



VALUES

In honoring the directives Eleanor Ford provided in her will, while working to meet the needs of contemporary audiences, Ford House makes choices that uphold and further institutional values of equity, playfulness, and philanthropy. We are guided by Eleanor and Edsel's shared legacy of love: of Detroit and its people, of art and culture, and of the greater good.

IMPACT

We activate open-minded culture seekers as they invest time, talent, and money in their own communities and the communities that Eleanor and Edsel supported and loved.

PLACE

AS A HISTORIC SITE, and as a National Historic Landmark, Ford House is committed to preservation and the restoration of both our physical space and the history of the region. In sharing this family estate with our community, we recognize that we preserve not only our physical space, but the spirit in which it was used. We work daily to activate the site with a spirit of play.

AS A CULTURAL CENTER, Ford House is a place where visitors can surround themselves with art and beautiful design. The estate also provides education spaces, galleries, and performance space to support Detroit-based artists and art organizations, in keeping with Eleanor and Edsel's own support of these groups. We encourage artists to find inspiration in the home, collections, and landscape in the creation of new work.

AS A GATHERING SPACE, Ford House welcomes groups both large and intimate to share space with each other as the Ford family did. Ford House is a welcoming, warm, and accessible place for all people to come together, both formally and informally.

AS A PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACE, Ford House provides space for exploration, quiet reflection, the support of healthy local ecology, and ecological observation. We engage in environmentally sustainable practices in order to support these uses. We work to further appreciation for nature and its positive effects on the human spirit.

OUR PRACTICE

Ford House was, in all ways, a family home – filled with love, laughter, and stories. Telling those stories is the core of what we do. Every staff member is a storyteller. The stories we tell are rooted in historical evidence and rigorous research and are woven into every corner of the property. Because families are inherently complex, we tell complex stories. Our visitors come away with their own stories formed from

every experience that they have at Ford House, and we work to make those stories as positive as possible.

We are intentional in building relationships which prioritize equity and promote inclusion, as well as investment in Detroit. We seek out partners that share our institutional values, support our common goals, and broaden our impact.

We examine both the environmental and financial impact of new growth opportunities, including those provided by our new Visitor Center and Administration Building, and are committed to environmental, cultural, and financial sustainability.

We encourage visitors to connect personally with the many facets of the estate as they explore their interests and passions and work to eliminate the physical, educational, and economic barriers that could prevent them doing so.

We strive for innovation, exploring new ideas in the interest of infusing the estate with life. In keeping with Eleanor's enthusiasm for learning and Edsel's forward-thinking design aesthetic, we work to be fresh, relevant, and continually evolving. We are invested in the dynamic use of collections and space and embrace our own curiosity by openly engaging in dialogue with visitors, partners, and each other, around the contemporary legacies of issues raised by a visit to Ford House.

NON-NEGOTIABLES

The Ford family had and continues to have both wealth and privilege. The Fords also used both their time and their wealth to support organizations benefiting immigrants, the arts, children, and culture. This legacy of giving is something Edsel and Eleanor learned from their parents and passed down to their children and future generations.

Grosse Pointe has historically excluded, both implicitly and explicitly, people of color and people of lower socio-economic income brackets. We work to make sure the estate is welcoming to all people. We illuminate the historical legacy of the communities Edsel and Eleanor loved through programming and dialogue while working to address structural racism and classism by investing our time and energy in Detroit and its people.

Historically, the staff employed by the Fords at Gaukler Pointe were white Americans and immigrants. There were many reasons for this. The Fords hired people from the Grosse Pointe area, which upheld the practice of redlining – a set of practices that allowed only white people to live in certain areas. The rise of manufacturing towns drew southern Blacks to northern cities. While not Jim Crow laws were not as overt in the north, life was still difficult for Black Americans. Owing to a mixture of bias and lack of resources such as education and housing, they were assigned the most difficult tasks. While FMC hired people of color and paid them the same as white employees, they were mostly placed into the most distasteful roles, like in the metal foundry. Employment services often designated jobs for specific races. Labor laws at this time didn't apply to domestic workers, so that was a legal practice at the time.

Families are complicated; and Edsel was not his father. Though anti-Semitism was rampant in the world, country, and Detroit while Edsel and Eleanor were alive, in examining their surviving communications, work, and philanthropy, we have no reason to believe either was anti-Semitic. The current Ford family and Ford Motor Company have denounced anti-Semitism.



EDSEL & ELEANOR FORD HOUSE

INTERPRETIVE PLAN

2021
DIALOGIC CONSULTING



THE ESTATE

Ford House tells the story of the home life of a prominent American family.

The Fords were cultural, social and economic leaders in an era of great optimism, as well as a turbulent time of economic depression and world war. They were nationally prominent and while they owned more than one house, Southeast Michigan was their home.

Here, they built their final residence along the shores of Lake St. Clair, at a place known locally as Gaukler Pointe. This is where they raised and nurtured their four children - Henry II, Benson, Josephine, and William - in a safe and loving environment. It reflects their love of family as well as their mutual passion for and interest in art, design and nature.

PROCESS

Dialogic Consulting began working with Ford House in March 2020 in the development of our strategic plan.

The process engaged trustees, directors, and staff in a series of online surveys, individual interviews, focus groups and collaborative workshops resulting in a five-year strategic framework, including 18-month implementation milestones and an accountability plan approved by the Board of Trustees on September 16, 2020.

This interpretive plan includes learning from that seven-month process. It also incorporates findings from a gap analysis conducted between December 2020 and January 2021, as well as interviews with outside stakeholders - educators, museum professionals and friends of the Ford House - conducted in February 2021.



GAP ANALYSIS

In developing this plan, 25 strategy and interpretive documents from 2010 - 2020 were reviewed.

The last three years mark an ambitious and intensive transformation of the Estate, most notably through the building of the new, green Visitor Center and Administration Building as well as a new, impact-centered strategic plan. Additionally, Ford House brought on new executive team members, and now embraces a collaborative leadership model.

Beyond the profound physical changes to the Estate, the dual pandemics of Covid-19 and racial injustice have altered the trajectory of historic house interpretation, causing the field to examine innovative technologies and institutional accountability in an attempt to keep audiences and internal teams safe.

Past interpretative themes were written in service of audiences who already frequented the Estate. With this plan, Ford House is working with an eye toward both growing the Ford House audience and diversifying it. Most notably, this interpretive plan centers interpretive themes and objectives developed to support Ford House's 2020 impact statement:

We activate our audience to invest time, talent, and money in their own communities and the communities that Eleanor and Edsel supported and loved.

Finally, previous interpretive plans emphasized learning objectives that centered Ford family history and design, as well as very general emotional and behavioral objectives, such as: "Visitors will be pleasantly surprised to learn something new about Edsel and Eleanor Ford and/or Gaukler Pointe." With this new plan, Ford House commits to objectives that serve as measurable indicators of the goals set forth by our impact statement.



FROM STAFF & STAKEHOLDERS

Interpretive challenges identified through the strategic and interpretive planning processes include:

Though staff recognize the dedication and deep knowledge of past docents, some described the interpretive content as “boring.” Multiple staff referenced that Ford House does, “the same thing year after year.”

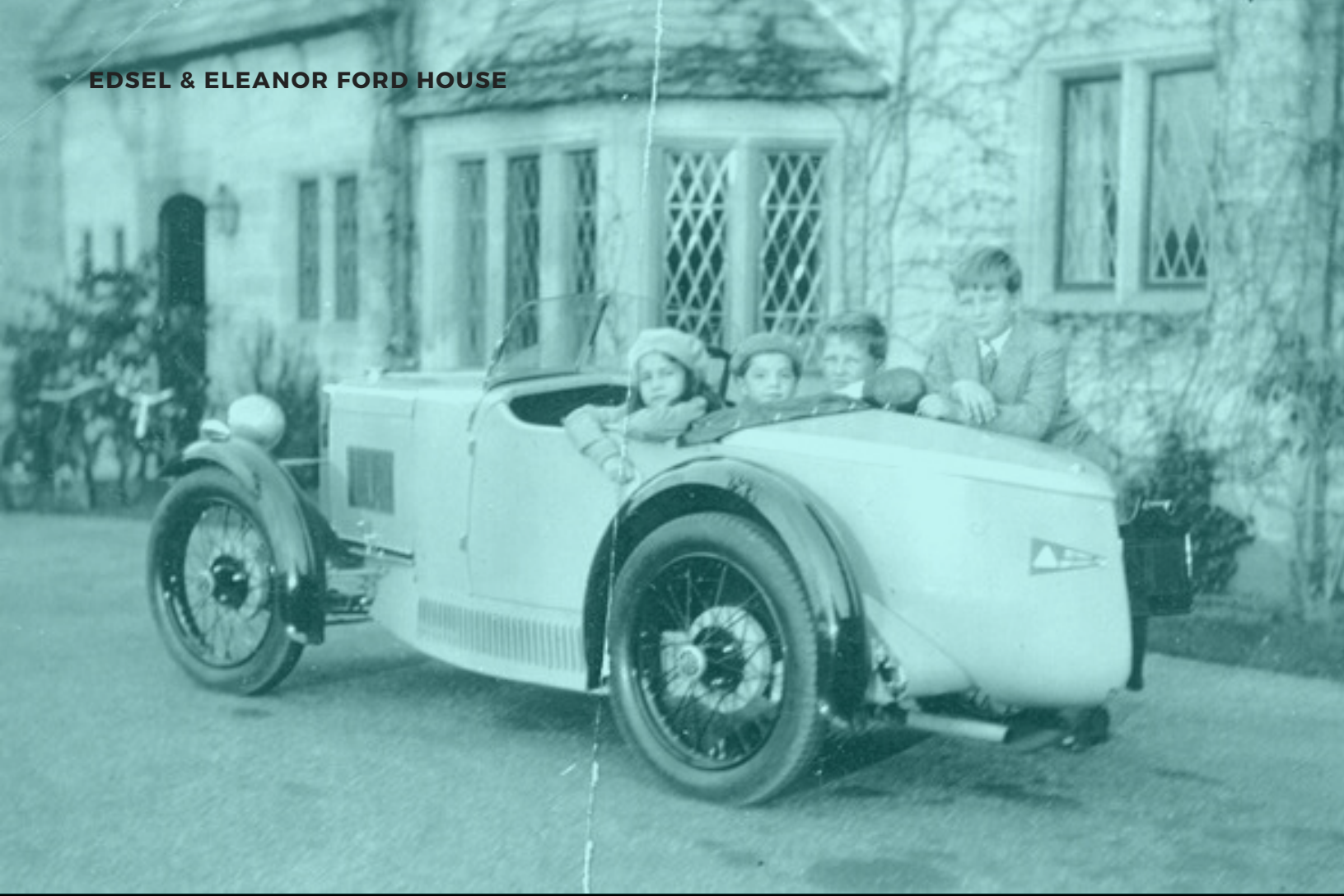
Many outside stakeholders found the word “invest” in the Ford House impact statement off-putting and indicated that philanthropy would need to be discussed in a way that did not only spotlight great wealth and financial contributions. Philanthropy as an interpretive value worked well for educators in light of their schools’ focus on service learning.

Multiple educators loved the House’s environmental education programs and noted the freedom they enjoy while onsite. Educators would appreciate better integration of the house and the estate - themes which would connect what often feels like disconnected experiences. It is important to note that the educators included in the focus groups came predominantly from wealthy districts, and - most likely as a result of their chosen teaching foci - were heavily invested in both science and design-theory based learning.

Museum professionals indicated a clear interest in the site telling more transparent, complex stories and looking critically at issues related to among other themes - capitalism, wealth, anti-Semitism and climate change. There was also a noted interest in environmental sustainability.

Numerous internal respondents indicated they would like to cultivate a diverse audience beyond the confines of Grosse Pointe. There is strong recognition that Ford House could greatly diversify and expand the partners they work with.





AUDIENCE

Ford House events, programs, and tours aim to reflect and respond to diverse cultures, interests, and needs of our regional communities. As we work to deepen our work with vested stakeholders, we are also committed to earning the trust of new audiences. With this interpretive plan, we are focused on:

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- Families and intergenerational learners
 - The tri-county area of Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties
 - National and international visitors drawn to the Ford story

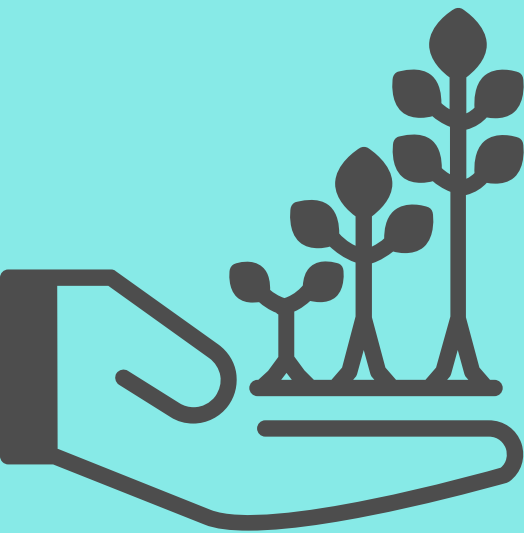
GOALS

The goal for this stage of interpretive planning is to envision a new interpretive experience at Ford House through the lens of its newly-defined institutional values.

In keeping with the objectives set forward in the strategic plan, these new approaches will:

- Tell fuller, more complex, and relevant stories
- Form the basis for a three-year programming and exhibition plan developed in conjunction with community, cultural, and educational partners
- Embrace an audience-centered process that encourages prototyping, evaluation, and revision

This plan is designed to serve the entire Estate, as well as inform offsite interpretation (e.g., on digital platforms).



VALUES-DRIVEN INTERPRETATION

In honoring the directives Eleanor Ford provided in her will, while working to meet the needs of contemporary audiences, Ford House makes choices that uphold and further institutional values of equity, playfulness, and philanthropy. We are guided by Eleanor and Edsel's shared legacy of love: of Detroit and its people, of art and culture, and of the greater good.



LOVE

Ford House was a family home filled with love, joy and stories. Telling those stories, and those of our visitors, is the core of what we do. Whether their love is nature, art, history, design, or giving back, there's a place for them here, a path that fits their passion.



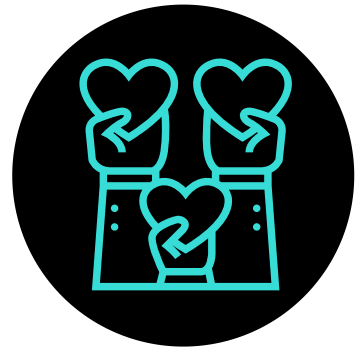
EQUITY

Ford House is a welcoming, warm, and accessible place for all people to come together, both formally and informally. We are intentional in prioritizing equity in the stories we tell, the audiences we serve and the partnerships we build.



PLAYFULNESS

Though a woman of great influence - Eleanor was lots of fun. Though we talk about important subjects, we refuse to take ourselves too seriously. This estate bears witness to generations of play. Visitors should laugh here. Our team should laugh here.



PHILANTHROPY

The Fords shared, and continue to share, their love through philanthropic giving and service at both the local and national levels. We ask ourselves, and our visitors, to give back and provide opportunities that they may do so.

INTERPRETIVE PRACTICE

Ford House is a welcoming, warm, and accessible place for all people to come together, both formally and informally. Visitors may engage in both facilitator-led dialogic experiences and self-guided interpretation.

We strive for innovation, exploring new ideas in the interest of infusing the estate with life. In keeping with Eleanor's enthusiasm for learning and Edsel's forward-thinking design aesthetic, we work to be fresh, relevant, and continually evolving.

We are invested in the dynamic use of collections and space and embrace our own curiosity by openly engaging in dialogue with visitors, partners, and each other, around the contemporary legacies of issues raised by a visit to Ford House.

We recognize that we preserve not only our physical space, but the spirit in which it was used. We work daily to activate the site with a spirit of play. Though we tell complex stories, our guest experience centers joy, humor and discovery.

Ford House provides space for exploration, quiet reflection, the support of healthy local ecology, and ecologic observation. We work to enhance appreciation for nature and its positive effects on the human spirit. We encourage every visitor to "Find Their Own Path."

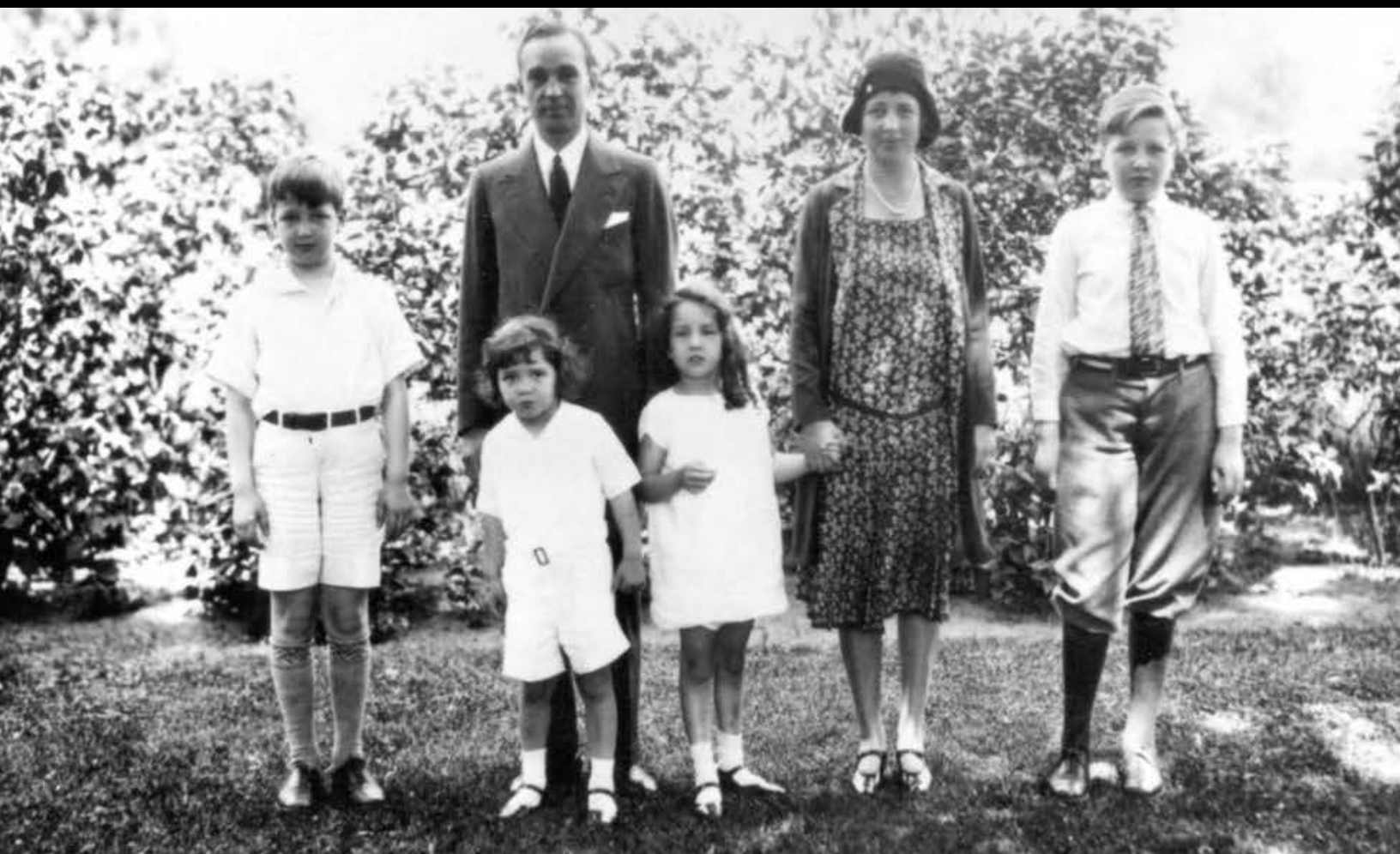


INTERPRETIVE THEMES & OUTCOMES

In the development of interpretive themes, we reviewed prior interpretive themes and revised those ideas - in accordance with our values - to better convey contemporary relevance, impact and complexity.

Each theme is accompanied by a list of audience outcomes for that theme - potential gains in knowledge, emotional impacts or behavioral changes necessary to achieving Ford House's desired impact. Sample dialogic questions are included with each theme.

It is important to remember that in keeping with our desire to be "fresh, relevant, and continually evolving," outcomes and questions will likely - and should - change as the Ford House team becomes more comfortable using dialogic interpretation in both personal and non-personal interactions and in conjunction with the three-year programming and exhibition plan developed with community, cultural, and educational partners outlined in the 2020 strategic plan.



FAMILIAL LOVE

*At Gaukler Pointe, Eleanor and Edsel Ford built a refuge for their family.
Find respite in love and playfulness.*

Facts based in the historic resources.

- Know that Gaukler Pointe is where Edsel and Eleanor Ford lived with their four children.
- Understand why Gaukler Pointe was designed as a refuge from the demands and visibility of city life.
- Know that Edsel and Eleanor Ford collaborated with Jens Jensen and Albert Kahn in designing their home at Gaukler Pointe.
- Examine the sacrifices made by staff - and their families - in living onsite to create the refuge the Fords valued.

Interpretation/extrapolation based on historic resources.

- Recognize that family lies at the heart of Ford House.
- Understand that while they shared many values in common with other Americans, the Fords' family life was distinguished by their social class.

Calls to action based on values expressed or illustrated from historic resources and interpretation.

- Share memories of places in which they have found joy in engaging with others.
- Engage with each other - listening to other visitors' stories and asking questions of each other as appropriate.
- Express curiosity.
- Be willing to "play" via interactive opportunities provided by their facilitator.
- Connect to the Fords in the way they prioritized family.
- Find places of refuge for themselves and spend time in them.
- Articulate how the Fords - and they in turn - have put family first.
- Listen to and share stories of personal connections to the Ford family or the organizations they supported.
- Speak with their children/family about their family's values.



10 QUESTIONS

- Where do you feel most yourself?
- Where do you find refuge?
- What place is most special to you and those you care about?
- What is the worst design choice you or someone close to you has made?
- Along the way, tell me when you see a great place to...tell secrets, read a letter from someone you love, hide from your siblings, kiss, etc...
- What is one thing someone has done for you that made you feel loved?
- What is/was especially valued in your family?
- What rule is/was extremely important to those that raised you? Did you ever break it?
- What is your favorite way to spend time with someone you love?
- What do families most need to thrive in America today?

CIVIC LOVE

The Fords' philanthropy was inspired by a deep and abiding sense of personal responsibility to furthering the collective good - a continual dedication to asking oneself - what do you have to give?

Facts based in the historic resources.

- Know the Ford's history of philanthropy.
- Learn how people become inspired to make change.
- Understand that Eleanor's vision for Ford House is supported through the endowment Eleanor created.

Interpretation/extrapolation based on historic resources.

- Examine what drove Eleanor and Edsel to work to advance the collective good.
- Accept that some generosity is self-serving, and that the pursuit of systemic justice will challenge our individual identities.
- Examine why the Ford family had and continues to have resources that others do not.
- Critique issues of equity within philanthropy and philanthropic organizations.

Calls to action based on values expressed or illustrated from historic resources and interpretation.

- Define civic love.
- Listen to and share personal connections to the Ford family or the organizations they supported.
- Make connections between current issues and the issues the Ford family has worked to address.
- Identify and voice pressing issues in their communities.
- Identify this as a space where differing perspectives on how we promote collective good are welcome.
- Talk about uncomfortable truths.
- Tell Detroit stories that highlight agency and resilience.
- Shift their perspective on the city from need to asset.
- Identify ways to share their assets with others.
- Choose an organization toward which to donate their time, talent or money.
- Share personal/professional connections with others.
- Spend at Detroit-based small businesses.
- Seek out information about our community partners.
- Volunteer with our partner organizations.
- Advocate for and encourage others to engage in philanthropy.



10 QUESTIONS

- Is criticism a practice of civic love? Does it have limitations?
- What connections do you have to the Ford legacy? The organizations they supported?
- What issue is weighing heaviest on your community?
- What do you most love about Detroit?
- What do you most want others to understand about where you come from?
- Is it easier to do what benefits you or what benefits others?
- What is your greatest gift? How do you share it with others?
- What motivates philanthropy? What has led you to give of your time, talent or resources?
- In an era of distrust in civic institutions - whose work do you find most inspiring?
- What are the benefits of a philanthropic society? What are the challenges?

CULTURAL LOVE

The Fords made art and design more accessible and promoted greater access to the natural environment, education, health care, food and leisure. Join us in furthering their legacy.

Facts based in the historic resources.

- Know that Lake St. Clair is part of the largest surface water system on the planet.
- Know the Ford's involvement in the National Park Foundation and the creation of Shenandoah National Park.
- Understand the dangers of invasive species in damaging local ecosystems.
- Understand that nature, and our relationship with it, is culture.
- Know that the estate is preserved for public benefit, per Eleanor's wishes.
- Recognize that Ford House is on 2 migratory bird paths.

Interpretation/extrapolation based on historic resources.

- Question the structures that prevent all Americans from equal access to these resources.
- Consider both the benefits and challenges of Ford House maintaining and exhibiting art from non-Western and indigenous cultures.
- Consider how urban/suburban development effects the environment.
- Understand that we love the environment differently than the Fords did while living here.
- Explore how we balance environmental stewardship with the preservation of a historical site.

Calls to action based on values expressed/illustrated from historic resources and interpretation.

- Appreciate the arts as a vehicle for exploring human condition and its complexities.
- Share how art and/or design inspires them.
- Explore their own creativity.
- Spend more time in natural spaces.
- Begin a meditative, reflective or recreative practice.
- Participate in environmental initiatives on the estate.
- Increase their efforts to recycle, reuse and compost.
- Promote bird, watershed, and environmental protection.
- Make environmentally responsible choices and reduce energy consumption.
- Spend with companies who engage in sustainable business practices.



10 QUESTIONS

- When have you made a choice between personal gain and what best serves the collective?
- Is access to natural spaces a human right?
- What effect does being in a natural space have on you?
- What National Park is your favorite?
- How should private collectors - and collecting institutions - address stolen items currently in their collections?
- What do you make? How does the act of making or creating feel?
- Tell me about your best experience with art.
- Should a government mandate environmentally responsible choices?
- Do you consider the environmental record of a business when choosing to patronize them?
- What is our responsibility in supporting civic institutions - parks, museums, libraries, etc.?

