

**Hand[Righting] the Constitution:
A Public Exercise in Contemplating Our Democratic Rights
Submitted by Gordon Yamate**

Summary: This proposed project consists of a series of community-based, participatory, conceptual art events inspired by the artist Morgan O'Hara, who was featured in an article in the April 21, 2025 online issue of *The New Yorker* magazine¹. The project concept is relatively simple, but profound: 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. Participants would sign up for a one-to-two-hour time slot. A log would be created to track their efforts, specifically identifying where in the Constitution each individual begins and ends the transcription, and the date and time of that activity. Participants would also be invited to reflect on their experience: What did they learn? What surprised them? How did it feel to handwrite a foundational civic text? Subsequent participants would start transcribing where a previous individual has ended. To ensure inclusivity, a set of guidelines and rules of conduct would be developed to foster a safe, welcoming environment, set expectations for participants, ensure respectful conduct, and protect against "political" proselytizing or coercion.

The project culminates in a large-scale collective artwork—the entire U.S. Constitution transcribed by diverse hands, curated into a visual installation by an artist or arts organization. The variations in handwriting become a living metaphor for individuality within unity, reflecting both the fragility and resilience of democracy.

This project has been approved by the Los Gatos DEI Commission and recommended to the Town Council for implementation. Mayor Rob Moore has indicated his support of the project and would offer the Town chambers as a potential location to display the end results of the project. This project has also been approved by the Town's Community Health and Senior Services Commission and Arts and Culture Commission.

Who would be project sponsors, participating organizations and hosts?

This project envisions a collaborative effort between the Town of Los Gatos with leadership from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission and an artist/arts organizer (the "Artistic Lead"). The project will be conducted in phases with an initial roll-out of a series of small group handwriting sessions, each accommodating 6-8 participants, and two larger group sessions at Villa Montalvo and the Town's 4th of July Concert in the Park events. During this phase, the goal would seek to achieve participation of at least 100 participants in the aggregate. This phase would be followed by a review of the work conducted and produced to date, the hiring of one or more artists to (i) oversee the assembly of the handwritten panels into a public display and (ii) organize and present the results and learnings from participant feedback and observation of

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participants during the handwriting sessions. This phase could also be extended with additional handwriting sessions. The Artistic Lead will be Gordon Yamate working in collaboration with SVCCreates, a local charitable nonprofit arts organization that will act as the fiscal sponsor for the project, providing a vehicle for fundraising, a clearinghouse for project costs and expenses and limited administrative assistance. The Artistic Lead would take the laboring oar on coordinating the artistic elements of the project with the Town's endorsement and support of the project, helping to publicize and encourage public participation.

Members of the DEI Commission, the Arts and Culture Commission, the Community Health and Senior Services Commission in addition to other Town Commissions would be invited to assist in supervising and monitoring the handwriting sessions, particularly the larger events, in publicizing the handwriting sessions to friends and family, and participating in the sessions themselves. In addition, the Los Gatos Library, Los Gatos High School, the Los Gatos Anti-Racism Coalition, the Los Gatos Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Democracy Tent Los Gatos and TWW/Indivisible Los Gatos would be ideal participating/supporting organizations ("Participating Organizations"). Individual members/leaders of these groups have already voiced their support for the project. Participating Organizations would be primarily responsible for spreading the word about the various transcribing events and encouraging people to attend and participate (including their members). Other Participating Organizations could include Los Gatos schools, religious and faith organizations, service organizations and community groups in addition to the business community.

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 project targets high school students and older, middle school students with exposure to the Constitution would be welcome. Younger students may be able to contribute, but should be accompanied by an adult for safety purposes. Sessions would be intentionally structured to be intergenerational, encouraging dialogue and exchange across diverse ages, backgrounds and 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. The Montalvo Art Association has indicated that they would like to showcase a handwriting session at their annual outdoor festival on April 18, 2026. Another ideal venue would be the Town's Fourth of July Concert in the Park, where the DEI Commission has staffed tables with activities designed to engage families and children. In addition, sessions could be hosted at Los Gatos High School (to the extent that

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they can also accommodate non-student public participants) and maybe some private organizations like the Terraces of Los Gatos senior living facility. Materials needed for the project can be purchased at a relatively modest cost: white archival (acid free) foam core boards and Sharpie black ink pens to transcribe the Constitution in its entirety.

How many participants would be anticipated and how long would the project last?

It is hoped that publicity and word of mouth would generate participation 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 with priority given to first time participants. This project could potentially continue for an indefinite period. An officer of the Los Gatos chapter of the DAR noted that project would coincide with the 250th anniversary of the United States (July 4, 2026), or Semiquincentennial, when the U.S. will celebrate 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In addition, September 17 marks the anniversary of the signing of the final draft of the U.S. Constitution—as such, an extended run of the project could continue through September 17, 2026. Depending on the level of interest generated by this project, it could be extended beyond September 17, 2026 to accommodate participants and/or related activities. With strong community interest, it may extend further as an ongoing civic art practice.

Do these transcribing sessions need to be supervised?

In discussing the overall project structure, the Los Gatos DEI Commission concluded that supervision was necessary for the transcribing sessions: it was critical to have someone available to greet participants, answer questions and get the project rolling, monitor respectful conduct during the sessions and then collect materials and obtain feedback at the end. Volunteers would be recruited to provide that supervision and would be required to participate in training sessions to ensure that there is consistency on how the sessions are conducted.

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

Display of Transcribed Constitution. One obvious tangible outcome would be the production of community-transcribed versions of the U.S. Constitution that could be assembled into a single work and publicly displayed. Suggested areas for display include the Town Council chamber and/or reception area, Los Gatos Library or other Town facilities. The collection and organization of the written transcriptions would be supervised by the Artistic Lead, who may engage curators and artists to create an artistic presentation of the transcriptions for physical display. One suggestion for organizing the transcribed works might be to hinge them together with tape on the reverse side in accordion style

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Fostering Individual Connection Within Los Gatos. While not required, it is hoped that participants will interact with fellow participants, even though the project setting would otherwise offer a relatively quiet and somewhat meditative opportunity to do the actual transcription. 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?

Reengagement of an Interest in Civics. Through the desired interactions described above, participants may develop a deeper familiarity with the U.S. Constitution and reflect upon its meaning. While the transcription activity is designed to foster conversations among strangers, it will also hopefully encourage members of the Los Gatos community to think more deeply about Constitutional rights, democracy and governmental processes. 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. It is hoped that Los Gatos High School, Fisher Middle School and other Los Gatos-based educational institutions will develop curriculum and parallel efforts supporting this community art project or relating to its subject matter.

Activating Local History Resources. This project also allows NUMU to activate its Los Gatos history resources to highlight local connections to the Constitution and the democratic process. Over the years, members of the Los Gatos community have participated in and/or led efforts to establish important Constitutional Amendments, which have been documented and preserved by NUMU.

What is the conceptual art component of the project?

In addition to creating a tangible work from the transcription efforts, this project offers a conceptual art component comprising both process and product. The act of handwriting—the nuances, fluidity and flourishes—embodies a collective meditation on democracy. The wordplay in the project title (“hand righting” versus “handwriting”) captures and embraces the revisiting and reflecting on democratic rights. Participant reflections and stories will become part of the artwork. Is there an element of “righting” the Constitution that might be uncovered through the project?

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.

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To increase the level of awareness of the Constitution, this project could be supplemented by various public programs, where speakers educate and engage the public about the Constitution, its history and interpretation.

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 within 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.

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. The artist featured in the New Yorker article, Morgan O'Hara, is a conceptual artist based in New York City and Venice, Italy. Compelled by the disconcerting and troubling political discourse surrounding the 2016 Presidential election, she created art work based on "copying out the Constitution in a public place [that] would provide consolation by deepening her understanding of the document." At the time of publication of *The New Yorker* article, more than 2,000 people across the globe had participated in 147 public writing sessions transcribing the U.S. Constitution inspired by Ms. O'Hara.

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>