Reimagine Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park

Online Survey Summary

Introduction

California State Parks is undertaking the Reimagine Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park project to shape an updated vision for the park following the December 2024 fire that destroyed the mansion. The vision will convey how the park will continue to serve as a place of history, learning, reflection, and community connection as informed through comprehensive public engagement.

As one part of this broader engagement process, California State Parks hosted an online public survey from March 12, 2026, through May 1, 2026. The survey was available at www.reimaginebidwellmansion.org and was shared through California State Parks communication channels, including social media, a formal press release, and e-blasts as well as through in-person pop-up events and more.

The survey included two parts. Part 1 asked respondents about their connection to the site, past visits, visitor experience, interpretive priorities, desired future uses, and demographic information. Part 2 was optional and asked respondents to share their level of agreement with potential treatment options for the Bidwell Mansion, as well as with a set of draft statements related to the future vision for the park. In total, the survey received 1,079 responses. Of these, 172 respondents, or 16 percent, completed only Part 1, and 907 respondents, or 84 percent, completed both Part 1 and Part 2.

Because the survey was open to the public and distributed through broad outreach channels, the results should be understood as one source of public input rather than a statistically representative sample. The findings summarized in this report are intended to help California State Parks, Tribal partners, project partners, stakeholders, and community members understand major themes, areas of alignment, and where perspectives differ as the reimagining process moves forward.

This report is organized into three sections:

- **Section 1** presents responses to multiple-choice and ranking questions.
- **Section 2** summarizes responses to key treatment-option questions by age, race, and proximity to Chico.
- **Section 3** summarizes and synthesizes responses to free-response questions.

Executive Summary of Key Online Survey Insights

The survey results point to several major insights that can inform the next stages of the Reimagine Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park project.

- **Participation was strong, with a substantial local connection.** The survey received 1,079 responses, including 907 respondents who also completed the optional Part 2 questions. Most respondents participated as individuals, and the response map shows a strong concentration in Chico and Butte County, with responses from elsewhere in California and outside the state.

- **Bidwell Mansion remains deeply tied to local identity, memory, and loss.** Respondents frequently described the site as connected to Chico's founding, the Bidwells, Chico State University, Bidwell Park, architecture, childhood memories, and 19th-century California history. The December 2024 fire produced sadness, anger, frustration, heartbreak, nostalgia, and concern about the future.

- **Reconstruction had the highest overall support among the treatment options.** In Part 2, 65 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to see reconstruction of the Bidwell Mansion. Support was lower for preserving and stabilizing the ruins (34%), rebuilding for new uses (29%), or creating a commemorative treatment without reconstruction (21%). Younger respondents were generally more open to non-reconstruction approaches than older respondents.

- **Respondents showed strong alignment around shared principles for the park's future.** The highest average scores were for preserving the grounds as a significant cultural landscape, continuing to recognize the site's statewide and national significance, and honoring the Bidwells' legacy in a historically contextual way. Respondents also strongly supported education; inclusive and accurate history; and stewardship of native species, trees, historic plantings, and landscape features.

- **Future interpretation should build on what has worked while addressing gaps.** Respondents valued guided tours, docents, original artifacts and furnishings, the visitor center, outdoor grounds, school field trips, and special events. They also called for fuller interpretation of California Native American history, colonization, Chinese immigrant history, estate workers and laborers, landscapes and plantings, outbuildings, Mansion construction, Annie Bidwell's advocacy, Chico State University, and the fire and rebuilding process.

- **Future facilities and programs should support learning, gathering, and access.** Desired uses included interpretation, educational programs, guided tours, outdoor gatherings, school programs, cultural events, interpretive panels, and indoor exhibition space. Respondents also raised practical priorities related to transparency, funding, local expertise, site security, maintenance, visitor center reopening, and interim interpretation while long-term decisions are made.

Taken together, the survey results show that future alternatives should consider more than the treatment of the Mansion building. They should also address the broader park experience, including the cultural landscape, visitor use, Tribal collaboration, interpretation, community programming, security, maintenance, and phased implementation. These insights will help shape the guiding principles and vision statements used to develop and compare future alternatives for the site.

Section 1: Survey Results

FIGURE 1: What is your association with Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park? (Select all that apply)

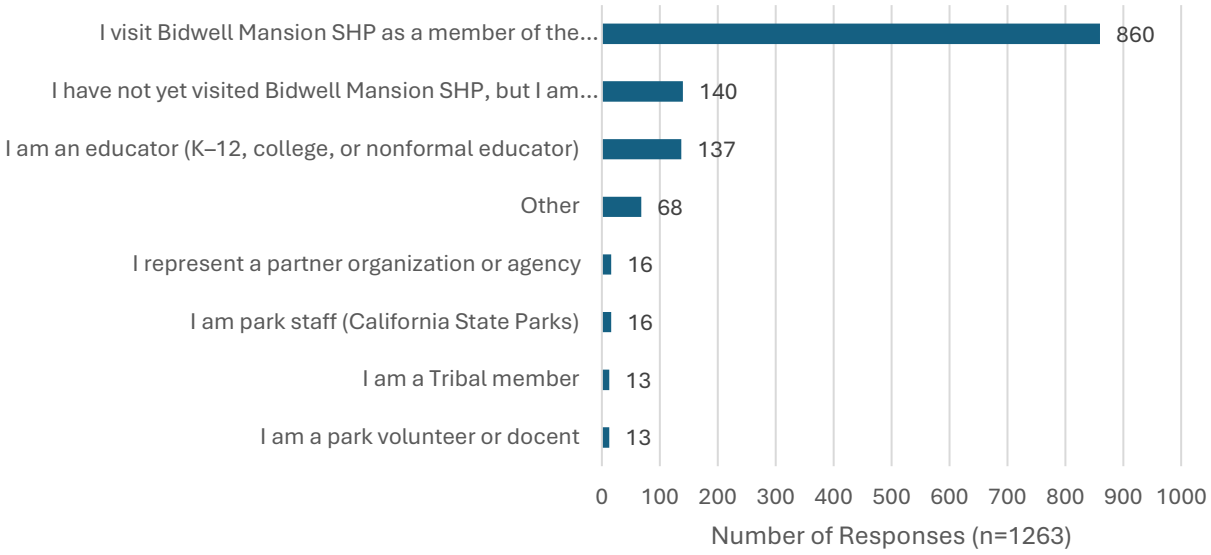
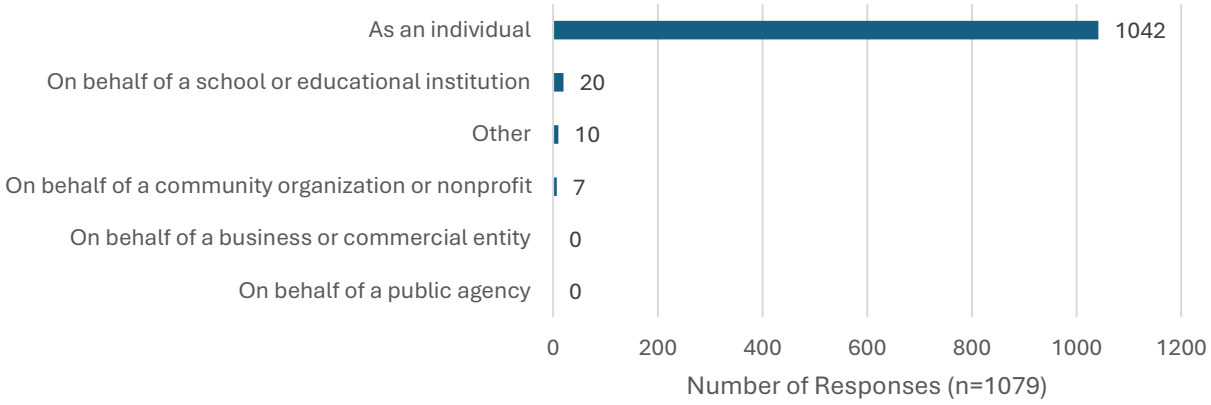


FIGURE 2: Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of a group, organization, or other entity?



Responses to Which institution, organization, agency or business? included:
Soroptomist International of Chico, Chico Heritage Association, Chico State University, John Marsh Historic Trust, Chico First Founder/Attorney, Chico Unified School District, NorCal Anti-Racism Coalition, Pedal Press, Beautiful and Historic Chico Coalition

FIGURE 3: How old were you the first time you visited Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park (SHP)?

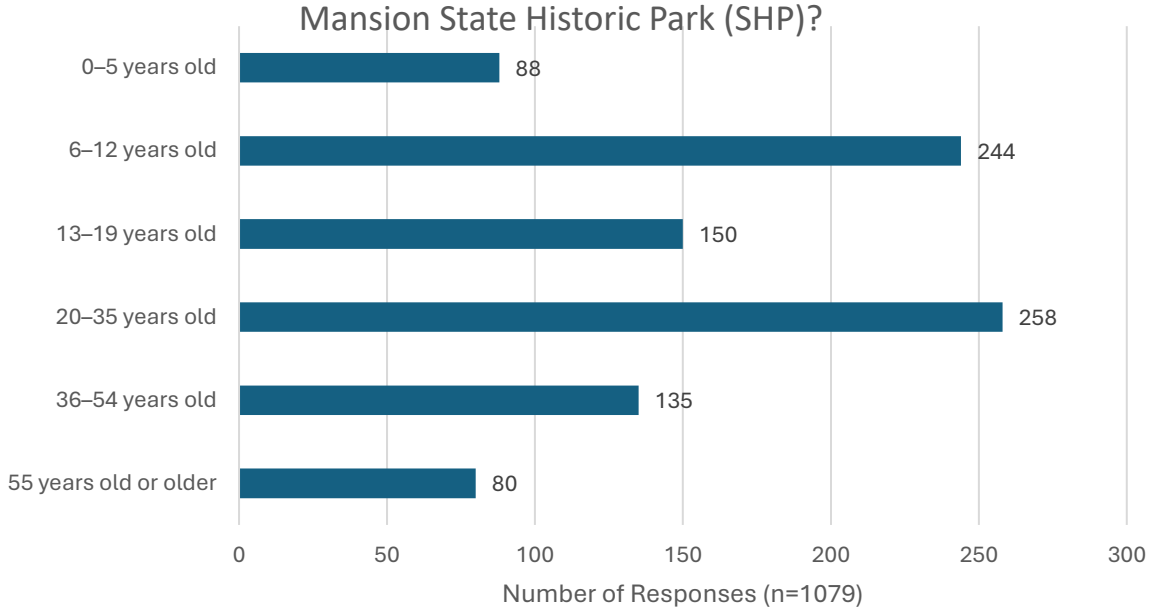


FIGURE 4: Within the last five years, how many times have you visited Bidwell Mansion SHP?

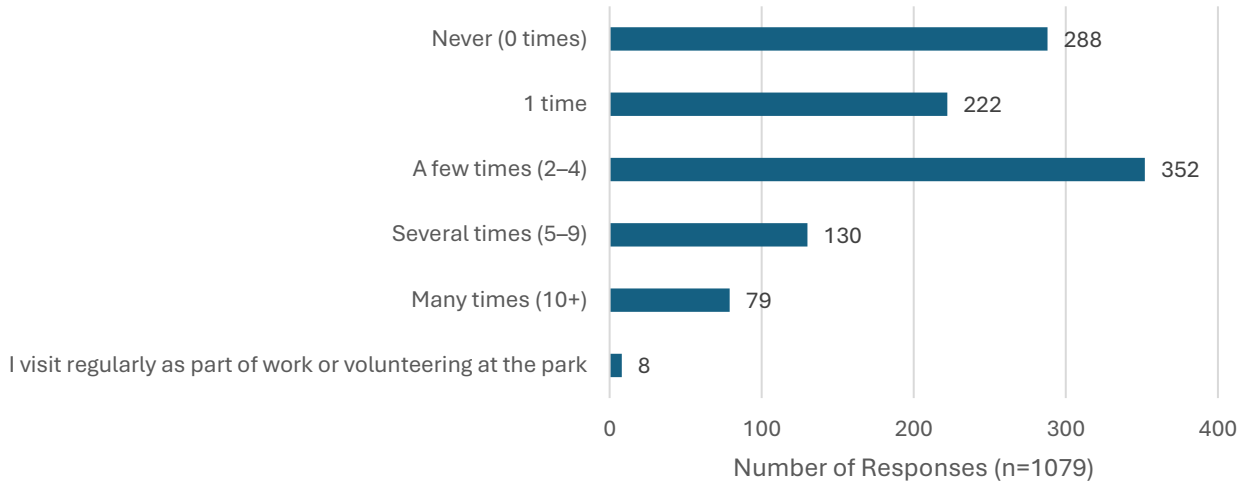


FIGURE 5: During a typical visit to Bidwell Mansion SHP, how much time do you spend on site?

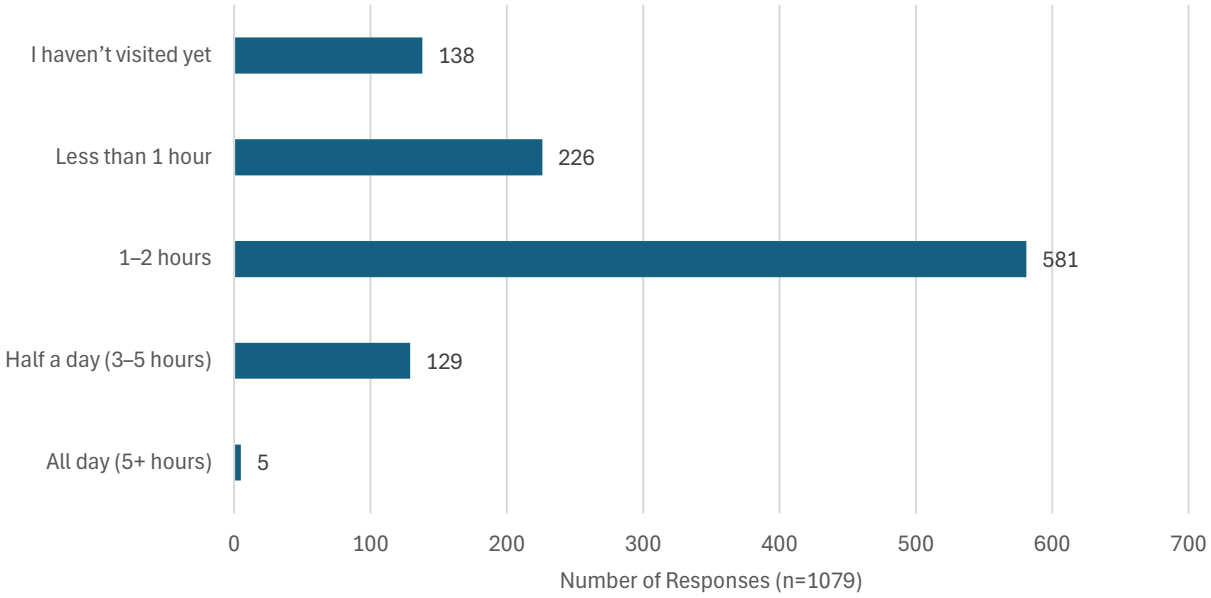


FIGURE 6: Which areas have you experienced at Bidwell Mansion SHP on your visits? (Select all that apply)

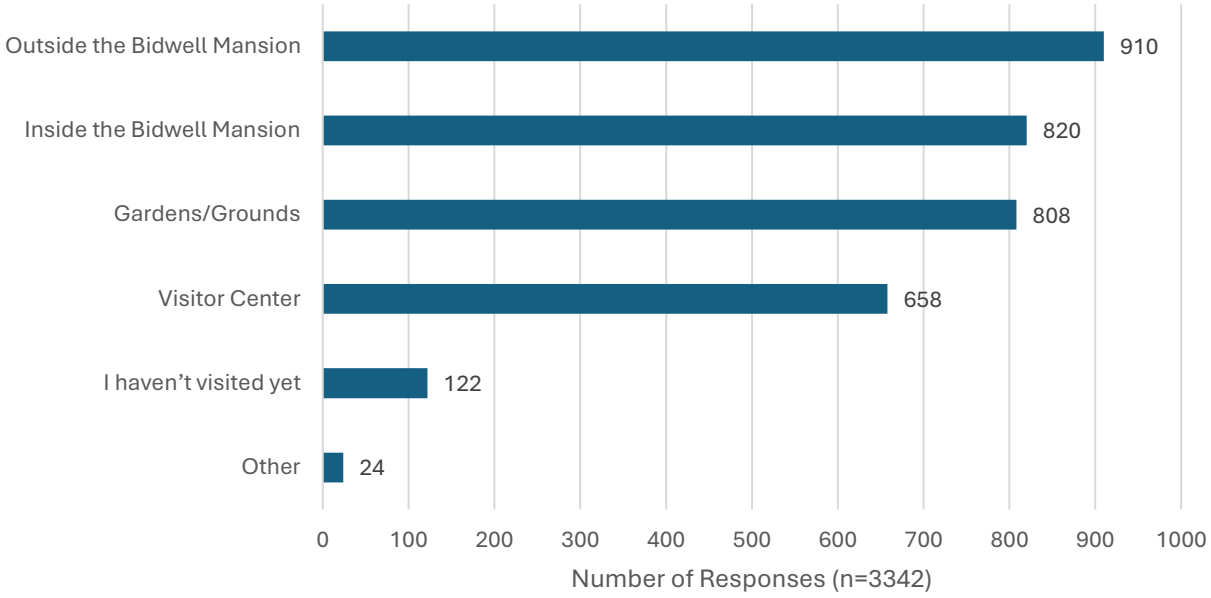
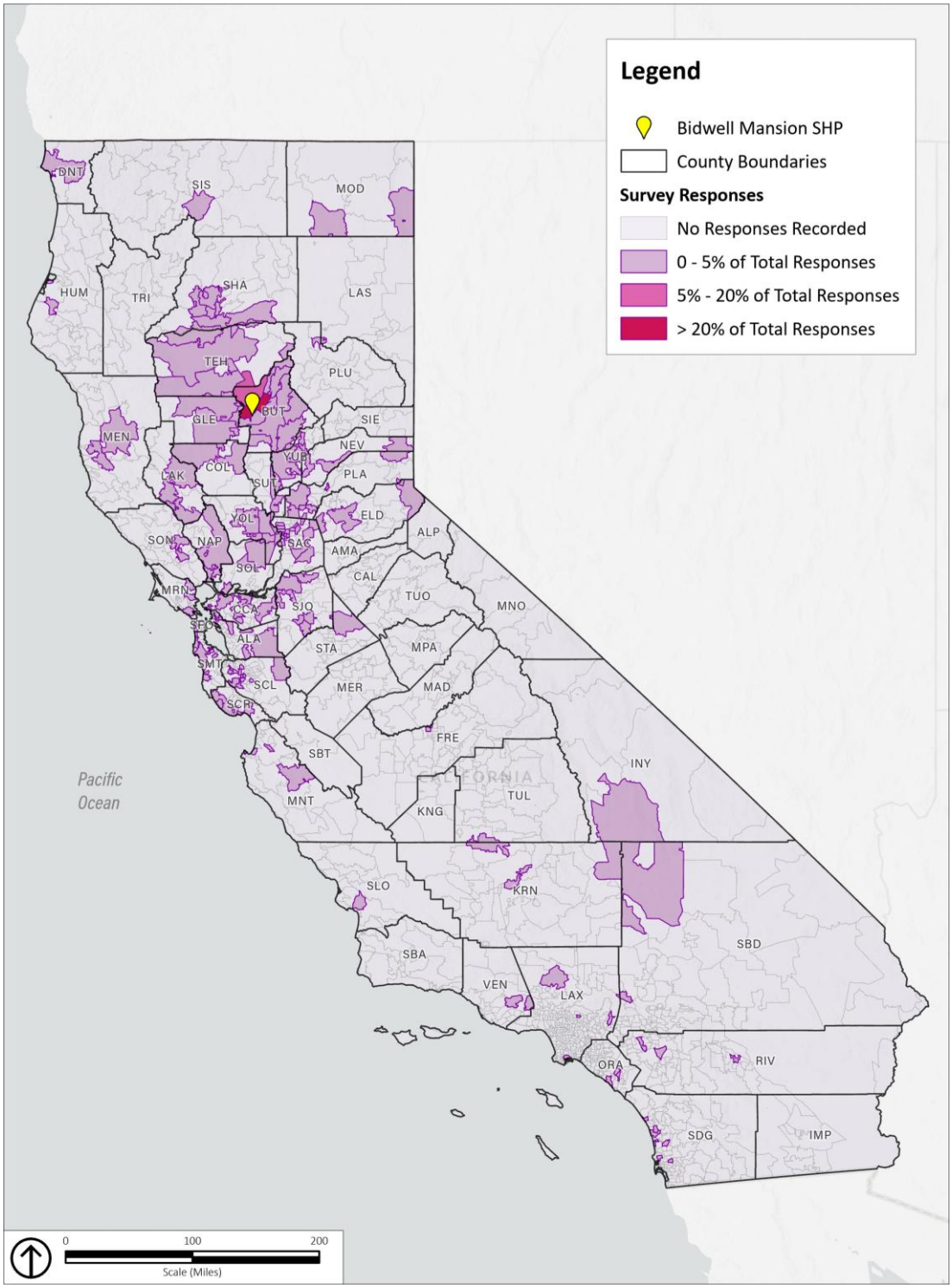
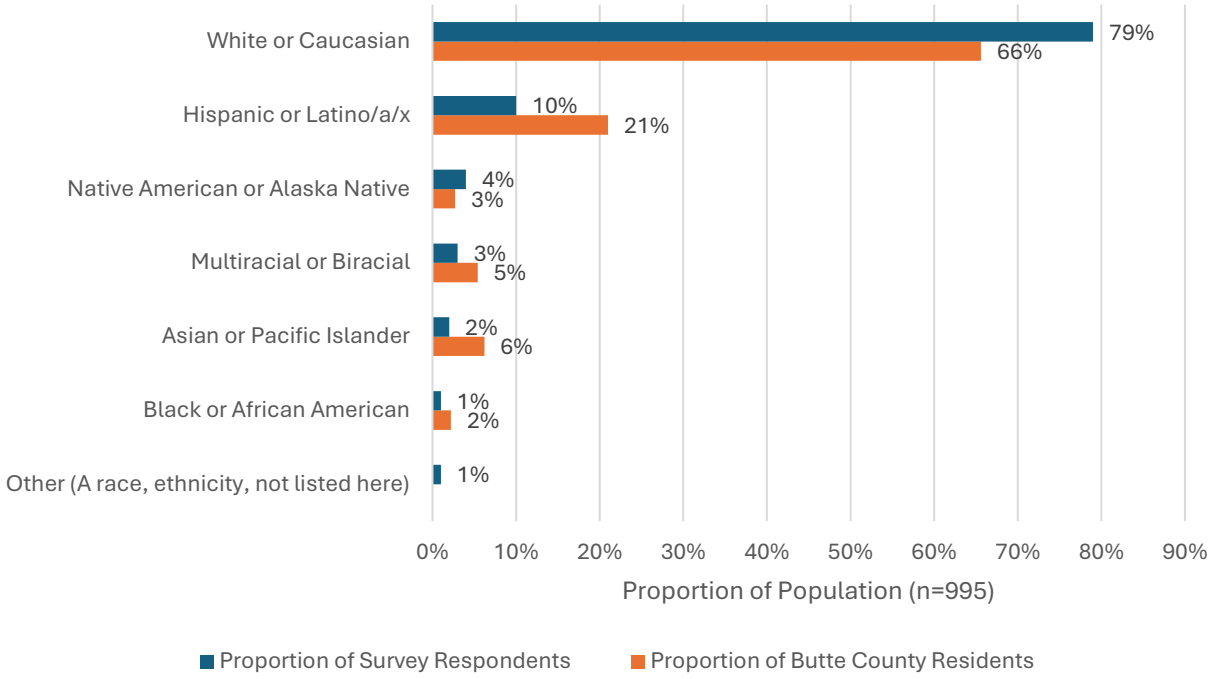


FIGURE 7: What is your zip code?



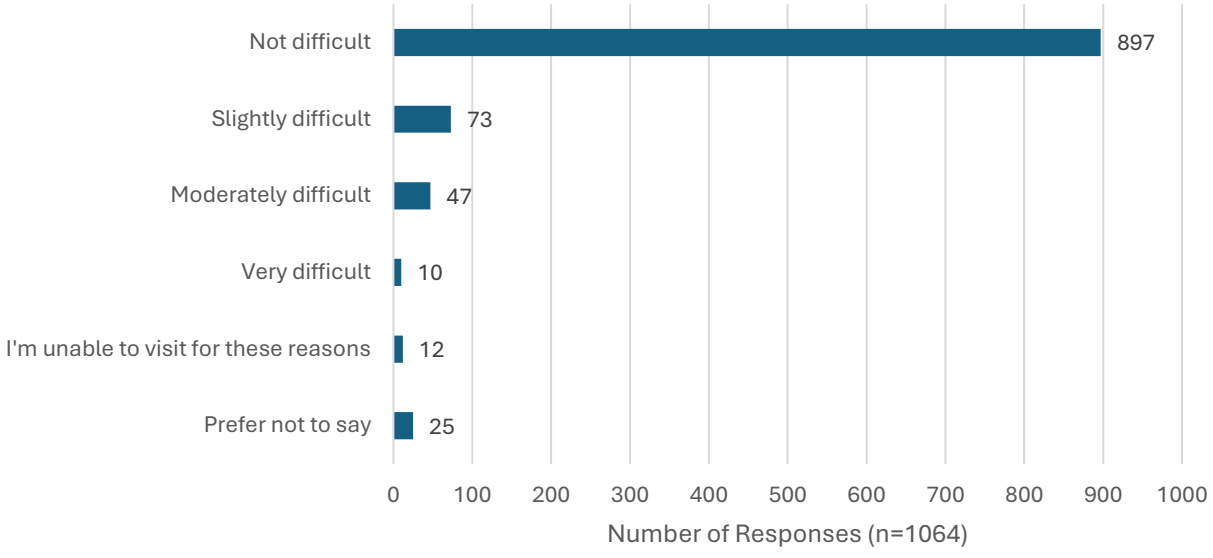
Map shows geographic distribution of residential zip codes of 1,044 survey respondents within the state of California. Additionally, 32 respondents provided a zip code outside of California.

FIGURE 9: Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply); Compared to Butte County Population



1

FIGURE 10: How difficult is it for you to visit Bidwell Mansion SHP due to transportation (car access) and cost (gas, parking, admission/fees)?



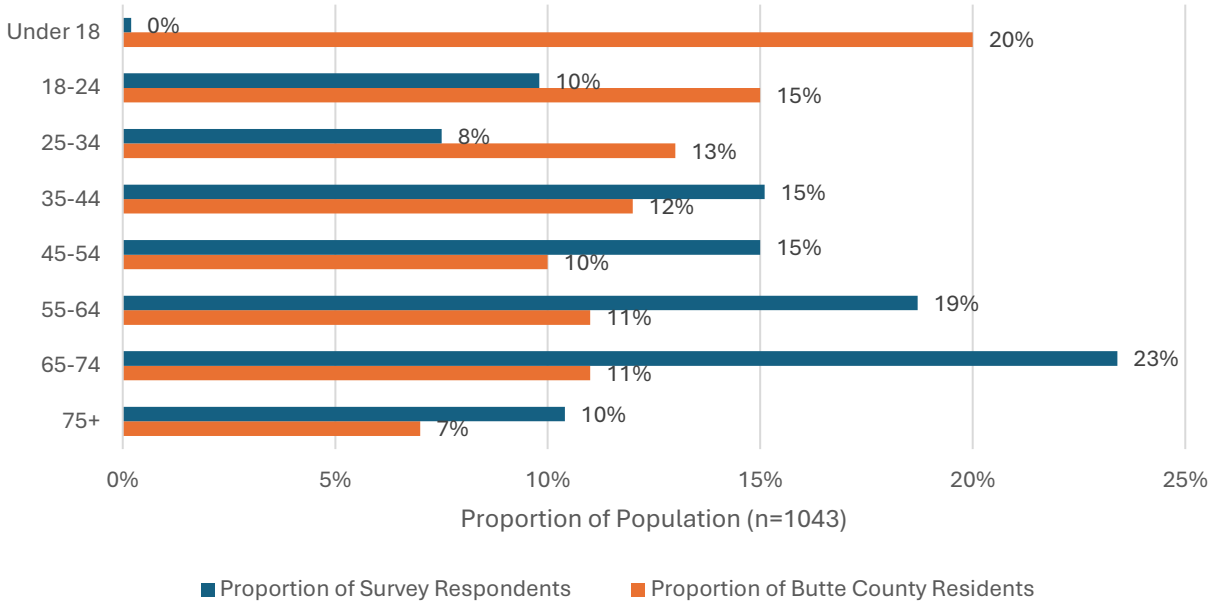
1. Population estimates, July 1, 2025 (V2025)

Sources:

U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (PEP). Updated annually. Population and Housing Unit Estimates.

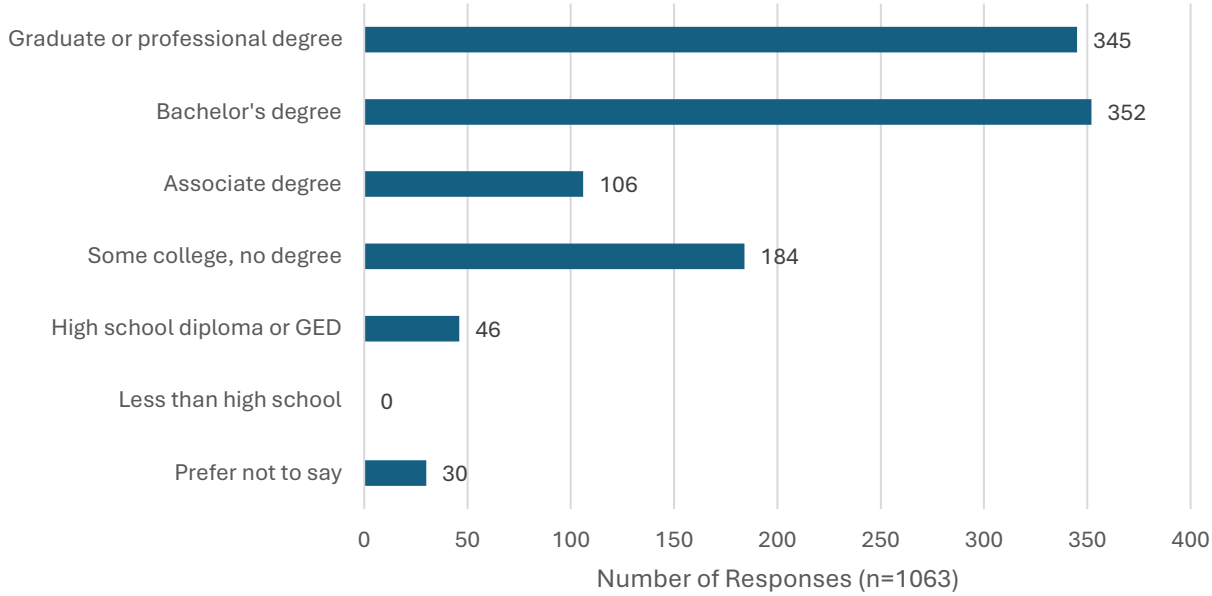
U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS). Updated annually. American Community Survey.

FIGURE 11: Which age group are you in?; Compared to Butte County Residents



2

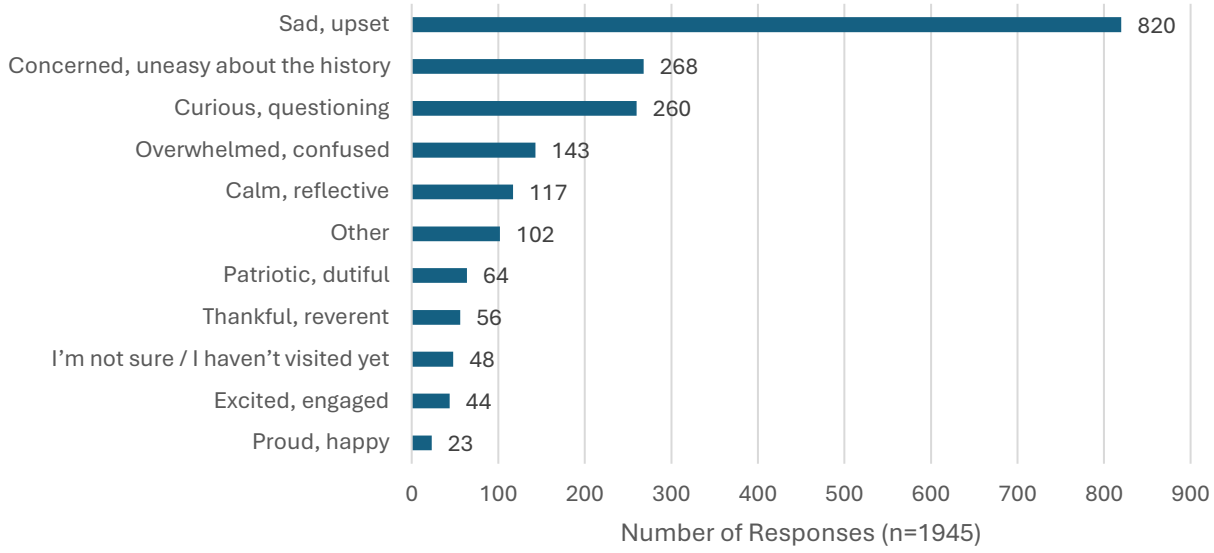
FIGURE 12: What is the highest level of education you have completed?



2 U.S. Census Bureau, "Age and Sex," *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0101*, accessed 20 May 2026, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2024.S0101?g=050XX00US06007.

Interpretation, Learning, and Experience

FIGURE: 13: When you see or think about Bidwell Mansion SHP in the aftermath of the December 2024 fire, which emotions or feelings best describe your experience? (Select all that apply.)

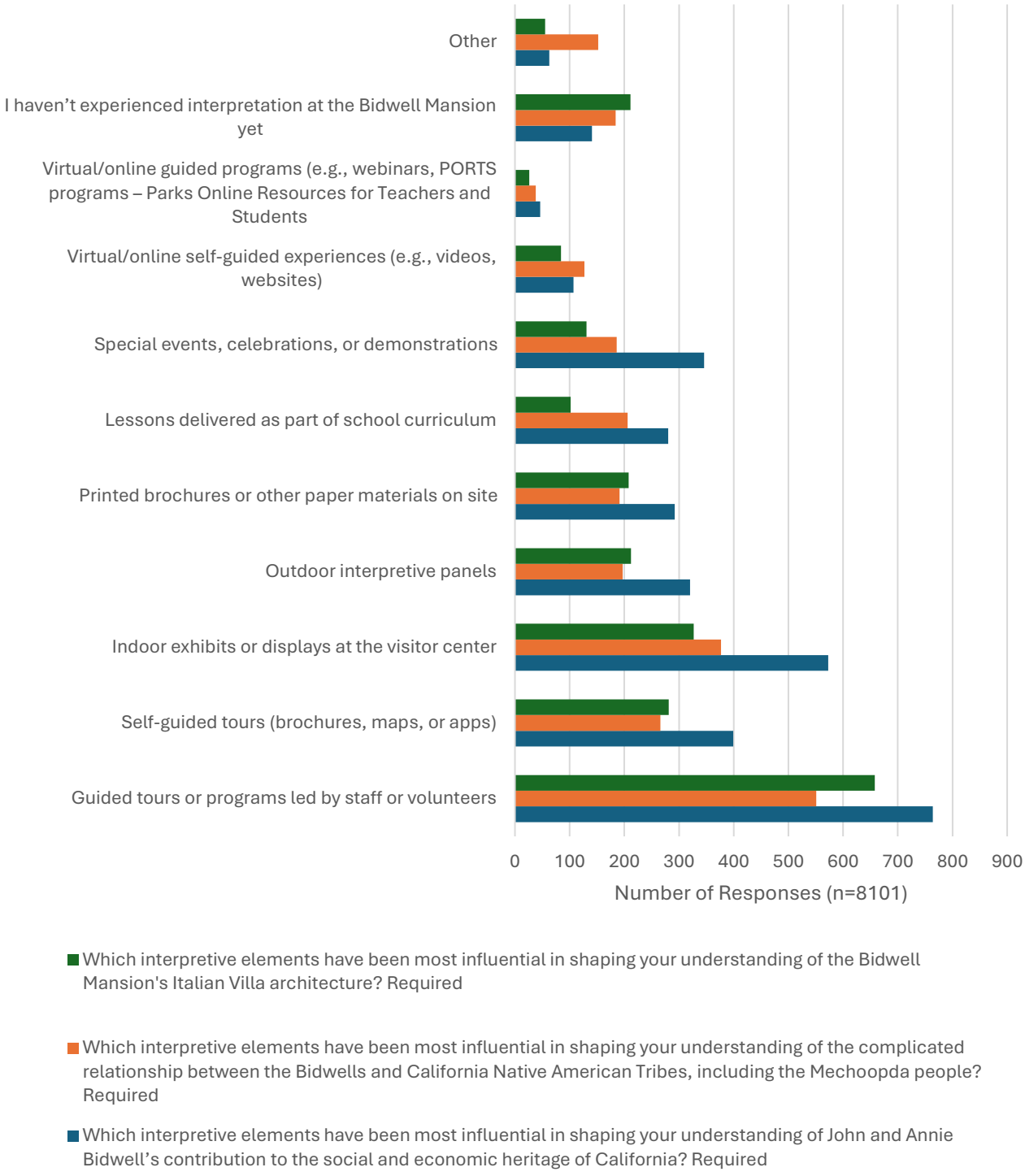


Among respondents who selected "Other," the most common additional emotions were anger, outrage, and frustration, often directed at the convicted arsonist and the perceived lack of accountability. Many respondents also described grief, devastation, heartbreak, nostalgia, and a deep sense of personal and community loss, particularly those with long family or personal connections to Chico and Bidwell Mansion.

Several respondents expressed anxiety or uncertainty about the future of the site, including concern that the Mansion may not be rebuilt or that future generations will lose access to an important part of local history. Others described more mixed or complicated feelings, including sadness paired with hope, curiosity, or openness to a new future for the site.

A smaller but important set of comments challenged the meaning of the Mansion itself, emphasizing the need to tell a fuller and more honest history of the Bidwells, including the site's relationship to Mechoopda people and other California Native American Tribes, settler colonialism, forced assimilation, and Indigenous dispossession. Some respondents felt the fire created an opportunity to move forward with a more equitable, inclusive, and truthful approach to interpretation. A few respondents expressed indifference to the loss of the building or felt that the Mansion should not be honored in the same way going forward.

FIGURE 14: Questions 14-16, What interpretive elements have been the most influential?



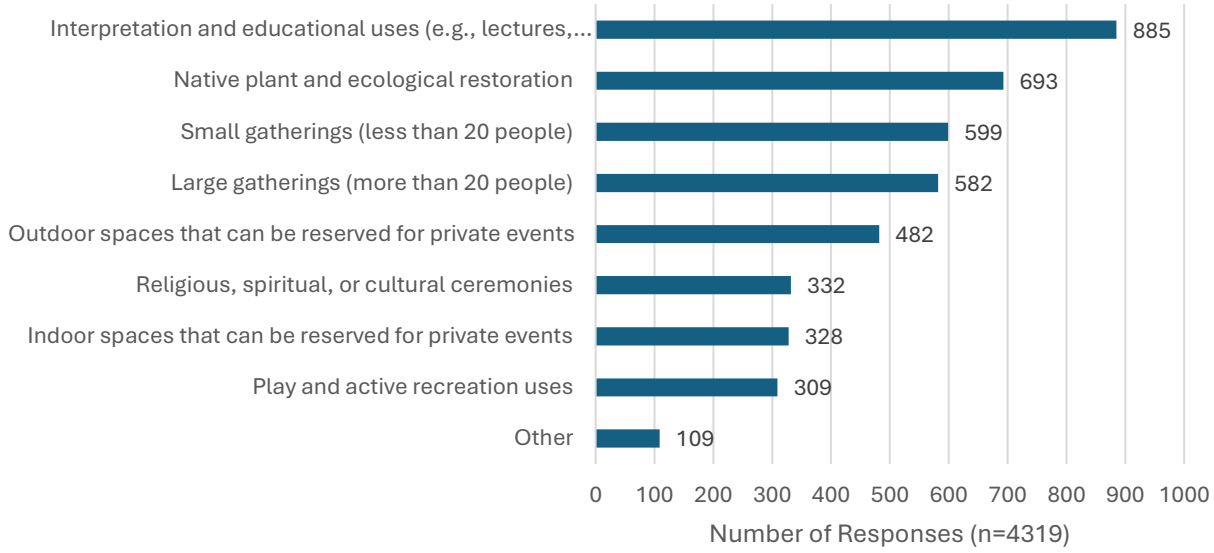
Among respondents who selected "Other," many said **their understanding of Bidwell Mansion's Italian Villa architecture** came from sources outside of formal interpretation, including books, personal research, architecture coursework, historic architecture references, restoration work, news coverage, and conversations with Chico residents or professionals. Several respondents also cited direct experience with the Mansion itself, including visiting the interior and exterior, observing restoration efforts, or simply seeing the building over time. However, a notable number of respondents said they did not recall the Mansion's architecture being discussed, did not know

much about this aspect of the site, or were less interested in the building's architectural style than in the broader history of the land, people, and cultural relationships connected to the site.

For respondents who selected "Other" **regarding John and Annie Bidwell's contributions to California's social and economic heritage**, many pointed to books, biographies, local history resources, school coursework, personal research, family stories, community memory, docent or staff training, and involvement with volunteer groups or events at the Mansion. Several respondents described the Mansion as deeply tied to Chico's identity, Chico State University, family histories, childhood memories, and local civic life. Others noted that their understanding was shaped by tours, exhibits, the visitor center, Christmas programs, reenactments, and interpretation of the surrounding land. A smaller number of comments questioned the framing of the survey or described existing interpretation as selective, minimal, or biased.

For respondents who selected "Other" **regarding the relationship between the Bidwells and California Native American Tribes**, including the Mechoopda, many said their understanding came from independent research, books, newspaper articles, academic work, Chico State University classes or Tribal Relations programming, conversations with Tribal members, family stories, oral histories, and community discussions. Several respondents noted that this topic was not strongly addressed in their past experiences at the Mansion, or that they only learned about it later through outside sources. Comments reflected a wide range of perspectives: some respondents called for fuller, more honest, and more visible interpretation of Mechoopda history and the impacts of colonization, while others objected to the framing of the relationship as "complicated" or felt the Bidwells' relationship with California Native Americans had been positive or should be understood in the context of its time. Overall, these responses suggest both strong interest in this topic and significant differences in how community members understand, interpret, and value this history.

FIGURE 15: What kinds of uses and events would you like to see the park accommodate after the reimagining process? (Select all that apply)



For respondents who selected “Other” regarding the uses and events they’d like to see the park accommodate after the reimagining process, many want to see uses and events that center the Mechoopda Tribe via educational events, new interpretive experiences, or the transfer of the property to the Mechoopda. Some respondents indicated that uses and events should be determined by the Mechoopda. Many respondents also questioned the premise of the question, rejecting the notion that a “reimagining” process should take place, and that the property should accommodate its previous use as a museum, including tours and living history events. Other responses included accommodating private and commercial uses via shops and small businesses, and a reservable venue space for private events. Other respondents indicated that the park should accommodate less uses beyond being a free-to-enter public park.

FIGURE 16: Which of the following interpretive elements or visitor facilities would you like to see created or improved at the park? (Select up to three)

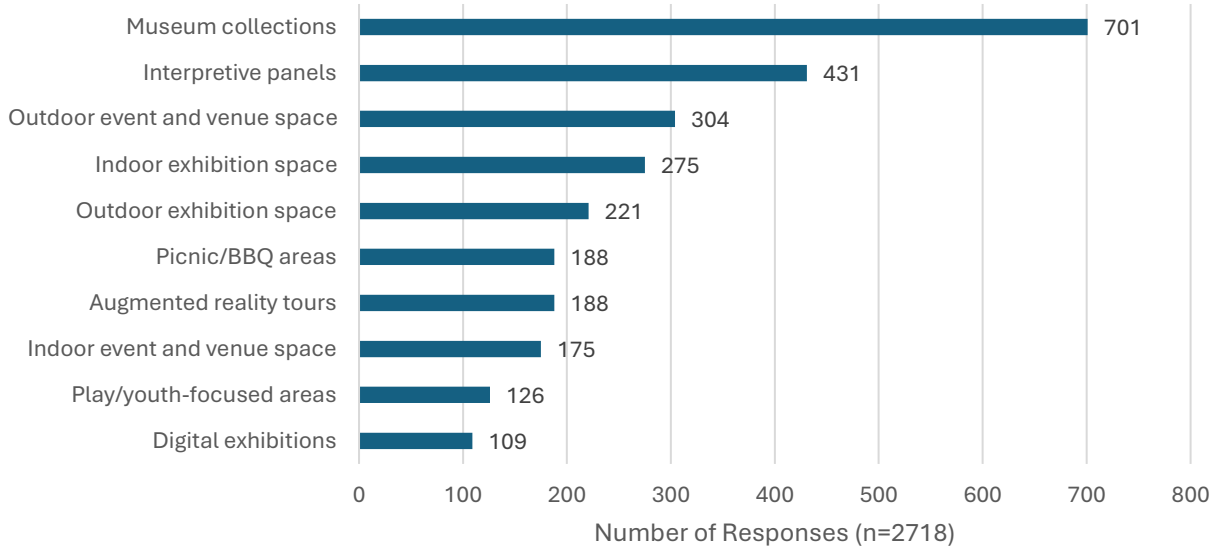
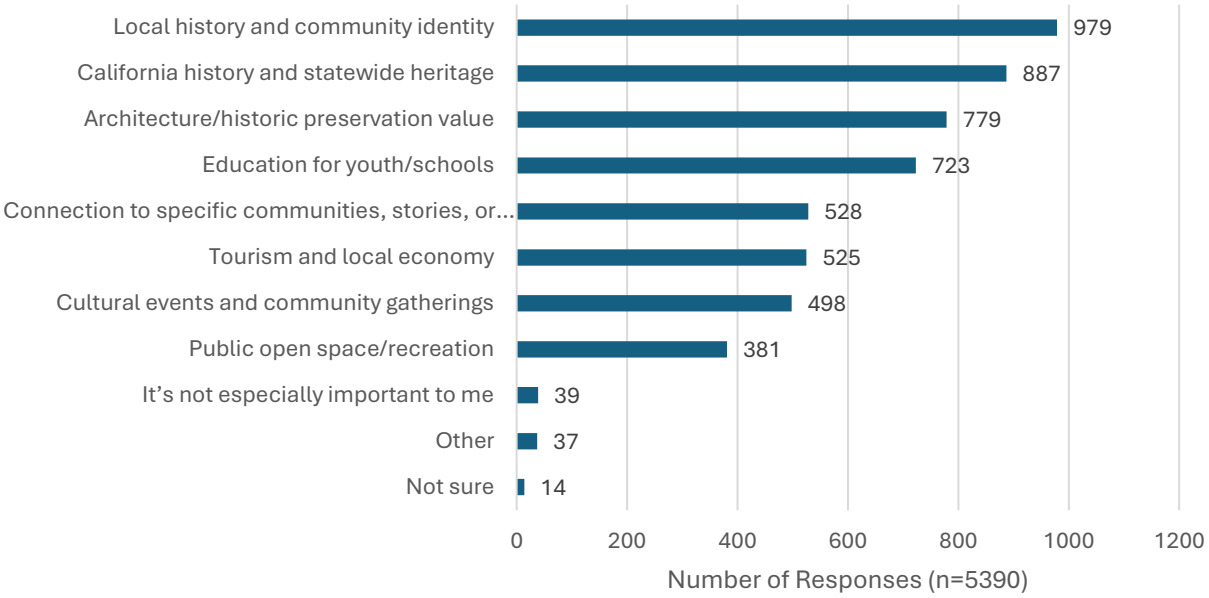


FIGURE 17: What do you think makes Bidwell Mansion SHP important? (Select all that apply)



Survey Part 2

Questions on the Treatment of the Bidwell Mansion

The following four Likert scale questions were presented to gauge the level of agreement on each of the following statements related to potential treatment options for the Bidwell Mansion.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

Commemorate the Site
"I would like to see a commemorative treatment that does not involve reconstructing or restoring the Bidwell Mansion."

Preserve the Surviving Structure
"I would like to see the ruins of the Bidwell Mansion preserved and stabilized."

Rebuild for New Uses
"I would like to see the new structure adapted to accommodate new uses by visitors and the local community."

Rebuild the Historic Structure
"I would like to see a reconstruction of the Bidwell Mansion building"

FIGURE 18: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

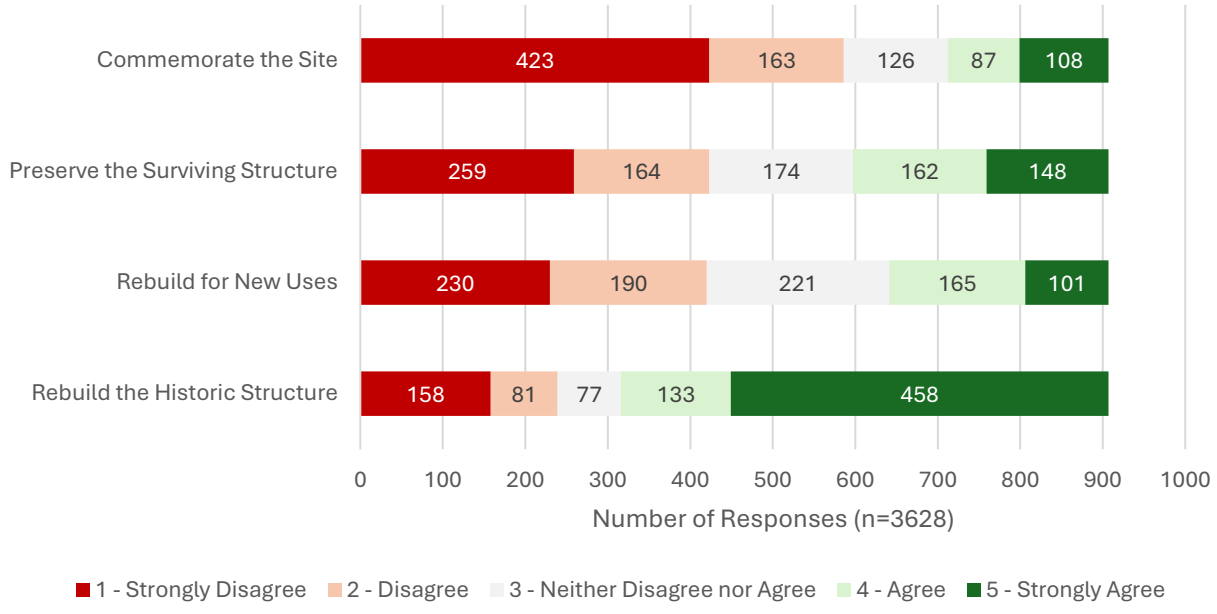


FIGURE 19: On a scale of 1-5, how important is it?

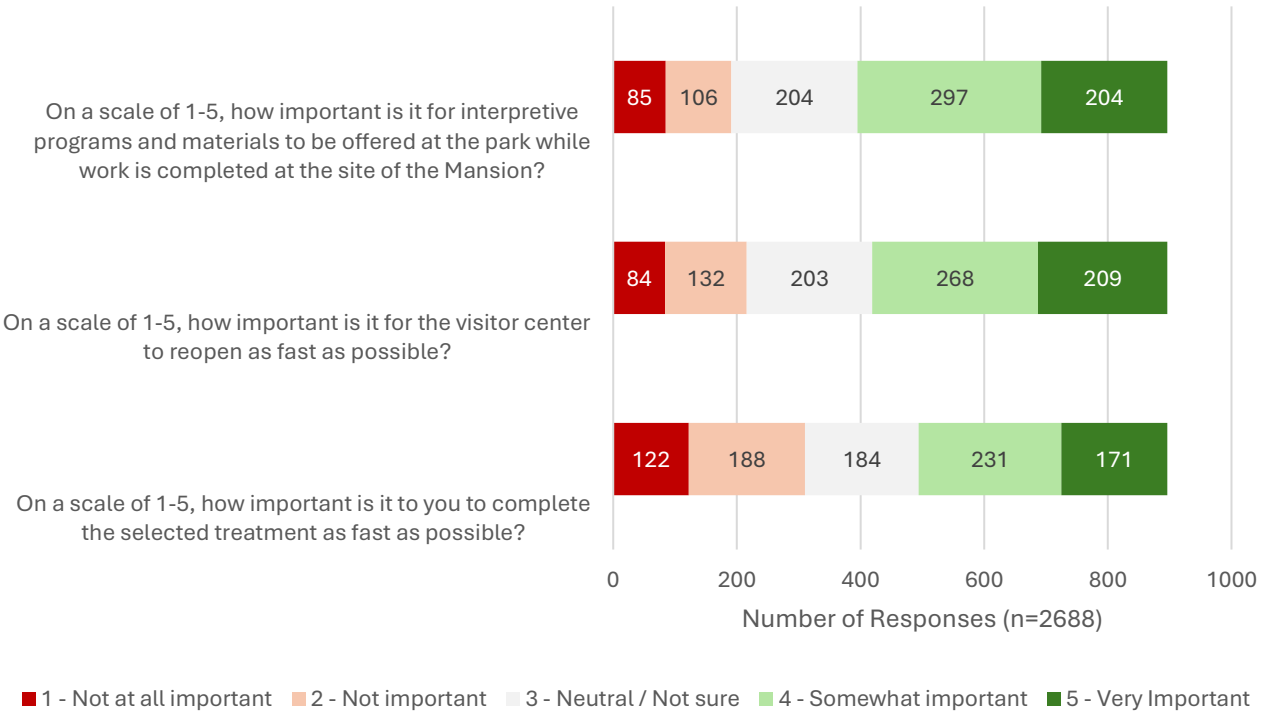


FIGURE 20: For each question, rate the statements on a scale of 1 to 5 based on whether it aligns with your vision of the park. *Scores shown are the average score for each statement; they are presented in descending order, from highest to lowest average score.*

The grounds of the Bidwell Mansion will be preserved and managed as a significant cultural landscape.	**4.36**
Bidwell Mansion will continue to be recognized as a site of national and statewide significance.	**4.35**
The Park will honor the life and legacy of John and Annie Bidwell in a historically contextual way that recognizes both their contributions and the complex impacts of their actions and beliefs.	**4.33**
The Park will be a place for formal and informal education and learning for youth and adults alike.	**4.28**
The Park will provide a complex, accurate, and inclusive history of the region's cultural landscape, including both inspiring, and sometimes painful histories.	**4.27**
The Park's landscape will restore and steward native species, trees, and plantings while respecting historic garden and landscape features and elements.	**4.23**
The Park will contribute to downtown Chico's economic and cultural vitality by attracting visitors and supporting local businesses and institutions.	**4.19**
The Park will use a variety of interpretive tools—such as exhibits, public art, guided programs, and digital media—to engage different learning styles and languages.	**4.06**
Restrooms, parking, arrival areas, and outdoor spaces (lawns, courtyards, gardens) will be intentionally designed and serviced (e.g., power, lighting, shade, seating) to comfortably accommodate school groups, tours, and community gatherings.	**4.02**
The Park will present California and Chico's history in a broader context, including the Gold Rush, Euro-American community development, settler violence, dispossession of Indigenous lands, and violence against Native peoples.	**3.99**
The Park will provide dedicated, appropriately sized spaces for collections care, archives, and exhibit preparation to support long-term interpretation, including under-told stories.	**3.97**
The Park will interpret under-told stories, including those of Chinese residents, African American communities, and those socioeconomically diverse workers and residents whose labor and lives shaped Chico.	**3.89**
Facilities will incorporate modern infrastructure (power, lighting, sound, and A/V) and universal design principles so that key spaces, exhibits, and programs are accessible to visitors of all abilities.	**3.84**
The Park will honor the continuing legacy of the Mechoopda Maidu people by centering Mechoopda stories and dedicating new facilities and resources for Tribally led interpretation and Tribal use.	**3.83**
The Park will be planned and managed through ongoing collaboration with Tribal partners, local organizations, and community members.	**3.79**
New or renovated facilities will be designed first and foremost to support high-quality interpretation—such as exhibits, tours, school programs, and public presentation.	**3.79**
Park facilities will include flexible indoor and outdoor spaces that can support a wide range of interpretive programs, community meetings, and special events without detracting from the site's historic and cultural significance.	**3.61**
The Park will be a critical civic and community destination where locals gather to fulfill civic responsibilities, organize, and uplift their fellow community members.	**3.55**
The Park will be a model for how historic sites can promote social, economic, and environmental sustainability and resilience, including responses to climate change and wildfire.	**3.46**
The Park will balance preservation of historic resources with sensitive new development to meet contemporary community needs.	**3.43**
The Park will support moments of rest, reflection, and healing, including thoughtfully designed spaces to remember the December 2024 fire.	**3.38**

Section 2: Treatment Option Feedback by Age, Race, and Proximity

Responses by Age

FIGURE 22: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see a reconstruction of the Bidwell Mansion building"

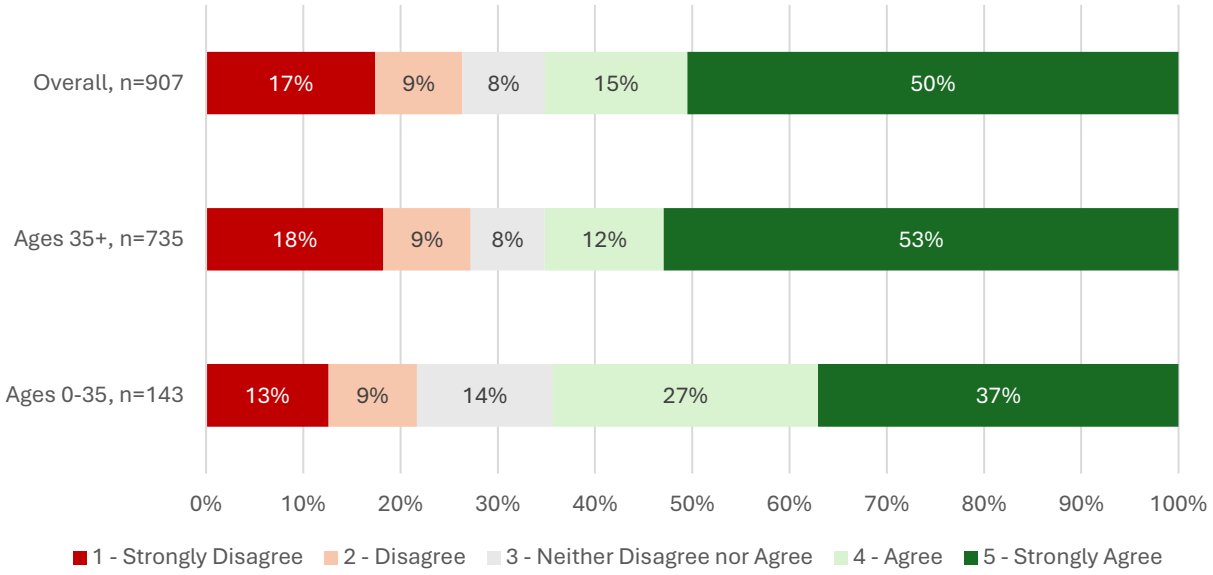


FIGURE 23: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see the new structure adapted to accommodate new uses by visitors and the local community."

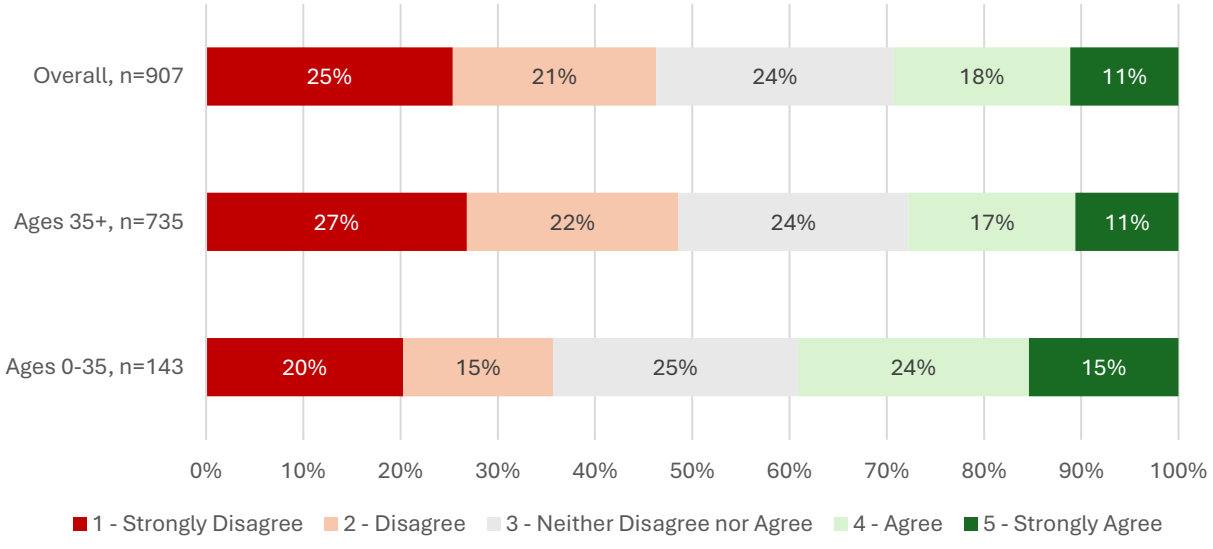


FIGURE 24: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see the ruins of the Bidwell Mansion preserved and stabilized."

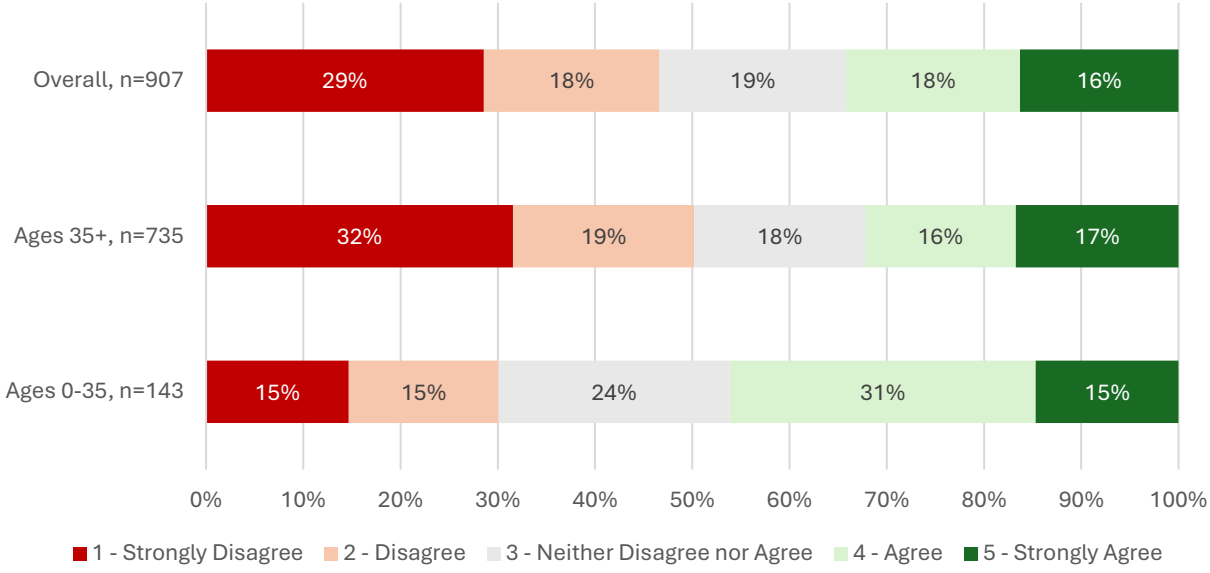
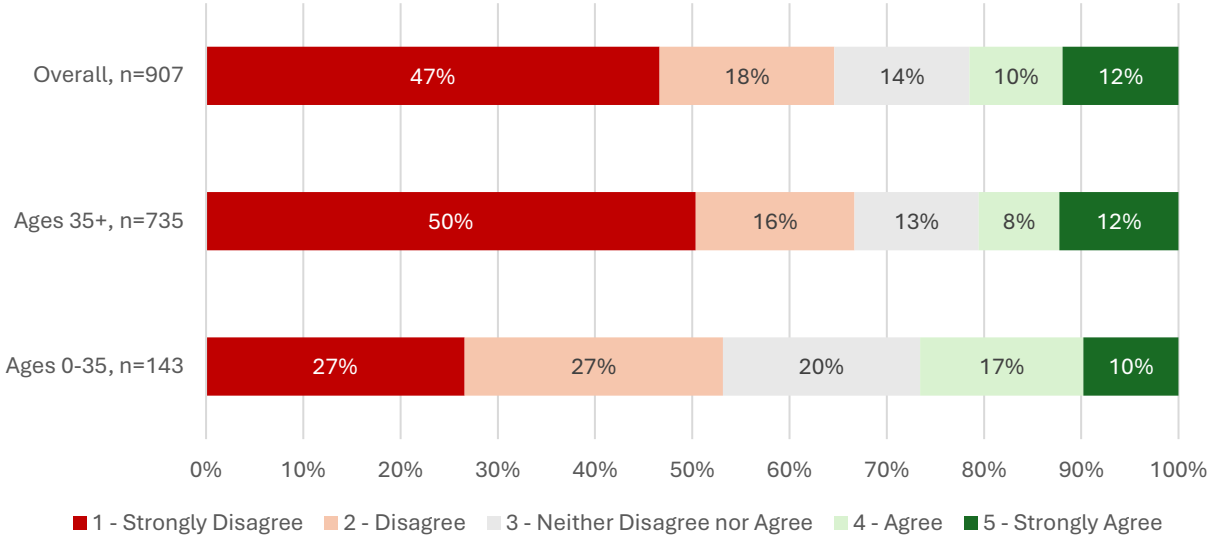


FIGURE 25: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see a commemorative treatment that does not involve reconstructing or restoring the Bidwell Mansion."



Responses by Race

FIGURE 27: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see a reconstruction of the Bidwell Mansion building"

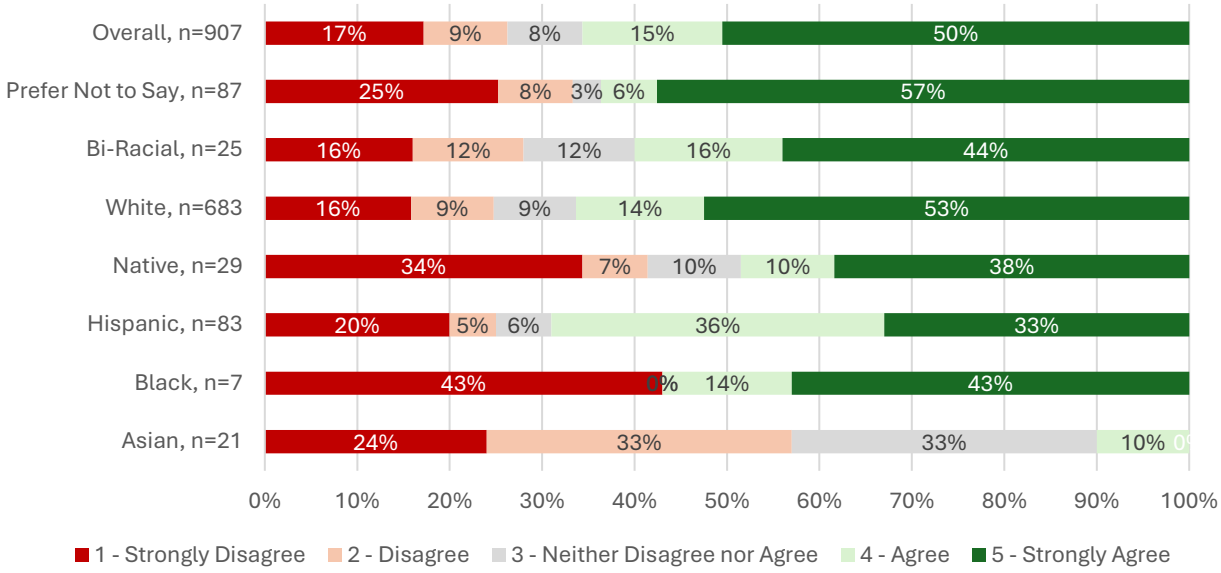


FIGURE 28: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see the new structure adapted to accommodate new uses by visitors and the local community."

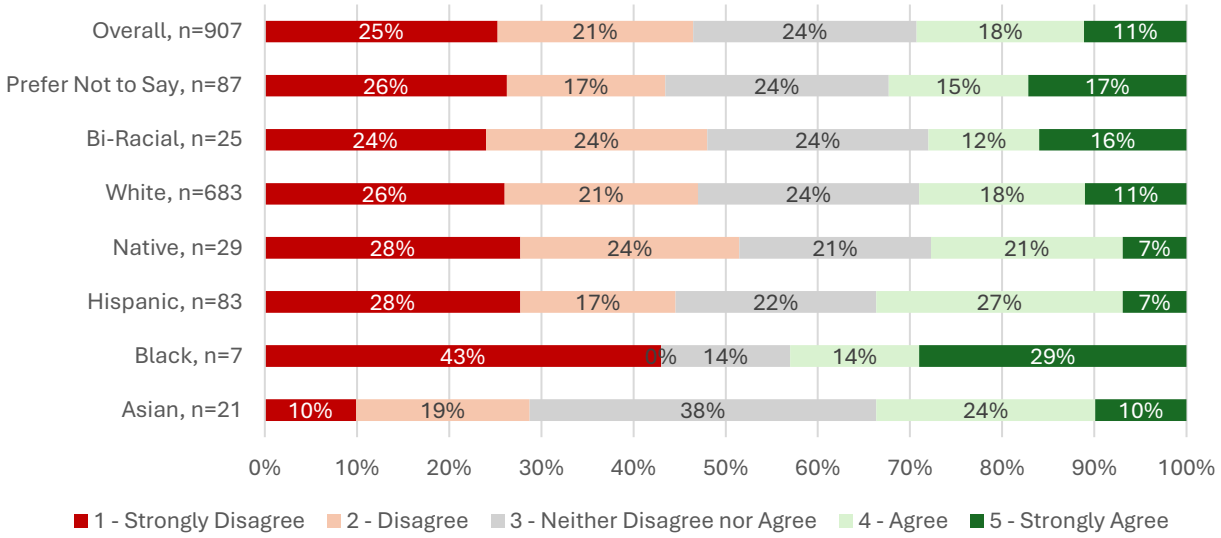


FIGURE 29: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see the ruins of the Bidwell Mansion preserved and stabilized."

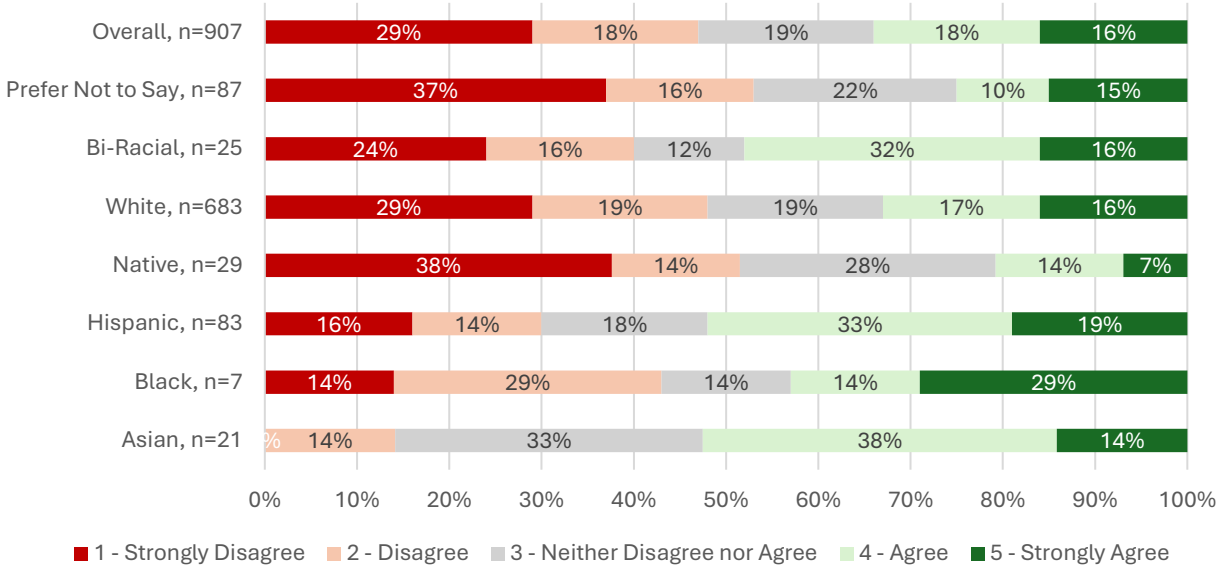
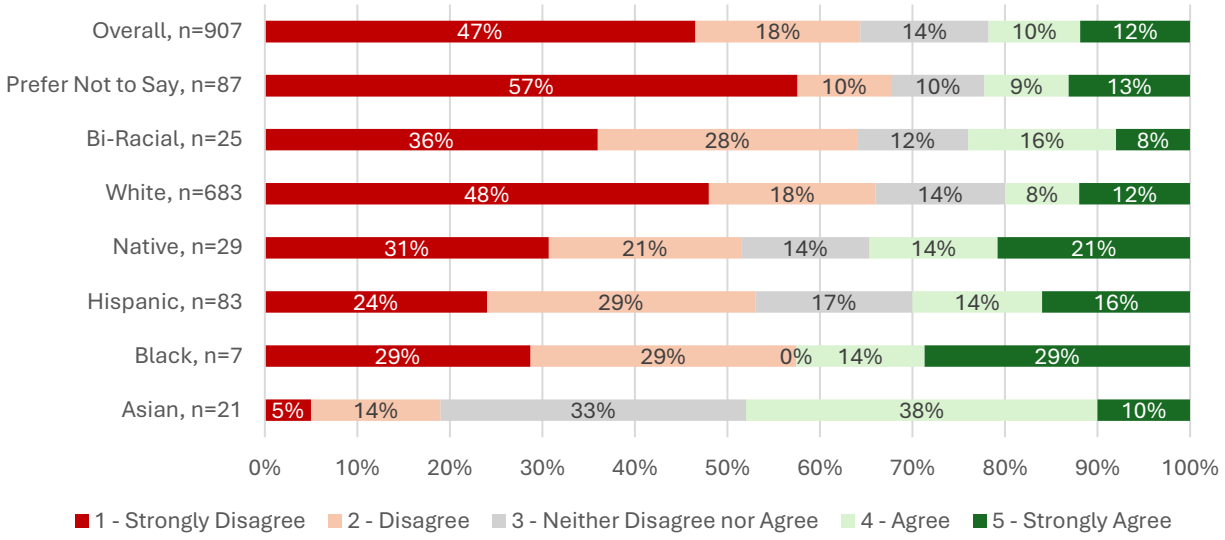


FIGURE 30: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see a commemorative treatment that does not involve reconstructing or restoring the Bidwell Mansion."



Responses by Proximity

FIGURE 32: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see a reconstruction of the Bidwell Mansion building"

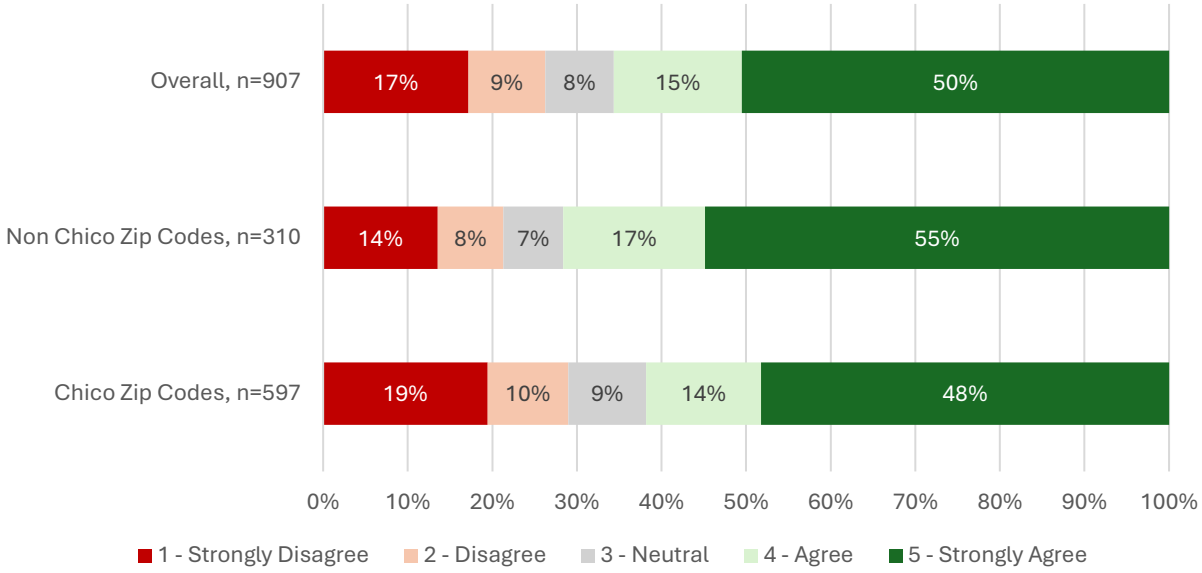


FIGURE 33: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see the new structure adapted to accommodate new uses by visitors and the local community."

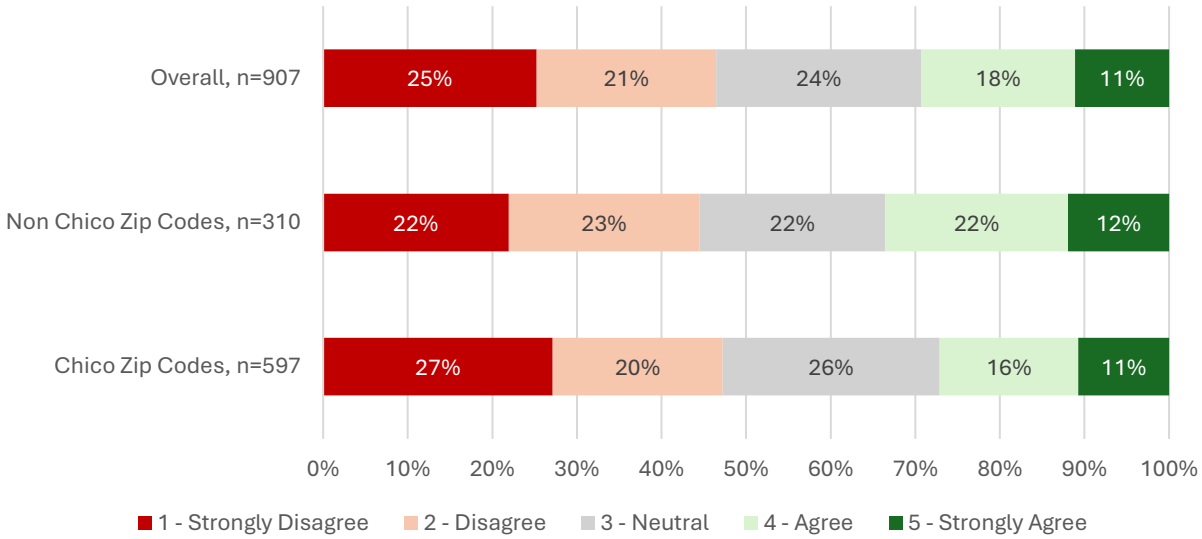


FIGURE 34: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see the ruins of the Bidwell Mansion preserved and stabilized."

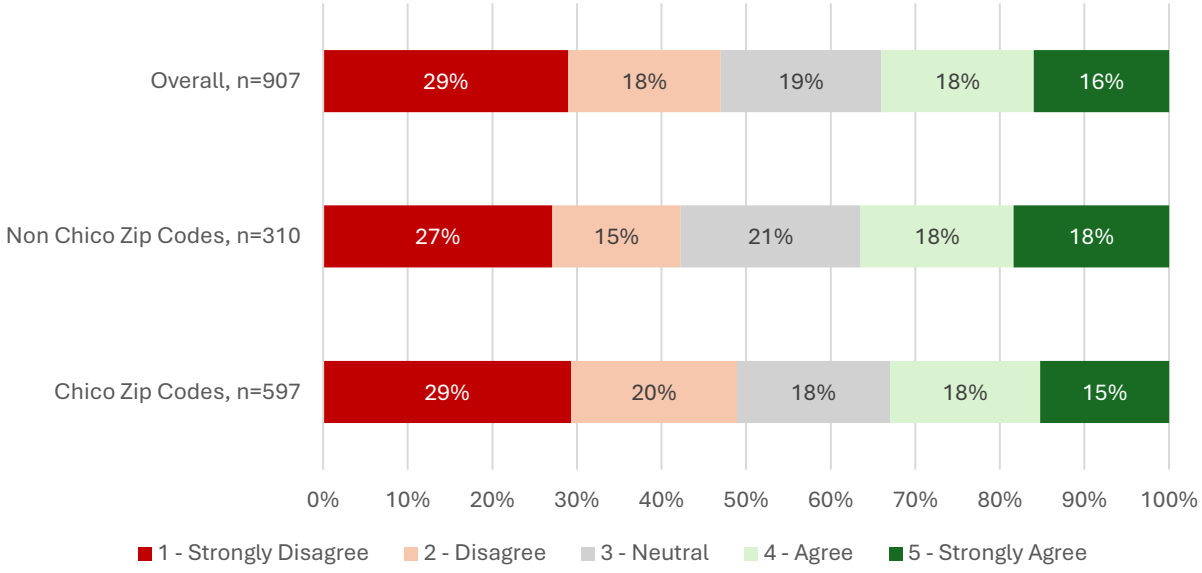
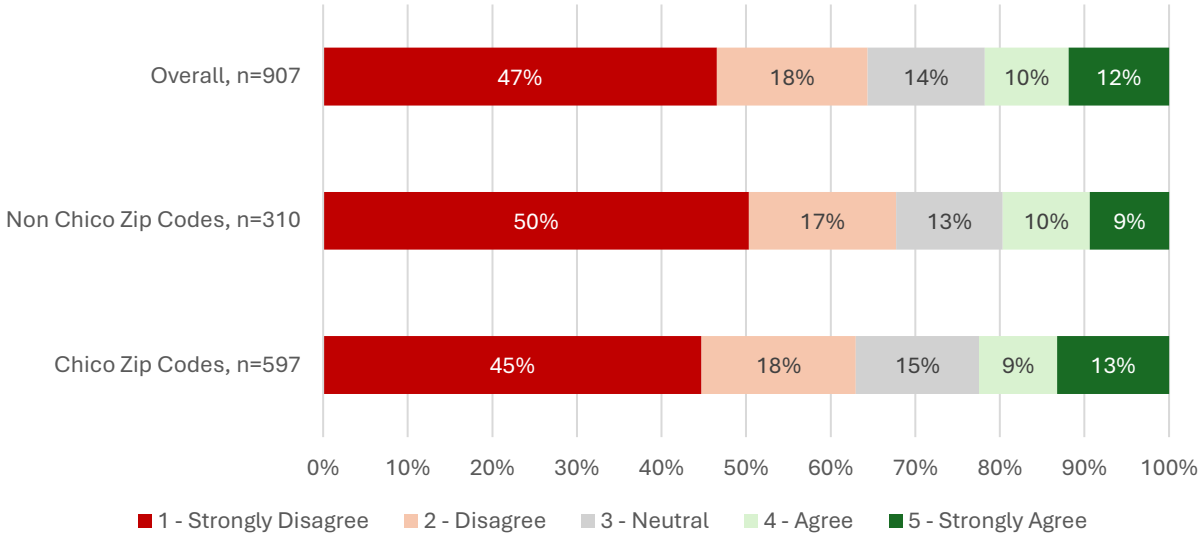


FIGURE 35: On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about the following statement?

"I would like to see a commemorative treatment that does not involve reconstructing or restoring the Bidwell Mansion."



Section 3: Free Text Question Synthesis

Methodology

This section summarizes the survey's five free response questions. Artificial intelligence (AI) was used to support the synthesis of nearly 3,000 qualitative free responses through Google's Gemini 3.5 Thinking, which is well suited for complex synthesis tasks and problems.

Survey responses were exported into an Excel workbook, which was then uploaded to Gemini. Gemini was prompted to identify all unique topics from the list of question responses, with explicit parameters to not insert additional information that was not found in the list. The list of topics was then categorized and refined based on reading and analysis of survey responses by PlaceWorks staff.

Interpretive Themes

What do you currently think Bidwell Mansion is mainly "about"? You can answer in a few words or a few sentences, and your response may include why you think the park is significant.

869 individual text responses indicated that Bidwell Mansion was mainly about the following topics.

1. **Chico's Founding and Local/Regional Roots; including…**

    - The birth, foundation, cornerstone, and origin story of the City of Chico.
    - The general history and development of Butte County, the Sacramento Valley, and Northern California.
    - A physical window or snapshot into daily life, values, and society during the 19th century (the 1800s).

2. **The Bidwell Family Lives and Legacy; including…**

    - The personal lives, marriage, daily experiences, and lifestyle of city founders John and Annie Bidwell.
    - John Bidwell's history as an early California pioneer, explorer, and significant historical figure.

3. **California Native American and Indigenous Tribes; including…**

    - The original presence and history of the Mechoopda and Mountain Maidu Tribes.
    - The negative impacts of settlement on indigenous populations, including land seizure, forced displacement, erasure, cultural devastation, forced assimilation, conversion to Christianity, enslavement, and historical violence (such as killing and scalping).
    - The perspective that the mansion represents a history built on native land and labor.

4. **Settler Colonialism and White Privilege; including…**

    - The glorification of white European-American settlers and occupation of native lands.
    - A demonstration of how the wealthy, affluent, and privileged political class lived and dominated local commerce.

5. **Community Identity, Pride, and Symbolism; including…**

    - The mansion serving as the "heartbeat," "heart and soul," "anchor," "centerpiece," or "crown jewel" of the Chico community.
    - Its symbolic status as a prominent landmark featured in local advertising and displayed on Chico police cars.
    - A geographical gateway and touchpoint connecting downtown Chico, the neighborhood, and the university.

6. **Architecture and Design; including…**

    - The building's Italianate Villa and Victorian architectural style, layout, paint, and craftsmanship.
    - Specific advanced features of the time, such as its historical indoor plumbing.
    - Its designation as a registered National Historic Landmark.

7. **The Recent Fire, Loss, and Future Rebuilding; including…**

    - The recent destructive fire (or arson) that left the mansion in ruins, and the current "ghost" state of the property.
    - The tragic loss of irreplaceable historical items, unique original furnishings, artwork, and artifacts inside the house.
    - The current debate, decision-making, and urgent desires regarding whether to rebuild and restore the mansion to its previous splendor.

8. **Childhood Memories and Nostalgia; including…**

    - Deep personal and family memories, childhood traditions, and multi-generational family milestones associated with visiting the property.

9. **Education and the Founding of Chico State University; including…**

    - The mansion's role as an educational tool for youth, local school field trips, and educators.
    - Its significance as the physical birthplace and historical anchor of Chico State University.

10. **Natural Landscape, Parks, and Gardens; including…**

    - The beauty of the surrounding outdoor nature, grounds, trees, gardens, and nearby creek.
    - Annie Bidwell's landmark donation of the adjacent Bidwell Park to the citizens of Chico.

11. **Agriculture, Ranching, and Horticulture; including…**

    - 19th-century agricultural history and development in California.
    - John Bidwell's specific innovations and actions as a local rancher.

12. **Annie Bidwell's Philanthropy and Social Reform; including…**

    - Annie Bidwell’s philanthropy, religious devotion, generous gifts to the city, and her active contributions to the women's suffrage movement.

13. **State Management, Financing, and Political Controversy; including…**

    - Critiques regarding the State of California's slow response, property oversight, and poor management.
    - Political debates regarding the use of taxpayer dollars to fund repairs and comments linking the site to modern political bias, left-wing rhetoric, or social controversy.

14. **Tourism and Gathering Spaces; including…**

    - The property's role as a primary local tourist attraction and a public "third space" intended for community gathering, peaceful reflection, and photography.

15. **The Dual Nature of History ("Warts and All"); including…**

    - Interpretations that encompass a complicated, multi-sided history, capturing the "good, the bad, and the ugly" of the past without hiding unpleasant truths or historical actions.

16. **Future Suggestions for the Site; including…**

    - Explicit proposals to give the land back to the Mechoopda people, turn the area into a park completely unassociated with the Bidwell name, or utilize virtual reality technology to show the mansion's lost interior.

Interpretation: Successes to Build On

Please share what you think worked well in how the Bidwell Mansion and the overall landscape was interpreted. Interpretation means how stories are told about the site and includes panels, brochures, exhibits, tours, and programs.

518 individual text responses indicated that the following programs, strategies, and priorities worked well with respect to interpretation of the Bidwell Mansion and the overall landscape.

1. **Guided Tours and Docents;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *The value of guided tours over self-guided or stationary materials.*
    - *The enthusiasm, expertise, and knowledge of the staff and volunteers.*
    - *Specific mentions of a memorable blind tour guide from the 1980s.*
    - *Docents wearing time-period clothing or costumes (such as the Las Señoras group in the 1990s).*

2. **Mansion Architecture,** Structure, and Design; *with emphasis on…*

    - *The Victorian and magnificent architectural style of the mansion.*
    - *Structural design features, colors, and building dimensions (comparing historical sizes to modern structures).*
    - *Specific advanced historical elements like the mansion's original indoor plumbing.*
    - *The physical view and aesthetic presence of the mansion from the Esplanade.*

3. **Original Artifacts, Collection, and Furnishings**; *with emphasis on…*

- *The presence of original historical artifacts, antiques, objects, artwork, and furniture that made the home feel like a "time capsule."*
- *The prominent painting/portrait of General John Bidwell (including a mention of how his eyes appear to follow you down the stairs).*
- *Visitors being allowed to play the historical piano inside the house.*

4. **Interpretation Media and Tools;** *with emphasis on…*

- *Outdoor interpretive signs and stationary description plaques distributed across the grounds.*
- *Educational brochures, panels, and on-site literature.*
- *Digital or secondary materials, including virtual/online information, websites, local history books, and a podcast featuring a craftsman who worked on the mansion's trim restoration.*
- *Suggestions for utilizing modern technologies (such as videos, holograms, and 3D photographic images).*

5. **The Visitor Center and Museum;** *with emphasis on…*

- *The separate visitor center and museum building constructed by the State.*
- The role of the visitor center in providing baseline historical orientation before tours begin.

6. **Outdoor Grounds, Landscaping, and Natural Environment;** *with emphasis on…*

- *The beauty and maintenance of the surrounding lawn, trees, and gardens.*
- *The history of the rose garden and its connection to Chico State University.*
- *The proximity and connection to Big Chico Creek.*
- *Suggestions to incorporate and teach about indigenous plants.*

7. **Historical Context, Pioneers, and Chico's Founding;** *with emphasis on…*

- *Stories regarding the establishment and economic development of the town of Chico, Rancho Chico, and early California pioneer life.*
- *The specific marital story, personal values, and historical legacy of John and Annie Bidwell.*
- *The status of the mansion as a designated historical monument.*

8. **Specific Historical Figures and Social Movements;** *with emphasis on…*

- *General John Bidwell's agricultural contributions, state/national political influence, and life on the ranch.*
- *Annie Bidwell's personal life, story, and advocacy for women's suffrage.*

9. **Multi-Cultural and Group Perspectives;** *with emphasis on…*

- *The history of local settlers, early contemporaries, and gold mining communities.*
- *The relationship between the Bidwells and the indigenous populations (Mechoopda and other California Native American Tribes), including their progressive stances for the time or their efforts to convert California Native Americans populations to Christianity.*
- *Requests to further expand storytelling to include the local Asian communities.*

10. **Educational and School Program Impacts;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Field trips and structured educational tours for school groups, children, and youth.*
    - *The integration of the mansion into the local childhood growing-up experience and history curriculum.*
    - *The connection to the university experience for Chico State University students.*

11. **Special Events and Reenactments;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Annual festivals, holiday celebrations, and special harvest festivals.*
    - *Interactive Christmas/holiday reenactments.*

12. **Public Accessibility, Space Utilization, and Community Integration;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *The property being physically approachable, embedded, and integrated within the city, downtown, and university campus.*
    - *The ability for the public to freely walk the grounds, relax on the stairs, or use the site as a picturesque backdrop for photos and special occasions.*
    - *The mansion serving as a prominent local landmark or geographical meeting hub ("meet at the mansion and we'll go downtown").*

13. **Critical Perspectives and Critiques of the Narrative;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Views that the existing interpretation was "whitewashed" or sugar coated to hide the negative impacts of colonization, displacement, and oppression of indigenous peoples.*
    - *Opinions that the site glorified a "dark period" in history or focused too heavily on a privileged class and white settler history.*

14. **Rebuilding, Preservation, and Property Future;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Explicit mentions of the recent destructive fire and the preservation/maintenance efforts of California State Parks over the years.*
    - *Direct calls to rebuild and restore the property back to its exact original state.*
    - *The perspective that the property should be repatriated (given back) to the Mechoopda people.*

15. **General Baseline Feedback;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Statements indicating general satisfaction ("everything worked well," "it was great," "informative," or "concise").*
    - *Comments stating the user could not answer due to a lack of familiarity, not having visited the site yet, or not understanding the phrasing of the question.*

Interpretation: Suggestions for Improvement

Please share what you think felt missing or incomplete in how the Bidwell Mansion and the overall landscape was interpreted. Interpretation means how stories are told about the site and includes panels, brochures, exhibits, tours, and programs.

442 individual text responses indicated that the following programs, strategies, and priorities were missing or incomplete with respect to interpretation of the Bidwell Mansion and the overall landscape.

1. **Existing Satisfaction / Nothing Missing**

    - *Many respondents explicitly stated that nothing felt missing, noting the current interpretation was fully satisfying, comprehensive, concise, thorough, or perfect, and requested that it not be changed or reimagined.*

2. **California Native American and Indigenous History (Mechoopda and other Maidu Tribes, Bahapki Settlement); *i**n particular…*

    - *The history, culture, and land-management practices of the indigenous peoples before the arrival of white settlers.*
    - *The impact of colonization, which includes a history of exploitation, forced displacement, land seizure, cultural devastation, forced assimilation, and acts of violence or genocide against California Native Americans.*
    - *The complex interactions between the Bidwells and the Mechoopda tribe, including differing viewpoints on whether the tribe was protected/shielded or subjected to low-wage/slave labor and assimilation pressures.*
    - *The need for tribal curation, more prominent native landscaping, and telling history from the indigenous perspective rather than solely from a settler's viewpoint.*

3. **Chinese Immigrant History; *i**n particular…*

    - *The history and presence of Chinese immigrants in Chico, including historical events such as the burning of Chinese homes, businesses, and farms by neighbors in 1877.*

4. **Everyday Estate Workers, Servants, and Laborers;** *in particular…*

    - *The lives, roles, treatment, and socioeconomic context of the cooks, farm laborers, domestic staff, and craftspeople whose labor built and maintained the mansion and agricultural operations.*

5. **Landscape, Botany, and Nature;** *in particular…*

    - *Clearer descriptions, botanical labeling, or nature tours regarding the flora, fauna, and specific tree varieties planted on the grounds (such as the magnolia, ginkgo, and rose gardens) as well as requests for bee and butterfly habitats.*

6. **Outbuildings and Historical Property Structures;** *in particular…*

    - *Information, visual displays, or physical replicas of non-mansion structures, including the carriage house, buggy house, the original adobe structure, and John Bidwell's earliest ranch foundations.*

7. **Mansion Architecture, Design, and Construction;** *in particular…*

    - *Information concerning the Italian Villa architectural style, the specific house plans, how materials were sourced and transported to the site, the actual construction methods, and public reactions during its building.*

8. **John Bidwell's Specific Activities and Life;** *in particular…*

    - *Historical details about John Bidwell's gold mining exploits, agricultural innovations, political career, role in the settling of California, personal controversies, or long-denied legitimate children.*

9. **Annie Bidwell's Advocacy and Philanthropy;** *in particular…*

    - *Annie Bidwell's historical role as a philanthropist and her specific advocacy regarding the temperance movement and women's suffrage.*

10. **Chico State University / Normal School History;** *in particular…*

    - *The history of the mansion during the period it served as "Bidwell Hall," a women's dormitory for the Chico State Normal School.*

11. **Cinematic and Filming History;** *in particular…*

    - *The historical use of the adjacent Bidwell Park as a filming site for classic movies, specifically Robin Hood.*

12. Tour Operations, Formats, and Logistics; *in particular…*

    - *Critiques regarding limited hours of operation, restricted daily access, tour length constraints (e.g., one hour being insufficient to cover the full history), the depth of tour guide knowledge, and advising visitors on how much time to allocate for the experience.*

13. Immersive and Living History Experiences; *in particular…*

    - *The use of docents or actors dressed in period attire, live roleplay/historical reenactments, hands-on educational activities for children, and video or multimedia presentations.*

14. Mansion Curation, Furnishings, and Artifacts; *in particular…*

    - *The display of more authentic indoor items, historical photos, portraits of the Bidwells, original furniture, and curated artifacts.*

15. Community Events, Publicity, and Signage; *in particular…*

    - *Utilizing the lawns and mansion for socializing, music, concerts, fundraisers, and community celebrations; the need for stronger online marketing/publicity; and clearer outdoor signage to indicate what the building is (as some mistook it for a campus classroom).*

16. **Post-Fire Rebuilding and Restoration;** *in particular…*

    - *Commentary regarding the recent fire, the urgent desire to see the property rebuilt or restored precisely to its original state, and suggestions to turn the ongoing reconstruction process itself into an active educational exhibit.*

17. **Land Repatriation;** *in particular…*

    - *The specific perspective that the land should be returned to the local tribe or transformed into a community center focused on indigenous education.*

18. **Deliberate Emotional Tone;** *in particular…*

    - *Suggestions for establishing a more cohesive, deliberate overall emotional tone or mood across different segments of the visitor experience.*

Hopes for Future Visitors

What is one thing you wish every visitor could understand or feel after visiting Bidwell Mansion SHP?

634 individual text responses indicate the following themes, topics, and ideas are desired takeaways for visitors to Bidwell Mansion SHP.

1. **Chico and California History / Founding & Origins;** *in particular…*

    - *The founding, establishment, birth, and early development of the town of Chico and the broader state of California.*
    - *Gaining a deeper, realistic awareness of local roots, cultural inheritance, and how the city came to be.*
    - *Connecting the historical significance of the region to major national events, such as the California Gold Rush and early mining exploits (e.g., Bidwell Bar).*

2. **John and Annie Bidwell's Personal Lives and Character; *i****n particular…*

    - *The actions, achievements, biographies, and personalities of John and Annie Bidwell as real, multifaceted people rather than just names on a building.*
    - *Their progressive vision, values, hopes, dreams, and massive regional influence across Northern California.*

3. **California Native American and Indigenous Perspectives and Hard Realities;** *in particular…*

   - *The long-standing presence, pre-colonial life, and cultural heritage of local California Native American Tribes (specifically the Mechoopda and Maidu people) who occupied the land for thousands of years prior to settler arrival.*
   - *The difficult and hard-to-hear realities of white settlement, including native erasure, land seizure/takeover, forced assimilation, abuse, killings, and the exploitation of native labor or slavery.*
   - *Ongoing community contention over the Bidwells' relationship with native populations—debating whether they protected and worked with the tribes or acted as authoritarians who conducted a disrespectful takeover.*
   - *The perspective that none of the estate's historical successes would have been possible without the native populations.*

4. C**olonialism, Westward Expansion, and Socio-Economic Privilege;** *in particular…*

   - *The broader historical context of the American Westward movement, pioneer settlement, and the realities of colonization.*
   - *Reconciling the complicated emotions and trauma surrounding colonialism, and how individual wealth was built on the backs of the poor.*
   - *Critical perspectives portraying the mansion as a symbol of white European-American domination or a monument built to showcase a rich, privileged class and advance a political career.*

5. **Historical Complexity;** *in particular…*

   - *Gaining a nuanced understanding of history that captures "both sides of the story" or the "good, the bad, and the ugly" of the past without oversimplification.*
   - *Reconciling the fact that historical figures were imperfect human beings who did great things for the community while also doing harmful things as a "sign of the times."*

6. **Architecture, Design, and Historic Craftsmanship; *i****n particular…*

   - Appreciation for the elaborate craftsmanship, manual effort, building detail, and architectural styles (Victorian and Italianate Villa) that went into constructing the mansion, noting how modern construction lacks that level of detail.
   - *The general value of historic architectural preservation and keeping physical buildings standing.*

7. **Community Identity, Pride, and Connectedness;** *in particular…*

   - *Fostering civic pride, a sense of community, togetherness, and connection among modern residents.*
   - *The status of the mansion as an indispensable local icon, visual reference point, and the historical "heart" of the Chico community.*
   - *Learning to respect other cultures, celebrate modern diversity, and carry lessons from the past into daily life.*

8. **Bidwell Park and Environmental Stewardship; *i****n particular…***

    - *Gaining an appreciation for the extensive miles of Bidwell Park, natural landscape preservation, flora, fauna, and trees.*
    - *Recognizing the Bidwells' role as environmental stewards and their immense generosity in donating land and gifts for generations of citizens to enjoy.*

9. **California State University, Chico Connection;** *in particular…*

    - *The recognition that Chico State University would not exist without the Bidwells, highlighting the property's significance as the birthplace and catalyst for the university.*

10. **Stepping Back in Time / Immersive Experience;** *in particular…*

    - *The unique "time travel" feeling of walking through the mansion to step into a bygone era or old California.*
    - *Imagining what it felt like to live in the 1800s, including understanding the domestic mechanics, lifestyle, and societal expectations of that time period.*
    - *Nostalgia surrounding personal childhood memories, such as third graders touring the house and taking class photos on the front porch.*

11. **Agriculture and Horticultural Innovations;** *in particular…*

    - *Understanding the vital importance of agriculture, ranching, and horticultural practices to the economic transformation of Rancho Chico, Butte County, and early California.*

12. **Annie Bidwell’s Social Advocacy and Philanthropy;** *in particular…*

    - *Annie Bidwell’s forward-thinking contributions as an early advocate for women's rights, the suffrage movement, and philanthropy.*

13. **The Recent Fire, Loss, and Future Rebuilding;** *in particular…*

    - *Addressing the tragic destruction of the mansion due to arson, the loss of irreplaceable history/artifacts, and the debate over rebuilding.*
    - *Stances demanding that the property be fully rebuilt and restored to its original glory exactly as it was.*
    - *Counter-perspectives suggesting that a physical rebuild is unnecessary, too costly, or should be replaced simply by a memorial plaque or a public green* space.

14. **Opposition to Revisionist History and Modern Bias;** *in particular…*

    - *Critiques regarding modern "woke," politically correct, or revisionist interpretations that judge 19th-century history with 20-20 hindsight or look to vilify historical figures while ignoring their positive local impacts.*

15. **Specific Curated Highlights;** *in particular…*

    - *Distinct internal memories of the home, such as the mansion's portraits with moving eyes that appeared to follow visitors down the hallway.*

16. **Baseline/General Responses; *i**n particular…*

- *Minimal responses expressing hope that visitors leave feeling "inspired," "fortunate," or "reflective."*
- *Disclaimers from respondents stating they cannot answer because they are unsure, have never visited the mansion, or have been unable to visit due to working.*

Additional Comments

Is there anything else you'd like California State Parks to know as part of the Reimagine Bidwell Mansion planning process?

372 individual text responses to the last question of the survey included previously expressed opinions and novel questions. Responses reflect diverse approaches to the question, with some respondents using their response to advocate one more time for their preferred treatment and others using their response to emphasize an aspect of the reimagining process that is particularly important to them.

1. **Rebuild and Restore the Mansion Exactly as It Was;** *with emphasis on…*

- *Refurnishing the interior with authentic period pieces matching what was there when the Bidwells lived there.*
- *Taking care to stabilize or secure the remaining shell/structure before it degrades further.*
- *Resisting the notion that the history of Bidwell Mansion should be "reimagined"*

2. **Alternatives to Reconstruction;** *with emphasis on…*

- *Keeping the burned-out skeleton exactly as it is (similar to European ruin preservation sites), decorating it with vines or foliage, and treating the fire itself as an active chapter of the site's history.*
- *Ruin-based adaptive reuse concepts (e.g., a specific proposal titled "Bidwell After Dark").*
- *Demolishing or removing the burned shell completely because looking at it causes sadness, or replacing it entirely with a simple open park, green space, shaded picnic areas, or a parking lot.*
- *Opposing a reconstruction project due to cost and the belief that doing so improperly glorifies the Bidwells at the expense of a broader story.*

3. **Historical Interpretation, Diversity, and Cultural Ideologies;** *with emphasis on…*

- *Telling a comprehensive, factually correct, and researched history that captures every perspective (the good, the bad, and the ugly) without sugar coating said history.*
- *Giving the property entirely back to the Mechoopda Indian Tribe, letting the tribe decide the future of the space, or establishing interactive learning spaces led directly by Mechoopda Tribal members.*
- *Improved representation and honoring of minority groups who contributed to the local history, such as Chinese workers.*
- *Exploring the broader context of California's settlement, the Bidwells' connections to Washington D.C., and prioritizing local Chico history over statewide history.*

4. **Planning Process, Public Involvement, and Survey Critiques;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Explicit complaints that the survey format is flawed or invalid because it lacks a neutral "middle spot," forcing respondents to choose "Does not align" when they feel neutral.*
    - *Demanding that California State Parks maintain a transparent planning process and keep the public actively informed.*
    - *Implementing a phased approach so that urgent elements move forward quickly while long-term consultations take time.*

5. **Funding, Insurance, and Financial Contributions;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *The willingness of some local citizens and businesses to make monetary donations or organize fundraising campaigns to cover building costs.*
    - *Questions regarding the amount of insurance money to be awarded and the status of lawsuits against the property's security company.*
    - *Recommendations to keep certain outdoor areas or facilities free of charge so that local residents are not deterred by entrance fees.*

6. **Local Construction Labor, Experts, and Student Training;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Giving local experts and contractors (e.g., mason contractors) the opportunity to help install brick and rebuild the structure.*
    - *Partnering with Chico State University and Butte College to create a vocational trade program where students can learn renovation skills, brickwork, and painting during the construction phase.*

7. **Landscaping, Flora, Fauna, and Nature;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Active preservation and maintenance of the site's historic trees to prevent future losses, including collaboration with the Chico State University campus.*
    - *Replacing introduced species with native grasslands vs. criticisms that native planting can look undesirable.*
    - *Including historical wildlife data of the area before and after the Bidwells (e.g., historical fish numbers or the presence of beavers).*
    - *Suggestions to completely remove the grass lawn to eliminate water waste.*

8. **Security, Crime, and Site Maintenance;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Installing a working monitored alarm system, tasteful security fencing, and hiring 24/7 on-site security to prevent future arson, vandalism, or trespassing.*
    - *Closing the park strictly at night to discourage local camping and occupation of the site by unhoused people.*

9. **New Site Facilities and Community Use;** *with emphasis on…*

    - *Evolving the property into an active community space rather than a building that just takes up space.*
    - *Utilizing the rebuilt mansion or grounds as an active venue for public art shows, weddings, parties, and community gatherings.*

- *Integrating the site with the surrounding neighborhoods and the Chico State University campus, potentially forming a tree-lined "museum row" connection extending from the Chico History Museum to MONCA (Museum of Northern California Art).*
- *Improving supporting facilities like parking lots and visitor center structures, their accessibility features, and installing gender-neutral restrooms.*

10. **Educational and Digital Media Ideas;** *with emphasis on…*

- *Creating a dedicated on-site display that explicitly documents and celebrates the rebuilding process itself.*
- *The positive impact of digital tools on education and interpretation vs. criticisms that that digital tools are not authentic to the mansion or its interpretive period.*
- *Creating an interactive website with short online history courses and associated benefits like free admission.*

11. **Specific Associations and Artifact Mentions;** *with emphasis on…*

- *Formal support for a rebuild from the Lambda Pi Alumni Association*
- *Recommendations to preserve the "horse steps" located out back.*
- *Incorporating collaboration with the Chico History Museum.*