

# Museums as sites of social change:

Exploring processes of placemaking and barriers to access and participation for underrepresented communities

Erin Toolis

University of California, Santa Cruz



# Critical placemaking

Place-based,  
asset-based

Dialogic,  
collaborative,  
inclusive

Plural, critical

Active,  
participatory

# Empowering processes

**Place Attachment**  
Connects people to place

**Sense of Community**  
Connects people to each  
other and expands  
community narrative

**Critical  
Consciousness**  
Connects people to  
knowledge and resources

**Civic Engagement**  
Expands boundaries of  
participation

# Social Change

# Research questions



What are the processes and outcomes facilitated by museum participation?

→ Questionnaires with museum visitors



What are the barriers that limit access, participation, and relevance for low-income residents and people of color at museums, and how can they be reduced?

→ Focus groups with underrepresented community members



# What are the processes and outcomes facilitated by museum participation?

## □ Questionnaires with local museum visitors

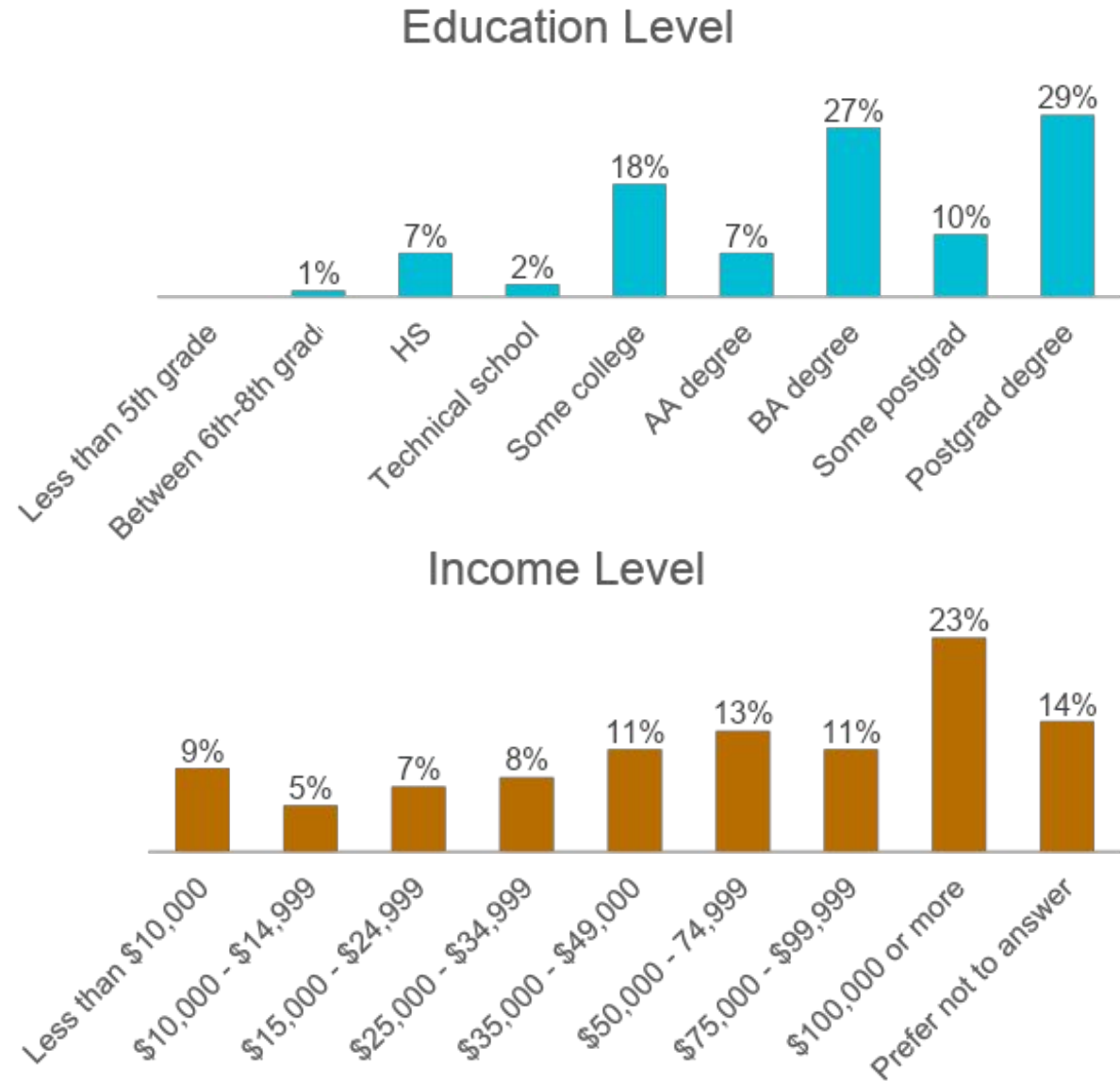
- Quasi-experimental design with “before” and “after” condition
- Lasted 5-10 minutes
- *Scales*: Place attachment, sense of community, awareness of structural injustice, diversity attitudes, civic responsibility, intentions for civic action



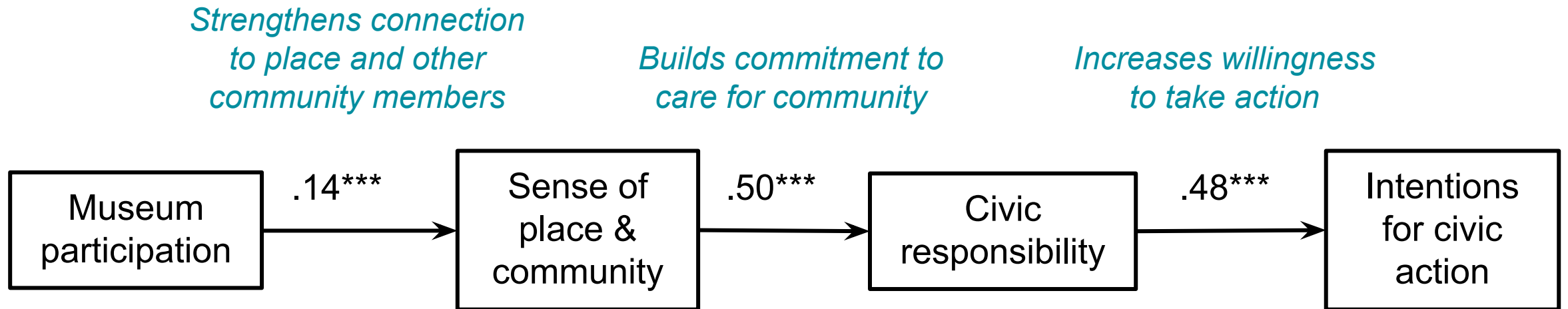
(Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, 2017)

# Participants

- 546 respondents (64% women, 31% men, 2% non-binary or genderfluid, 1% different identity)
- Age range: 18-86, median=41 years
- Race/ethnicity:  
White/European-American (69%),  
Latinx/Hispanic (16%), bi- or  
multi-racial (7%), Asian American  
or Pacific Islander (7%),  
Black/African American (3%),  
American Indian (3%)



# Quasi-Experiment: Structural equation modeling



# Events with highest levels of intentions for civic action



**Lightning Talks:  
The struggle is real**



**Friday night debate  
dance off**



**December First  
Friday**



**Salsa Thursday**



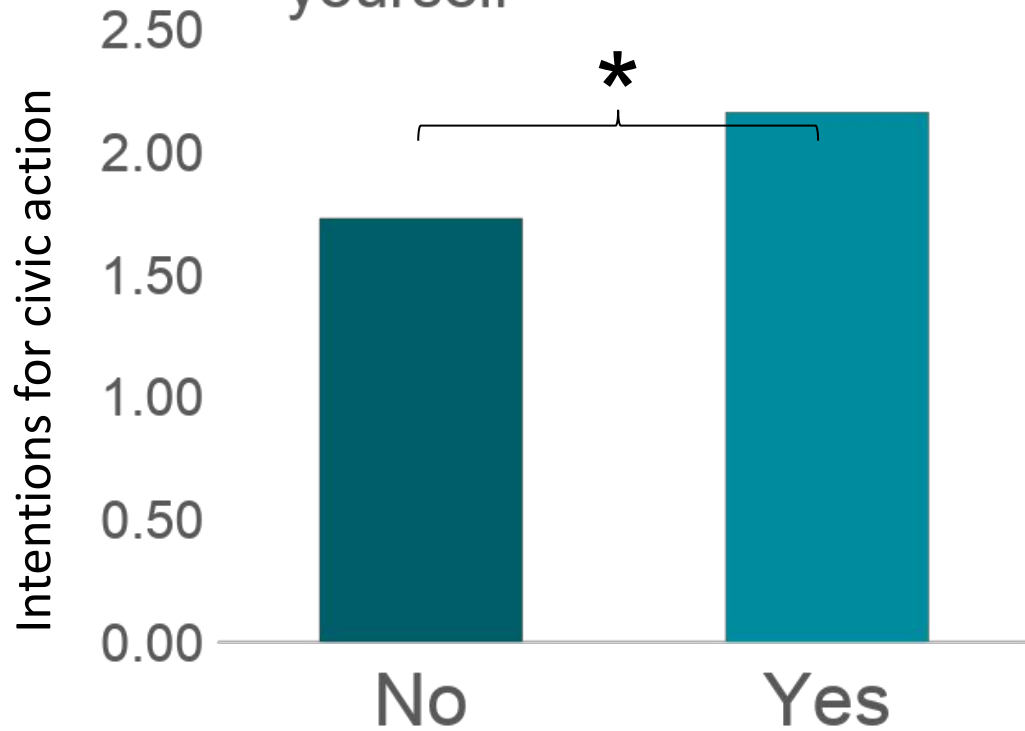
**Joaquin  
Immigration Story  
Event**



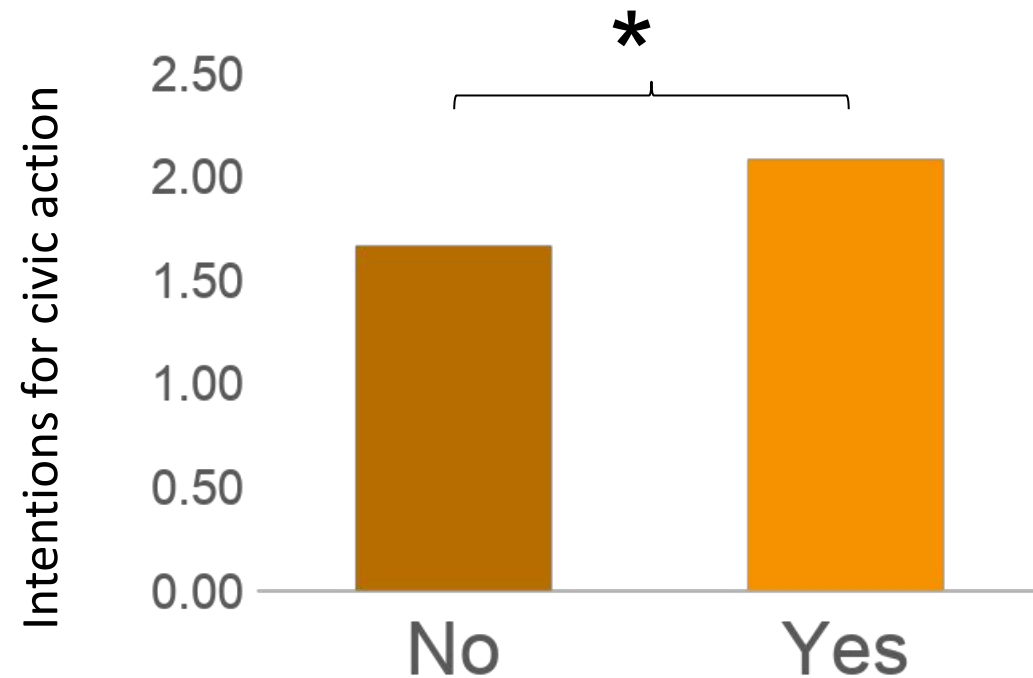
**Youth  
Homelessness  
Forum**

# Impact of specific activities on civic engagement

Had a conversation with someone of a different cultural background than yourself



Watch a performance





# Group differences: Demographics

## On average, Latinx participants...

- Were younger (34 vs. 42 years)
- Reported lower levels of education and income
- More likely to report zipcodes in Live Oak and Watsonville
- Were more likely to be a first-time visitor (33% vs. 19%)
- Were less likely to be a MAH member (4% vs. 15%)
- Were less likely to watch a performance (32% vs. 42%), have a conversation with someone they didn't know before (20% vs. 39%), or view an exhibition (46% vs. 65%)

...compared to other visitors

# Events with the highest % of Latinx visitors



Spanish Storytime in  
Abbott Square  
(50% Latinx, n=8)



Joaquin Immigration  
Story Event  
(42% Latinx, n=12)



Dia de Los Muertos  
(40% Latinx, n=25)

# Group differences

- Comfort in museum
  - No differences were found in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, education, income, political outlook, or MAH membership status
  - Older participants reported higher levels of comfort being in the museum and comfort asking questions about the exhibitions or activities than younger participants
- Leaving the MAH with an impulse to be more creative in your life or work
  - Latinx visitors were more likely to report that they were leaving the MAH with an impulse to be more creative in their life or work (78% vs. 66%)

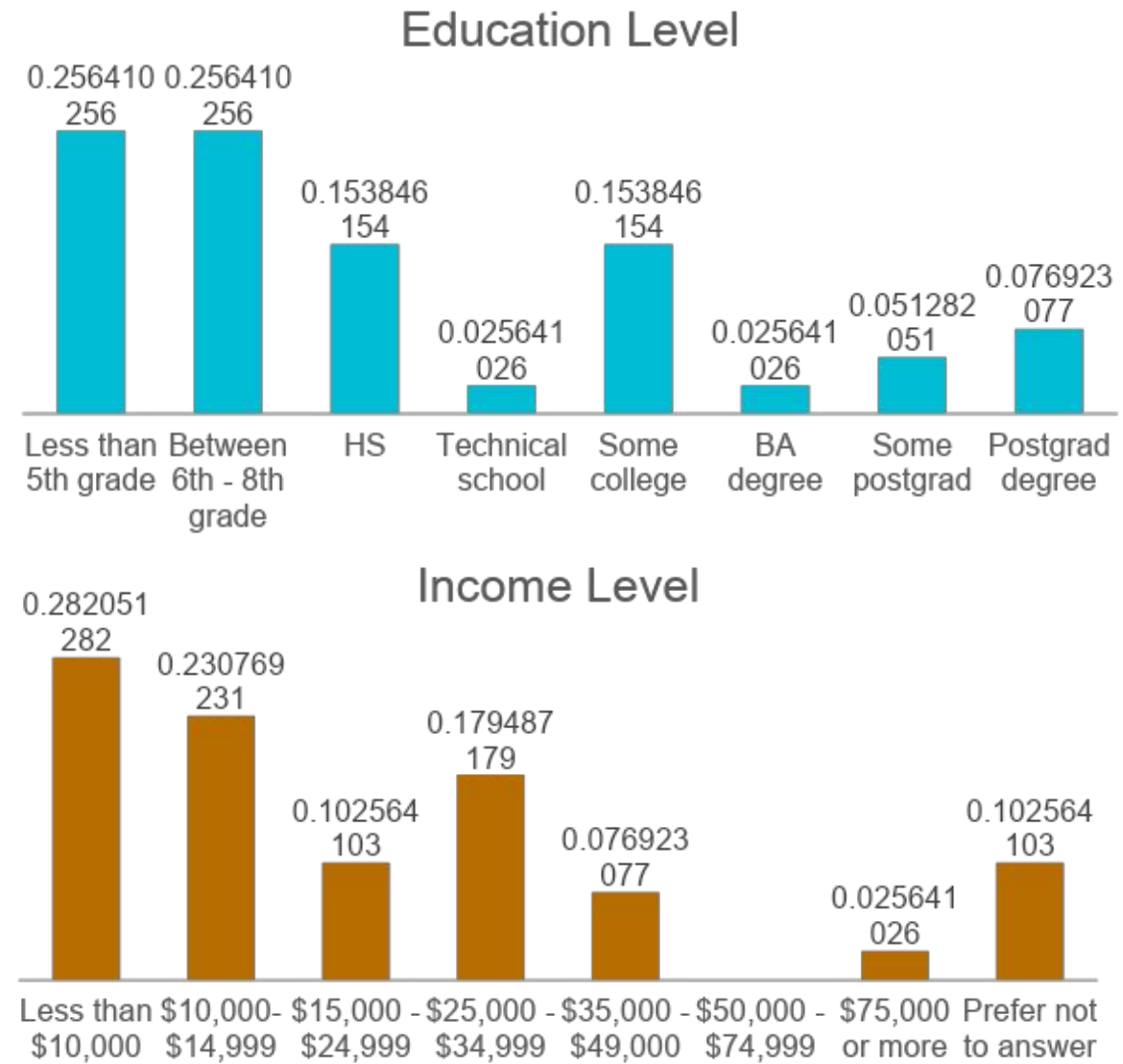
the barriers that limit access and participation for low-income residents and people of color at museums, can they be reduced?

## □ Focus groups with underrepresented community members

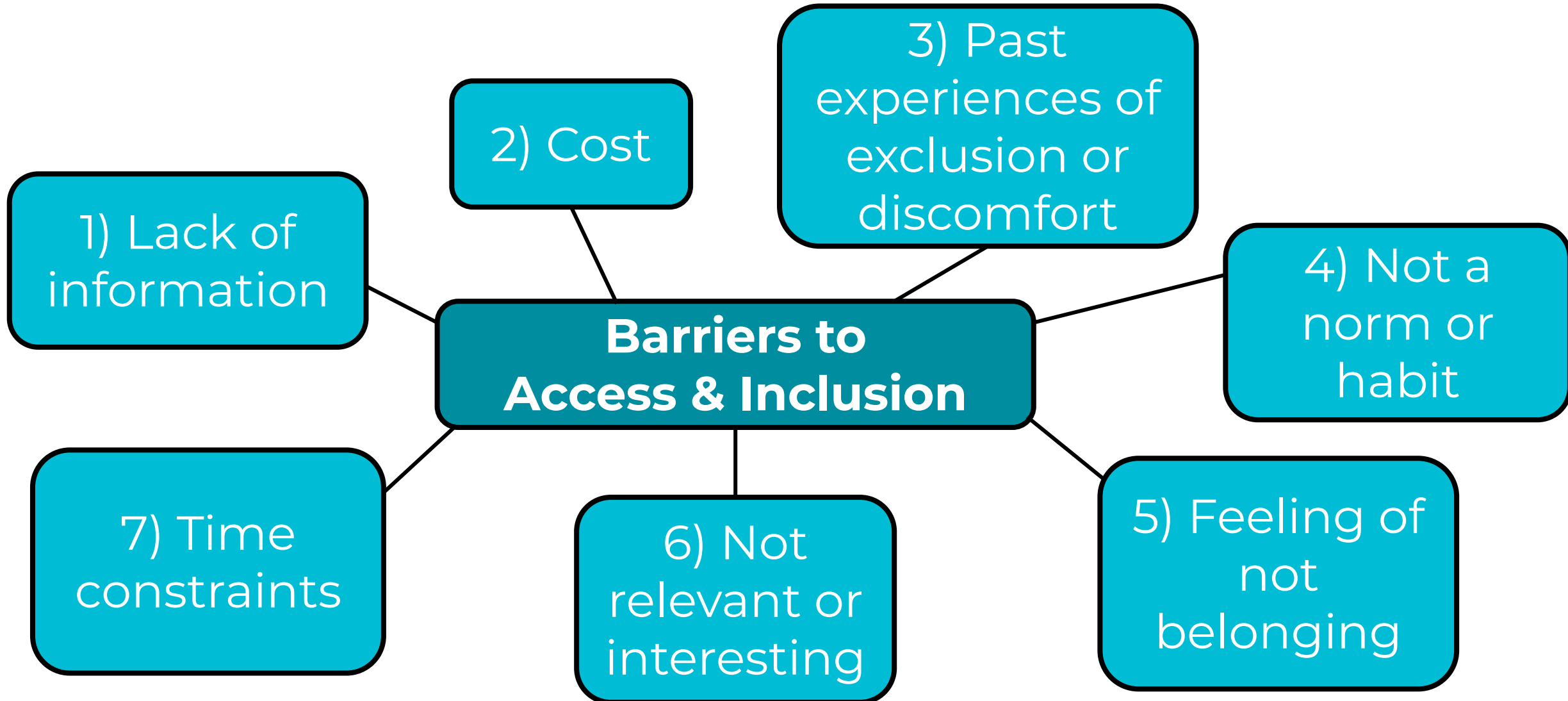
- 5 focus groups with low-income residents and residents of color who have not visited the museum in the past year
- 90 minutes
- *Questions explored:* Perceptions of museums, and the MAH; barriers to access and participation; suggestions for improvement

# Participants

- 39 focus group participants (22 women, 16 men, 1 non-binary)
- Age range: 18-72, median=45
- Race/ethnicity: Latinx ( $n=24$ ), biracial ( $n=5$ ), white/European-American ( $n=4$ ), Asian American ( $n=1$ ), American Indian ( $n=1$ ),
- 54% were parents of a child under 18



# Focus group findings: Barriers



# 1) Lack of information

“I think that the museum is worthwhile, but we as Latinos, we are lacking that information, that’s what it is. That is why a lot of people go to other places, but not to the museums. I think it’s a question of better advertising the museums.”

“I didn’t know it was free the first Friday...”

“Oh yeah! That’s huge! If more people knew that, I feel like that would promote so many more people to want to come in.”

## 2) Cost

“People, like the regular people, we have to care because that \$10 could be feeding your family...”

## 3) Past experiences of discomfort

“I usually feel constrained because I feel like I can't move freely. Like, I'm always being watched... like I'm going to touch something or break something. I always feel uneasy.”



## 4) Not a norm or habit

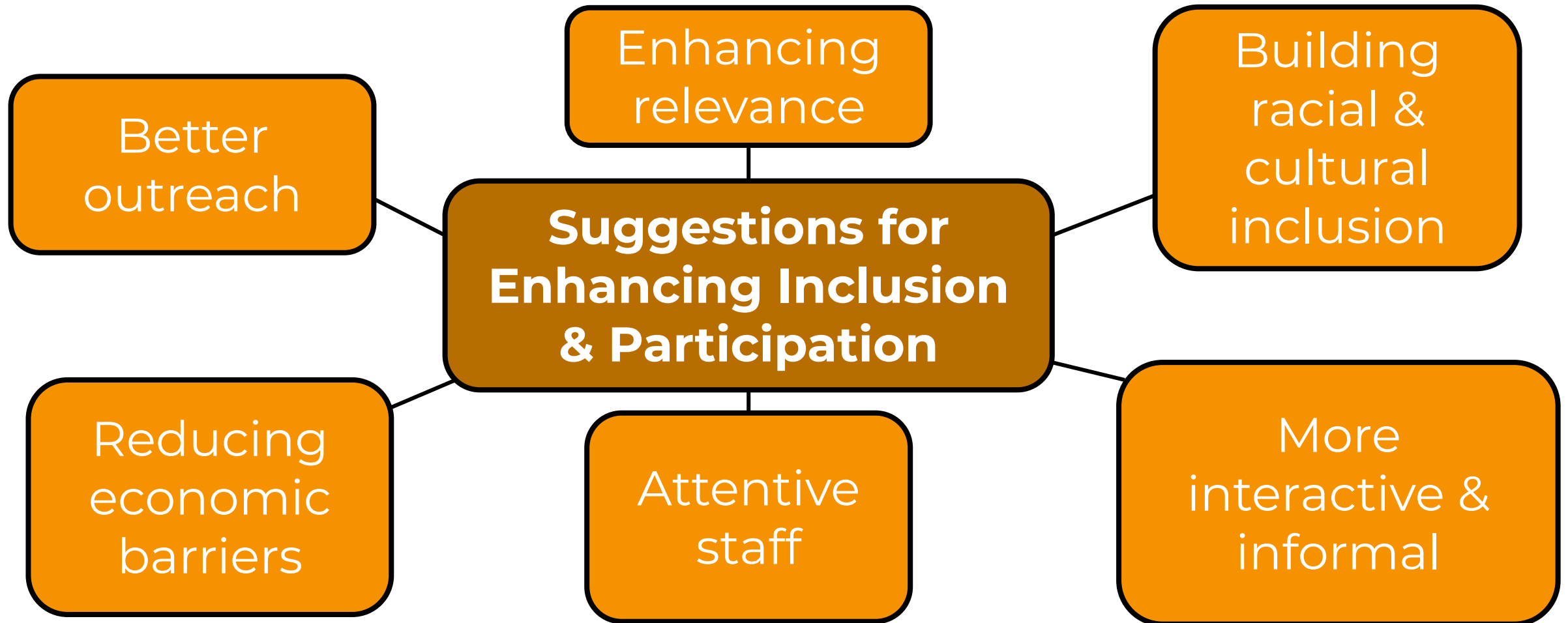
“No, I tell you, back in my country I never went to a museum, nor did I know that these places existed.”

## 5) Feeling of not belonging

“Every time I walk by and they have an exhibit, they’re always having people inside drinking wine. They’re not regular joes.... It makes it uncomfortable.”

“What intimidates me the most is that I don’t see Latinos, or better yet, I see Americans and I feel like something stops me from entering.”

# Focus group findings: Suggestions



# Enhancing relevance

Providing opportunities for families to connect with their roots

“We have a beautiful story...”

“Well, it is frustrating because... we cannot show our kids our roots, and for them to feel the thrill of seeing that. Because when one sees those dances, then you feel excitement and you better remember your country... we miss our, our land. I think that we would feel better if we had more, well more things, closer regarding our culture.”

# Enhancing relevance

## Showcasing art by community members

“I would like to invite the whole damn neighborhood- my kid- you know? Because again, children born and raised here, they’re gonna be part of our history here. And it’s just nice to see more of the kids, the younger people knowing about the museum or the art part of it.”

# Building cultural inclusion

- More Latin American art and crafts (textiles, clay)
- Latin American food, music, dance, storytelling
- Celebrating Santa Cruz's cultural diversity
- Bilingual materials and staff

# Outreach and visibility

“[There is the perception] that is more so for Americans. So then one has that mentality, and that is why we won’t go into the museums. But when this kind of information is given, that it is free, that the whole community is invited, not only just a few, I think that- that has to change one's mentality.”

- Local radio
- El Avisador magazine (free in stores)
- Flyers in the mail
- Schools (but they often throw these away)
- Community centers
- Signage (like the boardwalk, beach)
- University promotion (bus stops)
- Friendly greeters outside
- English speaking focus groups: Goodtimes, NextDoor, campus bus stops, local shops

# Reducing economic barriers

- Discount for locals
- Sliding scale admissions cost
- Free for children under 12
- More free days

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