because they personally connect to the content and experience or because they shared the museum’s values.

60% trusted museums because they personally connect to the content and experience

58% trusted museums because they share their values

### How Trust in Museums could be Increased

Among those respondents who expressed a distrust in museums, many were unsure why they would need to give trust or indicated they would trust a museum only for specific reasons or purposes. The most common responses for how trust could be improved include: through provision of more proof, facts and information to demonstrate artefacts are genuine, increased honesty about the sourcing and collection of artefacts and more transparency, openness or willingness to take part in open debates. Generation Z exhibited the strongest need for trust and transparency, desiring unbiased exhibitions with honest explanations around how artefacts were acquired.

### The Purpose of Museums

#### Role of Museums in Society

Respondents tended to have a traditional view of the role of museums in society, focusing on curatorship, providing descriptions and artefacts from history, conducting research and facilitating community development through education. They most commonly agreed that museums can care for, hold collections and mount displays, preserve our cultural heritage and connect the past, present and future. These traditional views tended to be stronger among older respondents, with respondents becoming more progressive in the beliefs around what museums can do as age decreases.

There was least agreement given to museums promoting economic growth, debating contested ideas, helping the vulnerable and promoting social justice.

### Museums and Civic Action

#### What Museums Should be

Again, it was expected museums act in a more traditional sense and operate within their area of expertise. The highest levels of agreement were expressed in response to the suggestion museums should: play an active role in providing public education within their area of expertise, to ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented (76%), provide safe spaces for community discussions on difficult issues in their areas of expertise (75%) and combat fake news (73%).

Raising awareness of environmental issues (62%) and delivering programmes to support marginalised groups in the community (55%) were significantly less likely to be seen as things museums should be doing. Although these statements had lower NET agreement, a small majority agreed with all statements about what Museums should be, and there was also low disagreement (with many instead returning a neutral response of 'neither agree nor disagree') indicating there is room to shift opinions and perceptions of what museums should be doing.

86% of respondents agree museums should play an active role in providing public education in their area of expertise

55% agreed museums should deliver programs to support marginalised groups in the community.

#### Impact of the Loss of Museums

The most commonly cited loss if museums were to close was a loss of history, historical records and an understanding of how we, as humans, came to be. This was followed by a loss of heritage, a link to the past and a sense of belonging. Knowledge, information, education and learning were also perceived losses if museums closed:

"It would be a piece of history lost." *Millennial*

"Our past. The learnings from all our ancestors" *Generation X*

"Our connection with the past." *Baby Boomer*

"We would lose a place of education" *Builder*

### **Trust in Australian Museums in Comparative Perspective**

The survey was designed to allow for easy comparison with similar surveys conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) by the [Museums Association](#), the [American Alliance of Museums](#) in the United States (US) and the [European Union](#) (EU) to provide a measure of commonality and difference between mature democracies.

Australian Museums (78%) rank higher on the public trust scale in comparison with their counterparts in the US (64%). In the UK, the EU, the US and Australia, trust in museums appears to be rooted in a traditional perception that museums are (or should be) fact-based and non-partisan and thus “neutral.” Survey respondents and focus group participants see museums as experts and public educators, the guardians of factual information, presenting all sides of the story. However, Australian and EU respondents also understand museums as shaping our futures as well as our past. In Australia, museums are seen as potentially playing an active role in sharing new knowledge, ensuring that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented, and providing safe spaces for community discussions on difficult issues in their areas of expertise. In the EU, museums are considered “places where issues of controversial history are debated and the nation’s/state’s official stance on matters of disputed heritage or history should not always take prominence.”

### **Conclusion – Museums as the Guardians of our Civic Culture**

This research indicates that museums are well trusted and highly regarded public organisations. A large proportion of survey participants tended to hold traditional views about what museums can and should be doing, preferring them to operate within their area of expertise and the role known to them. However, there was still strong majority support for museums playing an active civic role, such as delivering programmes to support marginalised groups. There was also low disagreement in relation to all the suggested roles for museums presented. This indicates there is room for growth. Museums have the opportunity to shift perceptions about their purpose and role within the community as there is evidence of public support for museums to undertake a range of civic actions and duties.

In summary then, at a time when trust in most sources of information is declining, museums have proven resilient, retaining their status as super trusted institutions. Australians see museums as a trusted social intermediary with the citizenry uniquely placed to perform five key roles in community governance:

- fostering critical educated citizens in their areas of expertise;
- combating ‘truth decay’ in their areas of expertise;
- providing safe spaces for enabling community participation on historical, social and environmental issues;
- ensuring that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented; and,
- there is majority support for delivering programmes of various kinds to help integrate marginalised groups into the community and give voice to their current needs and aspirations for the future.

# 1 Research Context

## 1.1 Background and Research Aims

The Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD) commissioned Ipsos Social Research (Ipsos) to conduct an online survey about the community's attitudes towards and perceptions of the role of museums. The study had three main aims:

- To explore the level of public trust in museums in the context of declining public trust in other institutions.
- To understand citizens views on the purpose and role of museums.
- To assess citizen's views on the role, real and potential, for museums in civic action.

## 2. Methodology

The CAMD designed the questionnaire with Professor Mark Evans from the *Democracy 2025 – strengthening democratic practice* initiative at the Museum of Australian Democracy. The questionnaire was approximately 10 minutes in length and was refined slightly by Ipsos to ensure the questions, scales and format of the online questionnaire were accessible and appropriate to meet the research objectives. The final questionnaire completed by research participants is available as an appendix in Section 8 of this report.

### 2.1 Sample Composition

Minimum quotas were set to ensure a robust sample of Australians by age, gender, location and socioeconomic status, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Rather than aiming for a sample that is perfectly representative of the population, these 'quotas' were set to ensure a sufficient sample was collected for each key group of interest, therefore allowing statistical testing to occur. For example, this involved boosting the sample for smaller states (such as the Northern Territory) and decreasing it for larger states (such as New South Wales) to allow for comparison by location.



## Methodology

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Table 1. Minimum Quotas

Location	Minimum sample
NSW	196
Vic	196
QLD	150
WA	96
SA	96
TAS	42
ACT	42
NT	42
TOTAL	1000
Household income	Minimum Sample
<50K	200
50-100K	200
>100K	200
Gender	Minimum sample
Male	450
Female	450
Age	Minimum Sample
Builders (born 1925-45)	100
Baby boomers (1946-64)	100
Generation X (1965-79)	100
Millennials (1980-94)	100
Generation Z (1995-present)	100

### 2.2 Weighting

All data were weighted by location, age (in generational bands) and gender in line with population statistics obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Age and gender weights were 'nested' to ensure a more representative dataset.

Weighting, also known as sample balancing, is used to adjust the results of studies to make them more representative (e.g., if a study has 20% men, but the population has 50%, weighting can be used to bring the results of the study into line with the population). Rim weighting was applied to the data using Q software.

Rim weighting was used as it allows the adjusting of a data set to occur across different characteristics, such as age, gender, location etc, ensuring that these different characteristics are kept proportionate across the sample.

## 3 Analysis

All statistical significance testing in this report was performed using the Q computer software package and SPSS. Significance testing between independent subgroups was performed using independent samples t-tests for comparison of means and z-tests for comparisons of proportions, all conducted at the 95% confidence level using the effective sample size.

Coding, editing and weighting of variables and statistical manipulations were conducted as appropriate.

All questions have been analysed by the overall level of support and age (generation breakdown). Additional significant differences by the following variables have been noted in the commentary, where observed: location, gender, income, highest level of education completed, employment status, recent migration status and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status.

Additional comparative analysis is provided by Professor Mark Evans in Section 6 and in-text links are provided to key on-line sources.

### 3.1 Significance testing

Where significance testing has occurred between pairs such as gender, this has been undertaken as independent-sample t-tests. However, where significance testing has occurred between more than two categories within a group (e.g., age), significance testing has been used to test one category against the average of the other categories (i.e. against the total excluding itself). Such a test is ideal for multiple comparisons as it reduces the likelihood of displaying a significant difference where one does not exist.

A 'significant difference' means that we can be 95% confident that the difference observed between the two samples reflects a true difference in the population of interest and is not a result of chance. Such descriptions are not value judgements on the importance of the difference. The reader is encouraged to make a judgement as to whether the differences are 'meaningful' or not.

Significance testing has not been applied to open-ended questions, as they are qualitative in nature and not conducive to statistical testing.

### **3.2 How to interpret this report**

For each question, data has been presented in a combination of tables and charts at the overall level and by generational (age) breakdown. Other variables presenting a significant difference will also be identified in the commentary, with full tables provided as an appendix in excel format. For key variables, significant differences will be identified using **red** text to indicate that a result is significantly lower among that group and **blue** text to indicate it is significantly higher.

Due to rounding, responses may not always add up to 100%, and NETs (e.g., 'strongly agree' + 'agree') may not appear to be an exact addition of the two responses included. In text references to on-line sources are provided throughout the report.

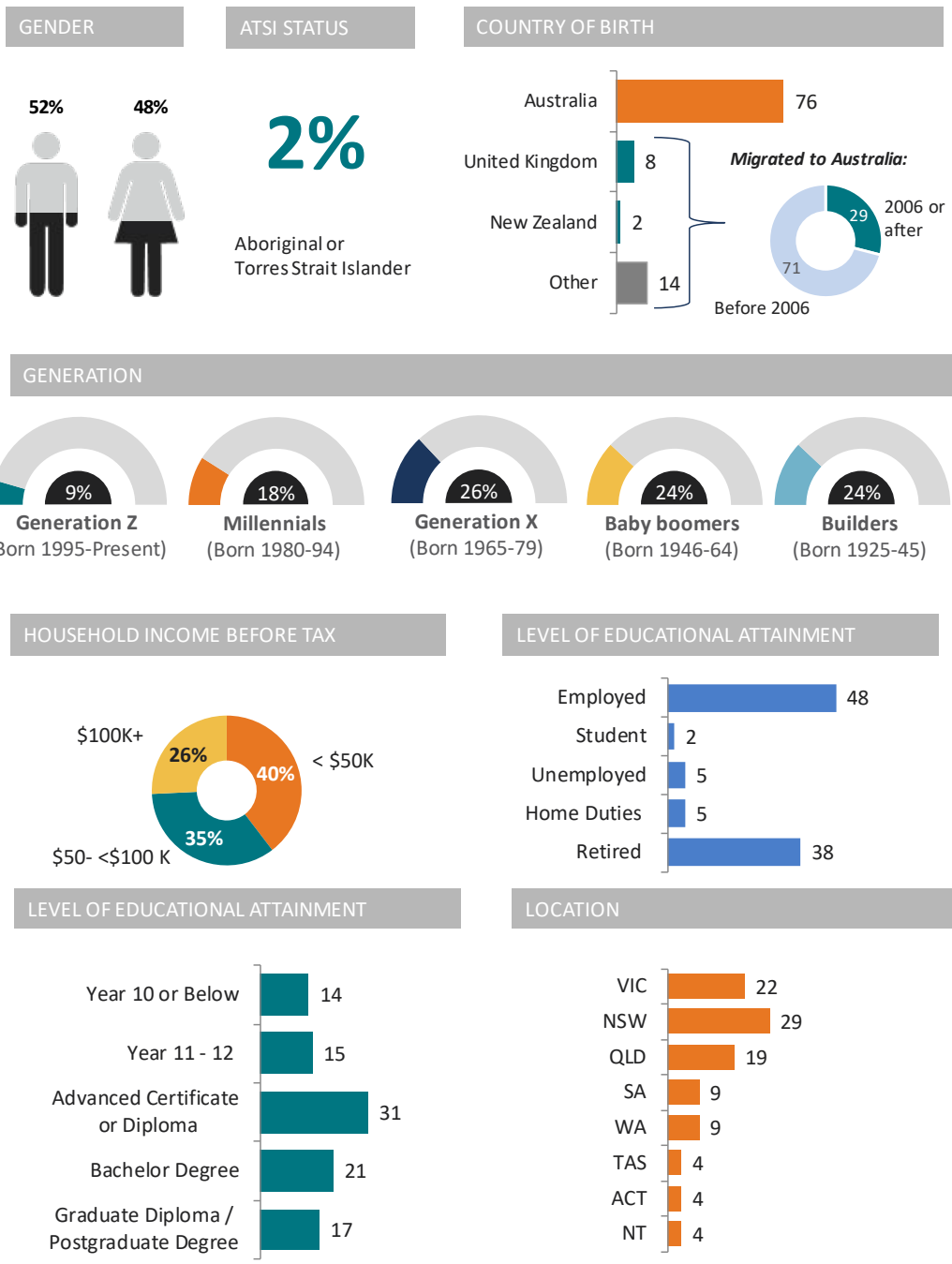
## **4 Survey Sample**

### **4.1 Demographics**

Figure 1, below, outlines the demographics of the survey sample, in terms of gender, location, employment status, household income and level of educational attainment. Note that this data is unweighted, however, as outlined in section 3.2, above, data shown in the remainder of the report has been weighted to bring the survey results in line with the true Australian population.

# Survey Sample

Figure 1. Demographics



# 5 Findings

## 5.1 Trust in General

### 5.1.1 Satisfaction with Democracy

All survey respondents were asked how satisfied they felt with the way democracy worked in Australia. As shown in 2 below, close to half (47%) expressed they felt fairly or very satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia, approximately a quarter (26%) felt dissatisfied to some degree (fairly or very), and the remainder reported feeling 'neither satisfied' or 'dissatisfied'.

Satisfaction with democracy tended to increase with age. Older generations - builders and baby boomers – were the most satisfied with the way democracy was working, with baby boomers significantly more satisfied than other age groups. While level of dissatisfaction didn't vary significantly by age, builders and baby boomers were both significantly less likely to state that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with democracy than other generations.

Conversely younger generations tended to be more likely to be ambivalent about democracy. Interestingly, males were significantly more likely to feel satisfied with democracy than females (51% NET satisfaction compared to 42%). Some differences among employment status were observed: those who were retired expressed significantly higher satisfaction (58%) than other employment types, and homemakers expressed the lowest satisfaction with democracy (28%). Satisfaction with democracy in Australia also varied among level of educational attainment. Individuals with the highest educational attainment of year 10 or below were significantly less likely to express satisfaction (36%), and those with a bachelor degree were significantly more likely to express satisfaction (55%) compared to all other groups. Results among NET satisfaction did not vary by location, income, migration status or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Status.

How does this measure compare with our previous surveys? [In 2018](#), fewer than 41 per cent of Australian citizens were satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia down from 86 per cent in 2007; so we can report an improvement of six percentage points.

Figure 2. Satisfaction with Democracy by Total, Generation



Q1. How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?

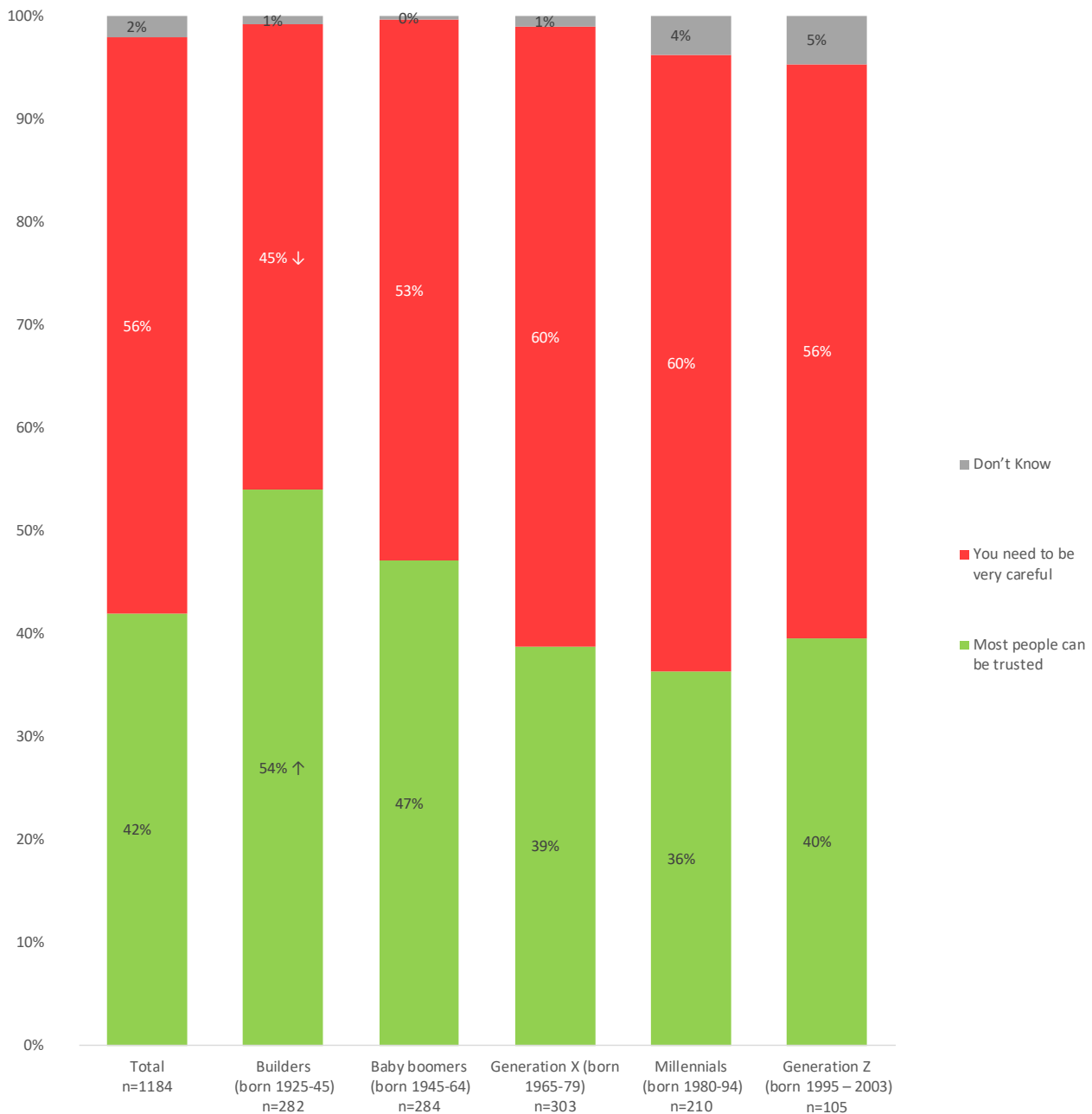
Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

### 5.1.2 Trust in Others

To gauge their general levels of social trust, survey respondents were asked if they think that generally, people can be trusted or if they believe they need to be careful when dealing with others. As shown in Figure 2 below, more than half (56%) believed it is important to be very careful when dealing with people. Interestingly, individuals tend to be more cautious of others if they are younger, with higher levels of trust in others correlated with older age. Builders were the most trusting generation, showing significantly higher levels of trust, compared to other generations.

## Findings

**Figure 3. Trust in Others by Total, Generation**



Q2. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or you need to be careful when dealing with people?

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

Significant differences were observed by gender, with males more likely than females to agree that most people can be trusted (47% compared to 37%), with females subsequently significantly more likely than males to say you need to be careful when dealing with people (60% compared to 52%).

Additionally, income and employment had an impact on results. Those earning less than \$50,000 a year were significantly more likely to agree you need to be careful of others than

other income groups, and those earning \$100,000 or more were less likely to agree they need to be careful when dealing with others. In line with significant differences observed with age and income, those who were unemployed were significantly more likely to believe you need to be careful when dealing with people than all other employment groups, while those who were retired were significantly less likely than all others to believe this.

How does this measure compare with our previous surveys? [In 2018](#), 49 per cent of Australian citizens felt that most people could be trusted; so we can report a decline of seven percentage points. Social trust is comparatively low in Australia compared to other mature liberal democracies.

### 5.1.3 Trust in Media and Science Sources

In order to determine the level of trust placed in a range of information sources about Covid-19, survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each source's ability to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19. They were given the option of responding on a Likert scale from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree') with the option to select 'Don't Know'. Figure 4 below represents the results of these ratings at a total level.

Unsurprisingly, scientists and experts were significantly more likely to be trusted to provide honest and objective information (79% NET agree) compared to television (40%), radio (39%), newspaper (38%) and social media (15%) sources. Television, radio and newspaper media showed little variation in terms of levels of trust - however newspaper media falls slightly below the threshold to become significantly less trusted than other mediums.

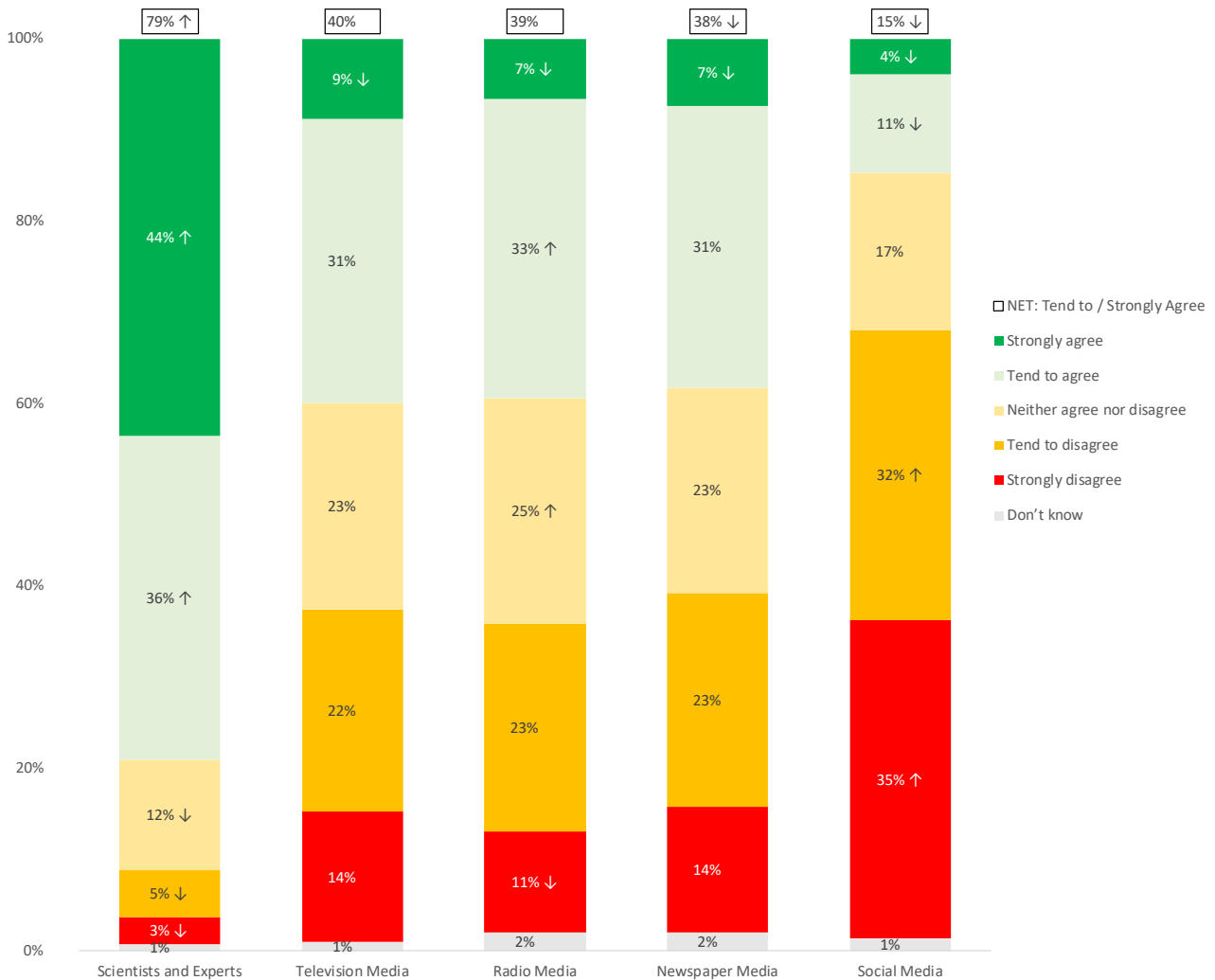
[Australians exhibit higher levels of trust in scientists and experts when compared with other mature democracies](#) such as the UK and the US. Notably [trust in scientists and experts has continued to increase during the pandemic](#).

Social media was found to be the least reliable source to receive information, with significantly lower levels of trust (15%) and significantly higher levels of distrust (67% NET distrust) compared to all other sources. Overall, the results shown in Figure 4 indicate that while traditional media forms are considered to be more trustworthy than social media, individuals tend to be more cautious and sceptical of media sources in general, with the greatest trust placed in science and expert opinion.



## Findings

**Figure 4. Trust in [source] to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19 by total**



Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Note: each statement was asked in the following way: I trust [media or science source] to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

As highlighted in Table 2 below, levels of trust attributed to media and science sources were relatively consistent across generational age bands, with no significant differences observed.

Results did vary amongst Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Status - with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples significantly more likely to trust social media sources for honest and objective information about Covid-19 (35% NET Agree) compared to people who do not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (14%).

## Findings

**Table 2. Trust in [source] to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19 by Age: Net Agree (Tend to / Strongly Agree)**

Column %	TOTAL	Builders (born 1925-45) n=282	Baby boomers (born 1945-64) n=284	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=303	Millennials (born 1980-94) n=210	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=105
Social Media	15%	14%	11%	15%	19%	14%
Television Media	40%	45%	45%	39%	36%	36%
Radio Media	39%	41%	44%	41%	34%	37%
Newspaper Media	38%	40%	41%	39%	36%	34%
Scientists and Experts	79%	80%	80%	79%	79%	78%

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Note: each statement was asked in the following way: I trust [media or science] to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

## 5.2 Trust in Museums

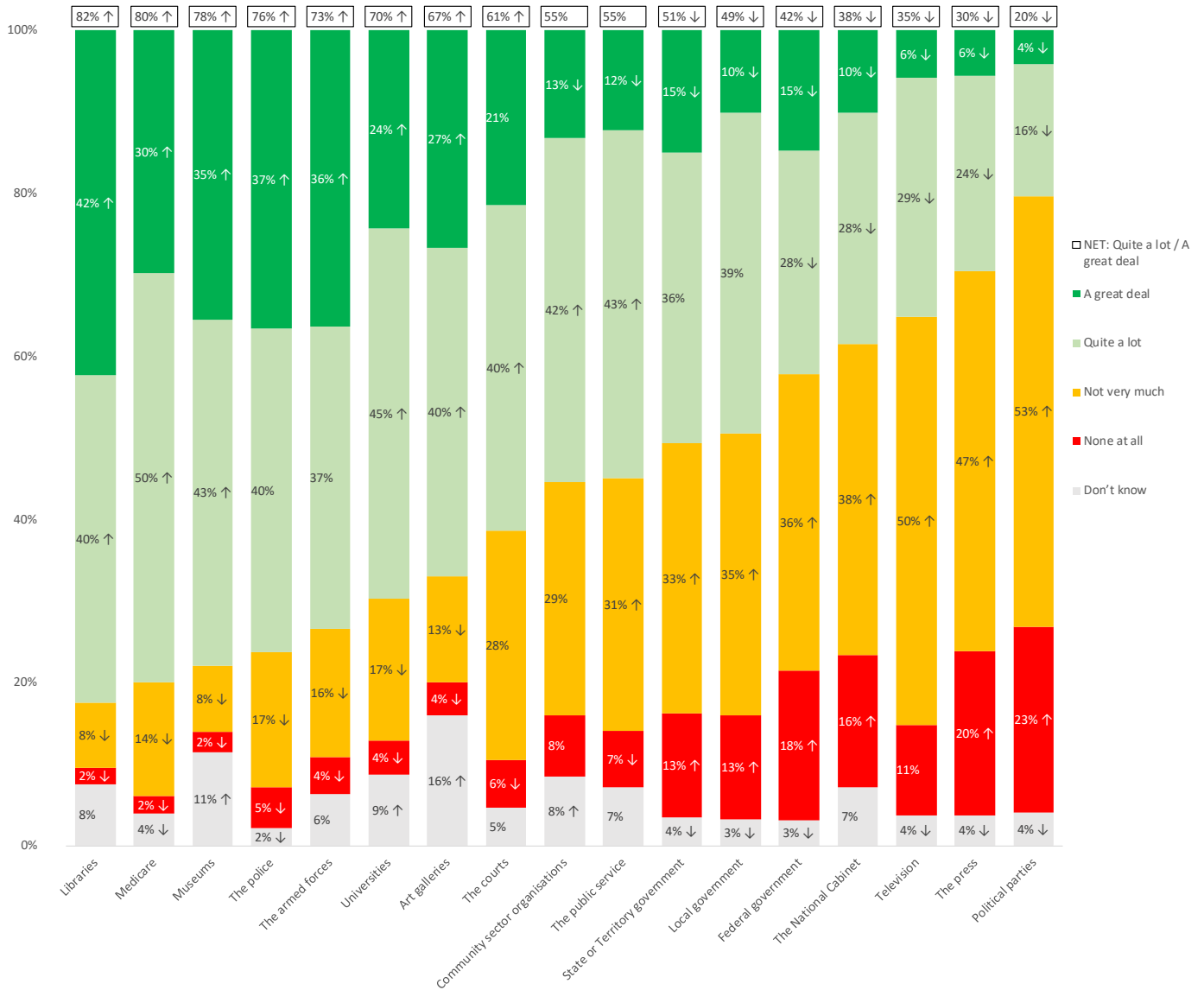
### 5.2.1 Trust in Institutions

To understand how trust in institutions vary, including levels of trust in museums, survey respondents were asked to indicate how much they personally trusted a range of organisations from a provided list, with answer options ranging from 1 ('none at all') to 4 ('a great deal'). Results are displayed in Figure 5 below. Museums received the third highest levels trust of all organisations (78% NET trust), which was significantly higher than the average level of trust among all organisations. Trust in museums was preceded only by Medicare (80%) and libraries (82%). Interestingly, a higher proportion trusted museums compared to art galleries (67%), arguably the most similar institution on the list.

On the other end of the scale, the organisations holding the least trust were political parties (20% NET trust), the press (30%) and television (35%). In general, respondents were more dubious of political and government institutions, expressing significantly less trust in state or territory government (51%), local government (49%), federal government (42%), the national cabinet (38%) and political parties, compared to public services and education bodies (such as above-mentioned libraries and Medicare, universities (70%), art galleries (67%), police (76%), armed forces (73%) or the courts (61%).

## Findings

Figure 5. Trust in Institutions, by Total



Q4. Here is a list of organisations. How much trust do you have in each of the following?

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

Reflective of the level of trust in others displayed in Figure 3 above, older generations – builders, and to a smaller extent baby boomers – tended to be more trusting of organisations in general and were more likely place a higher level of trust in art, community sector and service organisations.

Conversely, younger generations tended to be less likely to trust many of the above institutions. However, surprisingly Generation Z respondents were significantly more likely to trust local government than any other generation.

## Findings

Notably, millennials were the least likely to trust Museums, with just shy of 7 in 10 (69%) placing quite a lot or a great deal of trust in the institution, significantly lower than any other generational group.

Trust in museums did not vary significantly by the other demographic variables investigated.

**Table 3. Trust in Organisation by Total, Age: NET Trust (Quite a lot, A great deal)**

Column %	TOTAL n=1184	Builders (born 1925- 45) n=282	Baby boomers (born 1945- 64) n=284	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=303	Millennials (born 1980- 94) n=210	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=105
Libraries	82%	90% ↑	86%	80%	78%	84%
Medicare	80%	87%	81%	77%	78%	82%
<b>Museums</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>69% ↓</b>	<b>80%</b>
The police	76%	87% ↑	80%	72%	73%	74%
The armed forces	73%	83% ↑	82% ↑	71%	65% ↓	70%
Universities	70%	71%	65%	69%	70%	80%
Art galleries	67%	77% ↑	75% ↑	64%	63%	57%
The courts	61%	60%	64%	61%	55%	72%
Community sector organisations (churches, clubs, social service groups etc.)	55%	68% ↑	58%	53%	52%	53%
The public service	55%	47%	52%	52%	58%	66%
State or Territory government	51%	46%	47%	47%	53%	63%
Local government	49%	47%	45%	46%	51%	65% ↑
Federal government	42%	47%	41%	39%	42%	48%
The National Cabinet	38%	37%	38%	34%	40%	46%
Television	35%	42%	37%	34%	33%	31%
The press	30%	32%	29%	29%	31%	26%
Political parties	20%	16%	18%	19%	22%	28%

Q4. Here is a list of organisations. How much trust do you have in each of the following?

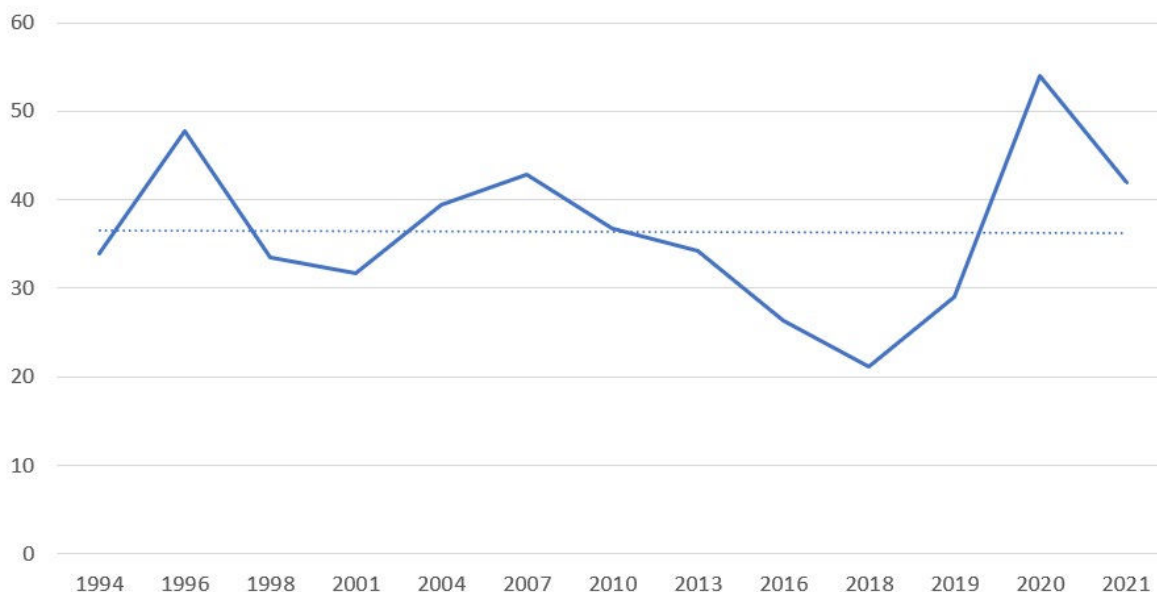
Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

How do these findings compare with recent time series data? By mid-2020, Australia was widely viewed as having successfully managed the pandemic, especially compared to the US, the UK and other European countries and public trust in government almost doubled in a year from a low point at 29% in 2018 to 54% in July 2020. (see Figure 6). These findings show that trust in people in government declined 12 points from 54% to 42% in a matter of 3 months. The early groundswell of public support during the pandemic is partly explained by what is called the [‘rally-round-the-flag’](#), patriotic effect. In Australia, Scott Morrison’s approval rating soared on the back of his effective handling of the initial threat, judicious decision-making on early closure of international borders and an atypical coordination of state and federal

## Findings

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Figure 6. Trust in People in Government, 1994 to 2021



Sources: Australian Election Study (1994-2019) and Democracy 2025 (2016, 2018, 2020 and 2021)

governments via the National Cabinet. Yet, [research](#) also suggests that people do not lose their capacity for reason or critical judgement in a crisis. Above all, the competence and outcomes of the government's actions matter. If the government is perceived as not able or willing to adequately respond to a threat, then public support will fade. It was therefore expected that public trust would increase once the government had got to grips with the vaccine rollout but this has not proved to be the case with [public trust continuing to wane](#). Is there something distinctive about the present trust debacle or are we returning to a longer term pattern of distrust in our political class?

Our survey findings suggest that institutions viewed as extending the protective power of democracy in a time of fear – safeguarding our civic culture and heritage, community security, health and wellbeing – are most trusted (see Table 3). For example, note the high levels of trust in defence and law and order organisations such as the police (76%), army (73%) and the courts (61%). Moreover, the highest levels of trust are bestowed to Medicare (80%), cultural institutions such as libraries (82%) and museums (78%) and universities (70%) and experts (79%). Trust in the Australian public service also remains quite high at 55%.

In contrast, institutions deemed, rightly or wrongly, to be acting on the basis of self-interest or against the collective interest fared worst. And unfortunately, politicians figure strongly. There is evidence of receding trust in political parties (20%), the National Cabinet (38%) and other key institutions held responsible for bringing politics into disrepute such as television (35%), the press (30%) and especially social media (15%).

### 5.2.2 Why Trust is Placed in Museums

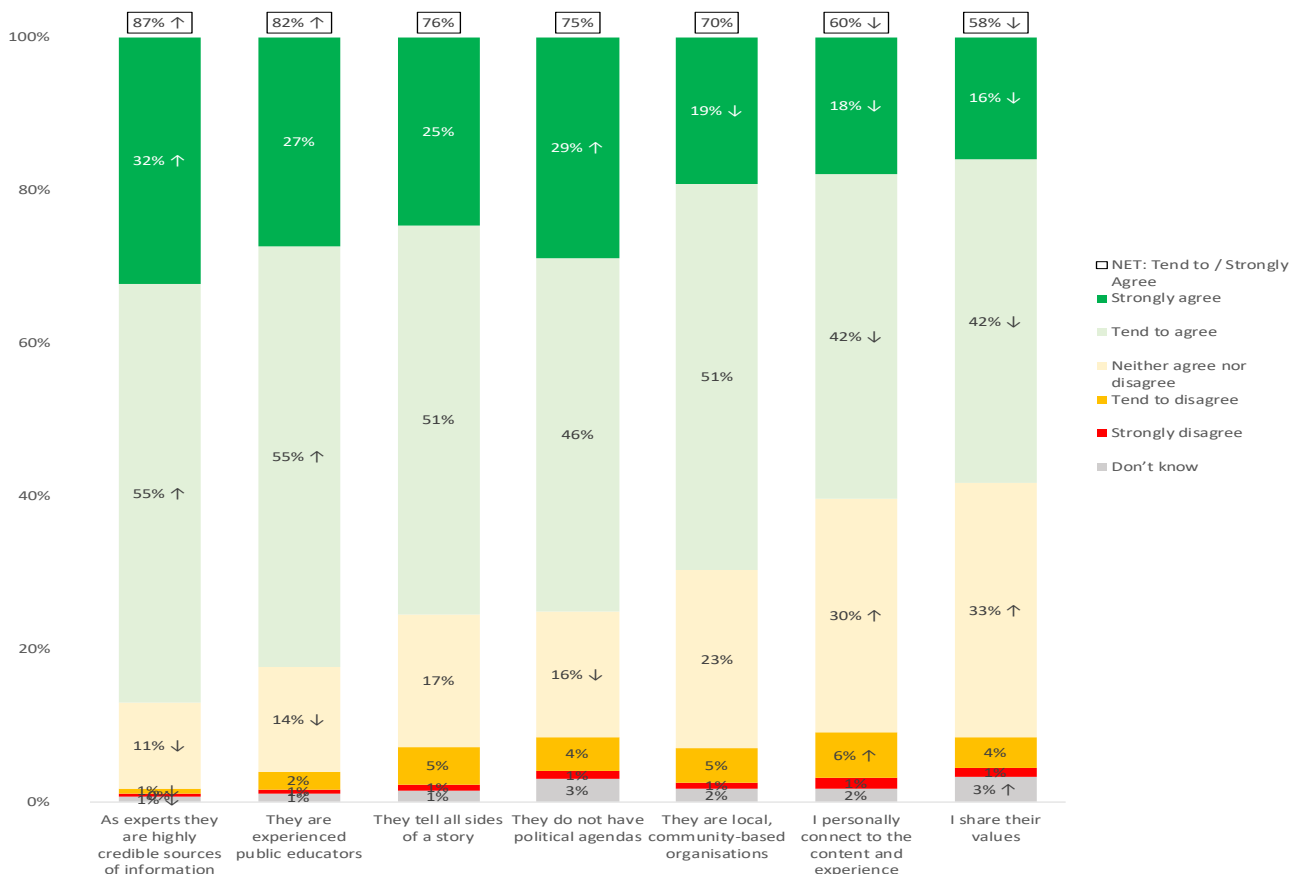
Survey respondents were presented with a list of reasons people might trust museums, and asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with these statements on a

## Findings

Likert scale of 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree') with the option to select 'Don't Know'. All statements began with the prefix 'I trust museums because'. This question was only asked to respondents who placed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust in museums, as identified question 4, displayed in Figure 5.

Results indicate that of the options presented, trust placed museums can likely be attributed the confidence in the education and information offered by the institution. Almost 9 in 10 (87%) place trust in museums because as experts they are highly credible sources of information, and 8 in 10 (82%) place trust in museums as they are experienced public educators. Agreement with these statements was significantly higher than the average of all statements. While there was support for the educative role of museums, respondents were less likely to feel a connection to museums on a personal level. This is evidenced by the significantly lower agreement the following statements: 'I trust museums because there is a personal connection to the content and experience' (60%) and 'I trust museums because I share their values' (58%).

Figure 7. Why Museums are Trusted by Total



Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Sample: n=930. Asked if selected 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' to level of trust in museums at question 4.

Weighted by age, gender, location. Total responses <4% not shown

Note: 'I trust museums because' began all statements

## Findings

Belief that museums tell all sides of the story varied significantly by demographics. Current students were significantly less likely to agree to this statement compared to all other employment statuses (37% NET agree). Furthermore, migrants who moved to Australia prior to 2006 were significantly less likely to agree with this statement (73%) compared to those who moved to Australia after 2006 (90%).

Additionally, migrants who relocated to Australia earlier than 2006 were significantly less trusting of museums as local, community-based organisations (63%) compared to those who relocated after 2006 (84%).

Responses among other demographic variables remained relatively consistent, with no additional significant differences observed.

**Table 4. Why Museums are Trusted by Total, Age: NET Agree (Tend to Agree / Strongly Agree)**

Column %	Total n=930	Builders (born 1925- 45) n=230	Baby boomers (born 1945- 64) n=238	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=233	Millennials (born 1980- 94) n=148	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=81
As experts they are highly credible sources of information	87%	88%	91%	83%	84%	91%
They are experienced public educators	82%	85%	84%	82%	78%	85%
They tell all sides of a story	76%	79%	80%	79%	73%	
They do not have political agendas	75%	78%	78%	76%	72%	71%
They are local, community-based organisations	70%	70%	69%	68%	73%	69%
I personally connect to the content and experience	60%	54%	57%	62%	61%	68%
I share their values	58%	64%	59%	58%	56%	56%

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Sample: n=930. Asked if selected 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' to level of trust in museums at question 4.

Weighted by age, gender, location. Total responses <4% not shown

Note: 'I trust museums because' began all statements

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of reasons individuals held trust and confidence in museums, survey respondents were asked to provide a response in their own words to the open-ended question 'Are there any other reasons you trust museums'. Responses to this question have been coded and displayed in Table 5 below, with verbatim examples also included in the commentary below.

## Findings

A wide range of other reasons for trusting museums were given. The most common reason trust was placed in museums was as a keeper and source of history (11%).

**“I trust them because they are safekeepers of our history. It is their job to preserve and present it .” *Generation X***

Following this, trust was placed due to the information and knowledge museums provide, made easily accessible to the public (7%).

**“They provide a source of education for everybody regardless.” *Builder***

**Table 5. Additional Reasons why Museums are Trusted by Total, Age (Coded)**

Column %	Total n=930	Builders (born 1925- 45) n=230	Baby boomers (born 1945- 64) n=238	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=233	Millennials (born 1980- 94) n=148	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=81
History / source of history / they look after our history	11%	4%	9%	14%	12%	16%
Information / knowledge	7%	4%	9%	6%	7%	8%
Honest / truthful / transparent / reliable / no reason to lie	7%	2%	3%	8%	11%	10%
No hidden agendas / non bias / they don't have an alternative motive	6%	3%	8%	4%	5%	13%
Trustworthy / no reason not to trust them	5%	3%	5%	5%	5%	10%
I like visiting them / good place to go / great exhibitions / interesting	5%	3%	5%	6%	3%	9%
You can learn / educational / research	5%	6%	3%	5%	2%	13%
Factual / they share facts / based on facts	5%	1%	5%	5%	5%	4%
<i>Don't Know / None / Nothing</i>	45%	58%	47%	47%	30%	45%

Q5a. Are there any other reasons you trust museums? (Please write in)

Sample: n=930. Asked if selected 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' to level of trust in museums at question 4.

Weighted by age, gender, location. Total responses <4% not shown

Trust was also placed in museums as they are perceived to be honest, truthful, transparent and reliable (6%), they have no hidden agendas or bias – their actions are perceived to be understood and truthful (6%) and they are trustworthy or have given no reason for participants not to trust them (5%).



**“They are there to tell/show history and be objective and no hidden agenda I think”** *Millennial*

Tests of significance cannot be applied to coded variables due to their qualitative nature, however, results across generations were relatively consistent.

### 5.2.3 How Trust in Museums Could be Increased

Survey respondents who expressed a distrust of museums, as identified in question 4, and displayed in Figure 5, were asked to provide more detail around how their trust in museums could be increased. Responses to this open-ended question were coded, with the 10 most common answers presented in Table 6 below. There was some confusion uncovered around why individuals should be trusting museums, or what type of trust was being discussed (13%).

**“They are just a museum – how can you trust them?”** *Millennial*

**“It depends on what sort of trust you are talking about. I wouldn’t trust them with my money; however, I trust them with dead animal bones.”** *Baby Boomer*

References to type of trust placed in museums suggests some individuals have defined roles and responsibilities imagined for museums, within which they should operate and trust can be given.

Some respondents also noted they believed museums are lacking credibility, with comments appearing to reflect recent controversies about the sourcing of artefacts in some museums. Respondents suggested trust could be increased if museums displayed more proof, truth or facts (8%), displayed greater honesty regarding where they have obtained their exhibitions (8%), were more transparent and open (7%), provided more unbiased presentations (6%) or provided more in-depth, genuine or accurate information (4%).

**“Acknowledge how artefacts were acquired”** *Generation Z*

**“Stolen things need to be returned to original countries.”** *Millennial*

When looking across generations, responses from Generation Z had the strongest focus on honesty, trust and transparency and unbiased exhibitions with an honest explanation of how artefacts were acquired.

## Findings

**Table 6. How Trust in Museums Could Be Increased by Total, Age (Coded)**

Column %	Total n=120	Builders (born 1925- 45) n=22*	Baby boomers (born 1945- 64) n=19*	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=31	Millennials (born 1980- 94) n=36	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=12*
Why would I need to trust a museum / depends what kind of trust	13%	11%	14%	12%	14%	5%
More proof / more facts / information to prove genuine	8%	10%	16%	11%	5%	3%
Be honest on how they have obtained artefacts / tell the truth about where resources are from	8%	4%	6%	7%	6%	21%
More transparent / be more open / open debates	7%	0%	8%	10%	8%	0%
Increase awareness / better advertising / attract people to visit	6%	7%	0%	2%	12%	0%
Expand research / science-based evidence / more source data	6%	14%	0%	4%	6%	15%
More unbiased presentations / not agenda driven / being ethically run	6%	0%	5%	10%	0%	25%
More in depth /genuine/ accurate information	4%	17%	4%	0%	1%	16%
More security / make it safer	4%	0%	0%	0%	7%	7%
<i>Nothing</i>	8%	19%	11%	11%	6%	0%

Q6. If you don't trust museums what is one thing that could be done to increase your level of trust? (Please write in)

Sample: n=120. Asked if selected 'not very much' or 'none at all' to level of trust in museums at question 4.

Weighted by age, gender, location. Total responses <4% not shown

\*Caution: small base sizes.

### 5.3 The Purpose of Museums

#### 5.3.1 Role of Museums in Society

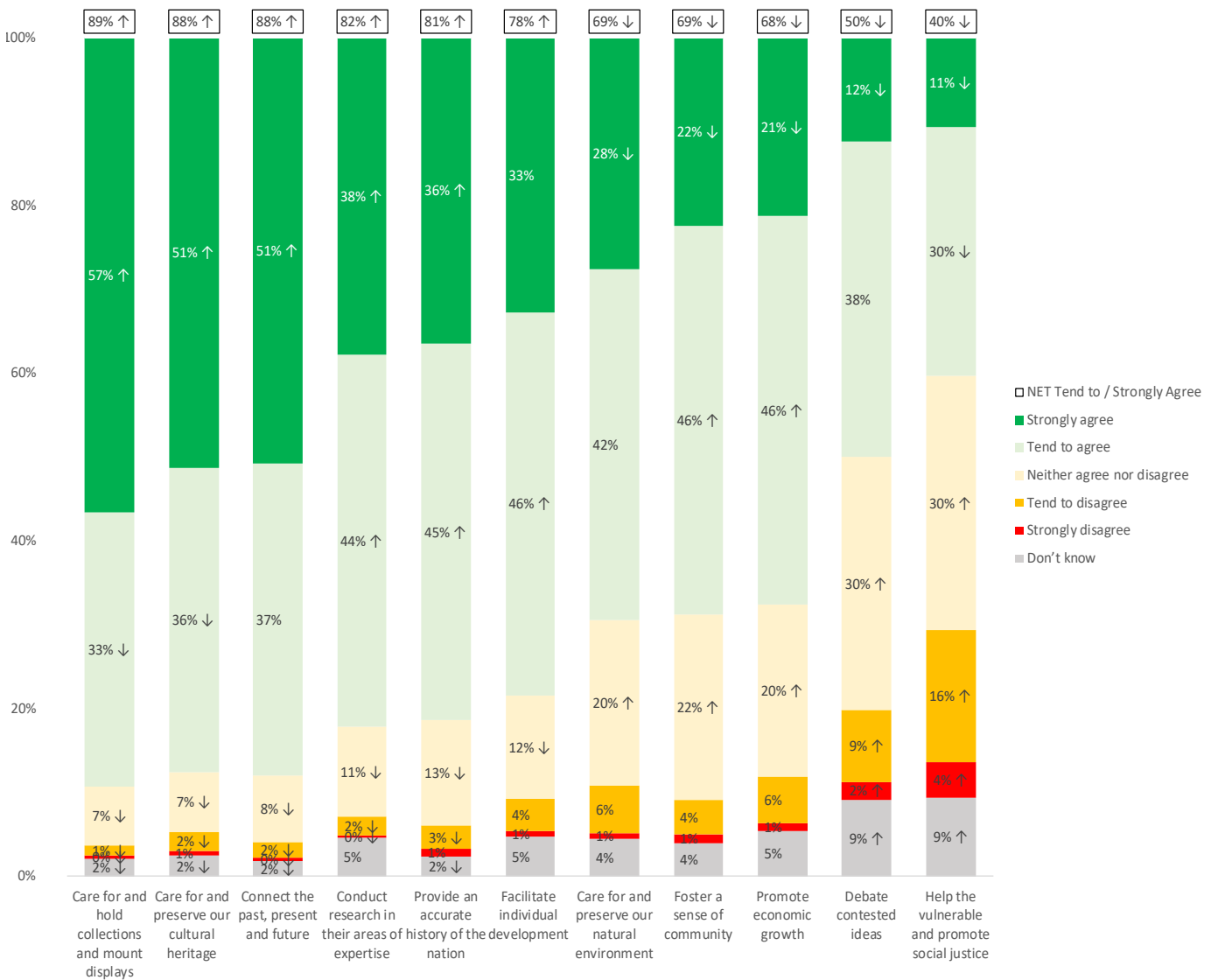
To understand public perceptions of the role museums can play in society, survey respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with things museums can do, on a Likert scale consisting of 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree') with the option do select 'Don't Know'.

As shown in Figure 8 below, a clear distinction of the perceived role of museums in society emerged, with the NET Agree score for each statement significantly higher or lower than the mean agreement with all other statements.

Respondents were significantly more likely to agree that museums can act in a traditional role, operating within their area of expertise while undertaking the visible roles they are known to do. This was led by the perception museums can care for and hold collections and mount displays (89%), closely followed by the agreement that museums can care for and preserve our cultural heritage (88%) and connect the past, present and future (88%). Additionally, it was thought to be appropriate that museums can: conduct research into their area of expertise (82%), provide an accurate history of the nation (81%) and facilitate individual development through education, stimulation and building skills (78%).

Conversely, participants tended to be less likely to agree with the idea that museums can act in a more progressive way than is typically seen or familiar. Respondents were significantly less likely to agree that museums can: care for and preserve our natural environment (69%), foster a sense of community (69%), promote economic growth (68%), debate contested ideas (50%) or help the vulnerable and promote social justice (40%). These findings indicate there may be some challenge from the general public in the recognition and adoption of these roles. Encouragingly, However, there was still majority support for most of these actions, with many feeling 'neutral' (selecting 'neither agree' nor 'disagree') suggesting there is room to increase support for museums playing a broader role in society. The most hesitancy was seen in museums helping the vulnerable and promoting social justice, with 20% disagreeing this is something museums can do.

Figure 8. Things Museums Can Do by Total



Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the things Museums can do? Museums can...

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

Older generations tended to have a more traditional view of the role of museums than younger generations. Almost all builders understood the role of museums to be ‘caring for’ and ‘holding collections and mounting displays’ (96% NET agree), significantly higher than other generations. Additionally, builders were significantly more likely to agree that museums can ‘care for and preserve our cultural heritage’ (94%), ‘conduct research into their area of expertise’ (90%) and ‘provide an accurate history of the nation’ (90%).

Millennials tend to be more hesitant about the things museums can do. They were less likely to agree museums can ‘care for, hold collections and mount displays’ (84%), ‘care for and preserve our cultural heritage’ (81%) or ‘connect the past, present and future’ (82%).

## Findings

Both millennials and Generation Z were more supportive of the civic role of museums, significantly more likely than other generations to agree museums can help the vulnerable and promote social justice (50%, 56% respectively) compared to all other generational groups – a direct contrast to builders and baby boomers, who were significantly less likely to agree with this statement (29% and 28% respectively). This suggests younger generations could be more open minded towards museums moving into stronger social activism roles.

**Table 7. Things Museums Can Do by Total, Age: NET Agree (Tend to Agree / Strongly Agree)**

Column %	TOTAL n=1184	Builders (born 1925- 45) n=282	Baby boomers (born 1945- 64) n=284	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=303	Millennials (born 1980- 94) n=210	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=105
Care for and hold collections and mount displays	89%	96% ↑	93%	88%	84% ↓	88%
Care for and preserve our cultural heritage	88%	94% ↑	91%	87%	81% ↓	88%
Connect the past, present and future	88%	92%	91%	89%	82% ↓	89%
Conduct research in their areas of expertise	82%	90% ↑	84%	80%	76%	87%
Provide an accurate history of the nation	81%	90% ↑	80%	82%	80%	81%
Facilitate individual development through education, stimulation and building skills	78%	84%	78%	80%	77%	76%
Care for and preserve our natural environment	69%	70%	65%	71%	71%	70%
Foster a sense of community	69%	69%	64%	69%	71%	74%
Promote economic growth through tourism, investment and regeneration	68%	69%	64%	67%	69%	71%
Debate contested ideas	50%	46%	47%	46%	57%	52%
Help the vulnerable and promote social justice	40%	29% ↓	28% ↓	38%	50% ↑	56% ↑

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the things Museums can do? Museums can...

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

Social income also had an impact on results. Those earning more than \$100,000 a year were the most agreeable towards museums taking on a broader range of social responsibilities.

Compared to other income groups, they were significantly more likely to agree that museums can: conduct research into their area of expertise (89%), facilitate individual development through education, stimulation and building skills (85%), care for and preserve our natural environment (77%), foster a sense of community (78%) and help the vulnerable and promote social justice (47%). In contrast, those who earned less than \$50,000 a year were significantly less likely to agree that museums can foster a sense of community (63%).

Results also varied across level of educational attainment. Individuals who completed year 10 or below were significantly less likely to agree museums can facilitate individual development through education, stimulation and building skills (66%).

Recent migrants who arrived in Australia later than 2006 were more open to what museums can do compared to those who arrived earlier than 2006. Recent migrants were significantly more likely to believe museums can: conduct research into their area of expertise (91% compared to 77% for those who migrated prior to 2006), care for and preserve our natural environment (85% compared to 64%), foster a sense of community (83% compared to 66%), promote economic growth (82% compared to 66%) and help the vulnerable and promote social justice (68% compared to 39%).

## 5.4 Museums and Civic Action

### 5.4.1 What Museums Should Be

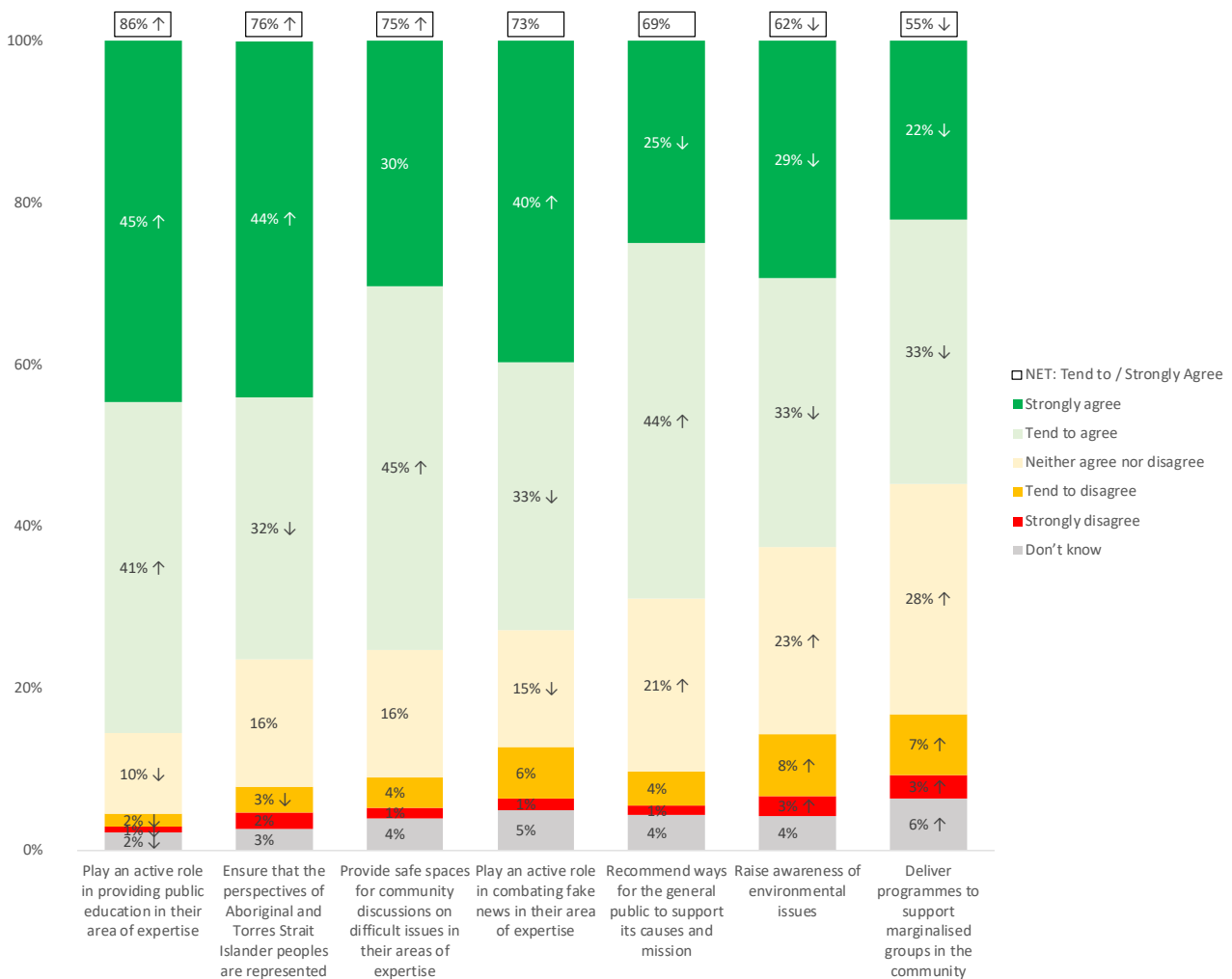
After establishing the role museums can play within society, survey respondents were asked what they think museums *should* be doing in regard to civic action. Again, this was achieved by asking respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement of 7 of statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree') with the option to select 'Don't Know'.

Figure 9 below shows, at a total level, the response to this question. Importantly, there was majority support for all statements, suggesting that there is the potential for museums to expand their role in society. The top 3 things respondents believed museums should be doing were firstly, to play an active role in providing public education within their area of expertise (86% NET Agree). Secondly, to ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented (76%), followed by an agreement that museums should provide safe spaces for community discussions on difficult issues in their areas of expertise (75%). These three statements all received significantly higher NET agreement than other statements asked. Overall, statements that specified suggested roles were within the museum's area of expertise received a more favourable response, indicating when undertaking civic action, more support may be received if perceived to be directly relevant and appropriate to the organisation.

## Findings

Respondents were significantly less likely to agree that museums should raise awareness of environmental issues (62%) or deliver programs to support marginalised groups in the community (55%). However, many felt neutral towards these points rather than disagreeing (11% and 10% NET disagree, respectively), and a slim majority agreed. For both statements, as well as the statement ‘museums should recommend ways for the general public to support its mission’, respondents were more likely to select ‘neither agree nor disagree’, than other statements, indicating many feel indifferent. Therefore, there is strong potential for museums to undertake these roles and gain support from the Australian public, although it may take some persuasion and time for people to recognise the change and associated benefits.

**Figure 9. Things Museums Should Do by Total**



**Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

Note: ‘Museums should’ preceded all statements

Few significant differences were observed among generational age groups, outlined in Table 8 below. Baby boomers were more inclined to agree that museums should play an active role

## Findings

in combating fake news within their area of expertise. Responses to all other statements were comparable across generations.

**Table 8. Things Museums Should Do by Total, Age: NET Agree (Tend to / Strongly Agree)**

Column %	TOTAL n=1184	Builders (born 1925- 45) n=282	Baby boomers (born 1945- 64) n=284	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=303	Millennials (born 1980- 94) n=210	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=105
Play an active role in providing public education in their area of expertise	86%	92%	90%	84%	83%	82%
Ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented	76%	77%	74%	77%	80%	73%
Provide safe spaces for community discussions on difficult issues in their areas of expertise	75%	72%	76%	72%	81%	70%
Play an active role in combating fake news in their area of expertise	73%	83% ↑	76%	70%	71%	66%
Recommend ways for the general public to support its causes and mission	69%	62%	63%	64%	75%	83%
Raise awareness of environmental issues	62%	55%	56%	63%	69%	68%
Deliver programmes to support marginalised groups in the community	55%	49%	47%	53%	60%	67%

Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

Significant differences were observed by gender, with women significantly more likely to agree museums should ensure the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented than men (80% NET agree compared to 72%).

Results were also found to differ by level of education achieved. Individuals who had completed year 10 or below were less likely to believe museums should recommend ways for the general public to support its causes and mission (57%) or deliver programmes to support marginalised groups in the community (37%) compared to other education levels attained. Conversely, individuals who had achieved a higher level of education, a graduate diploma or



postgraduate degree, were significantly more likely to agree that museums should recommend ways for the general public to support its causes and mission (78%).

Again, the period in which migrants arrived in Australia impacted significantly, with recent migrants more accepting of the role museums should take. Recent migrants (who arrived in Australia later than 2006) were significantly more likely to believe museums should: recommend ways for the general public to support its causes and mission (91% compared to 65%), raise awareness of environmental issues (84% compared to 62%), ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented (89% compared to 75%), provide safe spaces for community discussions on difficult issues in their areas of expertise (87% compared to 73%) and deliver programmes to support marginalised groups in the community (81% compared to 55%).

### 5.4.2 Impact of the Loss of Museums

The final question asked survey respondents to reflect on what would be lost if all museums closed, and was asked as an open-ended question. Coded results are displayed in Table 9 below, and some verbatim examples have been included in this commentary.

Almost all (94%), listed a perceived loss, demonstrating the usefulness people see in museums. Unsurprisingly, the main loss if museums were to close was identified as a loss of history, historical records and an understanding of how we, as humans, came to be where we are now – approximately 6 in 10 respondents (61%) mentioned this spontaneously:

**“It would be a piece of history lost.”** *Millennial*

This was followed by the loss of heritage, a link to the past, or a link to personal history cultivating a sense of belonging (23%):

**“Our past. The learnings from all our ancestors”** *Generation X*

**“Our connection with the past.”** *Baby Boomers*

A loss of knowledge and information (17%) and the removal of centres facilitating education and learning (15%) were also identified as core losses to society if museums closed:

**“We would lose a place of education”** *Builder*

**Table 9. Loss to Society if Museums Closed by Total, Age (Coded)**

Column %	TOTAL n=1184	Builders (born 1925- 45) n=282	Baby boomers (born 1945- 64) n=284	Generation X (born 1965-79) n=303	Millennials (born 1980- 94) n=210	Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003) n=105
History / historical records / historical understanding	61%	57%	58%	69%	57%	59%
Heritage / Link to the past / sense of belonging	23%	31%	31%	19%	16%	22%
Knowledge / Information	17%	17%	17%	16%	15%	25%
Education / Learning	15%	12%	12%	14%	18%	21%
Culture	13%	8%	9%	14%	19%	13%
Exhibitions / Artefacts / Access to see these	13%	10%	14%	12%	13%	13%
Impact on children / future generations / not good for kids	5%	7%	3%	2%	8%	4%
Community engagement / loss for the people	4%	4%	2%	3%	5%	6%
Link to the present / future	4%	4%	3%	4%	1%	11%
Entertainment / enjoyment / fun	3%	3%	1%	3%	4%	3%
It would be bad / not a good thing / sad	3%	3%	2%	2%	4%	3%
Art / works of art	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%	4%
Tourism / a tourist destination / economic impact	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	7%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	3%	1%	3%
Nothing	1%	2%	0%	1%	3%	0%

Q9. What would we lose if all museums closed? (Please write in)

Sample: n=1184, Weighted by age, gender, location

Total responses < 2% not shown

Results remain relatively comparable across generations. Generation X had the strongest focus on the loss of history, while Generation Z expressed the greatest concern for the loss of a link to the present and future.

## 6. Trust in Australian Museums in Comparative Perspective

The survey was designed to allow for easy comparison with similar surveys conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) by the [Museums Association](#), the [American Alliance of Museums](#) in the United States (US) and the [European Union](#) (EU) to provide a measure of commonality and difference between mature democracies. It should be noted, however, that the Museums Association in the UK deployed a qualitative method involving regional based deliberative forums in contrast with the quantitative survey methods deployed in Australia, and the US. Ideally, a mixed methods approach (which was deployed in the EU survey) allows for a better understanding of the attitudinal differences between sub-groups.

### Trust in Museums

Australian Museums (78%) rank higher on the public trust scale in comparison with their counterparts in the US (64%). For UK participants, “Museums hold a unique position of being trusted, which is particularly important given the perceived lack of trusted organisations in society such as the government and the media.”

There is a lot of nuance behind these results. In Australia, generation and gender plays a key role with “baby boomers” and men having more trust than “millennials” and women in general. In the US, the most trusting segment of the population in museums tend to be more educated and white. There are no significant gender or political differences, but Liberals do display higher levels of trust in museums (5.8 to 5.1 on a 10-point scale) than Conservatives.

### Why Trust is Placed in Museums

Overall, in all three countries and the EU, trust in museums appears to be rooted in a perception that museums are (or should be) fact-based and non-partisan ... and thus “neutral.” Survey respondents and focus group participants see museums as experts and public educators, the guardians of factual information, presenting all sides of the story. In the EU, the largest majority of respondents saw museums as “reliable sources of information on national history...established by members of the academic community who are knowledgeable and can be objective”.

### The Purpose of Museums

In the UK, the US, and the EU, there is strong feeling that museums should concern themselves with what they are good at first and foremost. This emanates from the notion that taking on additional purposes may undermine the essence of why museums are presently trusted. These are identified primarily as traditional concerns such as:

*Care and preservation of heritage*

*Holding collections and mounting displays*

*Narrating an important part of the country's/nation's history*

*Promoting/representing national identity and the notion of the nation*

*Creating knowledge for, and about, society – about public education, rather than academic or elite research*

In accordance with previous studies, the findings from the EU show that most people visit national museums expecting to entertain themselves or find pleasure in their visit, especially in countries where the notion of “edutainment” has a long history, such as in Sweden and the UK. The second most common reason given is education and learning. This is a first choice especially in countries with more conservative educational agendas.

In the UK, there was also more of an emphasis on museums “promoting economic growth through tourism, investment and regeneration”; demonstration of an austerity effect on public attitudes. Purposes essentially interpreted as bringing the community together such as – *fostering a sense of community, helping the vulnerable and protecting the natural environment* – were not objected to but were viewed as lower priority issues.

Australians also tended to have a traditional view of the role of museums in society, focusing on curatorship, providing descriptions and artefacts from history and facilitating individual development through education. Respondents most commonly agreed that museums can: care for and hold collections and mount displays, care for and preserve our cultural heritage and connect the past, present and future. However, in stark contrast to the UK, least agreement was given to museums promoting economic growth and the importance of museums conducting research is stressed. These traditional views tended to be stronger among older respondents, with respondents becoming more progressive in the beliefs around what museums can do as age decreases.

### **Museums and Civic Action**

UK research participants challenged the idea that museums should provide a forum for debate or promote social justice and human rights not on the basis that the participants didn’t think that museums cannot broach controversial subjects, but “that they should remain neutral in the displaying of information, rather than act as a leader in telling people what to think.”

In contrast, in the EU, the majority of respondents held a progressive or neutral position. Museums are considered “places where issues of controversial history are debated and the nation’s/state’s official stance on matters of disputed heritage or history should not always take prominence.” National museums should represent and reflect upon contemporary national issues and identities and should engage visitors in discussions about what it means (in this case) to belong to a nation, about what it means to be “European”, and about multiple viewpoints.

Australians also have an understanding of museums as shaping our futures as well as our past. As such they are seen as potentially playing an active role in sharing new knowledge, ensuring that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented, and providing safe spaces for community discussions on difficult issues in their areas of expertise.

Raising awareness of environmental issues and delivering programmes to support marginalised groups in the community were significantly less likely to be seen as things museums should be doing but a small majority still agreed that Museums should engage in these areas.

In the US, respondents are divided on ideological lines. Liberals find museums more credible in playing a role in social action but Conservatives are significantly less likely to find museums credible about art of racial and ethnic issues rooted in history (moderates fall in the middle). In the US, Liberals are the most likely to want prosocial content from museums.

## 7. In Conclusion – Museums as the Guardians of our Civic Culture

In summary then, at a time when trust in most sources of information is declining, museums have proven resilient, retaining their status as super trusted institutions. Australians see museums as a trusted social intermediary with the citizenry uniquely placed to perform five key roles in community governance:

1. fostering critical educated citizens in their areas of expertise;
2. combating ‘truth decay’ in their areas of expertise;
3. providing safe spaces for enabling community participation on historical, social and environmental issues;
4. ensuring that the perspectives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented; and,
5. there is majority support for delivering programmes of various kinds to help integrate marginalised groups into the community and give voice to their current needs and aspirations for the future.

Two of these putative roles require further explanation.

How can museums help combat ‘truth decay’? ‘Truth decay’ is defined by the [RAND Corporation](#) as the increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data; the blurring of the line between opinion and fact; the burgeoning volume, and resulting influence, of opinion and personal experience over fact; and declining trust in formerly respected sources of factual information. Given the high level of trust citizens have for museums they should be publicly funded to provide independent, evidence-based fact checking services in their areas of expertise. Museums could also deliver public programmes that build the capacity of citizens to discern and refute misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation.

It is also proposed that museums could provide ideal institutional venues for enabling community participation on issues of social concern. But what would this mean in practice? Although there is limited evidence available to identify what types of museums are best able to perform this role, we have 50 years of research that tells us when public participation schemes are likely to succeed. Positive impact is more probable when the public:

## In Conclusion – Museums as the Guardians of our Civic Culture

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- Can engage (*has the resources, skills and knowledge to participate*)
- Likes to engage (*has a sense of attachment to the issue or institution*)
- Enabled to engage (*is incentivised to participate*)
- Asks to engage (*feels valued*)
- Responds to when they do (*are included on an ongoing basis*)

The [CLEAR model](#), developed by Vivien Lowndes, Lawrence Pratchett and Gerry Stoker for the Council of Europe, provides a useful framework for helping museums facilitate public participation activities as guardians of our civic culture.

# 8. Appendix

## Appendix A: Questionnaire

### SCREENER QUESTIONS

**SQ1** What is your age? (Please enter)  
 {NUMERIC, VALIDATE: INTEGER, RANGE 18-99}  
 #Age# AUTO CODE TO AGE GROUP

Builders (born 1925-45)	01	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
Baby boomers (born 1945-64)	02	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
Generation X (born 1965-79)	03	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
Millennials (born 1980-94)	04	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
Generation Z (born 1995 – 2003)	05	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
Born 2003 – present (under 18)	06	Terminate

**SQ2** What is your postcode?  
 {NUMERIC}  
 {AUTO CODE TO STATE/TERRITORY}

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**SQ3** Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?

{SINGLE}

Male	01	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
Female	02	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
In another way	03	ASSIGN TO GENDER QUOTA AT RANDOM
Prefer not to say	98	ASSIGN TO GENDER QUOTA AT RANDOM

**SQ4** Which of the following ranges best describes your household's approximate combined income, from all sources, before tax is taken out?

{SINGLE}

Less than \$50,000 a year	01	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
\$50,000 – less than \$100,000 a year	02	RECRUIT TO QUOTA
\$100,000 a year or more	03	RECRUIT TO QUOTA

## SECTION 1: TRUST IN GENERAL

[SHOW SECTION 1 TO ALL RESPONDENTS]

**Q1** How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?  
{SINGLE}

Very dissatisfied	01
Fairly dissatisfied	02
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	03
Very satisfied	04
Fairly satisfied	05

**Q2** Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?  
{SINGLE}

Most people can be trusted	01
You need to be very careful	02
Don't Know	99

**Q3** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

[RANDOMISE ORDER]

{SELECT ONE OPTION PER ROW}

		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
A.	I trust social media to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19	01	02	03	04	05	99
B.	I trust television media to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19	01	02	03	04	05	99
C.	I trust radio media to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19	01	02	03	04	05	99
D.	I trust newspaper media to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19	01	02	03	04	05	99
E.	I trust scientists and experts to provide honest and objective information about Covid-19	01	02	03	04	05	99



## Appendix

**Q4** Here is a list of organisations. How much trust do you have in each of the following?

[RANDOMISE ORDER]  
{SELECT ONE OPTION PER ROW}

		None at all	Not very much	Quite a Lot	A great deal	Don't know
A.	The armed forces	01	02	03	04	99
B.	The press	01	02	03	04	99
C.	Television	01	02	03	04	99
D.	Federal government	01	02	03	04	99
E.	The National Cabinet	01	02	03	04	99
F.	The courts	01	02	03	04	99
G.	The police	01	02	03	04	99
H.	The public service	01	02	03	04	99
I.	Medicare	01	02	03	04	99
J.	State or Territory government	01	02	03	04	99
K.	Political parties	01	02	03	04	99
L.	Universities	01	02	03	04	99
M.	Community sector organisations (churches, clubs, social service groups etc.)	01	02	03	04	99
N.	Local government	01	02	03	04	99
O.	Museums	01	02	03	04	99
P.	Libraries	01	02	03	04	99
Q.	Art galleries	01	02	03	04	99

## SECTION 2: TRUST IN MUSEUMS

**Q5** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

[RANDOMISE ORDER]  
{SELECT ONE OPTION PER ROW}

< ASK IF Q4\_MUSEUMS = CODE 03 or CODE 04 I.E. TRUST MUSEUMS >

		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
A.	I trust museums because I share the same values	01	02	03	04	05	99
B.	I trust museums because as experts they are highly credible sources of information	01	02	03	04	05	99
C.	I trust museums because they do not have political agendas	01	02	03	04	05	99

## Appendix

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D.	I trust museums because I personally connect to the content and experience	01	02	03	04	05	99
E.	I trust museums because they tell all sides of a story	01	02	03	04	05	99
F.	I trust museums because they are experienced public educators	01	02	03	04	05	99
G.	I trust museums because they are local, community-based organisations	01	02	03	04	05	99

**Q5a** Are there any other reasons that you trust museums? (Please write in)  
{OPEN ENDED}

< ASK IF Q4\_MUSEUMS = CODE 01 or CODE 02 I.E. DO NOT TRUST MUSEUMS >

**Q6** If you don't trust museums what is one thing that could be done to increase your level of trust? (Please write in)  
{OPEN ENDED}

## SECTION 3: THE PURPOSE OF MUSEUMS

< ASK ALL >

**Q7** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the things museums can do?

Museums can...

[RANDOMISE ORDER]  
{SELECT ONE OPTION PER ROW}

		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
A.	Care for and hold collections and mount displays	01	02	03	04	05	99
B.	Help the vulnerable and promote social justice	01	02	03	04	05	99
C.	Provide an accurate history of the nation	01	02	03	04	05	99
D.	Promote economic growth through tourism, investment and regeneration	01	02	03	04	05	99

## Appendix

E.	Connect the past, present and future	01	02	03	04	05	99
F.	Debate contested ideas	01	02	03	04	05	99
G.	Foster a sense of community	01	02	03	04	05	99
H.	Care for and preserve our cultural heritage (customs, practices, objects, technologies, archaeology)	01	02	03	04	05	99
I.	Care for and preserve our natural environment	01	02	03	04	05	99
J.	Facilitate individual development through education, stimulation and building skills	01	02	03	04	05	99
K.	Conduct research in their areas of expertise	01	02	03	04	05	99

## SECTION 4: MUSEUMS AND CIVIC ACTION

< ASK ALL >

**Q8** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

[RANDOMISE ORDER]

{SELECT ONE OPTION PER ROW}

		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
A.	Museums should recommend ways for the general public to support its causes and mission	01	02	03	04	05	99
B.	Museums should raise awareness of environmental issues	01	02	03	04	05	99
C.	Museums should play an active role in combating fake news in their area of expertise	01	02	03	04	05	99
D.	Museums should ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are represented	01	02	03	04	05	99
E.	Museums should provide safe spaces for community discussions on difficult issues in their areas of expertise	01	02	03	04	05	99
F.	Museums should deliver programmes to support marginalised groups in the community	01	02	03	04	05	99
G.	Museums should play an active role in providing public education in their area of expertise	01	02	03	04	05	99

## Appendix

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**Q9** What would we lose if all museums closed? (Please write in)  
{OPEN ENDED}

## SECTION 5: DEMOGRAPHICS

< ASK ALL >

Finally, we have a few questions about you. These help to ensure we have a good cross section of people in our survey.

**DQ1** What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

{SINGLE}

Postgraduate degree (honours, Masters, PhD)	13
Graduate diploma or graduate certificate	12
Bachelor Degree (undergraduate)	11
Advanced diploma or diploma	10
Certificate level IV	9
Certificate level III	8
Year 12	7
Year 11	6
Year 10	5
Certificate level II	4
Certificate level I	3
Year 9 or below	2
No educational attainment	1
Prefer not to say	98

**DQ2** Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

{SINGLE}

Employed full time (35+ hours per week)	1
Employed part time or casual (less than 35 hours per week)	2
Self-employed	3
Student	4
Unemployed	5
Home duties	6
Retired	7
Other (Please specify)	8

**DQ3** In which country were you born?

{SINGLE}

## Appendix

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Australia	1
United Kingdom	2
New Zealand	3
Italy	4
China (including Hong Kong)	5
Vietnam	6
India	7
Philippines	8
Greece	9
South Africa	10
Germany	11
Malaysia	12
Netherlands	13
Lebanon	14
Sri Lanka	15
Serbia and Montenegro	16
Other (Please specify)	98
Don't Know	99

ASK DQ4 IF DQ3 = 02-98

**DQ4** When did you arrive in Australia

{SINGLE}

Before 2006	1
In 2006 or more recently	2

**DQ5** Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Yes, Aboriginal	1
Yes, Torres Strait Islander	2
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	3
No	4

Thank and close.

**a. Appendix B: Detailed tables**

*Result breakdown by demographics highlighting significant differences noted in commentary. Detailed tables provided as an excel attachment.*

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