

The Value of History

The study of the past and telling its stories are critical to our sense of belonging, to our communities and to our shared future.

History shapes our **identities**, engages us as **citizens**, creates inclusive **communities**, is part of our **economic** well-being, teaches us to **think critically** and creatively, inspires **leaders** and is the foundation of our **future generations**.

Identity

History nurtures identity in a world characterised by difference and change. History enables people to discover their own place in stories of families, communities, First Peoples, and nations—individuals and groups who have shaped the world in which they live. There are stories of freedom and oppression, justice and inequity, war and peace, endurance and achievement, courage and tenacity. Through these varied stories, the systems of personal and community values that guide approaches to life and relationships with others are shaped.

Engaged citizens

History helps people craft solutions that meet community needs. At the heart of democracy are individual citizens who come together to express views and take action. Understanding the history of contemporary issues that confront our communities, nation and world can clarify misperceptions, reveal complexities, temper volatile viewpoints, and open people to new possibilities, leading to more effective solutions.

Strong communities

History lays the groundwork for strong, diverse and inclusive communities that are vital places to live and work. Communities are wrapped in human memory: Indigenous knowledge, family stories, oral histories, social customs, cultural collections, heritage and civic commemorations. These all strengthen our connections and commitment to one another. History supports a sense of community identity and place; and that in turn promotes social cohesion, individual and collective wellbeing, and resilience.

Economic development

History is a catalyst for economic growth. People are drawn to communities with a strong sense of historical identity, material heritage and character. Cultural heritage is a demonstrated economic asset and an essential component of any vibrant local economy, providing an infrastructure that attracts talent and enhances business development, including cultural tourism.

Critical skills

History teaches independent thinking and vital skills for the twenty-first century. Historical thinking requires critical approaches to evidence and argument and develops contextual understanding and historical perspective, encouraging meaningful engagement with concepts like continuity, change and causation, and the ability to interpret and communicate complex ideas clearly and coherently.

Leadership

History inspires leaders. It provides them with role models to meet complex challenges. Personal stories of leadership reveal how women and men met the challenges of their day and can give new leaders the courage and wisdom to confront the challenges of our time.

Legacy

History is the foundation for future generations. It is crucial to our future because it explains our shared past. When we preserve authentic, meaningful and significant stories, places, documents, images and artefacts, we leave a foundation upon which future Australians can build.

Call to action

We call on individuals and organisations in Australia to endorse, share, and use this statement on the value of history in contemporary life.

With common agreement, commitment, and open conversation about why history is important, we believe the historical community can better articulate history's critical role in the public sphere.

Endorsing this statement in principle, via your nearest History Council, is an initial step. See opposite for contact details. Look for the Value of History statement on these sites to see how you can show your support.

We encourage you to adapt and incorporate these ideas into projects, funding applications, training materials, mission statements, websites, marketing materials, submissions and other organisational outlets.

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This statement was adopted on 3 July 2019 by the History Councils of New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. It draws on the work of history organisations in the USA that promote the relevance and value of history through their History Relevance campaign. The four Australian History Councils have, with permission, adapted the USA 'Value of History' statement for all Australians to use.