



Sonoma Mission 200

Invited Stakeholder Meeting

Sonoma State Historic Park, Bay Area District

Meeting Summary

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March 16, 2022



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Introduction

This report summarizes an interactive meeting with local community stakeholder organizations and individuals who were invited to share their perspectives on the Sonoma Mission 200 Project. The meeting was held on March 16, 2022 at the Sonoma Veterans Memorial Hall and was attended by 19 individuals.

Project Overview

As the Bay Area District begins planning the commemoration of the Sonoma Mission anniversary, the voices and perspectives of the community will be crucial in identifying appropriate, meaningful, and impactful ways to reflect on the past 200 years and to shape the future of interpretation at Sonoma State Historic Park. The Sonoma Mission 200 Project is a multi-phase project that will gather community input, develop a commemoration plan and provide event management. The first phase begins with formal Tribal government consultations, community engagement with staff, volunteers, and stakeholders, and an online public meeting. The second phase includes plan implementation and commemoration activities. The final phase will yield a written update to the Sonoma State Historic Park interpretation and education programming.

The Sonoma Mission 200 project is part of a larger effort within State Parks' Reexamining Our Past Initiative. Among its goals, the initiative seeks to address interpretive programs and exhibits in California's State Park System that fall short of fully contextualizing the state's history. The initiative was started in 2020 when State Parks joined with other California State Agencies to redress discriminatory names within the state park and transportation systems. This followed the national conversation about racist public memorials in 2019, as well as Governor Newsom's formal apology to Native Americans and the creation of the California Truth and Healing Council that same year.

Meeting Format

The meeting began with opening remarks from Bay Area District Superintendent Maria Mowrey, Interpretation & Education Program Manager Karen Barrett, and Historian III/Cultural Resources Program Manager Noah Stewart. An overview of the Sonoma Mission 200 Project was shared as was the objective of the meeting: to collect honest input and ideas from stakeholders. Project consultant, Dana Shew of the Anthropological Studies Center at Sonoma State University, was introduced and served as the meeting facilitator. Dana provided participants with an overview of the meeting format and instructions for how to engage and submit comments. State Parks staff assisted during the interactive portion of the meeting, with a staff member positioned at each input station, providing additional guidance and instruction as needed and also listening and engaging with participants.

Participants were asked to visit five stations, each of which asked for feedback on a different topic. Attendees were able to anonymously share their ideas on post-it notes, through conversation with meeting facilitators, and by voting for specific ideas being presented. The results of the one-hour, interactive meeting are summarized below, organized by station.



Bay Area District Superintendent Maria Mowrey welcomes attendees.

The topics addressed by the five stations covered a wide range of concepts in order to gauge the current attitudes towards the mission, gain insight about how

to improve future interpretation, and collect specific input on the events and activities that will comprise the bicentennial commemoration.

Conclusion

Feedback from the invited stakeholder meeting provided invaluable insight into public perception and attitudes toward the mission. The input shed a great deal of light on which aspects of current interpretation leave lasting impressions, additionally providing ideas for expanding and improving interpretive opportunities in the future. Stakeholders identified problematic aspects of both the interpretive narratives as well as the physical condition of the mission itself. Suggestions for activities and programs to commemorate the mission's 200th anniversary prioritized historic site repair and maintenance, and new exhibit development including art installations. Overall the thoughtful solutions and perspectives shared by the participants showed their investment in the mission and an overall desire to support its improvement and preservation into the future. This feedback will play an important role in shaping and guiding the development of the Sonoma Mission 200 plan.

Topic Station Feedback

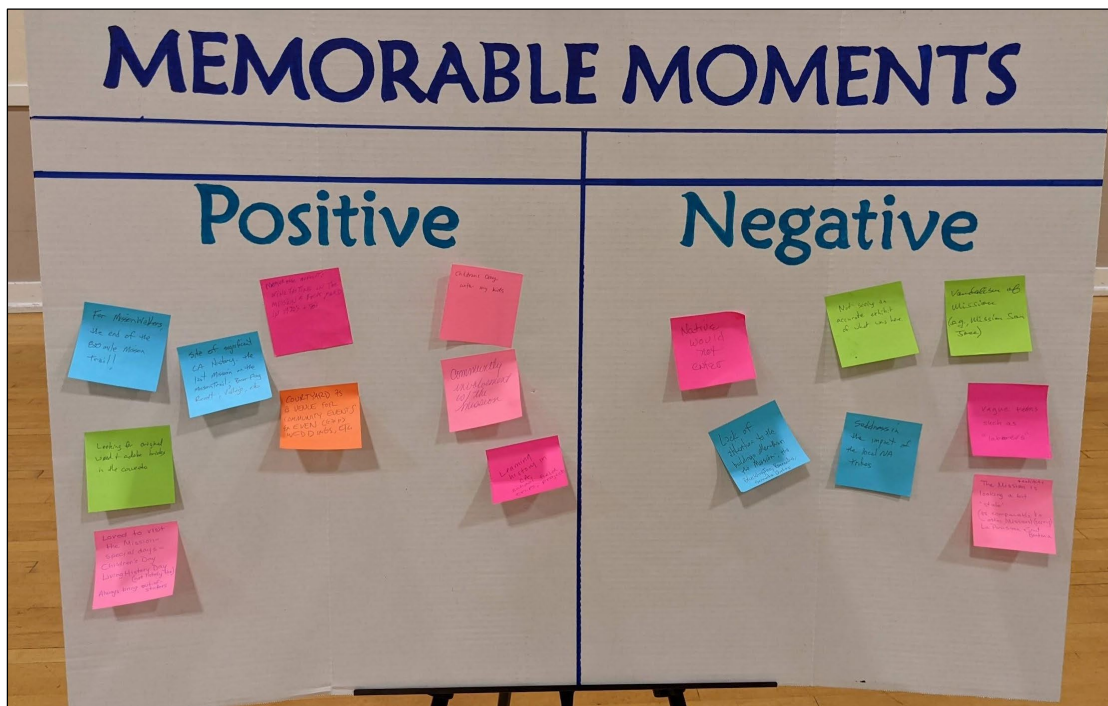
Five stations were positioned at different locations throughout the room. Each station addressed a different topic related to current interpretation at the mission and aimed to gauge attitudes towards existing conditions and offerings, gain insights about areas in need of improvement, collect ideas about how to make improvements, and solicit specific ideas for commemorating the 200th anniversary. The five stations included:

- **Memorable Moments.** This station identified the places, stories, and people at the mission that make lasting impressions on visitors
- **What is the mission's value?** This station highlighted the reasons why the mission is important.
- **Difficult History.** This station allowed attendees to identify difficult aspects of the mission's history.
- **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats.** This station examined interpretive exhibits, community engagement, and educational programs at the mission and evaluated them based on the categories listed in the title.
- **What should we do?** This station solicited ideas for 200th anniversary activities and programs.

More detailed descriptions of each station as well as responses received are presented below.

Memorable Moments

At this station, attendees were asked to write down their most memorable interactions with people at the mission. These interactions could involve docents, staff, other visitors, school groups, etc. and they could have been either positive or negative. There was a “Negative” column and a “Positive” column. Sticky notes with the attendees' responses were put in the appropriate column.



Responses received on sticky notes at the Memorable Moments station.

Overall there were slightly more positive interactions reported than negative with 9 positive responses and 7 negative ones. The positive memories heavily referenced special events such as Children's Day, Living History Day, wine tasting (in the 1970s) and weddings. The mission's significance in California history and its association to events such as the Bear Flag Revolt were also mentioned. Its position as the last mission on the mission trail was mentioned twice. One respondent had a positive impression of the mission's involvement with the community.

Responses that described negative interactions or impressions included feeling sadness regarding the impact the mission had on Native Americans. One respondent noted that Native people would not enter the mission today. No additional detail was shared so we do not know if this refers to a particular incident the respondent witnessed or if it is in reference to a broader observation about Native people being unwilling to visit the mission because it is viewed as a site of trauma. The latter perspective was strongly noted during the staff and volunteer meeting. The outdated appearance of the mission as well as the content of current exhibits were also categorized as negative memories.

What is the Mission's Value?

Attendees were asked to share three reasons why they felt the mission is valuable to them. They were then asked to place each value in the category that best described its importance: historical, cultural, economic, personal, educational, or interpretive. Below are responses, organized by category:

Historical

The mission is historically important because it...

- Is a part of the California landmarks league, gift givers in 1903.
- Helps us understand a different time and a different society.
- Is significant to the founding of California.
- Is connected with state and federal history.
- Exemplifies the flow of Catholic faith in California and the history of the religious movement in California and the US.
- Marks 300 years of mission history and the end of the mission trail.
- Is the final mission of the mission trail! What story led to that?
- Is the reason State Parks is in existence. To support activities. Our pillars are awareness, interpretation, and preservation.
- Is a place that airs hidden histories, where things that are too often archaeological (buried) are surfaced (it's even made of dirt!)

Cultural

The mission is culturally important because...

- It contains bilingual panels and it is the only "Mexican" mission.
- All the missions represent the founding culture of California and today are the basis for each city they are named for.

- It is the only non-church owned mission (or one of the few) so it is a venue for public history in a way that others aren't.
- It is one of the main reasons for the existence of the city of Sonoma.

Economic

The mission is economically important because...

- What would the town of Sonoma be without the mission?
- It is a tourist attraction.
- It shows how life in California/Sonoma changed due to mission agricultural practices.
- It brings visitors into Sonoma = economic value.

Personal

The mission is personally important to me because...

- Of my appreciation of California, education, religion.
- It is keeping my family history alive.
- Spiritual! The whole purpose for the establishment of the mission.
- As a child, I loved visiting the mission and hearing about the Indians.
- It is a place that defines Sonoma, in a time when Sonoma is changing A LOT.

Educational

The mission has educational value because...

- Of its Architecture/ Mexican value.
- It can teach us how people lived two centuries ago. What were their challenges? How did the groups organize themselves?
- Get the correct history on the painting of Francis Solano correct. The portrait of him above the altar is NOT CORRECT
- It represents the culmination/end of the Spanish/Mexican era in California.
- It is important for citizens of their state to know their state's history. This is done with 4th grade visits, tours, stay overs at park sites.
- It helps us understand the continuum of history.
- Educating the public as accurately as possible about shared history as well as group and personal history tells a more complete story.

Interpretive

The mission has interpretive value because...

- It is an almost perfect venue to talk about colonialism.
- The docents are under the state parks organization- State Parks covers the cost of lectures and training.
- Need more correct info on Maria Carillo and being buried at mission.
- It could present a depth of scholarship and not simply pandering to entertainment or targeting emotion without nuanced history.
- Interpretation of portrait over altar not correct.
- It is an opportunity to represent California's history- share into modern history.
- It can tell the stories of the mission: why established, mission life, secularization...



Responses at the Value station, placed in appropriate categories.

Difficult History

Attendees were asked what they thought was the most difficult part of the mission's history. Input was received by sticky note but a Park staff meeting facilitator also engaged in conversations with attendees about their opinions and perspectives.

As illustrated below, many respondents felt that the historic treatment of Native Americans during the mission period was the most difficult and darkest part of the mission's history. The mission's complex relationship with religion and religious leaders was also mentioned multiple times.



Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified for the mission's interpretive exhibits.

- Role of Religion
- Complicated history of why Native Americans were attracted to the Missions and legacy.
- Making the early Californians the bad guys; also the Padres
- Chinese History
- Visual representation of death/cemetery
- The lament of impact of Native American life
- Ebb & flow of immigration
- Imposing current standards on the past
- Focal point of "unseen"/buried history
- Missing cemetery/burials/bodies
- Native American treatment
- Catholic priests
- Native American genocide
- Religion
- Native American slavery
- Father Serra
- Complicated Spanish/Mexican relationships
- Healing vs history (Native American viewpoint)

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Participants were asked to engage in a marketing analysis exercise to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of three different aspects of the mission.



Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified for the mission's interpretive exhibits.

Interpretive Exhibits

The evaluation of interpretive exhibits encompassed all current interpretive elements both inside and outside of the mission. The responses are presented by category.

Strengths:

- No strengths were identified

Weaknesses:

- Needs to be bilingual
- English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, other languages.
- Mission exhibits are tired, old fashioned, and need to be replaced.
- Could be "freshened" to be more current and inclusive
- Courtyard needs maintenance/ fountain repair!!

- Needs more on the entire mission, complex & original layout and organization
- Use of old, outdated displays
- ADA accessibility to displays (i.e. The Bell Room)

Opportunities:

- Put some interpretive panels outside the mission for people who choose not to enter the building
- Audio tools as necessary, context specific to location.
- Podcast/ QR code/ Web Interactive
- Should be updated, needs more space for changing exhibits, to keep it fresh and give people a reason to revisit
- An opportunity to have an online interactive presence

Threats:

- Building neglect

Community Engagement

The evaluation of community engagement referred to any of the mission's community events, activities, and programs. In addition, it also referred to relationships and partnerships within the community and how active or successful the mission is at collaborating, consulting, and working with appropriate partners including tribes, businesses, historical societies, libraries, etc.



Input on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the mission's community engagement.

Strengths:

- An opportunity to engage Sonoma community now but develop relationships for future State Park needs

Weaknesses:

- The mission should be the jewel of the city of Sonoma
- Not enough employees are engaged in the community
- Potential for vandalism (for example, at mission San Jose recently)
- The mission really should be spiffed up with the lighting on the outside walkway. Make it interesting to the people/ "tourists" wandering the streets at night

- Not sure if the city of Sonoma embraces the mission (as a reason to visit)
- Not telling all aspects/sides of the mission's history (the good, the bad, and the ugly)
- Interpretive exhibits could be updated to be more inclusive/thoughtful.

Opportunities:

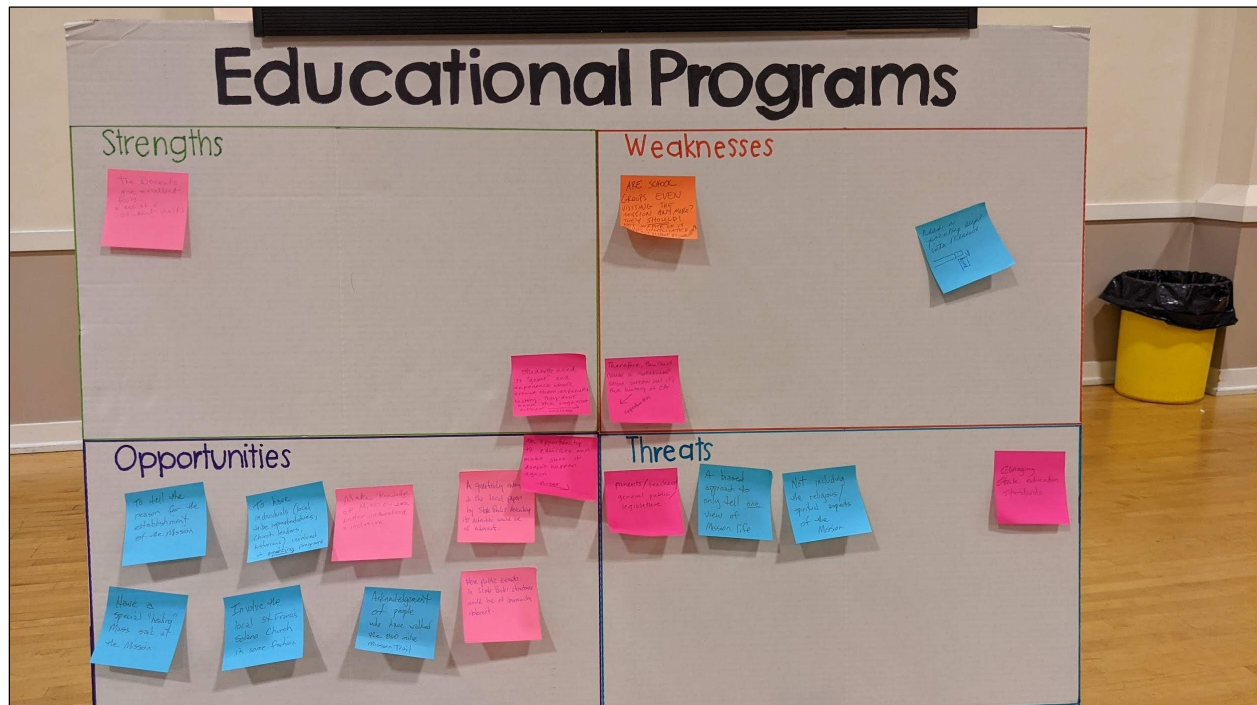
- Opportunity to engage new voices and underappreciated communities
- Any budget set aside for this?
- Concrete effort to work with the city of Sonoma for the 200 year commencement!
- Involve the local St. Francis Solano church parish. It's their 200th year too!
- Keeping the Sonoma State Parks structures in excellent repair is important.
- A chance to pull history back into the center of the Sonoma Valley story (not just wine country lifestyle)
- Religious/spiritual "healing" events (e.g. A mass in the mission for healing of the past)
- More events in the mission chapel would be interesting for the community.

Threats:

- No threats were identified

Educational Programs

The analysis of educational programs applies to the Environmental Living Program, virtual classroom engagement (PORTS), as well as in-person tours and any other educational outreach.



The mission's educational program analyzed for its strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats.

Strengths:

- Students need to go out and experience what's around them, especially history. They don't need the sugarcoat --->continued under Weaknesses...
- The docents give excellent tours and assist with student visits

Weaknesses:

- Therefore, this could cause a "weakness", some sorrow but it's the history of California ---> beginning of comment in Opportunities
- Need a sign pointing to mission
- Are school groups even visiting the mission anymore? They should!! Not in spite of it being a complicated history but BECAUSE it's complicated.

Opportunities:

- An opportunity to educate and make sure it doesn't happen again,

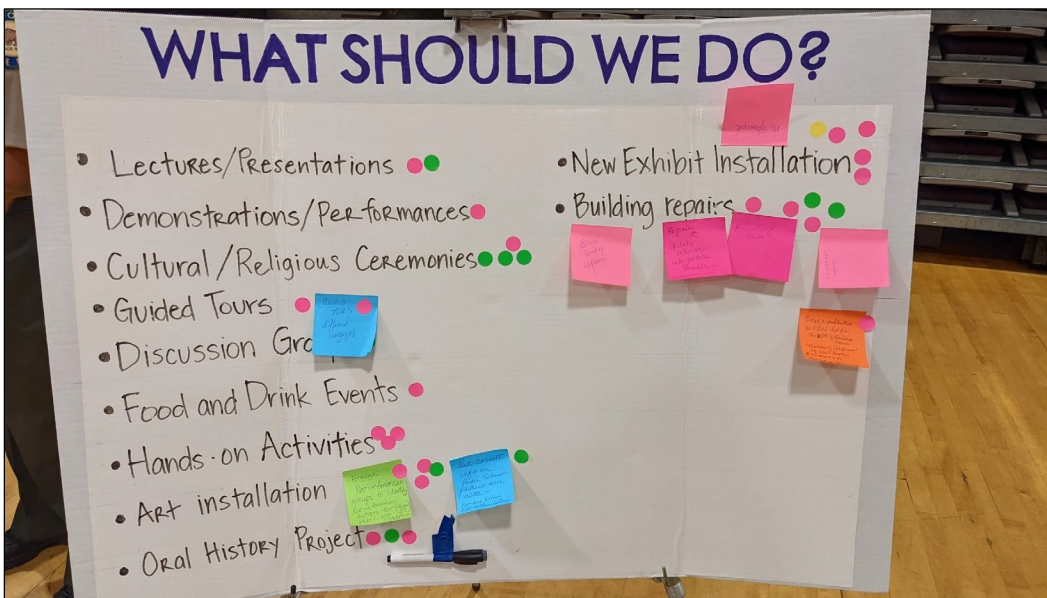
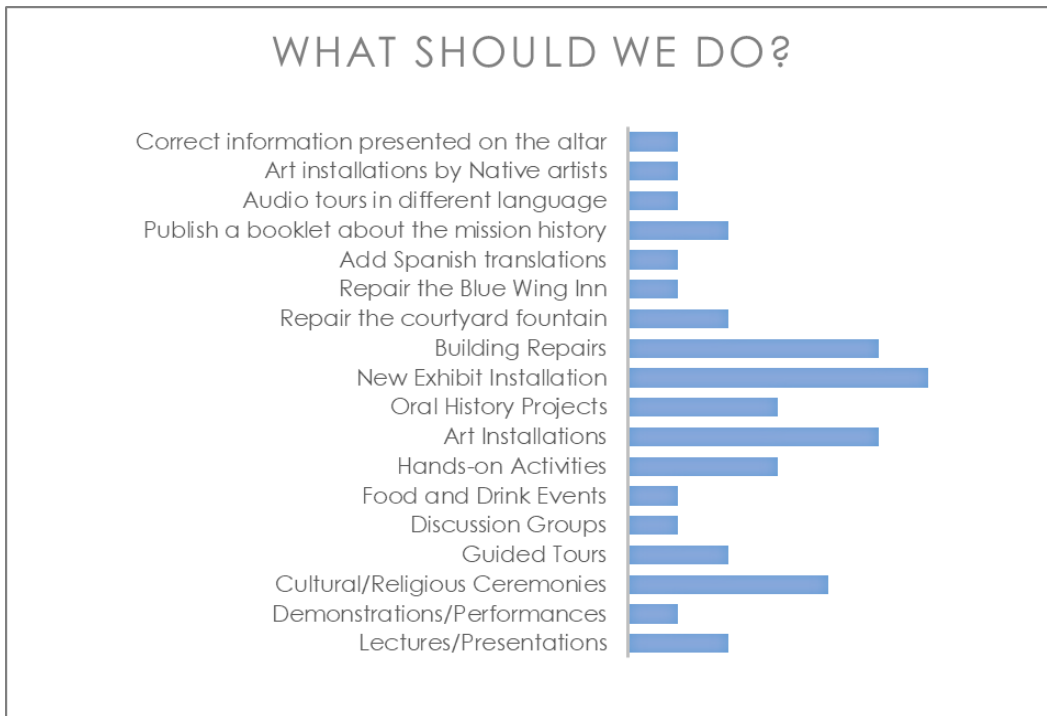
- More public events in State Park structures could be of community interest
- A quarterly entry in the local papers by State Parks describing its activities could be of interest.
- Acknowledgement of people who have walked the 850-mile Mission trail.
- Make "knowledge" of mission era better understood and inclusive
- To tell the reason for the establishment of the mission
- Involve the local St. Francis Solano Church in some fashion

Threats:

- Changing state education standards
- Parents/teachers/general public/legislature
- Not including the religious/spiritual aspects of the mission
- A biased approach to only tell one view of mission life.

200th Anniversary Activities

Attendees were asked what activities, events, programs, and initiatives should State Parks organize to commemorate the mission's 200th anniversary? They were presented with a series of ideas and were encouraged to add their own ideas to the list. Each attendee voted for their three favorite ideas using stickers. The results of the voting process are presented below:



Attendees voted on ideas using stickers and also added their own ideas using sticky notes.