

Hand *Righting* the Constitution: A Public Exercise in Contemplating Our Democratic Rights

Summary: This proposed project consists of a series of community-based, participatory, conceptual art events that was inspired by an article in the April 21, 2025 online issue of the *New Yorker* magazine¹. The project is relatively simple: provide one or more public spaces in various venues across the Town of Los Gatos, where a handful of individuals working independently transcribe by hand the U.S. Constitution. An online scheduler would allow participants to sign up for a one-to-two-hour time slot. A log would be created to track participants' efforts, specifically identifying where in the Constitution each individual begins and ends the transcription, the date and time of that event, and perhaps space for comments from that participant. Subsequent participants would start transcribing where a previous individual has ended. A set of guidelines and rules of conduct would be developed to set expectations for participants and to ensure that individuals are respectful of each other, that there is no "political" proselytizing or coercion, etc. Various online community standards may provide guidance on this.

Who would be project sponsors, organizers and hosts? This proposed project contemplates a collaborative effort among relevant Town commissions led by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission. Other Town Commissions would be invited to participate, particularly the Arts and Culture Commission, the Community Health and Senior Services Commission, the Parks and Sustainability Commission and the Youth Commission. In addition, the Los Gatos Library, the New Museum Los Gatos and Los Gatos High School would be ideal collaborators.

Who would be invited to participate in the project?

This project would be open to all residents of Los Gatos, owners and employees of businesses in Los Gatos, and visitors to Los Gatos. The target age population would be high school and older, although middle school students could be eligible if they have had some exposure to the Constitution. Younger students might be able to contribute, but should be accompanied by an adult for safety purposes. Ideally, each session would include a variety of ages to encourage intergenerational engagement, conversation, interaction, rapport and exchange of perspectives.

How and where would the project be staged?

Transcribing sessions could be offered in a conference room at the Los Gatos Library, space within the New Museum Los Gatos, as an activity at the Adult Recreation Center, and perhaps selected public venues, indoors or outdoors, throughout the Town (e.g., coffee shops, picnic tables at local parks, etc.). In addition, sessions might be hosted at Los Gatos High School (to the extent that they can also accommodate non-student public participants) and maybe some private organizations like senior living facility The Terraces of Los Gatos. Materials needed for the

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project can be purchased at a relatively modest cost: white archival (acid free) foam core boards and ink pens for participants to transcribe the Constitution in its entirety.

How many participants would be anticipated?

It is hoped that the project would be embraced by more than an insignificant number of community members, and that all interested community members would have an opportunity to participate. Participants can attend multiple transcription sessions, depending on availability.

Do these transcribing sessions need to be supervised?

At the outset, it might be helpful to have someone available to greet participants, answer questions and generally get the project rolling, and then collect materials and get feedback at the end. It is not anticipated that someone would need to be available during the entire transcription process.

What would be the goals and desired outcomes of the project?

One obvious tangible outcome would be the production of transcriptions of the U.S. Constitution that could be assembled into a single work and publicly displayed. However, that might also be the least important outcome. It is hoped that individual participants will interact with other individual participants, even though the project setting would otherwise offer a relatively quiet and somewhat meditative opportunity to do the actual transcription. Through such interactions, participants may develop a deeper familiarity with the U.S. Constitution and reflect upon its meaning. The transcription activity is designed to foster conversations between strangers—for example, participants might ask each other about the meaning of various provisions of the Constitution, share personal perspectives on how a specific provision impacts or guides their life or thinking, or question how a provision operates or is supposed to operate.

This project is designed to connect individuals with other individuals with whom they might not know, and more importantly may never have had an opportunity to engage with but for this project. If the Constitution is a common bond for our community and society overall, how can it be utilized to create a more cohesive community within the Town of Los Gatos?

The collection and organization of the written transcriptions would be supervised by New Museum Los Gatos, using staff, curators and artists to create an artistic presentation of the transcriptions for physical display in the reception area of the Town Chambers, a space within the New Museum or other selected venue and/or online on the Town website. One suggestion for organizing the transcribed works might be to hinge them together with tape on the reverse side in accordion style

What is the conceptual art component of the project?

Aside from the creation of a tangible work from the transcription efforts, this project would have a conceptual art component. The title of this project plays on the word “handwriting”—is there an element of “righting” the Constitution that might be uncovered through the project? Participants would be encouraged to ask and respond to the following questions and questions that arise during a transcription session:

- What rights are guaranteed and/or restored by the Constitution?
- Is there a need to restore and/or elevate the Constitution in the minds of the American public?
- What behavior is the Constitution designed to redress?
- Are there portions of the Constitution that need to be “righted”—that is, corrected, redressed, or strengthened?

To capture the impact of the transcription project, participants would have an opportunity to share what they experienced and learned by participating in the project. Feedback could be collected via written questionnaires or short interviews. In addition, professional photographers and/or videographers could be hired to help document the project. If a budget does not allow for such recording, volunteers could be enlisted for this purpose. Curators, either hired or volunteer-based, would review and organize the collected input in a manner that can be shared with the public with the displayed transcription.

To increase the level of awareness of the Constitution as raised by this project, this project could be supplemented by various public speaker programs designed to educate the public about the Constitution.

How long would this project last?

Initially, the project will have a pilot phase, perhaps 4-6 weeks (or shorter) to allow the participating sponsors/organizers/hosts to evaluate and modify the project and project guidelines, as necessary. Depending on the level of interest generated by this project, it could be extended to accommodate participants and/or supplemented by related activities.

How does this tie to the DEI Commission’s workplan?

This project would qualify as a program and series of events designed to foster unity and diversity with the Town of Los Gatos as intended under the enabling resolution for the DEI Commission² and Work Plan Discussion Item C. Related to DEI Plan Goal A.2.a. (Discuss Ways the DEI Commission Can Make Visible the Equity Issues that Matter to the Larger Community, Including Action Items to Promote the Safety and Inclusivity of its Community Members)³.

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¹ Henry Alford, *Protest Dept.: Activism for Introverts! Copying the Constitution*, THE NEW YORKER (April 21, 2025) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/04/28/activism-for-introverts-copying-the-constitution>; Henry Alford, *Protest Dept.: Write It Again*, THE NEW YORKER (April 28, 2025) at p. 11.

² Los Gatos Town Council, Resolution 2023-053 (October 3, 2023) <https://www.losgatosca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/36658/2023-053-Revised-Enabling-Resolution-Establishing-the-Diversity-Equity-and-Inclusion-Commission>

³ Los Gatos Town Council, Town of Los Gatos Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan (October 17, 2023) <https://mccmeetings.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/losgatos-pubu/MEET-Packet-1d0e4263d4cf4f07b24233d15424beaf.pdf>

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