AASLH Essential Resources

This collection of resources addresses the challenges and opportunities faced by institutions preserving and interpreting state and local history, regardless of size, budget, or subject matter. These six topics, drawn from our Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs), are essential for every organization to understand and consider as they plan innovative exhibits, engaging programs, and meaningful projects to increase the relevance of history for diverse audiences.

AASLH is a national membership organization that provides resources, courses, webinars, books, and more to guide and serve history practitioners across the country. To learn more about how AASLH can help you do your best history work, visit www.aaslh.org.

<u>1. Mission, Vision, and Governance</u>

AASLH Statement of Standards and Ethics (2018)

TL 273: Demonstrating Relevance (2016)

<u>2. Audience</u>

TL 263: What's the Big Idea? Using Listening Sessions to Build Relationships and Relevance (2013)

TL 272: How to Design Programs for Millennials (2015)

<u>3. Interpretation</u>

TL 267: Not Just a Bunch of Facts: Crafting Dynamic Interpretive Manuals (2014)

TL 249: Exhibit Makeovers: DIY Exhibit Planning (2010)

<u>4. Stewardship of Collections</u>

TL 286: Choosing a Content Management System (CMS) (2019)

TL 278: Cleaning House: A Guide to Deaccessioning and Abandoned Property (2017)

<u>5. Stewardship of Historic Structures and Landscapes</u>

TL 247: House History: Some Assembly Required (2009)

TL 242: Preserving Historic Cemeteries (2008)

<u>6. Management</u>

TL 284: 101 Ideas for New Revenue at History Organizations (2018)

TL 283: Fundraising Basics for Local History Organizations (2018)

TL 269: Improving Financial Management (2015)

AASLH
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION for STATE and LOCAL HISTORY

AASLH STATEMENT OF STANDARDS AND ETHICS

(Revised 2018)

Introduction

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) is a membership organization comprised of individuals, agencies, and organizations acting in the public trust, engaged in the practice of history, and representing many disciplines and professions. AASLH expects its members, employees, and elected officials to abide by the ethical and performance standards adopted by all appropriate discipline-based and professional organizations.

The association and its members are to comply with all laws, regulations, and applicable international conventions. The association and its members are expected to take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity so as to warrant public confidence. The following ethical statements and related professional standards are provided for the guidance of all AASLH members and those in the field of history organizations.

Diversity and Inclusion

Everyone makes history. American History is inclusive history. Through staffing, training, collecting, programming, and marketing, history organizations should reflect the diverse communities they serve. History organizations should be attuned to issues and ideas reflective of the breadth of American experience, particularly those relevant to their local communities and should avoid bias in their documentation, collections, preservation, and interpretation.

Intellectual Freedom

Historical scholarship and interpretation depend upon free and open exploration and interpretation of the human experience.

History institutions must respect all legal, ethical, and cultural standards regarding individual privacy, human-based research and access to and use of sensitive cultural materials.

Historical Resources

History organizations frequently have complex and varied collections. These historical resources—including collections of objects, documents, and other records; built environments, cultural landscapes, historical viewsheds, archaeological sites, and other evidence of the past—are the tools through which history practitioners provide meaning to the past and are the bedrock upon which the practice of history rests.

A. In fulfillment of their public trust, association members must be responsible stewards, giving priority to the protection and management of the historical resources within their care and preserving the physical and intellectual integrity of these resources.

B. Institutions should manage their historical resources in accord with comprehensive policies officially adopted by their governing authorities. These policies should be reviewed regularly.

C. Historical resources should not be capitalized or treated as financial assets.

D. History organizations should detail the process for deaccessioning objects[1] from their collections in their collections management policy. Decisions to deaccession should be based upon the relationship of the object to the institution's mission, the object's cultural value (i.e., its ability to interpret a larger story), the physical condition of the object, and/or the ability of the institution to continue to care for the object. Under no circumstances should the decision to deaccession an object be made on the basis of its monetary value.

E. Funds from the sale of collections may be used for the acquisition of collections, or the direct care[2] or preservation of existing collections. Funds should not be used to provide financial support for institutional operations. In the case of institutions that accession their contributing buildings and landscapes (cultural and historical assets that are accessible to and interpreted for the public), funds acquired through deaccessioning can be used for direct care and preservation of objects, archives, buildings, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes that provide public benefit as outlined/defined in their collections policy. Institutional policy should distinguish between building maintenance and building preservation.

F. Historical resources should be acquired, cared for, and interpreted with sensitivity to their cultural origins. All efforts should be made to be transparent about and representative of these origins.

G. The physical condition of historical resources, including a record of their past treatment, should be maintained and appropriate steps taken to mitigate potential hazards to people and property.

Access

Access to historical resources gives preservation activities their meaning. Providing and promoting equitable access to historical resources through exhibitions, tours, educational programs, publications, electronic media, and research is critical in fulfilling the public trust and mission of history organizations. Access and limitations to access are governed by institutional policies and by applicable rights of privacy, ownership, cultural standards, and intellectual freedom.

Interpretation

Historical interpretation may be presented in a variety of formats.

A. All interpretation must be based upon sound scholarship and thorough research. Sound scholarship includes reference to and respect for community-based knowledge. Intellectually honest and scholarly rigorous interpretation reflects the cultural and temporal context and recognizes the potential for multiple perspectives.

B. History organizations should demonstrate respect for all cultures and peoples, and they should strive to be socially responsible and inclusive in their programming and interpretation.

C. Interpretation must use a method of delivery (historic marker, exhibit, book, program, etc.) appropriate for the intended audience.

Governance

The primary responsibility for governance, institutional policies, financial stability, legal accountability, and safety of a historical organization rests with its governing authority.

A. The governing authority has the responsibility to safeguard the organization's assets, including, but not limited to: the good name of the organization, its mission, its human and financial resources, collections, facilities, property, members and donors.

B. The governing authority should insure that the institution maintains accurate financial records and is managed in a fiscally sound manner.

C. The governing authority should insure that its organization has the financial and human resources necessary to fulfill the organization's mission.

D. The governing authority should ensure proper delegation of responsibility.

E. The governing authority should establish policies that reflect current legal, ethical, and professional practices.

F. The governing authority should regularly review the organization's policies and ensure their application.

Human Resources

Responsibility for the operation of a history organization rests with the staff, whether they are paid or volunteer.

A. All individuals in the service of history—employees, volunteers, or interns—deserve the respect and support of their peers, superiors, and institutions.

B. Individuals employed in the practice of history deserve pay and benefits commensurate with their training, performance, and contribution to the institution.

C. Volunteers should be held to clearly articulated performance objectives and offered the same respect as their paid colleagues.

D. While internships provide important training experience for students and new professionals, history organizations should strive to pay interns at a fair level reflecting the value of history work. The practice of unpaid internships disadvantages individuals who do not have access to familial or other resources that would allow them to work for little or no compensation.

E. Institutions should maintain personnel policies, adopted by the governing authority and distributed to all staff, documenting the terms of employment.

F. Institutions have the responsibility to engage personnel, including volunteers, who have appropriate training and expertise and to provide them with opportunities for additional training necessary to continue to meet their responsibilities.

G. If the governing authority employs an administrator, that person alone is responsible for the employment, discipline, and release of all other staff, subject to established personnel policies.

H. An employee or volunteer is never wholly separable from the institution, and actions by an employee or volunteer may reflect upon the organization or be attributed to it.

I. Institutions have the responsibility to respect the privacy of their members, volunteers, and employees and act in their best interests.

J. Institutions should not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, creed, age, sex, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, or gender identity.

K. Employers, staff, and volunteers shall not engage in or condone any type of harassment or discrimination.

L. Institutions and individuals working and volunteering in the history field should observe confidentiality and treat colleagues with respect, fairness, courtesy, and good faith, avoiding relationships with others which could compromise professional judgment or their reputation.

Revenue Producing Activities

Activities that involve the marketing and sale of products, programs, services, and facilities are acceptable ways to produce revenue and increase public awareness of, and participation in, historical activities.

A. No revenue producing activities should violate or compromise the integrity of an institution's mission. These activities should not hamper the ability of an institution or individual to meet professional standards or endanger an institution's nonprofit status.

B. Control of the intellectual content of products (e.g., exhibitions, publications, collections, programs) should not be delegated to outside parties for the purpose of obtaining financial support.

Confidence and Trust

History organizations exist to serve the public interest and must always act in such a way as to maintain public confidence and trust.

A. No governing authority member, employee, and/or volunteer should use their position, or the information and access acquired as a result of their position, for personal gain or for the benefit of other organizations. All proprietary information should remain confidential.

B. Board members, volunteers, and employees shall refrain from personal collecting when it conflicts with the collecting interests of their institution. Statements of personal collecting interests should be obtained prior to an individual joining an organization and updated on a regular basis. Collections should not be made available to any individual for personal use, either on or off the premises of the organization that owns the collections, or for any other purpose contrary to the adopted collections policies.

About the American Association for State and Local History

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) is a national association that provides leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful. Visit www.AASLH.org for more information about membership, continuing education, the association's resource center, and other programs and services.

Endnotes

[1] For the purposes of this statement, the word *object* is used broadly to refer to all items in an organization's accessioned or permanent collections.

[2] *Direct care* is an investment that enhances the life, usefulness or quality of a museum's collection. This definition was first introduced in the American Alliance of Museums' publication, *Direct Care of Collections: Ethics, Guidelines and Recommendations* (April 2016).

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#273

Demonstrating Relevance

By Mark Sundlov

At the AASLH 2015 Annual Meeting in Louisville, AASLH's Field Services Alliance (FSA) affinity group hosted a Current Issues Forum to discuss the importance of, and the methods for, history organizations to demonstrate relevance to their various audiences. FSA "is an organized group of individuals, offices, and agencies that provide training opportunities, guidance, technical services, and other forms of assistance to local historical societies, archives, libraries, and museums in their respective states or regions." Through their interactions with so many different history organizations, FSA members are well positioned to see trends (both good and bad) in the operations of those organizations. One trend that FSA members have seen in history organizations is a lack of appreciation for the importance of demonstrating relevance to their many audiences. Many of the difficulties that history organizations face have their roots in their failure to demonstrate relevance to their various audiences. The forum addressed the importance of demonstrating relevance and provided some tools to help history organizations succeed in that endeavor.[1]

The importance of demonstrating relevance in order to achieve success seems obvious. However, we often overlook that important work, simply take it for granted, or only passively pursue it. We all love history. We all love what we do, we naturally see its inherent importance, and we assume that others do as well. That is a dangerous assumption. Others do not always and naturally see the importance of our work. Or, if they do believe the work we are accomplishing is important, it quickly becomes irrelevant when compared to other things that they have given higher priority.

What do we mean by relevance? Relying on (but not going too deeply into) the *theory of relevance*, as developed by linguists Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, I'll provide a brief explanation. Foremost, relevance begins with communication. If we are not communicating, or providing *inputs* for a listener, we cannot create relevance. Second, when communication begins, both the speaker and the listener have a reasonable expectation of relevance. The speaker assumes she has something relevant to say, and the listener expects to hear something relevant. This is good news, for it means we start off on the right foot. However, once the communication has started, in order to prove the relevance of her message, the speaker must ensure two things about the message—it must be *helpful* to the listener and the message must be *easily understood*. If the listener does not perceive the message as helpful toward achieving her goals and/or if the listener has a difficult time understanding the message, the listener will perceive the message as irrelevant and will go about her day—she will not act upon the message.[2]

While this understanding of relevance seems rather straightforward, it is surprising how many of us fail to appreciate its importance and execute it in our daily work. If we imagine the creation of relevance as a chain, we can understand that every link in the chain is essential for the overall success. The chain will break if:

- We do not communicate our message
- Our intended audience does not receive the message we are communicating (we might be shouting into the darkness, failing to overcome the cacophony, or using the wrong communication platform)
- The message we communicate is not perceived as helpful by the receiving audience
- We are sending our message to the wrong audience
- Our message is muddled or difficult to understand.

We have all witnessed, experienced, and committed these failures.

To create relevance, our messages must create a positive effect in our audience (or excite them with the promise of future positive effects) and must be readily understood. When crafting messages, we must understand we have multiple audiences and that those audiences have different goals and different styles of communication.

To create broad relevance and support for history organizations, we must craft multiple messages for these multiple audiences. We must consciously consider how we can help those different audiences and how we can most easily communicate to them. History organizations have seemingly countless audiences and serve many communities (and sub-communities). While accepting the fact that we cannot be all things for all people, if we want our organizations to succeed we can start by identifying a number of key constituent groups and begin communicating with those groups in ways that create relevance.

The participants in our session, through small and large group discussions, developed a list of proven or promising approaches to developing and demonstrating relevance to four audiences: Educators, Neighbors, Community Leaders, and Donors. The result of those discussions is the foundation of this technical leaflet. It is meant to assist organizations struggling to find paths to relevance and to support those who work in field services who are responsible for assisting them. There is a nearly endless list of different audiences, with different (sometimes conflicting) needs and interests, that history organizations serve. This technical leaflet, coupled with an understanding of the theory of relevance, establishes a pattern of communication (and action) that can be repeated with any audience. The remainder of this leaflet will address ways to demonstrate relevance to each of these audiences.

Educators

Throughout the historic trajectory of museums and history institutions, working with schools and educators has increasingly solidified itself as a basic and expected function of operations. Increasingly, museums have been expected to fill a role much more significant than the end-of-the-year, blow-off-some-steam, run-around-and-scream field trip. Teachers just don't have time for that nonsense anymore. This role has developed partly because some museums have successfully demonstrated relevance to what teachers are attempting to accomplish—mainly to educate children. Some museums have been able to demonstrate this better than others. Those that have demonstrated relevance to educators have crafted their communication with educators in a way that enables educators to quickly realize how museums can help them fulfill their own objectives (and, of course, the museums have successfully delivered that help).

Again, the first and most critical link in demonstrating relevance is the initiation of communication. Communication, open, two-way dialogue between educators and museum staff (be they paid or unpaid, full- or part-time, single job function or multi-hatted), is the most critical step that history organizations can take to establish relevance with educators. Simply put, if your institution is irrelevant to local schools and educators, ask, "How am I communicating with those educators?"

- Have you called or written them and asked if you can visit them and explain how you can help them?
- Have you invited them to visit your museum and offered tours of your exhibits and facilities?
- Have you requested their advice (or asked them to participate in an evaluation) on ways to help them achieve their goals?
- Have you hosted a community open-house or an educator appreciation night?

If you haven't initiated, or are not continually nourishing, open dialogue with educators—start now. If you'd like to be relevant to your local educators, you should be able to answer "Yes" to many of the previous questions. Opening conversations is the first link in demonstrating your relevance and will eventually make a significant difference for your organization.

Remember, it's not just the teachers that will ultimately determine your relevance with educators. It will likely be necessary to open these educator-related communications, and to demonstrate relevance not only to frontline educators, but also to the school boards, to your own board, and to funders and other supporters. *It is critical to remember that to create relevance, the message must be clear and demonstrate to the receiver of the message how what they are hearing is going help them.* What educators find helpful to their cause may not be the same things other decision-makers find helpful to their cause. Be prepared to craft messages for all audiences involved—all of whom will have different, but related, goals.

When you start (or improve upon) communication with educators, you must *clearly communicate* how your organization can *help them* meet required content and skill development standards. When educators bring students to your organization, they are coming with the expectation that it can help their students learn content and skills that they cannot necessarily learn in the classroom. Students will likely be tested on skills and content they were expected to learn over the course of the year and will be expected to demonstrate a minimum level of proficiency. The results of those tests can ultimately contribute to a number of critical decisions at the school and school district. You help educators by helping them achieve their educational goals. This is how you are relevant. In other words, to become and remain relevant with educators, you must not waste their precious time.

Fortunately, history organizations are well positioned to help teachers educate students. You have a variety of resources that educators cannot find in any other location, including your rich collections and an in-depth knowledge of your subject matter. Your organization has the collections that can lift the history out of the textbooks and place it directly in front of the students. You can enable students to learn skills and content in a unique way. Work with educators to make that a reality.

Once you have demonstrated an initial level of relevance to educators, you have made a significant step in the right direction. Here are some additional concerns that you should address in order to maintain that relevance.

- **Your educational offerings must match state standards in content and skill development.** If you have healthy communication with your local educators, they can help you make sure this is a reality.
- **Your organization must be accessible.** Sometimes even after you have demonstrated relevance there are legitimate financial and logistical hurdles that educators must overcome to get their students to your location. Creatively find ways to assist educators to overcome those hurdles (e.g., assist with finding funds for busing) or bring your programming directly into the classroom.
- **Design your programs to meet the time constraints educators face.** Again, clear communication with your local educators is necessary to make this a reality.
- **Understand the importance of true collaboration and avoid duplicating services.** Smaller organizations can especially benefit from collaboration with others to enhance their offerings. Duplication of services (two organizations offering similar programs in a single locale) will result in one of the organizations not being able to establish relevance to educators.
- **Consider the costs you impose on educators.** Have you created a financial hurdle that educators cannot overcome? Is that financial hurdle actually necessary to help you meet your bottom line or is it poorly conceived with overlooked implications? Answers to financial questions (and needs) will vary by organization, but you must consider them. Your goal should be to minimize the financial impact on educators who find your organization relevant and would like to visit.
- **Remember that educators also exist outside of the classroom.** There are educators in home schools, retirement homes, prisons, and many other locations who would find your work relevant. You may find that your organization is best suited to work with a particular set of educators. Expand your horizons beyond your local schools.
- **Consider the impact of different languages and cultures in your area.** You may be unwittingly closing yourself off to an entire neighborhood or community due to the creation or maintenance of barriers.

Neighbors

In my professional life, there are few things more disheartening than a history organization irrelevant to its neighbors. This happens for a number of reasons. However, like all instances of irrelevance, communication (or lack thereof) is often at the root. The assumption and expectation of relevance on behalf of the history organization often accompanies (and sometimes is erroneously justified by) the lack of communication. History organizations that suffer from irrelevance all too often also suffer from some level of hubris. We hear expressions of disbelief from organizations who just don't understand why their communities don't appreciate them more. Typically, these organizations are sitting back, expecting the community to come to them in what would amount to a one-way relationship. These organizations are often paralyzed by stagnant boards, low volunteer participation, low attendance, little community participation in programs, and a general lack of involvement and excitement in the organization. They become irrelevant to their neighbors.

So, what can history organizations do to become relevant to their neighbors? Institutions have three significant responsibilities:

- Know audiences.
- Be open (physically and mentally) to neighbors.
- Support neighbors (collect and preserve their objects and their stories; open your space to your neighbors) and be an active participant in neighborhoods.

1 Know Your Audience

The idea that history organizations must be sincerely involved with their communities underpins all of these responsibilities. Organizations should encourage staff to be actively involved with other community organizations and efforts. That involvement can lead to staff members serving as ambassadors for their museum and to their participation in meaningful, selfless work with and for their communities. Additionally, all of these responsibilities reveal the core tenets of relevance theory. Organizations must be openly and clearly communicating with their neighbors while offering something meaningful to the neighbors.

Knowing your audience can happen in a number of ways. Formal evaluation programs like AASLH's Vistors Count! can provide your organization with a better understanding of your current audience and can help you appreciate what your audience considers to be your current strengths and weaknesses. Conducting such an evaluation will not only help you know the audience that is participating in your organization's offerings, but you can also learn who is not engaged with your organization. You may discover that your neighbors are not coming at all, thus confirming your fears that your neighbors consider you irrelevant. When you discover your weaknesses through an evaluation, you can gradually begin to turn those around through the development of new programs and a realignment of your priorities.

Another way to get to know your audience, and more specifically your neighbors, is to go outside your walls and visit the community. Organizational neighbors are much like the neighbors in your personal life—if you want to build a relationship with them, you must be willing to knock on doors and introduce yourself. It is through introductions and visits that you can enter into the conversations that lead to friendships and relevance. In the professional world, knocking on your neighbors' doors can take a lot of different forms, including attending community meetings and getting involved with the efforts of other organizations in your neighborhood. Sure, this type of relationship building takes time. But ultimately, once an institution builds and nourishes healthy, reciprocal relationships, new opportunities will open up that can lead not only to the betterment of your organization but to the betterment of your neighbors and your community as well.

Like any relationship, getting to know your neighbors will take time and commitment. However, if you are not willing to get to know your audience and build relationships, you run the risk of your neighbors perpetually considering you irrelevant. That irrelevance will leave you without their support and participation, and this could leave you vulnerable when difficult community decisions, especially funding decisions, are being made. That lack of involvement in your community also increases the difficulty of successfully preserving historic properties, important efforts many history organizations commonly undertake.

2 Be Open to Your Neighbors

The second significant responsibility is to be open to your neighbors—both physically and mentally. Being physically open simply means that your doors must be open when your neighbors are able and likely to visit. The most obvious example of this is the importance of opportunities for your neighbors to visit during the evening and weekends—when they are generally not working. Physically open also means physically accessible—your facility must be accessible for all members of your neighborhood. Mentally open primarily refers to issues of interpretation in your exhibits and programs. Are you inclusive? Do you share stories that are of interest to your neighbors? Are you engaged with your community when you develop new exhibits and programs? Answering "No" to any of these questions increases the chances of your irrelevance to your community.

3 Support Your Neighbors

The third significant responsibility is all about serving your neighbors. By supporting your neighbors and validating the importance of their history by collecting, preserving, and sharing their objects and stories, you will build upon a relationship of communication that leads to relevance. Additionally, you can serve your audience by opening your space to them. If you have meeting space or other useful facilities, ensure your neighbors know that that space is open for their needs. Perhaps you can offer special rental rates for organizations who need meeting space but have limited budgets.

Along with those three significant responsibilities, there are a number of other important considerations for establishing neighborhood relevance.

- *Be involved in the events and associations that are part of your community.* For example: staff can serve as volunteers, have an interactive booth or display at events, or financially support events. There are countless other ways to get directly involved.
- *Establish yourself as an anchor for neighborhood stability and safety.* Perhaps you can create afterschool programs for latchkey children, enabling them to come to your organization where they can be safe from potentially dangerous neighborhoods. Or offer programs such as "Safe Trick-or-Treat" for children in neighborhoods where trick-or-treating might not be a safe option.
- *Serve as a place for the community to congregate.* Open your doors to community forums, community events, or other activities.
- *Collaborate with organizational neighbors.* Find out what other organizations are doing in your neighborhood. Are there avenues for you to collaborate and use your strengths in those activities?
- *Develop visual and oral exhibits based on the community's history.* Let your neighbors see themselves and share their stories through their exhibits.
- *Take the time to gain a deeper understanding of your neighbors.* Shed any previous stereotypes and develop your understanding of who they are, what their concerns are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, how you can serve them, and how you can work together to enrich your community. Listen and learn from your neighbors.
- *Use your immediate space to discuss and interpret your larger neighborhood space.*
- *Utilize micromarketing.* Rely on community-based platforms to market to your community—placing less reliance on larger market platforms that may be less relevant to your immediate community.
- *Be nimble and well positioned to react consistently to contemporary concerns.* Remove or diminish overly burdensome bureaucratic systems that inhibit your ability to be flexible.
- *Know the needs and concerns of your audience.* Don't jump onto a national bandwagon for the sake of jumping on a bandwagon—especially if it is irrelevant to your audience or neighbors.
- *Work with and support your local schools.*
- *Invite your community to assist with the development and curation of exhibits.*

Donors

Generally speaking, our best intentions cannot be fulfilled without at least some financial support. While history organizations have multiple revenue streams, typically they all rely on philanthropic donors, foundations, or granting organizations, at some point. Foundations and granting agencies typically have well defined missions and goals they are attempting to achieve with their donations and/or grants. In procuring this financial support, institutions must demonstrate relevance to these donors. Unlike demonstrating relevance to educators and neighbors, demonstrating relevance to donors can be more formal and sometimes more challenging.

But don't forget demonstrating relevance always begins with communication! When working with foundations and granting agencies, communication often begins with thorough research. Before approaching a funding source, know what the funder is interested in funding. What is the funder trying to achieve? What types of organizations does the donor support? Many funders only fund specific types of projects with specific goals. Pursue funders that find your work relevant to their own. One source to locate appropriate funders is the Foundation Directory Online, a service of the Foundation Center (www.foundationcenter.org). Although you can use the Foundation Center basic tools to find foundations in your area, the directory has powerful search tools that can help you locate foundations that will find your work relevant to their goals. (To access the full capacity of the database you will need a subscription; your local library may have a subscription and may be able to provide you with access.)

For granting organizations such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, search their websites to learn about their missions, the different grants they offer, eligibility requirements, and ultimately whether or not your proposed project will be relevant and eligible. At Grants.gov you can search for federal grants appropriate for your organization and subscribe to receive messages when grants become available.

Begin all of this work with the development of a fundraising plan. The plan will give your organization direction while contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of your fundraising. The plan should identify and communicate how you can deliver history-connected impact through measurable, specific outcomes and compelling narratives. The plan should also set a path for you to establish relationships with diverse funders according to priority projects.

Once you've determined appropriate funders for your projects, initiate the communication that will enable you to demonstrate the relevance of your organization and programs. That demonstration of relevance, coupled with a solid project plan and other financial or community support, will help ensure you successfully receive funding from your targeted organizations.

Additional items that support you as you demonstrate relevance (or help you sustain that relevance) are:

- Develop a carefully constructed, well thought-out case statement. Referencing back to the relevance theory, this case statement should clearly and concisely communicate your need and how fulfilling that need will be mutually beneficial to your organization and the funder.
- Prepare narratives, stories, and examples that demonstrate your need and your relevance.
- Develop measurable, specific outcomes that demonstrate how proposed projects will help you meet your mission, serve your audience, and meet the mission of the funder.
- Successfully steward the funds you have received and the relationships with the donors who contributed those funds.
- Develop methods to publicly recognize and show appreciation toward funders who have supported your organization.
- Demonstrate your ability to use the power of history to transform lives and benefit your community.
- Build relationships with other organizations with a goal of accomplishing significant programs or events for the community.
- Develop a portfolio of other donors and be prepared to demonstrate the investment of other funders in your work.

Community Leaders

The final audience the forum examined was community leaders. This audience is comprised of the political leaders who make decisions at the different levels of government—city council, county commission, state and federal legislators, government executives—and the leaders of other government-based or -funded organizations and departments: convention and visitors bureaus, tourism departments, and the like.

Many history organizations receive (or would like to receive) funding from local, state, and federal governments. In order to do that, organizations must establish a strong argument for a portion of limited tax-based funds and clearly demonstrate their importance and relevance within their communities. If organizations have previously established relevance to educators, neighbors, and other funders, demonstrating relevance to community leaders should come easier. However, if organizations are still seen as irrelevant by local educators and the people and other organizations within their community, it will likely prove very difficult (or impossible) to gain the support of community leaders.

Three significant actions are necessary to demonstrate relevance and importance to community leaders. The first is economic. One of the primary actions is to demonstrate the key role you can play in the local economy, more specifically, the multiplier effect that museums and other tourism destinations create. Economists define the multiplier effect as "the total sales, output or other measure of economic benefits generated once the initial visitor spending has worked its way through the economy…through inter-industry transactions (the 'indirect impact') and through employee consumption expenditures (the 'induced impact')." In simpler words, when tourists visit your institution, they spend money at the museum. That money enables the museum to create and maintain local jobs. It also enables the organization to contract with local businesses to sustain operations. Those contracts enable local business to sustain their business (and pay their employees) and also reinvest in the local community. This is "indirect impact." Museum employees spend their money in the local community on living and recreation expenses. Through that, the museum employees support other businesses and sustain other jobs. This is the "induced impact" wherein a dollar an out-of-town tourist spends at a history organization sets off a multiplier effect that sustains jobs and local businesses. The impact of that one dollar is multiplied as it works its way through the local economy.[3]

While it is widely agreed that it is very difficult to accurately measure the multiplier effect in any given industry and locale, economists have proven the principle. So while you may not be able to supply accurate multiplier figures to community leaders, you can definitely argue the principle of the multiplier effect. Additionally, many museums have found creative ways to determine where visitors are spending their money while in town. (The use of front-desk surveys and the distribution of coupons is one way to track visitor spending.)

Although you may not have the capacity to conduct your own economic impact study, collaborating with other humanities or tourism organizations can enable the completion of such a study. Minnesota museums banded together to complete such a study and clearly demonstrate their significant economic impact. "In 2011, Minnesota's museums directly infused $337 million in spending into Minnesota's economy. Including indirect impacts, museum wages and spending contributed $690 million to the state's economy." Additionally, Minnesota museums "directly employ an estimated 1,700 full and part time workers, paying $80 million in wages." These numbers speak volumes to community leaders who are making important funding decisions.[4]

The second action is political. Make the point to community leaders that your institution serves their constituents. Our institutions play an important role in the development of the social and cultural opportunities in a community. We help create holistic communities that generate pride of community within its citizens. Additionally we improve student education through our work with schools. When we make community leaders aware of these additional, positive impacts, we help them understand that we are helping them by helping their constituents—we demonstrate our relevance to their goals.

The final action is active participation. We must be active community participants and assume leadership roles within the communities we serve. Our active engagement demonstrates we understand that our organizations are part of something larger than ourselves. That selflessness can ultimately benefit our organizations.

Among the importance of demonstrating our economic impact, stressing our service to their constituents, and our active participation in the community, other factors help organizations build and sustain relevance in the eyes of community leaders:

- Connect and serve the goals of the community and its leaders and not always (or only) our own organizational goals.
- Open dialogue and nurture relationships with community leaders and their staffs. In that relationship, as in any relationship, remember to ask, "What can I offer you?" And remember to offer support as often as you ask for support.

The History Relevance Campaign

From the micro level of institutional relevance to the macro level of the relevance of our discipline, community relevance is a key theme of our work. The History Relevance Campaign (HRC) is a diverse group of history professionals posing questions about what makes the past relevant today. The campaign serves as a catalyst for discovering, demonstrating, and promulgating the value of history for individuals, communities, and the nation. It is building on past conversations and attempting to bring together groups across the history spectrum.

The HRC recognizes the continuing need for the entire history field—history professionals, academic and public historians, historic preservationists, educators, archivists, filmmakers, everyone engaged in the history enterprise—to use a common language to articulate why history is relevant and to demonstrate how historical research teaches skills vital to the future of our communities, our states, our regions, and our nation.

To that end the HRC led a series of national conversations about history's value, and the result is the Value of History statement (http://on.aaslh.org/EndorseHRC). Our hope is that various components of the history field will widely embrace and adapt the seven values in their own work. So far, more than 100 organizations have endorsed the statement.

The HRC has selected three initial target groups on which to focus: history organizations, the K-20 education community, and funders. All of these groups have potential for widespread impact. The HRC created task forces to focus efforts toward each audience.

Three projects are at the forefront of the HRC's work:

1 **The Impact Project** is an effort to find examples of history organizations who are not only doing impactful programming that demonstrates history's relevance in the community, but also collecting and analyzing evidence of that impact. By identifying and documenting these best-practice projects, others can learn from them. This project can also inform the efforts of funding agencies desiring to require documentation of impact.

2 **National Governors Association.** The HRC has begun work with the National Governors Association Education and Workforce Committee to help administrators at the state level articulate and promote the value of connecting the past to the present.

3 **The HRC Tool Kit project** is an ongoing crowd-sourced resource that will help organizations of all sizes better articulate the value of history to their many different audiences, from Chambers of Commerce to prospective funders, community leaders, visitors, local students, and the press.

Together we can increase the volume of our conversation and make the case that the study of the past is vital to healthy communities in the future. As we've written in the HRC Impact Statement, "People value history for its relevance to modern life, and use historical thinking skills to actively engage with and address contemporary issues."

BY TIM GROVE

- Find out how community leaders perceive your organization. Is it the perception you want? How can you work to change it if need be?
- Demonstrate to community leaders that you have the potential, through creative collaborations and leveraging, to increase the capacity of cultural organizations in your locale.
- Remind community leaders that you serve a critical role in protecting things that their constituents care about. You are entrusted as the responsible steward of the community's treasured objects and stories.
- Act as a venue for engagement where dialogue can occur that shapes the future of the community.

Conclusion

A history organization must actively demonstrate relevance if it is to successfully meet its mission. The theory of relevance informs us that to demonstrate relevance we need to actively communicate. In that communication, the receiver of the message must easily understand the message and the receiver must readily be excited about how the message (and expected follow-up actions) can benefit them. History organizations have multiple audiences to which they must demonstrate their relevance. Those audiences receive messages differently, and each is seeking different types of assistance. To create relevance among different audiences, museums must:

- Begin (or sustain) communication with those audiences.
- Craft an easy-to-understand message for each audience
- Include in that message how the museum can help or support the needs of the particular audience.

Once an institution demonstrates relevance to an audience, it must deliver on the help that the original message promised.

This technical leaflet is meant to assist history organizations with their demonstration of relevance to four key audiences: Educators, Neighbors, Funders, and Community Leaders. However, history organizations have many more audiences than these four. Following the model presented here, organizations should examine their own audiences and how they can best demonstrate relevance to each of them. The days of assuming relevance, and being accusatory towards those who don't understand our relevance, are long past.

Acknowledgments

The ideas and thoughts in this technical leaflet either came directly from, or find their origins in the wisdom expressed by, a dedicated group of people who convened during a session of the AASLH 2015 Annual Meeting. These individuals, with countless years of experience and invaluable knowledge from their studies and their experience, are concerned about history organizations that are struggling to establish their relevance to many of their different audiences. The author has attempted to summarize and expand upon the ideas represented by the individuals in that forum—any errors of omission or submission are his alone and should not be attributed to the individuals.

Mark Sundlov is Local History Services Manager at Ohio History Connection and the current chair of the Field Services Alliance. Mark works with local history organizations in Ohio connecting them with resources, educational opportunities, and to each other. He is a 1998 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy (B.S. History), a 2007 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (M.A. Public History), and a member of the SHA Class of 2011. He can be reached at msundlov@ohiohistory.org. Raw audio of the session featured is available at http://on.aaslh.org/FSA2015Louisville.

[1] American Association for State and Local History, Field Services Alliance, community.aaslh.org/fsa.

[2] See Diedre Wilson and Dan Sperber, *Meaning and Relevance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[3] See Endre Horváth and Douglas C. Frechtling, "Estimating the Multiplier Effects of Tourism Expenditures on a Local Economy through a Regional Input-Output Model," *Journal of Traveo Research* vol. 37, no. 4 (May 1999): 324-332.

[4] American Alliance of Museums, *Sample Economic and Educational Impact Statements*, www.aam-us.org/advocacy/resources/economic-impact-statement/samples.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#263

What's the Big Idea? Using Listening Sessions to Build Relationships and Relevance

By Janeen Bryant and Kamille Bostick

The Challenge of Listening and Intentionality

Museums have good intentions. Whether preserving history, educating the public, collecting artifacts, interpreting perspectives, or creating community programming, museums nationwide have long settled into the niche of providing expertise. Too often, "museums tell stories about human experiences or situations that the curators or developers have not experienced personally–historic events, cultural developments, scientific discoveries." Telling contemporary stories with authenticity requires museums to build capacity for understanding based on building relationships and listening.[1]

When Charlotte, North Carolina's Levine Museum of the New South and its two partner institutions, the Atlanta History Center and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, joined forces to look at how to engage Latino audiences, we had to find a way to listen that was both effective and replicable. Our *Latino New South* listening sessions were fertile grounds to learn to listen and how to listen best.

One Museum's Response to Changing Demographics

A major demographic change has swept across the American South since 1990. It is a particular case pointing to a national demographic transformation. Within a generation, the entire U.S. will have no single racial or ethnic majority. Rather this country will be mix of people from multiple backgrounds.[2]

The Center for the Future of Museums of the American Alliance of Museums urges all of America's cultural institutions to engage directly with this demographic transformation, to boldly rethink what audiences they aim to reach, the programs they will undertake, and what tools they will use. The center writes that currently barely 10 percent of core museum visitors are people of color. If that does not change quickly, museums will find themselves marginalized and irrelevant.

An Opportunity for Authentic Listening

Listening has many connotations and implications, many negative. Below are some responses from sessions when we asked museum professionals, "When I say 'listening session' what comes to mind?"

- Inviting
- Assumptions
- Public relations
- Survey
- Necessary evil
- Sense of obligation
- Internal vs. external listening
- Complicated
- Hard
- Group selection
- Focus group
- Control
- Don't want to/Not critical

Unfortunately, the prevailing notion that listening is simply a waste of staff time, resources, and energy permeates the field. Indeed, it is difficult, time-consuming, and hard work, but ultimately rewarding, authentic, and increases institutional relevance. An

CASE STUDY: *The Latino New South Project*

Having learned many valuable lessons from the exploration between Latinos and African Americans with past projects and ignited by a hunger in the community to continue with authentic relationship-building, particularly the process that some call "Latinization," Levine Museum embarked on a multi-year exploration of Latinos in the New South. The *Latino New South Project* is a learning network of three history museums in the southeastern U.S. The Atlanta History Center and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute joined Levine Museum of the New South to conduct on-the-ground research to gain a better understanding of this historic shift.

Our process started in May 2012 as all three institutions grappled with ways to approach learning more about the Latinos in their communities. We began with a research phase in which we recognized that relationships and connections were vital. We began to understand that each city had vastly different stories to tell, if we were only willing to listen. Our innovation team, including museum staff members from our three institutions, Latino community members from our three cities (Atlanta, Birmingham, and Charlotte), and an urban geographer, planned two-day listening sessions in each city. The entire team visited each city to learn more about Latinos and their communities as well as better understand the local context of the receiving communities. Based on our findings, each institution will develop programming to engage Latinos in the activities of their museums and help build bridges between Latinos and non-Latinos.[3]

Levine Museum utilized a process of listening that it had used before to begin to understand the process of what immigrant integration will look like in our city. Having observed the model since its beginning, our partners in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the Atlanta History Center used the same model with a few modifications to fit their respective communities.

As the museum continues to work facilitating recognition of multiple perspectives used by people of different backgrounds to explain the past, evaluate the present, and project the future, we had a core question: Will our cities be welcoming places, creatively involving newcomers, or will our communities fragment? We listened for the answers.

A *Latino New South*

The South did not receive the great waves of European immigration in the early twentieth century and, consequently, is not as adequately prepared to address the shifting demographic makeup within its borders. The southeastern U.S. is now experiencing the nation's highest percentage growth in Latino newcomers and has since 1990. This is a great change for a region long known for its white and black racial landscape. Scholars suggest that this demographic and cultural shift may be the biggest story in southern history since the Civil Rights Movement.

—Dr. Tom Hanchett
Staff Historian
Levine Museum of the New South

Alexandra Vilchez for Levine Museum

Latino leaders in Charlotte share their opinions of how museums can play a role in relationship-building between the community and cultural institutions during a listening session.

What is a listening session?

When we decided to listen to our audience, we wanted to do more than conduct surveys or merely gather feedback on our ideas. The goal was to go beyond just tapping a demographic set for answers but to fully engage in the questioning process and use their thoughts as a way to further future conversations and actions.

For our listening sessions we wanted to create structured events where we could, as institutions, invite stakeholders to share ideas, insights, and input in an open forum.

important component of listening includes involving internal stakeholders (staff, board, members, and donors) as well as external stakeholders, and even those who have never been to your museum.

So how do you listen effectively and authentically?

Planning the Listening Session

Part 1: Set up a Framework

What idea is your institution looking to explore?

Think broadly. What are the issues facing your community? Every institution will have issues emerge from the economic, demographic, ecological, social, and political environment of its community. The issues will be unique to your community.

So what does it take to frame your big ideas?

Ask 1: What issues need to be addressed in your community and how could your museum have relevance to those issues? Where can your museum add value to community conversations and decision making?

Ask 2: Who needs to be in the room for you to deeply understand the experience in your community? Ask stakeholders, "Who else do we need to talk to?"

Ask 3: How can you use listening strategically to approach your big idea?

Ask 4: How will you create an environment conducive to listening and when?

Latino New South

At the start of this process, the *Latino New South* innovation team had to identify the motivating Big Idea for our needs. Here are our answers to the corresponding questions on the left:

Answer 1: What issues need to be addressed?
Inspired by the 2011 study, *All Immigration is Local* by Cornell University professor Michael Jones-Correa, Levine Museum recognized a need to address immigrant integration, or full and meaningful inclusion of newcomers in community life. We were propelled by a belief that museums can play a vital role in that work, and that sharing information between institutions will help our organization find effective strategies to truly engage Latino partners.

Answer 2: Who needs to be in the room?
For us, it was Latinos of all backgrounds as well as receiving community members.

Answer 3: How can we use listening strategically?
It was necessary to think outside the walls of the museum, figuratively and literally. We designed a two-day approach that involved listening to groups all over Charlotte (in Spanish and English).

Answer 4: How will we listen and when?
We decided to do this by starting with relationship building through individual meetings and we needed to start as soon as possible.

Part 2: Formatting the Session

Listening involves little technical knowledge, but much preparation, constant awareness, and plenty of follow-up. In planning for your listening session, adequate preparation and planning are paramount.

PLANNING
Research the dimensions of your topic
Identify barriers to participation
Identify opportunities to aid in participation
Prepare and plan for how you want to capture the information (include consideration of linguistic challenges)
Prepare questions (3-5 core questions are best)
Pilot first session with a group familiar with the museum and be open and honest with feedback
Consider promotional strategies to support session

DURING
Introduce your organization
Address the relevance of your Big Idea
Have participants introduce themselves to each other
Establish expectations of continued engagement
Share findings
Provide participants the opportunity to respond to questions in writing and verbally
Record and synthesize responses

FOLLOW-UP
Thank participants with an email after session (1 week)
Synthesize all transcripts and analyze for themes and suggestions (1 month)
Share findings and themes with key stakeholders (1 month)
Share the findings with participants and invite future engagement (2 months)

Part 3: Formatting the Session—Latino New South *Case Study*

SAMPLE AGENDA

- Welcome lunch
- Facilitated dialogue at each table
- Demographic presentation
- Bus Tour:
  - Compare Foods (grocery store)
  - Cooperativa Latina (credit union)
  - Norsan Multimedia (Spanish media center)
  - Camino Community Center
  - Latin American Coalition/United for the Dream Youth Group
  - Latino community members and teachers[4]

At each listening session, whether it was one person or a group, we provided key findings up to that point. This included demographic information about Charlotte and the U.S., relevant newspaper articles, and the opportunity to react and respond via bilingual paper (feedback) form. Sharing our research, articles, and time with them helped them to share their lived experience, hopes, and thoughts with us.

Checking In

Institutions usually ask: how is listening institutionally aligned or does this make you do more work? The short answer is to always start with the mission. By examining the mission of your institution you will quickly find out if your institution has a commitment to explore new strategies of community engagement and sustainable audience development. If the mission is aligned, listening sessions can be a powerful tool for you.

Alexandra Vilchez for Levine Museum

Dr. Tom Hanchett (far left) and members of the *Latino New South* innovation team, which includes the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Atlanta History Center, participate in a listening session at Coopertiva Latina, a credit union in Charlotte, NC.

We were able to plug in social media. For instance, the Atlanta History Center had a social media campaign telling their followers about the project and letting them respond. They posted several tweets throughout the listening sessions as well as a follow-up blog post.

We recognized that each of our cities had a different community context; therefore, we knew we were going to examine perception about the museum both in the broader community and Latino community.

An Important Note about Questions

We created the set of questions for the *Latino New South Project* to demonstrate our willingness to learn more about Latinos, share historical perspectives, and to explore new engagement strategies not previously considered. We wrote questions in a simple, easy-to-read format, giving careful consideration to nuances found in translation from English to Spanish. Over the course of three months, the team conferenced at least eight times to draft these three questions:

1. Using a particular instance that you have encountered, would you describe Charlotte as a welcoming city to newcomers?
2. What do you think the perception is about Latinos in the broader community?
3. What role can the museum play in telling the story of Latinos in the Southeast?

Benefits of Listening

- **Authentic Connections.** Particularly with groups that don't typically have a history of engagement with your institution, it is important to ask questions that not only increase the number of people attending programs, but also to foster a relationship dynamic with give-and-take from both sides.

- **Responsive Relationships.** Much different from a traditional focus group (in which participants answer questions and never engage with the results), the institution is asking with the transparent motivation to be responsive to answers. (A museum's actions may or may not address participant suggestions, but they will overtly reference them.)

- **Alignment with Community.** Once you ask real questions and establish transparency, your institution will have knowledge to become more aligned with the community. In our case, listening helped us understand family, the importance of language, and much more.

- **Stretching Staff Capacity.** When interacting with any new individual or group, we are stretched on a personal and professional level. (For example, learning how to conduct basic introductions and point of sale exchanges at the front desk in Spanish is a crucial skill for creating a welcoming environment.)

What Happened for *Latino New South*?

As a demographic grouping, this group has been largely without voice for arts and cultural institutions in the South. Our listening sessions offered a valuable opportunity to build relationships through listening to Latinos and how non-Latinos responded to the welcome Latinos receive in our communities.

We planned two days of sessions, both in and out of the museum.* A group of museum representatives and project partners attended a session at the museum with fifty Latino and non-Latino community members. The museum actively sought out and brought in experts, community organizers, and everyday people to create a space where a multitude of perspectives and backgrounds could engage with us.

The museum representatives and project partners then embarked on a bus tour of the city, stopping to have conversations with a cross-section of participants from diverse areas.

Ultimately, these listening sessions provided a platform for reciprocity between the museum and Latinos in our communities.

**Organizations may not need to do such aggressive scheduling of listening sessions. A series of smaller sessions over time may prove more effective depending on project needs and time constraints.*

Some Frequently Asked Questions

- **What are the greatest challenges to conducting listening sessions?**

First, institutional buy-in is necessary. The board, leadership, and staff must understand how the institution will benefit and the logistics of how to conduct effective sessions. This is why we suggest the first listening sessions happen internally. Second, staff must be committed to conducting sessions and THANKING every participant. All sharing may not shape the final product, but it will inform the process.

- **How is this different from a focus group?**

Listening is a process of empowering your constituents and actually using their input in exhibit and program design. It is about establishing sustainable engagement. Changing responsiveness depends on reciprocity with newly engaged stakeholders and the museum. This is the start of building a long-lasting relationship and cultivating future museum goers.

- **How did you choose participants?**

Build a network by reaching out to traditional stakeholders and ask them for connections. Build relationships with new stakeholders and then go to the community, and create safe and welcoming opportunities to share and LISTEN.

GARNERING INSIGHTS: *Latino New South*

As we held our listening sessions, several trends emerged about the museum's role in creating a culture of welcome in Charlotte.

- Latino community members thought Charlotte was welcoming to newcomers. In contrast, Latino leaders almost unanimously said Charlotte was not welcoming.
- "Levine has a great responsibility to educate our community, letting them know we also make history. They need to get to know us so they can accept us." This respondent explained that he thinks the museum should do more to educate the entire community about Latinos. The receiving community needs to know Latinos so they can accept them. Another interpretation indicates that the museum has a responsibility to play the role to educate ANYONE in the community—to act as a bridge builder and catalyst.

As we listened and heard all of these responses—particularly from Latinos—in our community we realized we have to extend ourselves in new ways.

Seven Insights into Working with Latino Partners

The following insights reflect what we heard from Latino community members during our listening sessions. As such, while some of these insights support traditional and scholarly research on Latinos in the U.S., others do not and are to be interpreted as distinct to this project and the three cities upon which it focuses.

In our listening sessions, Latinos and non-Latinos both asked that museums help receiving communities understand these realities.

Laura Anderson for Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

Multiple groups representing receiving and Latino communities as well as staff took part in simultaneous facilitation in Birmingham, AL.

1. Latinos are here to stay

- Few people grasp the huge demographic change in the Southeast since 1990. Latinos have gone from 1-2 percent of the population to around 10 percent or more in many localities.
- Roughly half of Latinos counted by the U.S. Census are already citizens—not just documented, i.e., progressing toward citizenship, but have achieved citizenship. Many are born here in the U.S. and Latino youth are the fastest growing group in many school systems.
- Museums need to convey this new reality. They can both facilitate discussion of the stresses these demographic changes bring, and also point out the opportunities.

2. From many cultures

- Latinos want everyone to know that they come from many cultures. While Mexico has sent numerous immigrants, one-third to one-half are from elsewhere in Central and South America.
- The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" (see also number six below) are U.S. creations. Latinos usually do not self-identify as Latino/Hispanic but rather as Cuban American, Colombian, or from their particular Mexican state, for example.
- They want receiving communities to appreciate these culturally rich backgrounds and are weary of being lumped together as Mexican, or answering questions like "Where in Mexico is Puerto Rico?" They also deeply desire that their Latino neighbors and their own children do likewise.

3. Biculturalism is growing

- Young people raised in the U.S. are typically, English-proficient and bicultural. They embrace U.S. food, entertainment, and so on, but do so without abandoning Latino culture and heritage. Adults, however, do not change as quickly or as completely.
- Latinos are more likely than the overall U.S. population to use the Internet and social

media. This is partly because communities have so many youth who are "digital natives."

- On the part of receiving communities, the perception that Latinos refuse to amalgamate into American culture (e.g., learn English, follow American laws and customs, etc.) is the single most expressed fear for Latino communities. Countering that misconception and fear can be a top museum goal.

4. Extended families are important

- Latinos usually experience cultural offerings as an extended family unit—mother, father, grandparents, several kids, cousins, plus maybe a friend or other relative.
- When choosing an activity, they look for things that will both bring pleasure and renewal or self-improvement and engage all family members.

5. Bridging is essential

- People urged us to get outside the museum, to go to places where people already are.
- They talked of the need for multiple introductions: Latinos to other Latino groups; Latinos to receiving community; Latinos to southern (especially African American) history; receiving communities to Latinos; and so on.
- Latino/African American bridging is especially needed. On the one hand, many Latino immigrants bring anti-black stereotypes spread by American media. And both groups often compete for entry-level jobs. On the other hand, civil rights history can be an inspiring model for immigrant efforts today. We heard that both groups are excited and grateful to learn each other's story, "Something we never heard in school."
- The organization Welcoming America emphasizes that communities become welcoming only when immigrants and non-immigrants *do things together,* and therefore get to know each other.

6. Language is a powerful symbol

- Spanish—words on the wall, personal greetings from a Visitor Services person—is a powerful signal that Latinos are welcome. For young people who are usually comfortable with English, this welcome is symbolic. For older people, it is functional—they do need some Spanish in order to be able to guide their group and teach their children, etc.
- Spanish text also signals to non-Latinos that the South is now increasingly bicultural.
- The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" seem largely interchangeable. In Charlotte, we heard Latino more often; in Birmingham we heard Hispanic more often.
- The term "illegal" offends many Latinos, who say that acts may be illegal, but no person is illegal. We suggest using the terms "undocumented" or "unauthorized."

7. Becoming "documented" is difficult, often impossible

- People in receiving communities often ask, "Why don't immigrants just obey the law and work toward legal citizenship?" Along with "They don't want to learn English," this is the most common negative reaction to Latinos we hear.
- In fact, quotas and convoluted regulations often make legal immigration impossible. People pointed to a graphic, "What Part of Legal Immigration Don't You Understand?" as an illustration of the barriers. At best, it is an extremely lengthy process requiring expert assistance (a leading Charlottean from Mexico talked about the nineteen years it took her to become a citizen).
- These legal problems can split families. Youngsters born here can suddenly find their parents sent back to their home country. Youngsters born in their native country but raised here can suddenly be deported to a strange land they have never known.
- Post 9-11 fears and new "show your papers" laws in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina have greatly increased problems for Latinos. Anyone who looks Latino—even a distinguished India-born surgeon in one case—can be jailed until they prove their legal status.

Conclusion

We have found that listening yields insights otherwise inaccessible to museums. In reaching out to hear thoughts and explore trends, listening also shows stakeholders—new and old—that their ideas and presence are valued.

In the case of the *Latino New South Project*, listening gave Levine Museum of the New South accessibility to participants we had not previously heard from. In addition, it gave voice to a community that heretofore had not been sustainably engaged. Because of our choice to listen, we have been able to create culturally relevant programming, develop culturally sensitive evaluations, witness an increase in our visitation, and learn about issues and practices that help us serve as a welcoming space for our community.

As museums seek relevance and to reflect their communities, we simply cannot afford *not* to listen, especially to a fresh set of voices. Regardless of a museum's size or demographic, a bounty of learning opportunities exists. Those with the most to say may not come directly to us, so we have to seek them out, openly hear what they have to say, and complete an authentic exchange by applying what we hear to everyday practice.

An advocate and catalyst for building community capacity and understanding culture, Janeen Bryant is Vice President of Education, collaborates, manages, and executes education experiences for Levine Museum of the New South. A graduate of Davidson College with a B.A. in anthropology, she completed her Master of Science in Leadership and Management at Montreat College. She joined the Levine Museum staff in 2007, after several years as a teacher in Charlotte. She can be reached at jbryant@museumofthenewsouth.org.

Kamille Bostick, kbostick@museumofthenewsouth.org, is a programs coordinator at Levine Museum of the New South. She facilitates and designs education programming that fosters civic engagement, connections between the past and contemporary issues, and builds community. In her position, she also works with schools and teachers on connecting curriculum to the museum's exhibits and initiatives.

Resources

Downs-Karkos, Susan. "The Receiving Communities Toolkit: A Guide for Engaging Mainstream America in Immigrant Integration." *Welcoming America*. (October 2011). Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/Downs-Karkos.

Gill, Hannah. *The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina: New Roots in the Old North State*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Jennings, Gretchen. "The Empathetic Museum." Presentation at the annual meeting of the American Alliance of Museums, Baltimore, MD, May 2013.

Jones-Correa, M. "All Immigration is Local: Receiving Communities and Their Role in Successful Immigrant Integration." *Center for American Progress*. (September 2011). Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/Jones-Correa.

Lippard Cameron D. and Charles A. Gallagher, eds. *Being Brown in Dixie: Race, Ethnicity, and Latino Immigration in the New South*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.

Mohl, Raymond A. "Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22:4 (2003): 31-66.

Singer, Audrey, Susan W. Hardwick, and Carolyn B. Brettell. *Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008.

Smith, Heather and Owen Furuseth, eds. *Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

Stein, Jill K., Cecilia Garibay, and Kathryn E. Wilson. Engaging Immigrant Audiences in Museums. *Museums & Social Issues* 3:2 (2008): 179-196.

Suro, Roberto and Audrey Singer. *Latino Growth in Metropolitan America: Changing Patterns, New Locations*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2002. Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/SuroSinger.

[1] Gretchen Jennings, "The Empathetic Museum," 2013 American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD.

[2] Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Ríos-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert. "The Hispanic Population: 2010." *U.S. Census Briefs*. (May 2011). Retrieved from http://on.aaslh.org/CensusHN.

[3] "Receiving Communities" refers to all non-Latinos, American-born Latinos, and Latino immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for more than twenty years.

[4] We met this group at a local Latino restaurant as it was a safe, comfortable setting. Two sessions were held simultaneously with the community member session being done entirely in Spanish with no translation to English while the teacher session happened on the other side of the restaurant.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#272

How To Design Programs for Millennials

By Aleah Vinick and Rachel Abbott

Millennials are famously underrepresented in museum and historic site attendance and membership, and because of this, many museum professionals are working to better meet the needs of this audience. This is certainly the case at the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) where recent experiences with program development and audience evaluation have led to a set of institutional recommendations, as well as program development guidelines.

Peter Meyers, courtesy of MNHS

Who Are Millennials?

Millennials are people born between 1981 and 2000. In this document, we also call them "young adults."

Why Should Museums Care about Millennials?

To say that millennials are a hot topic doesn't do justice to the flood of market research and think pieces focused on them in recent years. Millennials make up approximately 25 percent of the U.S. population and have an estimated consumer purchasing power of $10 trillion. The first generation of digital natives and the most racially diverse group in American history (one in four millennials is a person of color), they challenge cultural institutions to create programming that is engaging and relevant. It is important to consider millennials in museum programming not only because they are the largest generation of our time, but also because they are driving buying and philanthropic behaviors across generations.[1]

What Do We Know about Millennials?

Although it's difficult to generalize about such a large and varied group, data suggest some shared behaviors and characteristics.

Millennials Are Technologically Exceptional. They rely on technology for socializing, giving, and purchasing. As early as 2010, 75 percent of millennials identified as active users of social networking sites, creating buzz by posting videos, tweeting, and sharing links. Millennials also use social media to become well-informed consumers, tracking and advocating for their favorite events, causes, and brands. Although they tend to donate in smaller amounts than older generations, they can be consistent with their contributions when they understand and care about the organizations they are supporting. In fact, researchers note that the success of crowdfunding applications such as Kickstarter and GiveMN is due largely to their popularity with millennials.[2]

Millennials Are Social Adventurers. They prioritize experience and interaction over things: more than three in four would choose to spend money on a desirable experience or event over buying something.

Brady Willette, courtesy of MNHS

The Minnesota Historical Society partners with numerous community groups for its various outreach events. For the monthly *St. Paul Welcome Hat* event, MNHS partners with the group St. Paul Hello. Aimed at newcomers to Minnesota, the event fosters inclusion by showcasing community resources and offering each guest a warm, faux-fur lined hat.

Among millennials, 77 percent say some of their best memories are from attending an event or live experience. Given their familiarity with social media platforms to document and share these experiences, it is not surprising that many millennials report that FOMO (the fear of missing out) influences their social behaviors.[3]

Minnesota Historical Society Millennial Programs

The Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) has had some success reaching millennials through public programs. *RetroRama* was a large (up to 1,200 people) annual event that ran from 2007 to 2014 and featured cocktails, an original fashion show inspired by MNHS collections, and other experiences to create a lighthearted, see-and-be-seen atmosphere. *RetroRama* consistently attracted a nontraditional audience: more than half were nonmembers, and 40-50 percent of attendees were age thirty-nine or under.

Another program, *History of Hip*, uses a familiar bar as the setting for an informal lecture series that explores the historic origins of trending cultural phenomena, from tattoos to video games to mid-century

Don't confuse millennials' interest in socializing with shallowness.

design. Speakers are external partners who often bring their own fan base with them, creating an intersection of audiences that increases the reach of both the speaker and MNHS, and fosters new connections. The program generally sells out, and organizational costs are minimal. MNHS covers its hard costs, and about 40-50 percent of attendees are millennials.

In 2011, MNHS's Alexander Ramsey House developed *History Happy Hour* as an informal lecture series with drinks and snacks, held after work on the last Thursday of the month. The program includes a balance of structure and autonomy, allowing time for socializing with fellow guests and with the speaker. *History Happy Hour* generally sells out in advance and gets excellent marks on exit surveys. However, since April 2012, 62 percent of program survey respondents have been over age forty. Despite the number of older attendees, program coordinators consider these series a success at serving millennials and at developing millennial awareness of MNHS.[4]

Most ticketed MNHS programs (including *History Happy Hour* and *History of Hip*) draw a much bigger segment of MNHS's older member demographic than millennials. Though it's difficult to know for sure why the programs haven't garnered even higher millennial attendance, anecdotally, program managers hear complaints about lack of advertising and high ticket prices. Delving deeper, it seems clear that people who have already made the commitment to become members of MNHS are more prepared to devote an evening to an MNHS program and pay an additional fee to participate.

In Summary

Programs at MNHS that have done well with millennials have a few things in common: they are social, flexible, and occur after work hours on weeknights. Programs at MNHS that draw the largest proportion of millennials still don't draw a majority of millennials. The majority is a traditional MNHS member audience, and we consider a program that draws half or more nonmember attendees a successful first step to attracting a new audience.

Sean Smuda, courtesy of MNHS

The Minnesota Historical Society's *RetroRama* fashion show offered designs inspired by the society's collection; the event also featured photo opportunities, shopping, refreshments, and access to its exhibits.

These case studies also bring up questions about how we define these programs.

- Is any program a millennial program if a certain number of millennials attend?
- Is a millennial program unsuccessful if nonmillennials are interested too?
- If these programs are attracting a broader audience than the millennial demographic, are we actually programming for a psychographic rather than a demographic?

Demographic or Psychographic?

A study by the Pew Research Center shows increased online traffic and cell phone use among seniors age sixty-five and older. Today, one in three online seniors uses social networking sites, and seven in ten seniors own a cell phone. As older generations adopt the technological behaviors of their children and grandchildren, their values and expectations about shopping, giving, and cultural experiences might also begin to change. Are millennials influencing other generations, or are so-called millennial traits simply a sign of an increase in a social-adventure-seeking psychographic?[5]

Millennial Research at the Minnesota Historical Society

In 2015, MNHS staff undertook an evaluation project to better understand the organization's millennial users. Research included intercept surveys at MNHS events, focus groups exploring the cultural behaviors of millennials in the Twin Cities, and a cross-departmental Team Based Inquiry process to develop recommendations for better serving this audience. In many cases, the research confirmed common conclusions about this age group and lessons learned through MNHS's programming experience.

- Millennials look for and expect good value.
- Millennials want programs to be social and flexible.
- Social media and word of mouth are important promotional tools that in many cases are thought of interchangeably.
- Millennials invest in institutions they care about, where it's clear what their money buys, both for the cause and for them.

Based on this feedback, MNHS staff revised their survey for millennial programs to include questions that relate to the social experience and the value of programs. At the Minnesota History Center, MNHS staff are also developing a regularly scheduled ticketed series for young adults and improving offerings on Tuesday nights, when admission to the museum is free. Staff members are also exploring the possibility of establishing a millennial steering committee that would help establish new strategies for promotion, membership, and development campaigns.

This millennial research, as well as MNHS staff experience managing programs that serve (or are designed to serve) millennials, provides the basis for the following program development guidelines.

Guidelines for Designing Millennial Programs

Content

- Ground the program in content, not just experience. Don't confuse millennials' interest in socializing with shallowness. This is an audience that cares about learning new things and being engaged. Our intercept survey showed that the top reasons for attending events were "interest in topic" and "interest in a unique experience."
- Look to social media and trusted advisors to find topics that might resonate. Think about current events and how your mission might intersect with them. Think about this audience's characteristics: a passion for social experiences, adventure, and self-expression. For example, a program on the history of tattoos was one of the organization's most successful events in terms of millennial attendance.

Peter Meyers, courtesy of MNHS

Guests applaud the speaker at *History Happy Hour,* an informal lecture series in the historic setting of the Alexander Ramsey House.

Sean Smuda, courtesy of MNHS

Vintage clothing vendors sell their wares at *RetroRama* events, another example of partnering with other organizations to attract new visitors.

Design

- Create a social experience. Millennials value opportunities to share, express opinions, and visit with friends. Find ways to actively engage guests, and provide time for informal questions and conversations. Most will be attending with a friend or partner, or as part of a group. Provide hashtags so your guests can share photos and comments on social media, which will also help spread the word about your event.
- Use a flexible format. Millennials like to "party hop" and attend multiple social functions in one evening. Programs with a firm start and end time can dissuade younger people from attending. As one of our focus group attendees observed, "I'm more likely to go if it's a shorter program within a more flexible schedule."
- Play up the uniqueness. Create a sense of urgency by providing an unusual experience (after dark! sneak peek! behind the scenes!) that may only be available for a limited time or for a limited number of participants. Tap the potential of FOMO, or the fear of missing out.

Partners

- Work with external partners for both content and promotion; association with others is powerful. While millennials do seek out new experiences, they want endorsement from an entity they trust, be it a college radio station or a local brewery. One focus group participant put it this way: "Something recognizable...puts a familiar name next to the unfamiliar thing."

Timing

- Happy hour is your sweet spot. Plan events between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. on a weekday. Guests can attend on the way home from work, but it is also not too late to prevent them from doing something else afterward.
- Because happy hour is a popular time for older audiences, too, build in flexibility for (younger) last minute ticket buyers, who may decide on short notice to attend.

Price

- Offer programming that provides clear value for the money you charge. Millennials are optimistic about their financial futures and stand to build wealth through their careers, but they also came of age during a financial crisis. Thus, they are strategic about their expendable income. As a focus group participant put it, "I can do the $15 lecture, or I can do events where I can also get food, drinks, and have friends for $15."

Case Studies

As our research and experience have shown, programming for millennials is often more effective when partners and advisors play an essential role in program design. Two recent programs illustrate different, but equally successful, approaches to these partnerships.

Saint Paul Welcome Hat

Funded with a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, this initiative delivers a series of information-fair-style events to show off Saint Paul's many amenities to new residents. In addition to (not embarrassing) ice-breaker activities, fun swag, and food samples from area restaurants, each guest is presented with a warm faux-fur hat and Minnesota pro-tips (flash cards on local lingo and customs). The programs are a partnership between the Minnesota History Center and Saint Paul Hello, a group dedicated to making Saint Paul a friendlier place. The first two events have generated between 150 and 200 guests each. The partnership with Saint Paul Hello has encouraged program staff to work toward making the history center even more inclusive of newcomers. Saint Paul Hello volunteer ambassadors in branded green tee-shirts, oversized wayfinding signs, local food, and live music create a welcoming vibe that's been well received by guests.

Although survey results aren't in for the second event, the first event's results show that the program hit its goals in terms of audience demographics: 60 percent of guests were between ages eighteen and thirty-nine, and 76 percent were attending their first event by the Minnesota Historical Society. Guests' observations were generally positive and appreciative: "I have never felt SO welcome in any Metropolitan Area. When I lived in California, it was more of a 'there's enough people here already' mentality towards new residents."

The *Spooky Side of Suburbia* Happy Hour

To develop a millennial-friendly event themed to the Minnesota History Center's new "Suburbia" exhibit, we engaged the Minnesota History Center's 2015 fellows, an intern group that conducts in-depth research and implements other longer-term summer projects with the museum. We settled on a free happy hour event, riffing on pop culture's fascination with creepy, weird aspects of suburban life. The fellows had input on all aspects of the event, including the DJ, collections tours, photo opportunities, makeup demos, film clips, and pop-up "food court." Attendee numbers were impressive: more than four hundred guests attended, and photos on Instagram (using the hashtag #SpookySuburbs) show young, excited participants. Additionally, history center staff collected new contacts with a younger following to tap for future programming.

Time Into Pixels Photography, courtesy of MNHS

At its *Spooky Side of Suburbia* happy hour, MNHS offered photo opportunities and a hashtag (#SpookySuburbs), so that guests could share their experiences with friends via social media.

Promotion

- Use word of mouth. Note that "word of mouth" can definitely include email and social media. Millennials look at trusted friends' activities to determine whether "their people" are interested in attending a particular program.
- Promote events by collaborating with trusted external partners.
- Use the program itself as a promotional tool and your guests as promotional partners by creating opportunities to share images and comments during and after the program. Designate hashtags so that guests can share what they're up to, and plan a few places for photo opportunities. Also, remember to include consistent language about membership on all printed materials.

Don't underestimate the power of vibes

- Prep your staff and volunteers to be welcoming. A guest at an MNHS "millennial program" told the program manager about her discomfort around a volunteer who seemed unfriendly; for nontraditional audiences, it is vital that the energy at the program be warm and inviting.

Get advice

- Seek input on your ideas. An advisory group made up of millennial members, visitors, and/or supporters can be a great way to get external perspective on all of the above.

Conclusion

While these guidelines are based on audience research and some program management experience, they are certainly not exhaustive or fully tested. The future of millennial programming at the Minnesota Historical Society is still uncertain, and we will continue to learn about this audience as we move forward. Trial and error is an important part of any efforts at audience engagement, and building relationships with young adults can be an endeavor that creates rewards for decades to come.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Minnesota Historical Society 2015 Millennial Audience Research Fellows David Briese, Sam Bullis, Paul Kramer, Lauren Kitrell, and Khou Lee. They are also grateful to their MNHS colleagues Maren Levad, Kris Bergquist, and Wendy Jones for research and editing support.

Aleah Vinick is a Public Programs Specialist with the Minnesota Historical Society, where she manages an array of museum programs to engage young adults. She can be reached at aleah.vinick@mnhs.org.

Rachel Abbott is a Community Engagement Specialist with the Minnesota Historical Society's Historic Sites and Museums Division, where she develops programs for various audiences and leads community engagement projects. She can be reached at rachel.abbott@mnhs.org.

Resources

Abbott, Rachel, Sheila Brommel, Erica Orton, and Aleah Vinick. Millennial Focus Groups. Minnesota Historical Society. April 13, 2015; April 16, 2015; April 20, 2015.

Abbott, Rachel. "Success with a Twist: The Unexpected Benefit of 'Risky' Programming." *AASLH: Views from the Porch* (blog). July 22, 2014. http://blogs.aaslh.org/success-with-a-twist-the-unexpected-benefit-of-risky-programming.

Cary, William. "Millennials and Museums: Strategies for Short-Term Engagement and Long-Term Success." November 21, 2014. www.slideshare.net/WilliamCary/millennials-and-museums-strategies-for-shortterm-engagement-and-longterm-success.

Engaging Beyond the Program

Developing the millennial audience is just like developing any nontraditional museum audience: programs can't do it alone. Public programs can be an important entry point for millennials at museums and historic sites, but cannot sustain engagement without supportive marketing, membership, and development strategies. Successful models at other museums illustrate the necessary components of a long-term relationship with the audience. They include strong, targeted marketing (including a consistent voice on social media); flexible or temporary membership options; and short-term, cause-focused development campaigns.[6]

Cohen, Norty. "Is Your Strategy Showing? Truth, Justice, and the Millennial Way." *2015 Moosylvania Millennial Report* (website), http://moosylvania.com/millennials.

Dilenschneider, Colleen. "Hot Topics: Millennials." *Know Your Bone* (blog). 2015. http://colleendilen.com/hot-topics.

Feldman, Derrick. "2013 Millenial Impact Report." *Millennial Impact* (website). http://casefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/MillennialImpactReport-2013.pdf.

"Millennial Impact Report." *Millenial Impact* (website). www.themillennialimpact.com/research.

"Millennials: Fueling the Experience Economy." *Eventbrite* (website). 2014. http://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials_Research/Gen_PR_Final.pdf.

Morgan, Blake. "NOwnership, No Problem: Why Millennials Value Experiences over Owning Things." *Forbes* (blog). June 1, 2015. www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2015/06/01/nownershipnoproblem-nowners-millennials-value-experiences-over-ownership.

Newton, Cara. "Millennials: The Giving Generation?" *USA Today: College* (blog). December 11, 2013. www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/11/millennials-most-giving/3962781.

Smith, Aaron. "Older Adults and Technology Use." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science, and Tech* (blog). April 3, 2014. www.pewinternet.org/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use.

Solomon, Micah. "2015 is the Year of the Millennial: Five Traits These 80 Million Consumers Share." *Forbes* (blog). December 29, 2014. www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2014/12/29/5-traits-that-define-the-80-million-millennial-customers-coming-your-way.

Sundar, S. Slade. "Six Millennial Fundraising Ideas from Kickstarter." *SladeSundar.com* (blog). www.sladesundar.com/6-millennial-fundraising-lessons-from-kickstarter.

Taylor, Paul and Scott Keeter, eds. "Millennials: Confident, Connected, Open to Change." *Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends* (blog). February 2010. www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf.

Endnotes

[1] Many studies note millenials' buying power. See, for example, Micah Solomon, "2015 is the Year of the Millennial: Five Traits These 80 Million Consumers Share," *Forbes* (blog), December 29, 2014, www.forbes.com/sites/micahsolomon/2014/12/29/5-traits-that-define-the-80-million-millennial-customers-coming-your-way/.

[2] Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, eds. "Millennials: Confident, Connected, Open to Change," *Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends* (blog), February 2010, www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf, chapter 3; Norty Cohen, "Is Your Strategy Showing? Truth, Justice, and the American Way," *2015 Moosylvania Millennial Report* (website), http://moosylvania.com/millennials/; Cara Newton, "Millennials: The Giving Generation?" *USA Today: College* (blog), December 11, 2013, www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/11/millennials-most-giving/3962781/; and S. Slade Sundar, "Six Millennial Fundraising Lessons from Kickstarter," *SladeSundar.com* (blog), www.sladesundar.com/6-millennial-fundraising-lessons-from-kickstarter/. The above referenced *USA Today* article discusses the impact of crowdfunding, while S. Slade Sunbar offers an interesting analysis of why it's effective. According to one survey, 52 percent of millennials were interested in monthly contributions to causes they care about. Derrick Feldman, "2013 Millennial Impact Report," *Millenial Impact* (website), http://casefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/MillennialImpactReport-2013.pdf.

[3] "Millennials: Fueling the Experience Economy," *Eventbrite* (website), 2014, http://eventbrite-s3.s3.amazonaws.com/marketing/Millennials_Research/Gen_PR_Final.pdf; and Blake Morgan, "NOwnership, No Problem: Why Millennials Value Experiences over Owning Things," *Forbes* (blog), June 1, 2015, www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2015/06/01/nownershipnoproblem-nowners-millennials-value-experiences-over-ownership/. Morgan uses research findings to argue that millenials value access over ownership. Shared cars and the success of Airbnb bear out this conviction.

[4] For a more in-depth discussion of the *History Happy Hour* audience, see Rachel Abbott, "Success with a Twist: The Unexpected Benefit of 'Risky' Programming," *AASLH: Views from the Porch* (blog), July 22, 2014, http://blogs.aaslh.org/success-with-a-twist-the-unexpected-benefit-of-risky-programming/.

[5] Aaron Smith, "Older Adults and Technology Use," *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science, and Tech* (blog), April 3, 2014, www.pewinternet.org/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use/.

[6] Though his conclusions are supported by similar efforts at museums including the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, William Cary's engagement strategies at the Portland Art Museum lay out a clear route to cross-institutional engagement efforts with millennials. William Cary, "Millennials and Museums: Strategies for Short-Term Engagement and Long-Term Success," November 21, 2014, www.slideshare.net/WilliamCary/millennials-and-museums-strategies-for-shortterm-engagement-and-longterm-success.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET #267
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Not Just a Bunch of Facts: Crafting Dynamic Interpretive Manuals

By Donna R. Braden

Too often, written interpretive manuals are merely compilations of facts—if these manuals exist at all. Drawing from best practice in the field of interpretation—along with techniques borrowed from exhibition development, material culture studies, and even Walt Disney Imagineering—this technical leaflet will describe strategies for focusing and organizing a written manual that will help to ensure meaningful and memorable presentations for diverse audiences. At least some of this information may be familiar; however, what is new is the proposed structure for creating a written manual that is content-rich while at the same time being consistent, easily accessible, and enduring.

Much has been written about the subject of interpretation: what it is and why it is important, how to develop an interpretive plan and train interpreters, and how to deliver interpretive messages (see "Additional Resources"). But this literature offers little in the way of strategies for writing it all down—crafting a dynamic interpretive manual that can significantly aid in the successful delivery of any size and scope of interpretive program.

Why is it important to write it all down? How can a written manual contribute to the success of an interpretive program?

Here are several reasons:

- It encourages staff to define a clear focus, which helps in both the planning and the delivery of the program.
- It gets staff at all levels of the institution (from administrators to educators and interpretive planners to docents) on the same page about the key concepts and topics for an interpretive program.
- It has "staying power," living on beyond the original planning of the program, documenting all the good thinking that went into that plan and, ideally, lessons learned during the implementation of the program.
- If organized in a flexible format, it can be updated, added to, and reorganized as the program is refined. These changes can easily be documented and made accessible to interpretive staff.
- It provides a concrete, consistent tool for training and evaluation.

This technical leaflet describes the core components of a dynamic written interpretive manual that provides the framework for delivering an engaging, effective interpretive program. Examples of written manual components are drawn from the interpretive manuals and training guides of several of the historic structures at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan. In their broad range, time frame, and scope, many of these structures have served over the years as testing grounds for interpretive program planning, development, implementation, and, of course, the creation of written interpretive manuals. The ideas and recommendations included here draw from the evolution of my thinking over the course of almost four decades of experience and experimentation.

Core Components of a Dynamic Written Interpretive Manual

- Museum Mission Statement
- A Hierarchy of Themes, with one Big Idea that leads to three interpretive themes, then clearly connects to all other material
- A Narrative Backstory
- Connections to the Physical Site
- Audience Engagement
- Delivering the Presentation

First, Your Museum's Mission

Every written interpretive manual should begin with your museum's mission statement, the centerpiece for your institution. As Harold Skramstad explains in his essay, "Museum Mission Statements and the Accreditation Process":

> A clear and focused statement of mission stakes a museum's claim to its distinctiveness, is a guide to action, and a powerful yardstick against which the museum itself can assess each and every activity it carries out.[1]

The choice of themes and subjects for interpretation should always build upon, support, reference, and add value to the museum's mission. In the written manual, it is best to overtly state the mission and describe how the interpretive program relates to it.

Next, A Hierarchy of Themes

Interpretation experts commonly utilize thematic interpretation as a communication strategy. Themes are the central messages or key ideas that both guide you to hone in on the main points and help visitors get a focused understanding of what is unique or significant about your site or program. Themes also make the communication easier to follow and more meaningful to visitors, because they connect all the ideas, topics, stories, and physical evidence together. They also steer you away from just giving lists of facts.[2]

But, as many experts will tell you, effective interpretation is not just a collection of themes. Interpretation should be easy for visitors to follow. For this it needs to be organized, and the written manual can model this. As the authors of the book *Great Tours!: Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites* argue, the most effective, memorable learning often occurs when big ideas are used as an umbrella for smaller, related ideas. When done creatively, this hierarchy of ideas becomes easy for both interpreters and audiences to follow, because it is both organized and—no matter what is being communicated—it relates back to the same core ideas. By using this organizing structure, an interpretation can bring in many different topics or pieces of information that illustrate and reinforce a limited number of essential concepts. In this way, the constant but varied reinforcement helps visitors remember what is important while avoiding boredom.[3]

The organizing structure should start with one main idea. Not two. Not three. One. Always one. If the experience has a single focus that unifies all its parts, it will likely be easier for interpreters to convey and make more sense to visitors. Everything else should build off of that.

In the literature on interpretation, this hierarchy of themes takes on different names, like theme and subthemes, or main message and sub-messages. For the

The Henry Ford

Firestone Farm, Greenfield Village

primary theme or main message, I recommend using a foundational exhibition development term: the Big Idea. Using the term "Big Idea" immediately clarifies that it is separate from, and bigger than, other themes or messages. In her book, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, Beverly Serrell argues that "a Big Idea is big because it has fundamental meaningfulness that is important to human nature. It is not trivial." It should be a one-sentence statement of what the exhibition or program is about, including a subject, an action, and a consequence.[4]

The Big Idea should be followed by three supporting interpretive themes. Although writings on interpretation might suggest more than this number (varying to as many as seven), we have found that three work best, providing a sort of easy-to-remember symmetry. Embodying the same basic characteristics as the Big Idea, they should each:

- Present one discrete idea;
- Be specific enough to have focus but not be too narrow;
- Give unity and coherence to multiple things;
- Serve as a "basket" for other smaller concepts;
- Be inherent in, illustrated by, or supportive of the material culture and physical evidence at the site.[5]

Examples of the Big Idea/Interpretive Theme Hierarchy

J. R. Jones General Store

The J. R. Jones General Store provided a place where, in the mid-1880s, the rural residents of Waterford, Michigan, became interconnected with the outside world.

1. **The business of storekeeping**
   J. R. Jones, like other storekeepers of the 1880s, possessed only a little bit of capital but a lot of business ingenuity and a willingness to take risks.
2. **Availability of goods in the 1880s**
   An ever-increasing assortment of new consumer products was sold in rural stores like this one, due to factory production, railroad distribution, and new forms of advertising.
3. **Customer needs and wants**
   Making purchasing choices among the array of available goods in this store involved individual customers' backgrounds, economic and social status, and personal values.

From "J. R. Jones General Store Training Workbook," Greenfield Village, The Henry Ford, 2014.

Continuing with this hierarchy of themes, any additional information in the written manual should ideally convey how it relates back to one or more of these interpretive themes (which ultimately relate back to the Big Idea). This might include biographical information, site history, a furnishings list, descriptions of process demonstrations, and published articles, as well as supporting images, documents, or maps. As a result, many bits of previously disparate information and compilations of facts now have a context. They become part of a whole system of linked ideas.

The Narrative Backstory

While the Big Idea and interpretive themes are important, meaningful, and focused, they can seem a bit didactic when interpreters are looking to bring emotion into creating an engaging presentation. Taking the Big Idea, interpretive themes, and additional information about your site and turning them into a story brings people and emotion to the forefront.

It should go without saying that effective interpretation involves good storytelling. In her article, "Storytelling: The Real Work of Museums," Leslie Bedford argues:

> Stories are the most fundamental way we learn. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They teach without preaching, encouraging both personal reflection and public discussion. Stories inspire wonder and awe; they allow a listener to imagine another time and place, to find the universal in the particular, and to feel empathy for others.[6]

Writing the main ideas in the form of a story establishes this narrative format from the outset, providing another form of encouragement that gets away from "just a bunch of facts."

But how to write a brief narrative that includes main points, emotional resonance, and a story structure with a beginning, a middle, and an end? In my experience, the best model comes from the process of the Walt Disney Imagineers, who design the attractions at Disney theme parks. Inspired by Walt Disney's unflagging interest in and attention to storytelling, an Imagineering team creates what is called a "story behind the story," or a "backstory," for every new show or attraction.

The backstory is a story-based equivalent of the Big Idea. For Disney Imagineers, it provides the framework for every decision going forward and informs every detail that contributes to the experience. Because it is primarily a design aid utilized during the planning of an experience, the backstory may never actually be shared with Disney park guests. But it is there to support the structure of the story, "just as steel, wood, and concrete support its physical structure."[7]

How might this narrative backstory idea work in a museum context, where we interpret authentic objects, people, and places? Although the backstory for a museum program will, of course, take a more serious, reflective, and real-world turn than a Disney theme park attraction, the narrative structure can still apply. In the written manual, this narrative backstory should follow the Big Idea and interpretive themes—to show both how these are juxtaposed and how they work together.

Dymaxion House: Big Idea/Interpretive Themes Juxtaposed with Narrative Backstory

Big Idea/Interpretive Themes

The Dymaxion House challenges visitors to explore how house design can affect the way people live.

- The innovative materials helped create an efficient and adaptable structure.
- The factory production of components rendered the house affordable.
- The domestic spaces were engineered into a "system for living," maximizing space, facilitating ease of maintenance, and paying little regard to existing cultural expectations of house and home.

Backstory

The year is 1946. Wichita residents make their way to the Beech Aircraft factory because they have heard there are tours of a very different kind of manufactured home there in the factory. They are curious about this house that is touted as "designed to change the way people live." Besides, they are painfully aware that the housing crunch is acute, and money is tight. Why not see what this house offers?

Personnel at Beech Aircraft, producers of the house, are eager to hear what people (especially homemakers) think about the house and they have quickly devised a short marketing tour of the unique house. The marketers make sure to set the scene for the tour by first showing a short film [that] reminds guests of the housing crunch and touts the Dymaxion House as not only being innovative in design but offering a whole new, affordable way of living. The film, they hope, will raise such anticipation that guests will then eagerly move toward the entrance to the house, awaiting a peek at this new-fangled home.

From Dymaxion House Planning Documents, Henry Ford Museum, The Henry Ford, 2000.

Connections to the Physical Site

As Michael P. Gross and Ron Zimmerman maintain, effective interpretation involves connecting tangibles with intangibles. Linking broad, big-picture concepts embedded in the Big Idea and interpretive themes to the surrounding physical space and material culture brings the ideas down to earth and makes them accessible, engaging, and memorable.[8]

A dynamic written interpretive manual should overtly point out the connections between the Big Idea and the interpretive themes and such perceptible evidence as historic structures, architectural elements, landscapes, rooms, and objects people used, as well as supporting photographs, documents, maps, etc. The interpretive planning process should determine which ideas are most strongly evoked in the interpretive spaces and what material culture and/or documentary evidence can best illustrate these themes. Connections between the Big Idea, the interpretive themes, and the material evidence can be captured through a matrix or through object- or theme-based narratives in the written manual.

J. R. Jones General Store: Material Culture Connections

Examples of material culture related to Interpretive Theme #3:

- Making purchasing choices among the array of available goods involved individual customers' backgrounds, economic and social status, and personal values.

A young, single female customer who wants to look fashionable might choose:

- Curling iron
- Hair pins
- Knitted mittens
- Seasonal fabric and matching ribbon
- Pair of gloves
- Box with collars
- Lady's hat and hat pin
- Fan

A couple with growing children might choose:

- Blank book for spelling
- Infant's knit saque
- Dr. Hand's teething lotion
- Queen Anne laundry soap
- Eagle Brand condensed milk

An elderly customer who is old-fashioned might choose:

- Chewing tobacco
- Candlestick
- Old-fashioned style of pants
- Rockingham teapot

From "J. R. Jones General Store Training Workbook," Greenfield Village, The Henry Ford, 2014.

It is also a good idea to include here a description of specific program elements, as they can provide a tangible means to illustrate intangible ideas. These descriptions should also highlight the elements' relationship with the Big Idea and interpretive themes.

Henry Ford Birthplace: Program Elements

Audio Scripts

Description: Short audio snippets in the Formal Parlor, Dining Room, and Kitchen. Taken from the reminiscences of Henry and his sister Margaret, the snippets are told by different family members.

Relationship to Big Idea and Interpretive Themes: These help flesh out and reinforce the interpretive themes in this building: positive influence of the family, dislike of farm chores, and innate mechanical abilities.

Scrapbooks

Description: The Formal Parlor and Kitchen each [has] an interactive flip book in the form of a historical scrapbook. These are written from the point of view of Margaret Ford as a girl, and were inspired by her reminiscences.

Relationship to Big Idea and Interpretive Themes: These help flesh out and reinforce the interpretive themes of positive influence of the family and dislike of farm chores.

From "Henry Ford Birthplace Interpretive Training Handbook," Greenfield Village, The Henry Ford, 2012.

Audience Engagement

Knowing your audience is key to effective interpretation. And, as interpretation experts will tell you, one size does not fit all. Audiences differ in numerous ways, from age and gender to background and previous knowledge to motivations and learning styles. Engaging audiences through interpretation involves having at least a basic handle on the needs and characteristics of different audiences. A written manual can promote this understanding.[9]

The literature on audiences is vast. How can a written manual provide interpreters with at least a basic understanding of different audiences? This section of the manual should include at least four elements: a list of target audiences for the specific program; pre-determined visitor outcomes aimed at these audiences; a brief background on each target audience; and suggestions for tailoring presentations to these audiences.

Target audiences should, ideally, be determined when the program is being planned. These might be broad, or they may be as specific as: families with young children; specific age or generational groups; visitors from a particular segment of the local community; school-age audiences of specific grade levels; special-interest audiences like hobbyists or collectors; corporate groups; or specific types of special-needs audiences.

Visitor outcomes related to these target audiences, usually also developed during the planning of the program, should additionally be included here. What do you want your audience to take away from the experience—in thoughts, feelings, memories, or actions? Visitor outcomes are not simply learning objectives—although these can be considered, especially in relation to school-age audiences. At all times, they should involve strategies for making your interpretation more relevant and meaningful to your audience by:

- Providing context, giving meaning to the ideas;
- Bridging the familiar with the unfamiliar, letting people understand what you're saying by connecting to something they already know;
- Making emotional connections, thereby giving the intellectual information more importance;
- Bringing the ideas down to a personal level, to something people care about and will most likely remember.[10]

J. R. Jones General Store

Target Audience

- Primarily, Greenfield Village daily visitors (local/tourist, families and other social groups).
- Repeat visitors, especially during spring and fall, for special focus presentations.
- School-age audiences and teachers, particularly for grades 4–6 and 8.

Visitor Outcomes

As a result of interaction with objects, people, and place, visitors to the J. R. Jones General Store will:

- Become impressed by the quantity, variety, and far-reaching origins of products;
- Become curious about what the products are and how they fit into people's daily lives;
- Learn respect for the risks and decision-making options of sellers and buyers at this time;
- Feel a kinship with the original customers to the store, realizing that the process of making decisions about purchases is similar in many respects to the ways in which we make decisions today.

From Donna R. Braden and Mary Lynn Heininger, "General Stores: The Process and the Product," ALHFAM (The Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums) Proceedings of the 1993 Conference and Annual Meeting, St. Paul, Minnesota, XVI (1994): 48.

It is also helpful to include in the written manual additional background information and presentation guidelines related to the program's target audiences. This should include a list of important characteristics of target audiences, as well as strategies for tailoring presentations to them.

Characteristics of Family Audiences

- Visit in a social unit, attach great importance to social interaction.
- Personalize information, using it as a springboard for family interaction to reinforce their own experiences and family history.
- Want concrete information, not abstract concepts.
- Have diverse expectations and experiences, but consider the needs, comfort, and happiness of all group members to be pivotal to the success of the visit.
- Are most interested in active participation.

From "The Family Audience," Document Prepared for Furniture Exhibit Upgrade, Henry Ford Museum, The Henry Ford, 1997.

Tailoring Presentations to Family Audiences

- Present to the children.
- Include some aspect of family life.
- Use words that make ideas and concepts easily understood.
- Maintain eye contact with parents—they will let you know when they are ready to move on.

From "Basic Presentation Skills Presenter Training Manual," The Henry Ford, 1997.

Delivering the Presentation

According to Gross and Zimmerman, knowledge of interpretive methods is the third component of effective interpretation. It facilitates a connection between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor, and engages diverse audiences through a variety of methods. A dynamic written interpretive manual can reinforce these points, including a description of, expectations for, and strategies relating to the type of delivery to be given for a particular program.[11]

First, this section should reiterate that your mission statement informs every presentation delivered. The mission statement serves as the foundation for the stories you deliver. The manual can include ideas for stories and presentations that connect the interpretive program's main ideas to the organization's mission.

Second, the manual should describe the type of interpretation to be presented. Is the interpretation to be first or third person? What are the advantages of this type of interpretation at your site? What does

The Henry Ford

Dymaxion House interior, Henry Ford Museum

this entail? What are the expectations for this type of delivery? How might an interpreter best prepare for and deliver this type of interpretation?

Firestone Farm Interpretation

At Firestone Farm, our goal is to make visitors feel as if they have just stepped back in time to an 1880s farm—not just any 1880s farm, but the farm on which Harvey Firestone's family lived and worked. However, the presentation staff does not take on the roles of family members. We practice third-person living history on Firestone Farm, not first person.

Third-person interpretation is:
- Living history in which the presenter may look, behave, and perform tasks from the past, but maintains his modern personality and has modern knowledge.

Why do we practice third-person living history?
- In third-person presentation, staff can gauge visitor interest, ask questions, and "hook" them by creating connections from the site to their lives today.
- We feel that this is most effective for delivering our mission.

From "Firestone Farm Manual," Greenfield Village, The Henry Ford, 2012.

Beyond that, many books discuss common strategies and techniques for presentation style and visitor interaction, and relevant ones might be included in the manual. These might be organized as a list of techniques and brief description of each, including such delivery techniques as use of voice, language, gesture and facial expression, greeting the audience, honoring questions, and treating visitors with respect.[12]

Firestone Farm: Sample Interpretive Skill Competencies

- Gets visitors' attention through the use of voice and movement and maintains it through the use of story.
- Incorporates language that evokes the five senses, understands voice strengths and weaknesses, and modulates tone, intensity, and pitch when presenting.
- Uses direct questions to initiate or maintain interaction and open-ended questions to open up dialogue.
- Uses gestures, movement, facial expressions, and eye contact to convey image and to direct and maintain visitors' attention.

From "Firestone Farm Manual," Greenfield Village, The Henry Ford, 2012.

Suggestions for creating individual presentations that incorporate the Big Idea, interpretive themes, narrative backstory, and material evidence of the site might be included in this section. Space in the manual for individual interpreters to try writing out their own presentation outline or story that includes a beginning, middle, and end can also be added.

Additionally, it might be a good idea to include in the written manual expectations for interpreters' competencies that will ultimately lead to their performance evaluations. What skills will interpreters be judged on? Here, in the manual, everyone has consistent access to this information.

Everything Else

Other basic informational items for a written manual can include:
- General logistics
- Policies and procedures
- Safety and security protocols
- Emergency information

These should be easy to find, perhaps color-coded, and called out by a tab.

Because revisions to the interpretive program are inevitable, it is best to maintain an electronic version of the written manual for easy updates and printouts.

Conclusion

Putting thought and effort into creating written interpretive manuals will greatly enhance interpreters' ability to make connections to visitors. A well-organized interpretive manual provides a clear plan for communicating essential concepts about the past. Incorporating best practices from relevant disciplines and utilizing examples from the various historic structures that comprise The Henry Ford, this technical leaflet has elaborated a six-part model for crafting effective and engaging interpretive manuals.

Donna R. Braden is Curator of Public Life at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan. She has long been an advocate for developing visitor-focused experiences with rich material culture interpretation. She has a B.A. in anthropology from The Ohio State University and an M.A. from the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture, University of Delaware. She can be reached at donnab@thehenryford.org.

[1] Harold Skramstad, "Museum Mission Statements and the Accreditation Process," in *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity*, ed. Gail Anderson (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1998), 9.

[2] See, for instance, Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2013); John A. Veverka, *Interpretive Master Planning*, Volume One: Strategies for the New Millennium (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2011); Barbara Abramoff Levy, "Interpretation Planning: Why and How," in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002); and William J. Lewis, *Interpreting for Park Visitors* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1981).

[3] Barbara Abramoff Levy, Sandra Mackenzie Lloyd, and Susan Porter Schreiber, *Great Tours!: Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites* (Walnut Creek CA: AltaMira Press, 2001), 4; and Levy, "Interpretation Planning," 48.

[4] For a more in-depth explanation, see Chapter 1, "Behind It All: A Big Idea," in Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), 1-8; quotation, 1.

[5] Levy, "Interpretation Planning," 53.

[6] Leslie Bedford, "Storytelling: The Real Work of Museums," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 44, no. 1 (January 2001): 33.

[7] The Imagineers, *Walt Disney Imagineering: A Behind the Dreams Look at Making the Magic Real* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 42.

[8] Michael P. Gross and Ron Zimmerman, "Park and Museum Interpretation: Helping Visitors Find Meaning," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 45, no. 4 (October 2002): 274. For one of the key foundational works focusing on the interpretation of material culture, see E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (1974): 153-73.

[9] Useful sources that specifically describe different audiences and their characteristics include: John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Lessons Without Limit: How Free-Choice Learning is Transforming Education* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002); Alison L. Grinder and E. Sue McCoy, *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents, and Tour Guides* (Scottsdale, AZ: Ironwood Press, 1985); and Douglas M. Knudsen, Ted T. Cable, and Larry Beck, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*, 2nd ed. (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, 2003).

[10] Lisa Brochu and Tim Merriman, *Personal Interpretation: Connecting Your Audience with Heritage Resources*, 2nd ed. (Fort Collins, CO: National Association for Interpretation, 2008), 37-38.

[11] Gross and Zimmerman, "Park and Museum Interpretation," 274.

[12] Useful sources that describe specific presentation strategies and delivery techniques include: Grinder and McCoy, *The Good Guide;* Levy, et al., *Great Tours!;* Sam H. Ham, *Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993); *The Docent Handbook* (Berkeley, CA: National Docent Symposium Council, 2001); and Margaret Piatt, "Engaging Visitors Through Effective Communication," in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).

Additional Resources

Alderson, William T. and Shirley Payne Low. *Interpretation of Historic Sites*. 2nd ed. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996.

Black, Graham. *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement.* London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Braden, Donna R. and Mary Lynn Heininger. "General Stores: The Process and the Product." ALHFAM (The Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums) Proceedings of the 1993 Conference and Annual Meeting, St. Paul, Minnesota, XVI (1994): 42-70.

Braden, Donna R. "The Process and the Product: Transforming the General Store in Greenfield Village." *History News* 50, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 20-4.

Donnelly, Jessica Foy. *Interpreting Historic House Museums.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Glines, Timothy and David Grabitske. "Telling the Story: Better Interpretation at Small Historical Organizations." *Technical Leaflet #222: A Publication of the Association for State and Local History. History News* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2003).

Hench, John. *Designing Disney: Imagineering and the Art of the Show.* New York: Disney Editions, 2003.

Moscardo, Gianna. *Making Visitors Mindful: Principles for Creating Sustainable Visitor Experience Through Effective Communication.* Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing, 1999.

Tilden, Freeman. *Interpreting Our Heritage.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967.

Veverka, John A. *The Interpretive Training Handbook: Content, Strategies, Tips, Handouts, and Practical Learning Experiences for Teaching Interpretation to Others.* Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2011.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET #249
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Exhibit Makeovers: Do-It-Yourself Exhibit Planning

By Alice Parman

Do you remember the first time you visited a museum? How old were you? Who was with you? What impressions and memories can you conjure up? There may be a connection between those long-ago experiences and your current involvement with a museum or historical site. Tapping into your personal history can help you identify and empathize with your visitors—a necessary first step toward planning engaging, memorable exhibits.

As part of your volunteer or paid museum work, you may have the opportunity to develop a new exhibit a case, a group of displays, or even an entire gallery. With time, thought, and imagination, you and your colleagues can create visitor experiences that are eye-opening, mind-opening, even heart-opening. Few museum-based activities are as labor-intensive, or as rewarding, as exhibit development. An effective exhibit nurtures a bond between the visitor and your institution, and has the potential to inspire a lifelong love of museums.

This technical leaflet is a call to reflection followed by action. Whether you work through this introduction to exhibit planning on your own or with a group of colleagues, these observations and experiments may inspire you to tackle your own "exhibit makeover."[1]

What are Exhibits for?

In answer to this fundamental question, Barry Lord identifies *meaning* and *authenticity* as key factors that make exhibits transformative for visitors. "The purpose of a museum exhibition," he writes, "is to transform some aspect of the visitor's interests, attitudes, or values affectively, due to the visitor's discovery of some level of meaning in the objects on display—a discovery that is stimulated and sustained by the visitor's confidence in the perceived authenticity of those objects."[2]

The late Freeman Tilden, who first applied the word "interpretive" to visitor experiences in parks and other informal educational settings, incorporates similar factors into his definition of interpretation, "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, first hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."[3]

Consider these perspectives in light of a critique overheard years ago at Chicago's Field Museum. Two middle school students were filling out a paper-and-pencil worksheet (required by their teacher) in an exhibit hall. One said to the other in disgust, "This is just like school!" Clearly, those boys had been hoping to experience something *different* from school. Museum visitors expect to find an informal learning environment, without entry requirements, assignments, tests, or grades. Visitors are free to explore and discover; John Falk and Lynn Dierking have aptly named this core quality of the museum experience "free-choice learning." With thoughtful planning, exhibits can give all visitors—including students—opportunities to choose their own pathways, focus on topics and activities that interest them, and express their own ideas and opinions.

Romance: the Key to Planning Rewarding Exhibit Experiences

On your own or with colleagues, take time to recall and reflect on a frustrating experience you have had in a museum. Contrast that memory with a rewarding experience as a visitor. Begin to build your own list of exhibit planning dos and don'ts, based on your analysis of those very different encounters.

In his essay "The Aims of Education," Alfred North Whitehead offers a useful touchstone for planning rewarding exhibit experiences. Whitehead made his mark as a mathematician and philosopher. Along the way, he wrote essays about how people learn. His concepts of Romance, Precision, and Generalization correspond to levels of interest and expertise among your visitors.[4]

Whitehead believed that no matter how old you are, in order to learn something new, you must first fall in love with the subject matter. Dinosaurs, princesses, a basketball team, horses, a series of historical novels, nature photography—most people can identify a turning point that opened a door to a new fascination. Whitehead calls this mind-opening experience the stage of *Romance*.

When you fall in love with a person, everything about him or her becomes interesting. You ask, "What is your favorite flavor of ice cream? Where were you living in the fourth grade? Do you like cats?" The same holds true when we fall in love with a subject. We are hungry for information. We effortlessly absorb and remember every fact, no matter how detailed. This is what Whitehead calls the stage of *Precision*. Most kids who love dinosaurs don't grow up to be paleontologists. But their love affair with fossils may teach them that they can master a body of knowledge,

Experiment #1

Exploration

Please follow these directions one step at a time, without reading ahead.

1. Stand by yourself near the front entrance to the exhibit gallery.
2. Relax. Spend one or two minutes clearing your mind and using all your senses to become as attentive as possible to your environment.
3. Let yourself be drawn in any direction toward any one of the exhibit spaces.
4. Explore the exhibits until you find an object that you really like. Move around and look at this object from different points of view.
5. Make a drawing of the object. ____________________ (Use blank side of this page.)
6. List any words that will help you describe the object to another person. ____________________
7. What are some questions you have about this object? List them. ____________________
8. How does this object make you feel? ____________________
9. How is it like you? ____________________
10. How is it different? ____________________

or convince them that even the biggest and strongest critters may turn out to be vulnerable. For Whitehead, this is the culminating stage of learning, *Generalization* of a set of principles to other areas of one's life.

Romance is the essential ingredient in exhibit planning. Most people come to the museum in search of romance. They hope they'll fall in love with something in the course of their visit. It's very frustrating to run up against a welter of facts (such as a display case full of old tools) or a generalization ("Pioneer Tools"). Whoever planned those exhibits was already in love with tools, but neglected to do the essential matchmaking that would enable others to discover the romance of tools. Without romance, precision is just wasted breath and generalization becomes "this is just a bunch of old stuff and has nothing to do with me."

This technical leaflet alternates between information-sharing and hands-on, minds-on activities. Some might call them exercises, but it's more fun to think of them as experiments in creative exhibit development. The first experiment, *Exploration*, will help you fall in love all over again with the objects in your institution. Viewing your own collection through this new lens of romance, you'll be better equipped to help visitors connect, relate, and want to know more.

Exhibit Planning Step by Step

Keeping in mind the overriding goal—to create entry points that allow your visitors to connect, relate, and fall in love—you are ready to dive into exhibit planning. First, become familiar with the elements that make up an exhibit plan. Then try an experiment in exhibit planning—on your own, or with your colleagues.

< Step 1 >

Mission statement, take-home messages, and storyline

Exhibit planning begins with your institutional ***mission statement***. The mission statement summarizes why your museum, historical society, archives, and/or site exists, and identifies the people you serve. It reflects your distinct identity and purpose. Write your mission statement on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper, and refer to it throughout exhibit planning. Your exhibits and programs should be consistent with your mission. Ideally, they advance and contribute to fulfillment of your mission.

The next step is to decide on the big ideas that you want all visitors to take home from their experience.

Take-home messages don't necessarily appear anywhere in the exhibit. They are the moral, the summing-up, and the memory that visitors take home and apply to their own lives. Take-home messages are specific. They are also noble and inspiring. Like your museum's mission statement, take-home messages will guide you throughout the exhibit development process.

Don't skip this step! If you don't choose your take-home messages, they will choose you. Exhibits without clear, intentional take-home messages run the risk of being confusing, frustrating, incomprehensible, or even insulting to visitors. Some might conclude, "This museum makes me feel stupid," or "History is boring," or "A five-year-old could make better art than this."

In a museum setting, take-home messages fall into three main categories:

1) *The story.* The Columbia River Bar is both a gateway and a barrier to the Pacific Northwest. Though jetties and dredging have stabilized the Bar, it can still be dangerous and even deadly. (Columbia River Maritime Museum)
2) *The museum.* The Museum at Warm Springs is about our values and traditions. (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs)
3) *Myself, the visitor.* People like me are welcome at this museum. (Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture)

The storyline is the "so what" of your exhibit. The storyline expands on the take-home messages, encapsulating the core meaning of the exhibit in a succinct and compelling way. The storyline is the premise of the exhibit, and answers the question: "So what? Why go to all the time and trouble to create this experience for visitors?"

Some examples:

The Panhandle Plains Historical Museum in Canyon, Texas, tells a regional story. To outsiders, the Texas panhandle seems a desolate and inhospitable place. Yet people have lived there successfully for at least 12,000 years. How have they managed this? An exhibit titled *Experiments in Living* compared how people have addressed core life problems, from prehistory through the present day. (This approach was intended to challenge visitor assumptions about the superiority of contemporary panhandle cultures, by placing today's lifestyles on the same plane as earlier cultural experiments.)

Treasures from the Trunk: Quilts of the Oregon Trail, a 1993 temporary exhibit, brought ten heritage quilts to the Douglas County Museum in Roseburg, Oregon. Each quilt was made or owned by a woman who journeyed across the Oregon Trail in the mid-1800s. Quotes and historical evidence powerfully conveyed the message that none of these women had wanted to leave their homes and families. It was their husbands' idea to undertake the perilous journey across the Plains.

As you brainstorm ideas for your exhibit storyline, think of kindling a romance between your visitors and the subject matter. Aim for juicy ideas, with built-in drama and human interest. Remember, you are not writing this sermon with the choir in mind. The idea is to tell your story in a way that will engage and motivate people who are new to your museum—including some who have never before set foot in any museum. The next two experiments are warm-ups to get your creative energies flowing.

< Step 2 >

Organize your storyline into "galleries of thought"

In a well-planned exhibit, visitors can follow the storyline as it unfolds in a series of "chapters." Exhibit designer Craig Kerger calls them "galleries of thought." Each chapter or gallery of thought presents an aspect of the subject matter you are interpreting. This arrangement helps visitors make sense of this unfamiliar material, as they view it from a variety of perspectives.

There's almost no limit to the number of ways you can organize an exhibit. The only limit is your creativity. To get you started, here are some types of organizing concepts that many exhibit planners have found useful:

Category: If you have a fine collection that relates to your storyline—military uniforms, obsolete business machines, tea-party china, branding irons, cameras—consider including multiple examples in your exhibit. But bear in mind that the fact that you find a category of objects fascinating doesn't mean those objects will automatically appeal to visitors. Think about how you first fell in love with branding irons, etc. Then figure out how to offer your visitors a similar opportunity.

An exhibit on African hats (*Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head*, High Museum of Art, 1997) displayed amazing hats from all over Africa in four-sided cases. For each hat, four illustrated labels explained who made the hat, how it was made, how it was used, and how it ended up in the museum's collection. Visitors read each label completely, and looked carefully and repeatedly at each hat. Whoever organized this exhibit understood that people are insatiably curious, and capable of learning just about anything!

Chronology: Does your storyline have a beginning, middle, and end? If so, you may decide to organize the content along a timeline. (Warning: some people demand a timeline because they feel lost without it. Others find that timelines make their eyes glaze over.) An alternative solution is to contrast "then and now." What was the floor plan of a typical family home in 1600 and today? When did men wear beards and when did they shave them off? How did people in North America cook their food in pre-contact Native cultures, in the pre-industrial era, in the nineteenth century, and before microwaves?

Analogy: To help visitors understand a complex process, use analogies to familiar processes. An exhibit on adaptation at the University of Oregon Museum of Natural & Cultural History invited visitors to

Experiment #2

Pocket Archaeology

Warm up the romance juices, and let your imagination roam, by brainstorming storylines for an imaginary exhibit. With a group of colleagues, choose a few everyday objects from your pockets, purses, and desktops. Put them all together on a tabletop. Work as a group or in pairs.

Imagine that you are archaeologists in the year 3000. These assembled objects are the findings of your latest dig. You have dated the site to about 2000, a little-known period in human history. You are planning a small exhibit to interpret this previously unknown culture to museum visitors. Using only these objects, brainstorm as many storylines as you can.

Allow 15 or 20 minutes. If you're working in pairs, share your storylines with the whole group. How many different approaches did you come up with? (Remember this time-honored principle of exhibit design: "There's more than one way to skin a cat.")

Experiment #3

Telling Meaningful Stories

Each person brings an object or image from home that is special to him or her. (Ask people not to share personal information about their special item until later on.) Arrange the objects and images on a table where everyone can study them. Use white gloves, or establish "no handling" rules.

As a team, focus on one object or photograph at a time. Everyone uses their observational and brainstorming skills to share viewpoints on the meaning of each item. What clues does each image offer about particular people and families, and the historic context of their lives? What can each object tell you about how, where, and when it might have been made? How does each object and image relate to regional, national, or global events and issues?

Following the general discussion of each item, invite the person who brought that object or image to share the inside story. What makes it special to the person who knows the most about it?

compare different types of bird beaks to tools such as pliers, a hammer, and tongs.

Observation/deduction: Visitors like to solve problems. Is there a special object in your collection that has a story behind it? Consider including that object in your exhibit, along with helpful hints (other objects, images, quotes, information) to help visitors discover what it all means.

An exhibit on Africa at the Field Museum of Natural History included a mysterious wood object the size of a bowling ball, with dozens of nails pounded into it. Through text and photos, visitors had the opportunity to learn that in this particular African culture, when two people had a dispute, they were brought together in front of the whole village to work it out. When they had come to agreement, each person pounded a nail into the piece of wood as a sign of his/her commitment. What an "a-ha" moment for visitors, to learn that such an apparently nondescript object could carry so much social meaning, and that a community could resolve conflict in such a creative way!

Comparison/contrast: An object that seems familiar to exhibit planners may be a mystery to many visitors. Children whose shoes come from the mall may not be aware that people can make shoes for themselves, by hand, from natural materials. A pair of flip-flops displayed next to woven sagebrush bark sandals can help visitors make the connection. How are they similar? How are they different?

Theme: A theme is a concept that shows up repeatedly throughout an exhibit. Deeply embedded in the subject matter, a theme expresses the essence of a person, group, or situation. For example, the Museum at Warm Springs celebrates the traditions and values of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon. The importance of elders is a core value, represented by words and images of tribal elders throughout the exhibit gallery.

Watchword: English speakers say, "Two heads are better than one." Masai speakers say, "One head cannot hold all wisdom." In the United States people say, "It's raining cats and dogs." Greek speakers say, "It's raining tables and chairs." Look for proverbial expressions, song lyrics, jokes, rhymes, and other quotes that sum up familiar and unfamiliar ways of understanding the world. These intriguing sayings show why cultural diversity is essential. They add meat and zest to your storyline.

Experiment #4

Develop an Exhibit Plan

Develop an exhibit plan that includes:

- Take-home message(s)
- A storyline that delivers the take home messages
- One or more organizing concepts
- Must-display objects and images
- A couple of juicy facts

< Step 3 >

Inventory the content and pin down the most important facts

Which objects and images must be displayed?

Are there some hidden treasures in the storerooms, always shown during behind-the-scenes tours but not available to general visitors? Are some objects and photos so controversial that you're afraid to display them? Those may be the ones that will be most interesting to visitors. Do some objects and images lack information? Putting them on display and inviting visitors to share their ideas and opinions may help you decipher some mysteries!

Facts: invite visitors to observe and guess… then tell them something fascinating!

Either in label text or in the course of a docent tour, invite visitors to be "history detectives." Suppose a length of rope is a centerpiece object, dramatically displayed and lit. All the clues say this rope is important. Why? Ask visitors what they think the rope is made of. This could be a lift-board interactive; visitors might study the rope through a magnifying glass. Main point: it's made of a natural fiber; it's not made of nylon. This is a fact that visitors can *observe.* Then ask whether the rope was made before or after the 1950s. This question requires visitors to *guess*, based on observation.

Now they're ready for some juicy facts that awaken the "romance" of this object: this rope was used in a hanging in Lane County, Oregon in 1899; and this was the *first legal execution* in Lane County. At this point, visitors may be ready to move to the "precision" stage: interested, attentive, and hungry for information.

< Step 4 >

Find ways to motivate and engage your visitors

Multiple perspectives: People are insatiably curious about everything, especially important things—the whys and wherefores of history, natural history, art, and science. At the same time, each person brings a unique set of experiences and perspectives to your exhibit. How can you make the most of your visitors' curiosity and knowledge? One way is to let them know that their questions and knowledge are valued, accepted, and encouraged in your museum.

A single viewpoint—especially in relation to a controversial issue—will quickly be perceived as a party line. Offer multiple perspectives, inviting visitors to consider various viewpoints and come to their own conclusions. Use first person voices, in the form of quotes, eyewitness accounts, and oral histories, to illustrate multiple perspectives.

Who knows the stories? Open up the process. An exhibit about a particular group must be developed in consultation with members of that group. They know the juicy facts. They also know what stereotypes and misconceptions are out there that you should try to correct.

Interactives: Identify "bullet-proof" objects, or use replicas, to allow visitors to touch, explore, manipulate. Find opportunities to add sound and smell to the experience. Adapt simple games such as I Spy. Exhibit mystery objects and mystery photos and invite visitors to comment. Visit a nearby children's museum to get ideas; they'll be appreciated by visitors of all ages.

Invite visitors to contribute: Visitors can write, draw, or audio-record in response to changeable questions. A moving array of responses was posted when the Minnesota History Center asked, "What is a family to you?" Visitors can contribute photos of family members and friends who live in other countries, and loan treasured objects, with accompanying stories. They can give you feedback on current and proposed exhibits. Some may decide to join your museum, volunteer…even serve on the board! The key here is to think of exhibits as a way to *communicate* with your visitors.

< Step 5 >

Plan the "look and feel" of your exhibit

The following information and guidelines on exhibit design (Step 5 and Step 6) were written by Jeffrey Jane Flowers, and are excerpted and adapted from Parman and Flowers, *Exhibit Makeovers:*

A well-designed exhibit—whether large or small—has a distinct visual style that communicates key messages about the content to viewers from across the room. This is usually accomplished through the use of one or several design tricks that you can use in your display.

Scale: If you have many small or similarly sized objects to work with, consider enlarging one element to draw people in. This could be accomplished by photographing or scanning an object or image and enlarging it to use as a backdrop for a section of your display.

Color: Gather your objects on a table with a neutral (white or off-white) background. Cover a table with clean butcher paper, available at craft stores on rolls, or a simple white table cloth. Ideally, your table would be about the same size as your case. If not, consider approaching this exercise in sections. Study the colors of the objects and discuss what might be complementary or contrasting color options. Perhaps a darker or lighter neutral color is needed to allow the natural variety of colors and forms to be seen clearly. Or perhaps the color range is a little dull, so a bright or dramatic color is need to liven up the objects.

Craft and art supply stores sell sheets of drawing papers in 18" by 24" sheets in a large variety of colors—once you have some colors in mind, purchase a few of these to try out colors as part of your display in the backdrop, headlines, or text areas.

Active Dimensions: Often our first impulse is to think of our display cases as flat or one-dimensional spaces with elements arranged horizontally in line

Experiment #5

Expand Your Exhibit Plan

Add these components to your exhibit plan:

- Multiple perspectives on an aspect of your exhibit
- An interactive experience
- A way for visitors to contribute something to the exhibit

Experiment #6

Imagine Your Exhibit Plan

To imagine what your exhibit will look like and how visitors will experience the space, try some thought experiments. Imagine must-display objects and images as…

- Actors in a play. What kind of stage set will help visitors get into the mood and spirit of the story they will act out?
- Hosts of a party. What's the theme of this party? How will you furnish the room so that visitors will feel comfortable and at home? What would make the party fun for them?
- Part of a story that is set in a particular time and place. How can you use colors, textures, furniture, materials, graphic and typography styles, sound and light, and other elements to transport people to another era or a different part of the world?
- Reflections of human experience and emotion. How could exhibit elements express the essential emotions of your story, such as joy, fear, sadness, or courage? What props and décor could proclaim what this exhibit is all about—family, work, sport, overcoming challenges, or other dimensions of life?

with the edges of the display unit. This arrangement tends to lead to a static, or inactive, layout. In addition to scale and color, simply taking one element of your display, such as a headline or object, and "breaking out" of the flat, right-angled grid adds activity and interest to the case. For example, an object or text panel that is suspended away from the back panel of the case appears to step forward toward the visitor. Similarly, objects and/or text panels that overlap instantly add a sense of depth to the case. Objects can appear float in a case either by being suspended with monofilament line, being set out from a backdrop on wire. A flat object can be pushed out from the back of a case with layers of foam core cut somewhat smaller than the object's dimensions.

Dynamic Angles and Groupings: While you have your objects out on the table, take some time to explore some playful and unusual arrangements of the pieces. A good exercise would be to start with them in the most static, even arrangement you can think of—as if each one was in a little compartment by itself with no sense of organization other than being placed neatly on a set of evenly spaced shelves.

Now consider your organizing concepts. Which of these concepts can be represented by the placement of your objects on the table? Which makes the most sense with the story that you are telling? Some examples:

A time line: Where the objects tell the story in a chronological order.

Context: Some objects may belong together since they were all owned by the same family or were part of the same historical event.

Compare and contrast: A dozen examples of different objects that are related by function that are interesting to see side by side.

Which of these arrangements is the most visually pleasing, or tells the story best? Take digital images of groupings that you particularly like, so that you can easily re-create them in your final case.

This is also a good opportunity to think outside the case if there is a blank wall that adjoins your display area. You might add a headline, graphic panel, or model, or create an oversized cutout object that relates to your topic and grabs attention from across the room.

< Step 6 >

Produce and install your exhibit

Create a blueprint: Take accurate measurements of your case and create a scale drawing of your space. If you are using a wall area near the case, be sure to include this area as well. Make this drawing as large as possible and practical for the team to share—you'll find it easier to visualize things when they are closer to the actual scale of your final display. Use paper cut outs, also to scale, to approximate objects, images, text panels, and groupings that will form the display. Work from measurements so that your shapes reflect the real dimensions of your elements. If you are using large sections of color, use colored paper to approximate these areas as well.

Arrange and rearrange these pieces until you feel that you have found a balance of objects, images, and text that tells your story, and shows off the objects and images well. If things seem too crowded, consider editing out part of the story. If things seem a little sparse, consider enlarging some of your images or creating a backdrop that complements the period or message of the display. When you find the perfect balance, tape your papers down, and use this as a master guide to prepare for your installation.

Assemble the pieces: Graphic panels and backgrounds are often the first sections of an exhibit installation. Keep graphics simple; use one font or typeface with a minimum of bold and italic variations. Avoid white type on a dark or black background; it's difficult to read. Mount your graphic panels on acid-free board and trim them neatly.

Some of your objects or images may need to be propped up or held in place to show well, or may need protection if a case can be bumped or shaken. Consider each object before you begin and consult with a curator or conservator in your region for ideas about archival-quality materials to hold these pieces in place. Various kinds of tape that you might use at home (including duct and scotch tape) are not compatible with museum displays.

Take time to think through and jot down a schedule with a list of installation tasks. Note which of the parts can be prepared in advance (text panels, mounting and framing), as well as what needs to be done on site (painting, hanging objects). Are there tasks that require two or more sets of hands to complete safely or special tools or hangers that you assume are in the toolbox?

If space and security allow, assemble all of your elements in a staging area a day or so before you install everything. Review the installation plans to be sure that there aren't any holes in your schedule, equipment, or materials. Installing a new exhibit is stressful enough without three trips to the hardware store!

Practice common sense installation. If this is your first installation, allow lots of extra time. Don't install the day before the opening—install three days before. Install when the museum is closed if possible. If not, block the space around the case so that visitors are not in the area. This will protect your objects from accidents and your visitors from tools, drop cloths and ladders.

Be thoughtful about lighting. Direct sun and bright incandescent lights can be harmful to many materials and possibly the inks in your graphic panels. A lower level of fluorescent light or indirect, filtered natural light outside of a case will be much safer.

Wear gloves (white cotton) when handling delicate objects. This will also protect your display panels from fingerprints. Secure everything carefully. Don't worry if a pin or wire shows—it is more important that artifacts are safe from things that go bump in the night. Clean the inside of the case with non-toxic glass cleaner as you work through sections—it may be impossible to reach a section of glass after elements are arranged. Clean the outside of the case thoroughly once you are finished. Clean every day for dust and fingerprints once the exhibit is open.

Congratulations! You've completed this experiment in exhibit planning. For further guidance on exhibit planning, design, and installation, consult the reference list below; and ask advice from museum colleagues in your community and region.

By starting small (with a single case or two), you'll learn skills and methods that are applicable to an exhibit gallery, or even an entire museum. And remember: the most important goal of any exhibit makeover—single-case, gallery-level, or museum-wide—is to offer engaging and meaningful experiences to your visitors.

Alice Parman, Ph.D. is an interpretive planner based in Eugene, Oregon and is author of *Exhibit Makeovers: A Do-It-Yourself Workbook for Small Museums,* part of the AASLH at AltaMira Press (www.altamirapress.com). Contact Alice at alice@aparman.com or find other information and resources at www.aparman.com.

Useful References for Exhibit Planning

Kathleen McLean. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions.* Washington, D.C.: Association of Science-Technology Centers, 1993.

Alice Parman and Jeffrey Jane Flowers. *Exhibit Makeovers: A Do-It-Yourself Workbook for Small Museums.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008.

Beverly Serrell. *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach.* Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1996.

Stephanie Weaver, *Creating Great Visitor Experiences: A Guide for Museums, Parks, Zoos, Gardens, and Libraries.* Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2007.

American Association for State and Local History. *Technical Leaflet Bundle 6: Exhibit Planning.* Nashville, Tennessee.

John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking. *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning.* Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2000.

Tammy S. Gordon. *Private History in Public: Exhibition and the Settings of Everyday Life.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2010.

Footnotes

[1] Alice Parman and Jeffrey Jane Flowers, *Exhibit Makeovers: A Do-It-Yourself Workbook for Small Museums* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008).

[2] "The Purpose of Museum Exhibitions," Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord, *The Manual of Museum Exhibitions* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 19.

[3] Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1977, 8.

[4] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

Technical Leaflet
A PUBLICATION of the AMERICAN ASSOCIATION for STATE and LOCAL HISTORY

#286

Choosing a Collections Management System

By The Collections Management Systems Taskforce

A collections management system is software designed to manage the collections of a museum or similar organization. It digitizes and stores data, images, and documents to preserve information, give more control to those managing the collections, improve communication, and provide a platform to make collections accessible to the public.

A formal CMS selection process provides a collections-based institution the opportunity to reflect on its collecting and documentation practices, map its strategy, realize new opportunities, identify emerging practices in the field, and ensure it is making the best use of its budget and resources to support this core activity. Done well, the process can have an enormous and sustaining impact on an institution's collecting capacity.

Whether you are looking to acquire your institution's first CMS or searching for a system to replace what you are using now, the process can be daunting for many organizations. Where should you start?

This technical leaflet provides information for reviewing and selecting a collections management system in three parts. Part one provides justification and data about why it is important to adopt a formal process to select or replace your CMS. Part two provides simple guidelines and tips to prepare information and organize yourself for choosing a CMS, and part three gives details and resources to accomplish the selection process.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Museums exist to interpret the past through artifacts, but also to care for these artifacts behind the scenes so they are available for future education. Collections management is the process by which collections are physically and intellectually organized and cared for.

The Importance of a Formal Selection Process

Requirements for collections management have changed significantly over the last two decades. In particular, the internet has driven a more open philosophy towards collections access and discovery, not only in publishing collections on one's website, but also the sharing of collections information with broader cultural content. To meet these new needs, it is important to select a CMS using a formal method, relying on systematically collected data.

A Mellon funded study, published in 2018 as "*Museum Technology Landscape*," provides data that helps us recognize where collecting institutions are today with CMS and what we need to prepare for the next step. At the time of the study, approximately half of respondents were considering or actively pursuing a replacement for their CMS. Only one quarter of respondents referenced any form of formal process to select their CMS, instead relying on peer recommendation, prior familiarity, or other informal methods. Approximately half of respondents had used their current CMS for over fifteen years, in a landscape where two-thirds have been managing their collections digitally for more than fifteen years. The study also found that roughly half of the staff originally involved in the selection process at these institutions was no longer employed there.[1]

Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Museum Needs

Museums in the twenty-first century are looking at their various collections in a more holistic and integrated way. Users (both staff and visitors) want to understand the relationships between collections. Yet the thought of integrating collection information from previously isolated departments (artifact, archival, natural history, oral history, library, etc.) could not be imagined twenty-five years ago, let alone be articulated or accomplished. Nevertheless, the needs of museum communities have changed and CMS development is fighting to keep up. Few off-the-shelf systems offer the ability to integrate collections information without expensive customization.

Institutions today consistently have more demands on time and production with less staff and funding. Museums need more advanced technology that integrates with other systems, including membership, financial, and operational databases. This can help an institution realize many untapped opportunities both programmatically and operationally. The right system should help increase existing and create new income streams while streamlining work processes and time management.

A diligent CMS selection process requires an institution to widen its search beyond what it is familiar with to explore and review systems that match their requirements in terms of both price and functionality. Conservatively, there are at least thirty CMS platforms on the market which, in addition to offering core collections management functionality, offer a variety of extended functions and installation options (local, network, or cloud-based) to suit many needs.

TOP REASONS TO INVEST IN A NEW CMS:

- Advance institutional goals in public service, accountability, and efficiency
- Increase accessibility for all users to broaden meaningful use of the collections
- Improve collections management and care
- Greater efficiency and functionality for intellectual control
- Improve legal accountability with properly recorded, managed, and accessible records
- Advance management and use of digital assets (Digital Asset Management System/ DAMS)

Getting Started

Before jumping into the deep end, make sure you establish a project team. That team can be made up of three to ten people, depending on your organization's size and needs. Choose a project leader to oversee the work and include individuals who interact with the collections in different ways (curators, archivists, collections managers, leadership, educators, volunteers, researchers, etc.). A variety of people will bring different and valuable voices and viewpoints to the selection process. Remember that not every member needs to be at every meeting and on every task. Value your team's time.

Define the Roles of the Project Team

Ideally each function in the team will be the responsibility of one person. In many situations, several roles may be the responsibility of one person. If needed, look beyond regular/paid staff to volunteers, board members, and other community members.

Regardless of job title, assemble individuals responsible for:

- Team leadership: keeps the project on track and communicates progress to institutional leadership.
- Technical advice: knows about technology in general and preferably the institution's technical capabilities.
- Data collection: knows about how data is stored, organized, and used in the current system, and able to evaluate how a potential CMS would fit the data needs of the collection.

The more information you seek to document about your collections, the more useful you will find a formal CMS.

- Purchasing: knows about purchasing procedures for the institution and responsible for communicating with vendors (this role is particularly important if you are a government institution with complex requirements).
- Collections knowledge: knows about the various collections and data management needs, and familiar with collections policies and procedures.
- User needs: knows about the needs of non-staff users such as researchers, students, teachers, web-users, etc. (which might include creating a survey or focus group).
- Other functions if needed: if you want a CMS that provides an integrated system beyond collections including point-of-sale, membership management, and donor management, have a representative responsible for articulating the needs of these other areas to the team.

Identify the Reasons for Choosing a New System

Articulate what the needs and concerns are. This does not need to be a long list. Use this to start figuring out what you need the new system to do, and this information should also be used to communicate to stakeholders.

Identify Future Goals

Think long-term and plan for the future. Could the system be used in other areas of the institution? Could the system help with future income? What kind of online presence do you want long-term? In some cases, CMS can be upgraded or appended later to meet future needs. Hold a brainstorming session, make a survey, or attend regular department staff meetings to get ideas without making your team large and unwieldy.

Determine the Scope, Time, and Budget of the Project

Be specific and realistic about "musts" for CMS functions. Set limits for time and budget. Realize the relationship between scope, time, and budget and be ready to alter each as the project moves forward. Make sure to include installation, maintenance, and ongoing support costs in your budget.

Identify the Stakeholders

Beyond the team, who is involved with the CMS? Consider volunteers, borrowing institutions, donors, researchers, and marketing folks. What are their needs for a CMS, and what stake do they have in the project? Do you need to survey them?

Examine Your Current Collections Documentation

Document where and in what format collections documentation is currently stored. This will influence the cost and potentially your choice of CMS.

Determine Who at Your Organization Has Contracting Authority

This sounds straightforward, but can be complicated in some situations. Who can authorize a Request for Proposal (RFP), and who can sign the contract?

Establish a Project Schedule

Include planning, procurement, launch, and testing phases. Consider other upcoming projects and your cyclical busy seasons.

Establish a Communication Plan

Be prepared to inform staff, volunteers, board members, and the public of possible upcoming changes. This may occur in different phases and could include marketing and personnel training.

Making It Happen

Convince Decision Makers and Funders

Once you have a team and plans for first steps in place, prepare a case statement to serve as the core document to fundraise for this project. The statement should include the mission, vision, and a brief history of the organization, as well as a clear outline of the need for a collections management system. A case statement is the opportunity to describe the project in detail.

To prepare a compelling statement, include answers to the following:

- What is a CMS?
- How will it impact our mission?
- Why is our current method ineffective?
- What is our long-term goal?
- How can the CMS benefit other areas of the organization?
- What is our implementation plan?
- What is the cost?

Next, identify potential funders.

- Federal, state, and local grant-makers, including corporations and private foundations
- Community foundation
- Current donors

Grant-Makers

Capacity-building grants may be the best option for funding a CMS. Grants are non-repayable funds that provide financial assistance to tax-exempt organizations. Look for a funder whose giving priorities align with your project's needs and proposed outcomes, and make sure your proposal fits their guidelines. Potential federal grant partners, such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities are listed on Grants.gov. Check with your state humanities council, arts council, historical society, and field services office about regional, state, and local grant options.

Community Foundations

Community foundations serve a specific geographic area. They are grant-making public charities made up of a collection of individual charitable funds serving a variety of diverse causes. Community foundations support local nonprofits, highlighting areas of need and worthy causes and collectively connecting individual donors to support in the community as a whole. Even if your local community foundation cannot fund your project, they may know of another funder who might be interested, so it's good to make the connection.

Current Donors

Review your current database of donors to identify those with capacity and/or interest in collections care. First consider donors to the collections. Look to those who have contributed money and objects: these individuals understand the value of an organization's collections to its mission.

Once prospective funders have been identified, it's time to write a funding proposal. Take the time to research and gather information about the potential funders: this will be valuable when personalizing "the ask" and making the connection between the funder and project. Start with an introduction, then a summary of the need and/or the case statement, and the budget. For greater impact include anecdotes, case studies, and photos of how the current CMS functions and how a new CMS will improve service, workflow, and preservation. Conclude with an explanation of benefits the organization can provide as thanks the donors' support like recognition or a special tour of collections area. Use this as an opportunity to be creative.

The collection is the heart of the organization. It defines the purpose, the audience, and the relevance of the organization. Fundraising for appropriate management, care, and conservation is essential to the success of the mission. Be sure to include this in all proposals and place the emphasis on the project and less on the organization. There is no organization without a collection.

Defining Your CMS Requirements

To figure out what requirements you have for a CMS, start by assessing what you have. Doing this will help you determine the strengths and weaknesses of your current practices and will help you see where there is room for improvement.

- List all the information you track in your current system. If you don't currently use a CMS, list the information you track on catalog sheets, accession books, or in spreadsheets. Consider different needs for art, artifacts, oral histories, books, and digital collections.
- What functions does your current CMS provide that you need in the new system? Can it make the collection searchable online? Does it track loans (including interlibrary)? Does it organize exhibition information? Does it track membership? Are both collection and monetary donors tracked and cross referenced? Be sure to include those in your list as well.
- Consider the future needs of your institution as well as potential users of your data for both collections and other institutional functions.
- Are there any specific things you wish your current system did? For example, can you only use your CMS on specific computers, but wish you could use it on any device? Does the system need to interact with other applications or software? Do you need a point-of-sale application?
- Take time to review and hone business processes and workflows. Document the institution's strategy with respect to collecting and collections management.

- Review and analyze how effective current operations are, including some Return on Investment (ROI) calculations. An ROI and/or Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of a current and new CMS should include the actual cost to the institution and the potential in terms of revenue and productivity.

Choosing the Right Type of Product

After the needs of your organization and users have been determined, there are several approaches you can consider for acquiring a CMS: (insert Table here)

Local, Network, and Cloud-Based Systems

There are many options for data storage, and most of those options fall into three broad categories: local, network, and internet (cloud) storage. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. The option you choose will largely depend on existing infrastructure and access needs. There are pros and cons to each choice and knowing what best suits the institution's needs is a big step in choosing a CMS.

Purchase "off-the-shelf"	Purchase a system that is pre-built to perform all or most of your required functions, hosted either by your organization or by the software provider. **PROS:** This option is usually the most economical. **CONS:** Will likely compromise some of your requirements or items on your wish list.
Purchase a commercial product and have it customized	**PROS:** This option will help avoid some compromises. Like the off-the-shelf option, it has a maintenance and support structure behind the product. **CONS:** Usually entails additional costs, and heavy customization may adversely affect future system upgrades by the provider.
Acquire an open-source solution and contract for development	This method may allow you to acquire a product that is more customizable. Hiring an outside contractor to customize the product for you will include additional costs, but does not require you to have the in-house expertise needed to complete the customization.
Acquire an open-source solution and develop in-house	Because open-source software can be free to acquire, this option can be very economical if you have the skills and knowledge on hand. It should only be chosen if you have considerable information technology expertise on-staff to install, test, customize, maintain, and support the software. You should also be sure that this IT support will remain an integral part of your organization's staff in the future.
Create a custom system from scratch	Creating your own system allows you to have greater control over the end product and can ensure that you meet all of your needs and wishes. This approach requires a great deal of time and specialized expertise to design, develop, and maintain the system. It is rarely a timely or cost-effective solution.

List of CMS Companies

Archive Tech, https://architech.net
ArtsystemsPro, www.artsystems.com/product/art-gallery-software-art-collection-management-software
Axiell Collections, https://alm.axiell.com
Collection Harbor, https://collectionharbor.com
CollectiveAccess, www.collectiveaccess.org
Collector Systems, www.collectorsystems.com/index.html
Gallery Systems, www.gallerysystems.com
HistoryIT, https://platform.historyit.comvv
Keepthinking, www.keepthinking.it/qi-the-universal-content-management-solution
Lucidea, https://lucidea.com/argus
LYRASIS, www.collectionspace.org
Minisis Inc., www.minisisinc.com/index.html
Mukurtu, http://mukurtu.org
PastPerfect Software Inc., www.museumsoftware.com/pp5.html
Re:discovery Software, https://rediscoverysoftware.com
SKINsoft, www.skinsoft.org
Vernon Systems Ltd., http://vernonsystems.com/products/vernon-cms
Zetcom, www.zetcom.com/en

Local installation is a stand-alone computer with CMS software installed on it. **Network** installation is a CMS on a server attached to multiple computers. **Cloud**-based installation is a CMS installed online and accessible through the network to any computer anywhere. These options can also be combined. Think of these options as a sliding scale. The more local the installation of the CMS software the more responsibility the manager has to maintain, update, and back up the system and data. Cloud systems give more access points to data, but offer less control.

There are three types of security regarding these choices: physical, data loss, and access. Local systems have the highest security against someone accessing data, but less security for data loss and even less for physical security. Network systems have medium security overall. Cloud systems have high security for physical and data loss. Access security for cloud systems has so far proven safe but, for some, trusting the cloud is still difficult. Some CMS providers combine the strengths for these systems. You can as well by creating an off-site backup for a local system, for example. Table


DAKOTA ELLIOTT / TENNESSEE STATE MUSEUM

No matter what type of system you use, the goal of collections management is the same: to be able to easily access and organize information about artifacts while ensuring their long-term preservation.

How to Write an RFP

Develop a vendor-request process known as a Request for Proposal (RFP). An RFP is accepted best-practice for selecting any significant software application. An RFP is a structured document, often a spreadsheet, drafted by an institution that details the scope and functionality that it would like from a CMS. Document exactly what data will be entered in the system and what will be done with it. The requirements can be broad, ("Does your CMS have a web publishing module?") or highly specific ("Can I use wildcards and search only the object title field"?).

The Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) has made two invaluable tools available through its website (www.canada.ca/en/heritage-information-network.html) which help guide the RFP and CMS selection process. The first is a detailed RFP guide to help you prepare a RFP specifically for a CMS. The second is a robust checklist that will help you define your specific requirements and select the program that best suits your needs. As you move forward in your own CMS selection process, these resources should be consulted thoroughly and often. They will help you navigate the process and take you step-by-step through the crucial detail work of finding the product that is best for your institution. CHIN's CMS criteria checklist will help you think about the vast array of requirements you will want to consider.

Whether your RFP is very broad or very specific, it is most important that you are clear in laying out your requirements. This document will form the basis for a bidding process from CMS vendors who will respond in detail about their product and how it meets your requirements. You should be sure to submit your RFP to at least three different systems for review (you may want to include your current system). You may also elect to post your RFP on a relevant listserv or on your museum's website to allow vendors you may not be familiar with to respond. This variety will enable you to make good judgments about the products. Once you have received responses, the project team should review them to determine which product most closely matches your needs.

	Pros	*Cons*
Local	• Most secure data • Quickest access to data	• High maintenance responsibility • Backup's protocol falls on the user • Limited access to data
Network	• Low maintenance responsibility • Backups handled by network administration • Data accessible to network users	• Busy networks can slow data access • Data security defined by network administration • Access to data for reporting can be limited
Cloud	• Maintenance responsibility falls on the company • Backups are ensured by the company • Access to data is virtually unlimited	• Security of data is largely out of the user's control • Data access can be slow (dependent on connection) • Access to data for report is limited

When putting together the RFP, make sure to include the following things:

Cover Page	Include the name of your organization, the budget for the project, a short description of the RFP goal and a general timeline for RFP submission, project start-up, and project completion.
Background	Describe your organization, collection size and type, current state of digitized materials, online content, and plans for future growth.
Technical Environment	Describe in detail your current CMS as well as your network if you have one, operating systems, computer equipment, and internet browsers. Try to be as detailed about your current and future CMS as possible, including information such as how many records are in your systems, how many users have accounts, and what each user has permission to do within the system.
Contact Information	Provide contact information for your contracting authority and any individuals that vendors can contact if they have questions.
Timeline	Outline the dates of the RFP, including deadlines for submitting proposals, timeline for evaluation, and timeline for project start-up and completion.
Scope of Work	The scope of work will form the core of the RFP. It should outline in detail what the organization is seeking and should be based on your preliminary internal research. The scope of work should include, but not be limited to, major project goals; the necessary functions the CMS should provide; any functions that are not necessary, but highly desired; required training and documentation; data migration; expectations about backup of data and ongoing support after installation.
Limitations	Describe the parameters of the project. Will ongoing support be required or will support be on a case-by-case basis? Are there limitations to the length of contract? Be sure to note the maximum budget.
Collections Management Requirements	Spell out the procedures that the system must handle. These are the primary functions you plan to use most of the time and are crucial to doing your work. Ex: object entry, acquisition and accessioning, location and movement, condition reporting, loaning in and out, deaccessioning and disposal.
Submission Requirements	Outline for bidders what they should include in their submission. Tell them where to submit and when, how many copies, and in what format.
Contractual Details	Be sure to include general legal information, such as details about specific lines of communication, the right to cancel the RFP, and issues related to subcontracting.
Evaluation Criteria	Describe for the vendors how you will be evaluating their proposals. If you will be looking at clarity of proposal, the total cost of the project, their understanding of your needs, or their track record based on references, tell them up front. They will put together a better proposal if they understand what you want.
System Demonstration	You should always request a demonstration of each product, so you can be sure that you have seen what it can do. Make sure you let the vendors know what type of demonstration you would like. Would you like them to offer a live virtual demonstration? Would you prefer a downloaded version? What features need to be included in the demonstration? Use your mandatory requirements list to determine the features to be demonstrated and make sure you have key personnel available for the demonstration.

Calculate Real Costs

As you create your RFP, you want to have a general understanding of real costs, which encompass all expenses related to the system: not just the software itself, but the costs of maintaining and managing it. Be sure to include questions regarding warranty, registration, and ongoing support costs in your RFP process so that you receive quotes from each vendor. You will want to ask about any equipment purchases and/or upgrades each vendor recommends along with the CMS, such as a new computer, server, or hard drive. While a vendor may not provide such materials, they are often necessary to ensure the system functions optimally.

The IT member of your project team should be able to help you estimate the amount of time it will take to provide operational oversight of the system. If, for example, an employee will invest ten hours per week to manage the system integration, multiply his/her hourly rate by ten and consider that a regular expense. Together, the costs of purchase, maintenance, associated equipment needs, and system management will equal your real costs. This figure will be instrumental as you compare the offerings of each CMS vendor, and as you prepare your CMS-related components of your budget moving forward. Also figure out the life expectancy of the product: when should you be prepared to replace or upgrade it? Find out if upgrades are optional, mandatory, and/or included in the purchase price of the product or the maintenance contract. Found out what upgrades cost and budget appropriately.

Identify CMS Companies

Now you are ready to find the right company to provide the CMS system you need (finally!). One resource to help narrow the field is the CMS Company List below. This is a brief overview of a large number of companies with a wide variety of capacity. The second resource is the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) CMS Vendor Profiles.

Do not make decisions from these lists alone. You want a strong business relationship with the company you choose. Start with contacting the companies on your short list and have the conversation of where you are, what you want, and where you want to be. Be sure not to over or understate your situation. Check out each company's list of who already uses their system. Call institutions similar to yours and ask questions. Most people are happy to help colleagues.

AJA BAIN

A dedicated project team makes choosing a CMS an easier and more comprehensive process.

Conclusion

Whether you are looking for a CMS to replace a current system or acquiring one for the first time, it is important that you are very thoughtful and thorough during the selection process. While informal selection methods may seem easier, a formalized process will provide the opportunity to make certain that you have considered all angles and taken all needs into consideration. Preparing an RFP will bring the necessary people to the table to ensure that your organization understands and clearly defines its collections management and technical needs. While it may seem like a lot of time and energy to invest, the benefits of reflecting on collections practices, mapping strategies, thinking about the future, and aligning budget and resources with core museum activities will be an ample return on your investment.

View the full CMS report, including a glossary of terms, more detailed information about each company, and further resources at www.aaslh.org.

The Collections Management Systems Taskforce works to provide collecting history organizations with practical how-to information and resources to use when searching for a new CMS. Taskforce members are: Paul Bourcier, Sheila Carey, Julia Gray, Nik Honeysett, Jessica Jenkins, Julie Kemper, Jennifer Landry, Aimee Newell, Katrina Ojaste, Erin Richardson, and Laura Hortz Stanton. Contact Julie Kemper at julie.kemper@ky.gov.

[1] Deborah Schwarz and Bill Adair, "Community as Curator: A Case Study at the Brooklyn Historical Society," in Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World (*Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 112-123., (there's a comma here - is there missing text or delete comma?)

[2] Colleen Dilenschneider, "In Museums We Trust. Here's How Much," March 6, 2019, https://www.colleendilen.com/2019/03/06/in-museums-we-trust-heres-how-much-data-update.

[3] Southern Poverty Law Center, "Hate groups reach record high," February 19, 2019, https://www.splcenter.org/news/2019/02/19/hate-groups-reach-record-high.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#278

Cleaning House: A Guide to Deaccessioning and Abandoned Property

By Alli Rico

Museums today are in a constant state of flux. They change with society, collecting tangible evidence of this transformation as it occurs through time. But museums are not static entities. They must be allowed to evolve as priorities shift and visitor interests morph. Struggling to meet the demands of a new generation of visitors, today's museums—particularly history museums—are faced with the challenge of reinterpreting and reimagining collections in new and inspiring ways. Additionally, these museums are working to reshape their collections to better fit their missions and collecting policies.


Alli Rico

A Chippendale chair in the Naples room at the Cambridge Historical Society.

The Cambridge Historical Society was founded in 1905, and since 1957 has been located in the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House at 159 Brattle Street.

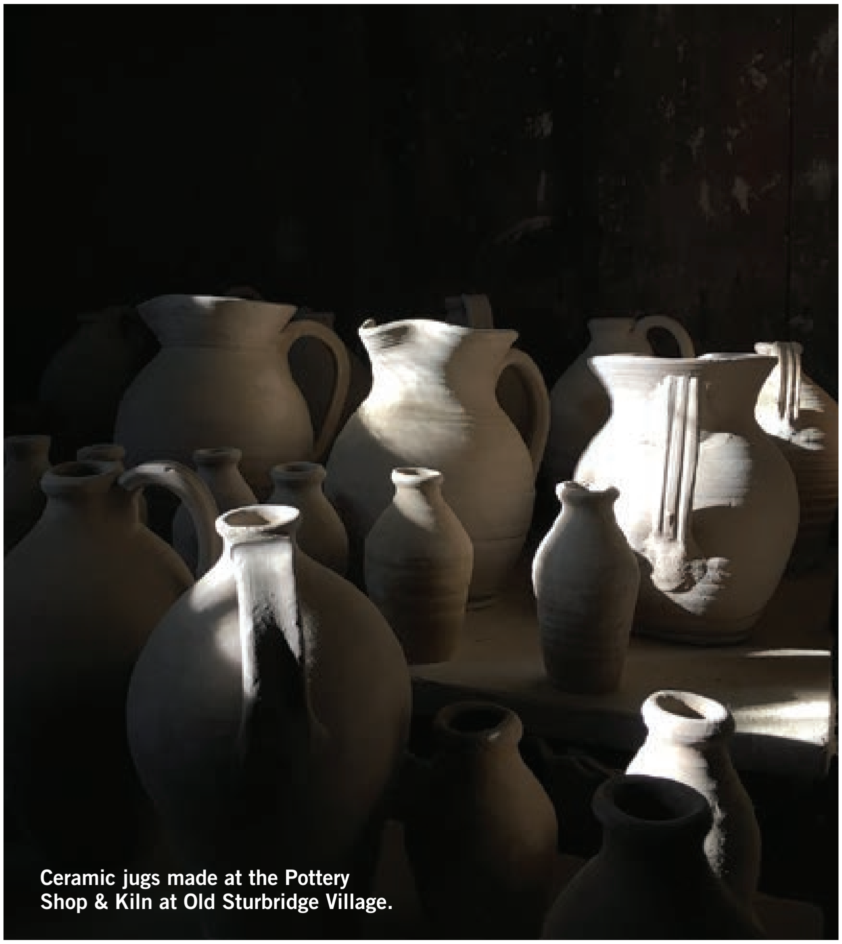
Evolving to meet new and developing trends should involve a thoughtful scan of the museum's collection. Distilling a collection should lead to deaccessioning objects that no longer—or in many cases never did—serve to further the museum's mission. While many museum professionals may know the definition of deaccessioning, it serves to restate it. Deaccessioning is the "[formal] process of removing an accessioned object or group of objects from the museum's collections." This process is an essential component of any strong collections management policy.[1]

Deaccessioning Procedure

A thorough, well-written deaccessioning policy is just as important as a thorough acquisitions policy. If staff know why their museum collects what it collects, they will have a better idea of why objects are chosen to be deaccessioned. Never fear: writing a deaccessioning policy doesn't require starting from scratch! Collegial efforts have made the process of writing these policies less intimidating. Not only have many museums made their policies available through AAM, AASLH, and other professional groups, oftentimes staff from other museums are willing to share their internal documents with colleagues, and will offer assistance when drafting new documents. (For example, the Shiloh Museum of the Ozarks has shared its deaccessioning policy on AASLH's website.)[2]

The critical part of the deaccessioning policy is, of course, the procedure. A comprehensive procedure will help current and future staff work their way through the deaccessioning process, and will be useful in the event that a deaccession is challenged or questioned. If staff can point to a thorough and board-approved procedure, they can show that due diligence was followed during the deaccessioning process.[3]

The deaccessioning procedure should start with ensuring your museum can show proof of this due diligence. Once staff has selected and set aside collections objects to be deaccessioned, each object should be thoroughly researched. Depending on the size of your institution, this might be done by a collections manager, registrar, or curator (or one person performing all three roles). Provenance research to document the life of the object prior to acquisition is particularly important. Examine your accession records or proceedings to determine when objects were accepted into the collection. Donor history, possible reasons for accession, and any further research into the object may also be necessary, depending on how thoroughly the object was initially documented when it first entered your collection. A provenance research form can come in handy to help organize this research for future use.



Alli Rico

Ceramic jugs made at the Pottery Shop & Kiln at Old Sturbridge Village.

Next, ensure the museum has clear title to every potential deaccession. For older museums and historical societies, this can often involve researching loans with little documentation, and objects found in the collection. Many historic museum collections have these poorly documented objects in their collection simply due to the age of the museum. Luckily, most states in the U.S. have statutes that specifically deal with the disposition of museum property, which will prove helpful when attempting to clear title to undocumented objects. If you're considering starting a deaccessioning project, become familiar with your local abandoned property laws and confer with colleagues at other institutions on how to best approach these materials. If you can afford to do so, consulting with a lawyer familiar with property law is an even more ideal solution.

While you are researching the provenance of these potential deaccessions, start considering alternative homes for the objects in question. Think about other area museums. What are their collections like? What are the stories they try to tell through their objects and exhibits? Taking this route not only promotes collegiality between museums, but shows an honest attempt to keep potential deaccessions in the public domain. Museums have an ethical responsibility to share objects, not hoard them. This idea of sharing can be extended to a permanent deaccession to a museum that has the resources and mission to fully utilize the object in question. Keep track of all correspondence regarding the transfer of objects between museums for future reference. And in that regard, make sure to save everything relating to deaccessioning an object: every email, letter, and form that you work on.[4]

AASLH has posted a sample deaccession recommendation form from the Historical Society of Central Florida at go.aaslh.org/Deaccession.

Forms like this ensure that you have followed proper procedure for choosing to deaccession these objects, and makes approval from the board and committees easier.

Additionally, consult an outside opinion when considering objects for removal from the collection. Often, an object may appear to be of little or no value to a curator or collections manager, but an outside perspective could provide an alternative way of viewing an object within the context of the museum's mission. This outside opinion can come from colleagues at other institutions, and from the members of your collections committee.

Document the reasons an object might be deaccessioned, and list those in your deaccessioning policy. These reasons seem to be standard across the field. When deciding to deaccession from your collection, the object could be:

- outside the scope of your collecting policy or no longer relevant to your mission
- a duplicate of other objects
- unable to be properly preserved, in poor condition, or causing a risk to the collection
- lost, damaged, or beyond reasonable repair

When noting your reasoning on a deaccession form, elaborate on each cause as it fits each object. Is an object causing risk to the collection because of a potential insect infestation? Say so in your recommendation. The more specific and descriptive you can be in your recommendations to your collections committee and board, the better your argument will be.

Once you have researched your potential deaccessions, each deaccession recommendation needs to be approved. Typically, this approval first comes from the collections committee, and then from the board. Create a deaccessioning recommendation form for each object. It should include:

- Object name and accession number
- Donor information (if available)
- Reasons for deaccessioning
- Method of deaccession (donating to another museum, public auction, destruction, etc.)

Abandoned Property

Abandoned property is endemic to the museum field, and it is important to understand the abandoned property laws in your state before embarking on a deaccessioning project. Many small state and local history museums have objects that have been in the collection seemingly forever, but nobody is quite sure where these objects came from. It is the responsibility of the registrar or collections manager (depending on the size of your institution) to reconcile all issues of title before any forward progress can be made on a deaccessioning project.

There are typically two types of abandoned property found within a museum's collection: old loans (often called unclaimed loans) and objects "found in the collection" (FIC).

Often, it is beyond the means of the museum to do research to find living heirs to old loans, as this requires extensive time and financial investment. It is important to thoroughly research how the museum documented loans. Sometimes, older museum records will use the term "permanent loan," which can often imply the object was given as a gift to the museum.[6]

It's important to note that old loans do not include undocumented objects or objects found in the collection. After a thorough collection inventory, undocumented objects can sometimes be reconciled and returned to their original status (permanent collection, loan, gift). However, objects labeled FIC are those that, after thorough research, the museum is still unable to determine the object's original status within the collection. With FIC's, though, the burden of proof rests with the claimant, to provide evidence that they are in fact the legal owner of the object.[7]

All museums deal with undocumented objects found in the collection, simply due to the age of most U.S. museums and the relatively recent professionalization of the field. It is only the past few decades that the museum field has begun using unified methods of documentation and training; as such, older objects suffer from a lack of proper cataloging and documentation.[8]

The best way to rectify this situation (before embarking on your deaccessioning project) is to do a complete collections inventory. This is time- and staff-intensive, and often put off to complete other tasks; however, it is an important part of healthy collections management, and absolutely critical if you plan to work on deaccessioning. A complete inventory can seem daunting, but if you are short of staff and time (as so many of us are), doing spot inventories can help you make slow progress toward a complete collections inventory, and will allow you to still be thoughtful about your collections. At the end of the inventory, when all FIC's are documented, the museum will be in a better position to deaccession

Old loans are expired loans, or loans of unlimited duration left unclaimed by lenders at the museum. The term includes unclaimed objects left at the museum under informal custody arrangements for study or examination by museum staff.

Found in collection are undocumented objects that remain without status after all attempts to reconcile them to existing records of permanent collection and loan objects are completed.[5]

Michigan Supreme Court

Alli Rico

Henry and Lance, two resident oxen at Old Sturbridge Village, a living history museum in central Massachusetts.

these objects due to their "undisturbed nature" in the museum—meaning, because nobody has come forward to claim the objects in question, it is more than likely that the objects belong to the museum.[9]

As the museum field becomes more professionalized, and more institutions improve collecting practices, museum professionals have found themselves looking to abandoned property laws to determine how to deal with unclaimed loans, undocumented objects, and objects found in the collection. Luckily, most states now have statutes that specifically deal with the disposition of museum property (the Registrars Committee of the American Alliance of Museums has a complete listing as of 2013 at www.rcaam.org/resources/general-reference). This type of legislation is crucial for effective collections care, as the objects in question are rarely of high value, but most often are abandoned or idly collected furniture and other odds and ends that end up accumulating in storage.[10]

Massachusetts Law on Museum Property

Each state statute will vary, so it is impossible to discuss them all here. However, there are similarities that are shared among the statutes. Research your own state and local statutes before moving forward on any deaccessioning project as these examples may not apply where you are.

Here is an example of how this works specifically in Massachusetts. A notice to the lender should be sent via Certified Mail. It should include the following:

1. A description of the object(s) in question
2. The date or approximate date the object arrived at the museum
3. How to contact the museum regarding the object.

If the museum cannot get in touch with the lender (usually because the address is no longer valid), a public notice must be published in a local newspaper. Some museums, like the Worcester Art Museum, post a list of abandoned property on the Web. Doing this can increase the visibility of the abandoned property notifications.

Many statutes will also discuss emergency conservation with regard to abandoned property. You'll want to check your local statute for specifics, but overall, it's a good idea to make a record of any and all emergency conservation methods used on an unclaimed object, and include that record in the object file. Some statutes, like the Massachusetts statute (MA General Laws, Part II, title II, chapter 200B), include disposal of the object as a measure of emergency conservation, but this is only if the object poses a health risk to staff, the collection, or the general public. If this situation arises, follow normal deaccessioning procedures, making record of the object's rapidly deteriorating state and imposed health and safety hazards.[11]

Of course, sometimes your abandoned property is a loan that was left in your museum. In this case, there's a better chance the museum will have a record of the loan, hopefully with the contact information of the lender. You would send a Certified Mail letter with the same information as previously mentioned. This method confirms delivery. Why is this important? If the letter is successfully delivered and the lender does not claim his or her property after a certain amount of time (in Massachusetts, the limit is one year), the museum will acquire title to the object. Keep copies of all correspondence, including the letter and return receipt, as proof of due diligence.

Deaccessioning is the "[formal] process of removing an accessioned object or group of objects from the museum's collections." This process is an essential component of any strong collections management policy.

It is possible that your local statute has a section discussing poorly documented property held at a museum. Section five of the Massachusetts law reads: "Property in the possession of a museum for which the museum does not know, and has no reasonable means of determining, the identity of the lender or claimant shall become the property of the museum if no person has claimed the property within 7 years after the museum can document the museum's possession of the property. The museum shall become the owner of the property free from all claims on the day after the 7–year period ends. This section shall not apply to stolen or confiscated property."[12]

You might find that many of the objects in your collection (especially if you work at an older museum) have the donor's name listed in the accession records, along with a relative date of donation. This is good information to have, because it establishes (at least in Massachusetts) the concept of "reasonable means." Trying to find the descendants of each donor for objects originally donated in the nineteenth or early twentieth century would be time-consuming, and more than likely require assistance from a genealogist. Engaging in this kind of research goes far beyond the concept of "reasonable means" and can be cost-prohibitive.

Having a relative date of donation recorded in accession logs or society proceedings is extremely helpful in regards to the "seven-year rule" in the Massachusetts statute. This requires research into the museum's object files and documentation, but if you're planning on deaccessioning objects, you'll be doing this research already. If your museum has an object inventory slip, photographs, object records, or entries in the museum's ledgers or proceedings, with a date of the object entering the museum's possession, the museum can take title to the object one day after the seven-year mark.

Hopefully, there have been inventories done of your collection since objects were first collected. These inventories will serve as further proof of your object's undisturbed nature within the collection. Many statutes focusing on abandoned property in museums will contain a section discussing legal action brought against museums by claimants to property within a museum. In Massachusetts, action cannot be brought against the museum more than two years after the date the museum provided notice to the lender. In other states, the length of time may be different. Seek out legal counsel if such an action is brought against your museum. This is why it's important to document every step of your deaccessioning project.

Keeping lenders aware of the law in your state is the responsibility of the museum. Some statutes require it, but even if it is not required, it is wise to provide lenders with a copy of your local statute at the time a loan agreement is made, so all parties are clear on the responsibilities of the museum and the lender. Make sure your museum holds onto loan agreements in perpetuity. A lack of loan agreements is what places most museums in the position of dealing with unclaimed and undocumented property. Now that record-keeping and databases are used throughout the field and employees are better trained, keeping loan agreements should mitigate most property issues in the future.

The problem of abandoned property in museums is universal; the size and scope of the problem varies by institution. Registrars and collections managers need to be acutely aware of their current unclaimed loans, and ensure that new objects coming to the museum do not suffer the same fate. It is important that museum employees acknowledge the state of abandoned property within their collections, and set up a plan for diligently working towards remedying the status of these objects. Deaccessioning, and the methodical process required to do it correctly, forces museum employees to thoughtfully consider the relevance and usefulness of every object in their col-

The Weave Room at the Boott Cotton Mills Museum, part of Lowell National Historic Park.

Alli Rico

lection. How does each object help tell the museum's story? How can it be best interpreted? What are the strengths of each object within the context of the rest of the collection? If you struggle to answer these questions for certain objects, you might need to consider deaccessioning them.

It's important to keep in mind that museums are not an objective record, but a biased accumulation of objects collected by the museum's founders. By creating a thorough deaccessioning plan and procedure, you will set your museum and staff up to have a greater sense of why you collect what you collect, and why you choose to deaccession select objects.[13]

Author's Note/Disclaimer: This leaflet should in no way replace obtaining legal advice or counsel if seeking assistance on a deaccessioning project or other abandoned property issues. This is an academic analysis of the law from a non-legal perspective, and should not be taken as legal advice or opinion.

I strongly recommend you consult both *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, by Marie Malaro, and *MRM 5: Museum Registration Methods*, by Rebecca S. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, before moving forward with a deaccession project.

Resources

Historical Society of Central Florida, Sample Deaccessioning Recommendation form: resource.aaslh.org/view/sample-deaccession-recommendation-form.

Registrars Committee, American Alliance of Museums *Abandoned Property Laws by State*: www.rcaam.org/resources/general-reference.

Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, Sample Deaccessioning Policy: http://resource.aaslh.org/view/sample-deaccession-policy.

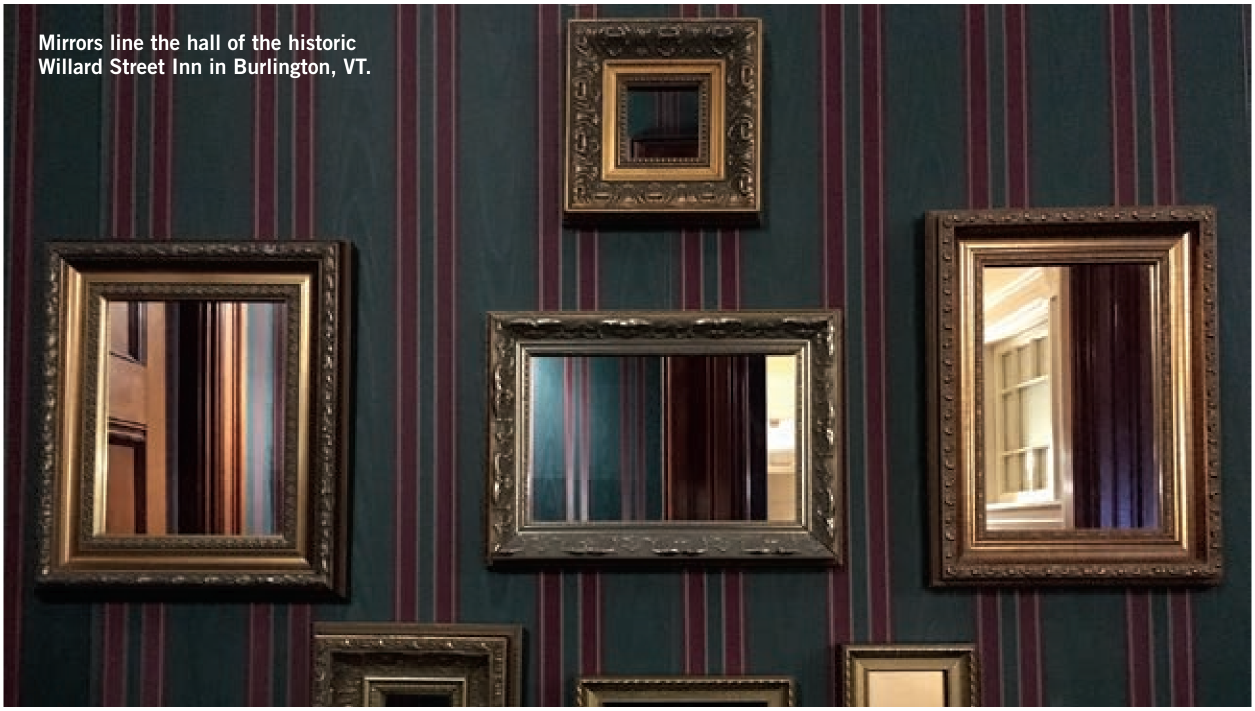
Additional References

American Alliance of Museums. "Collections Stewardship." *Museum Standards and Best Practices*. Washington, DC.

American Association for State and Local History. "Stewardship of Collections." *Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 2012.

Davies, Maurice and Helen Wilkinson. *Sustainability and Museums: Your Chance to Make a Difference*. London: Museums Association, 2008.

Gilmore Jean A. and Rebecca A. Buck, eds., *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods*, 5th edition. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2010.



Mirrors line the hall of the historic Willard Street Inn in Burlington, VT.

Alli Rico

Malaro, Marie. "Controlled Collecting: Drafting a Collections Management Policy," in *Museum Governance: Mission, Ethics, Policy*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1994.

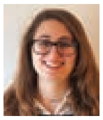
_____. "Deaccessioning—The American Perspective," in *A Deaccessioning Reader*. ed., Stephen E. Weil. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997.

_____. *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, 3rd edition. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2012.

Merritt, Elizabeth E. *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2008.

Weil, Stephen E. "Deaccessioning Practices in American Museums," in *Rethinking the Museum*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990.

_____, ed. *A Deaccessioning Reader*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997.



Alli Rico is an independent museum professional interested in deaccessioning and working with smaller history museums, including the Cambridge Historical Society and the Bostonian Society. You can find Alli on Twitter @alli_rico, on LinkedIn, and by email alli_rico@outlook.com. This leaflet is an edited excerpt from her 2016 master's capstone, which can be emailed upon request.

[1] Elizabeth E. Merritt, *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2008), 88.

[2] Stephen Weil, "Deaccessioning Practices in American Museums" in *Rethinking the Museum* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 109. See the sample policy at resource.aaslh.org/view/sample-deaccession-policy/.

[3] Marie C. Malaro, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 225.

[4] Personal interview, Nathaniel Sheidley, Ph.D., March 7, 2016.

[5] Jean A. Gilmore and Rebecca A. Buck, eds., *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods*, 5th edition (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2010), 483, 485.

[6] Ildiko Pogany DeAngelis, "Old Loans," in *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods*, 89.

[7] Rebecca Buck, "Found-In-Collection," in *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods*, 109.

[8] Malaro, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, 356.

[9] Rebecca Buck, "Found-In-Collection," in *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods*, 114.

[10] Registrars Committee of the American Alliance of Museums, "Legislation Related to Museum Property/Disposal of Museum Property/Abandoned Property" (Washington, DC: American Alliance of Museums, July 2013).

[11] Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 200B, §18 (2010).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Maurice Davies and Helen Wilkinson, *Sustainability and Museums: Your Chance to Make a Difference* (London: Museums Association, 2008), 4.

AASLH
TECHNICALLEAFLET #247
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

House History: Some Assembly Required

By Mary Warner

Shelter is a critical part of the human survival triad, taking its place beside food and clothing. The necessity of these items to the human experience makes them easy to overlook in terms of preservation, yet museums find ways to preserve representative examples of the food and clothing portions of the triad. Recipe books, dishes, utensils, cast iron stoves, flour sacks, and even food in the form of canned goods have been collected. Clothing, too, gets its due within museum holdings, being perhaps the easiest of the survival triad to save.

Shelter has not fared as well. The ubiquity of shelter, specifically the human domicile commonly known as the house, has been one factor in society's long-term neglect of methodically collecting its history. Another is size. How do you cram a house into a museum building without turning the house itself into a museum? And while there might be arguments about the historical worthiness of one house over another, the fact is that all houses contain history, whether mundane or exciting. If the thought of cramming one house into a museum brings on a fit of apoplexy, the idea of squeezing an entire community worth of houses under one roof is sure to induce a coma.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to bring or transform houses into museums in order to preserve their histories. Representative documentation will suffice. Unfortunately, the public has not considered systematic and consistent documentation important until the last few decades, so some assembly is required in order to compile the history of most houses. While the sources of house history may not be obvious, plenty of places provide clues. Investigating these sources in a logical fashion helps prevent house history assembly from becoming overwhelming.

The following is written for the house owner, who will have access to key resources, most notably, the house itself. Historical organizations can use the information to assist community members in documenting their houses or as a guide to systematically gathering the histories of houses in their communities. This process may also be adapted to research the histories of buildings other than houses.

Two Main Aspects & One Critical Piece of Information

When it comes to house history, there are two main aspects to analyze:

1. The history of the structure
2. The history of the owners and/or occupants

Remembering these aspects is vital to keeping your research organized and manageable. Naturally, these aspects overlap, but each involves examining different types of resources. If you clearly define which aspect you study at a given time, you will minimize potential distractions and your search will proceed more smoothly.

Before crawling into the nooks and crannies of house history research, you need one critical piece of information—the address of the house or the property description. If you live in a city, your street address will suffice for most of your research, although there is a longer property description attached to your street address. (It looks something like this: Lot 8, Block 12, Original Plat.) If you own a large piece of property within a city, encompassing more than one lot or block, use the description of the property on which the house sits.

If you live in a rural area, one outside the geographic bounds of a city, your property description will follow the Township-Range-Section formula of the Rectangular Survey System and will look something like this: Township 130 North, Range 31 West, Section 7. This may be abbreviated to T130N, R31W, S7. If you don't own an entire section in a particular Township and Range, the description will be narrowed further by the addition of a directional marker (N, S, E, W, NE, SE, NW, SW) and the portion of the section you own (1/4, 1/2). There may also be a lot number associated with the property description. For example, a more complicated rural property description might be T130N, R31W, S7 (Lot 11 & S 1/2 of SW 1/4).

The House as an Artifact

Just as museum professionals examine the artifacts in our collections for clues as to their past use, you can study your home for information on its history. The house is, indeed, an artifact, a really big artifact. Because of its size, it requires a methodical investigation. Consider these three areas:

1. The interior
2. The exterior
3. The neighborhood

Examine them in any order, but as you make your observations, take notes about what you find rather than leaving the details at the mercy of your memory. Draw sketches of the floor plan, wall elevations, and interesting details, or, if it is easier, take photographs. While this may seem to be a lot of work, photographs can do double-duty as documentation for insurance purposes in case you ever have to file a claim. Be sure to make duplicates of your photos (print version or saved on a compact disc or flash drive) and put the copies in a safe place away from the house.

The Interior

Take a look at the inside of the house. Move from room to room and ask yourself these questions:

1. How many floors or levels are there? How many rooms are on each level and what are their uses? What are the dimensions of each room (include ceiling heights)? What is the total square footage of each level and of the entire house?

2. What floor materials and wall treatments have been used in each room? How many windows and doors are in each room? Which walls are they on

Photos from the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society

Older house photos typically show family members posing in front of the house. This photo shows outbuildings, which are part of the history of the house. There's even a birdhouse on a pole on the far right of the photo. Unidentified home in Swanville, MN, December 17, 1900.

(north, south, east, west)? For kitchens, bathrooms, and other rooms, what fixtures are included?

3. What utilities are in the house? Is there a heating and/or cooling system? If so, what kind? What is the water source—private well or municipal system? Is there a water heater? How are sewage and waste water handled—through a municipal sewer system or an onsite septic system?

4. How is electricity supplied? Does it come from an electric company or is it generated onsite? If the latter, what is the source of power (solar, wind, etc.)? Is there a fuse box or a circuit breaker panel? How many outlets are in each room?

5. Is there a laundry area? What sort of equipment is it set up to handle (i.e., gas or electric dryer, etc.)? Are there other fixtures, such as a sink, in the laundry area?

6. List any special features in the house (i.e. pocket or swinging doors, hidden rooms, unusual trim or doorknobs, built-in furniture, fireplaces, a fancy staircase or a secondary staircase, stained glass windows, etc.).

7. Is there evidence that anything has been changed in the house? If so, what?

These questions will help you pay close attention to what is going on in your house. If you have hardwood floors and fancy trim throughout the house, it tells you something about the economic standing of the people who had the house built. If you have hardwood floors and fancy trim on the main level of the house, but the floors upstairs are made of pine planks and the trim has no decoration, this may be a clue about the original owner's financial means. It also indicates that the main floor was the showplace reserved for entertaining and the upstairs was meant for the occupants only.

Similarly, wall treatments tell a story. If your entire house, save one room, has plaster and lath walls, and that single room has 1970s-era dark paneling, you've got to ask why. Wall treatments like paint color and wallpaper will help you to date interior design trends, especially if you examine several layers of treatments.

In looking at utilities, each of these has a natural lifespan and has to be replaced eventually. If you have a fuse box instead of a circuit breaker, you may be able to gauge the era of the fuse box with some research. There might even be a label on it with the date of installation. If your house was built before your community had electricity and the fuse box is original to the house, you'll be able to tell when your house first had electricity.

The history is in the details. This stained glass window was designed by Martin Scott, who owned one of the brickyards in Little Falls, MN. The window is in a house on West Broadway, Little Falls, MN, 1987.

Photos from the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society

Counting outlets per room may seem pointless, but if you have only two outlets in an entire upstairs area that contains several rooms, those two outlets tell you that your wiring is old. Current electrical code calls for an outlet every so many feet, depending upon the type of room. The National Electric Code was first published in 1897 and has been regularly updated since that time. Theoretically, you could date your electrical system quite precisely by looking at how it matches past code.[1]

Your electrical system is not the only part of your house that was installed to code. All of the utility systems, including the plumbing and heating, were constructed according to whatever the current code was, with building codes dictating how the house itself was built. The purpose of these codes is to mitigate hazards, like fire or poor structural integrity. National associations update codes at regular intervals, but these may or may not be adopted by local municipalities.

Some of these observations about code and construction are easier to make if you're in the middle of remodeling and have the walls stripped down to the studs. You will be able to see whether the wiring is the old-fashioned knob-and-tube variety or the current Romex®-coated wiring. It will become apparent whether a wall was altered in order to install pipes for plumbing and you can examine its framing, the "bones" of the building. In an old house, any two-by-fours used for framing will actually measure a full two inches-by-four inches, whereas in new construction, a two-by-four measures 1 ¾ inch-by-3 ¾ inch. You'll be able to see whether balloon framing was used, wherein the framing runs from the ground floor up to the second floor without a plate between floors.

If you're lucky enough to be living through a remodel while researching the history of your house, keep notes of the process and what you discover. Is there anything hidden in the walls, like pennies, newspapers (check dates), or horseshoes? Did you find a door or window that was covered over? Is there evidence of previous remodeling endeavors?

The Exterior

Once you have thoroughly investigated the interior of the house, do the same with the exterior. Write down the materials used for siding, roofing, stairs, and foundation. Note the number of windows and doors on each side of the house and their placement, shape, type, and other pertinent details. Pay particular

Photos from the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society. Photo by Mary Warner, October 2007.

A house's surroundings help to put it into context. These practically identical houses were built in Little Falls, MN, as worker houses for a local industry.

Photos from the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society. Photo by Mary Warner, October 2007.

This Greek Revival style house is the oldest house still standing in Little Falls, MN. It was built by doctor and carpenter Zachariah Jodon in 1858. Because a previous owner was interested in both renovating the house and collecting its history, this is one of the best documented houses in the city.

attention to the special features of your home, such as porches, columns, towers, chimneys, decks, railings, the shape of the roof, porticoes, walkways or breezeways, decorative embellishments or brickwork, attached structures, signs of remodeling, distinctive local materials, etc. These may be the key to figuring out the architectural style of your house.

Even if you did not take photographs of the interior, you will certainly want to take exterior shots. Use them as a point of comparison in researching the architectural style of your house through architecture resources at your local library, history center, or on the Internet. While photographing the house, do not limit yourself to views of the front or "pretty" side of the house. Take photos of every side, plus close-ups of special details and wide-angle views that show how the house is situated on the property.

The Neighborhood

Houses, no matter how remotely located, are part of a larger environment or neighborhood, even if the nearest neighbors are miles away. Someone built your house on this particular spot for a reason, giving significance to this place. Take a good look around your property and its natural and built resources in order to deduce why your house is where it is.

1. How is the house situated on the property? Is it near a main road, tucked back on the property, or practically hidden? Is it close to a natural feature, such as a stream?

2. Are there other structures on the property? If so, where are they in relation to the house? What are their uses?

3. Does it appear as though the property was used for something other than a residence, such as a farm or business? If so, what was its alternate use? (You may not be able to answer this by observation alone, but it may become apparent as your research stretches to other sources.)

4. Describe other features—either natural or built—on the property (i.e., gardens, driveways, garages, sheds, fences, swimming pools, streams, woods, fields, rock outcroppings, archaeological sites, etc.). Is there any evidence that other structures formerly existed on the property, such as old foundations or concrete slabs?

5. How does your house fit within the neighborhood beyond your property? Does it blend in or stick out?

If your house is in a city, these comparisons can reveal development patterns. For example, if your house is constructed in a style similar to the other houses on your block, they may have all been built around the same time, or there is a strong local zoning ordinance that requires the houses in your neighborhood to follow a particular style. The other alternative, especially if the houses are identical to each other, is that they were built as part of a planned development or as company houses for the workers of a local business.

If you have a relatively new house with vinyl siding and your neighbor to the north has a similar house, but your neighbor to the south has a brick Victorian, there's a good chance that your property may have originally belonged to whoever used to own the Victorian; the land having been subdivided at some point. Even the size of your lot, whether spacious or skimpy, will give you clues as to the history of your house in relation to the community.

Emotional Resonance

Now that you have examined your house as an artifact, turn your attention to the people who have been associated with your house. Human beings are the source of a house's emotional resonance, which is what causes us to care about the history of our homes. Anyone with a significant connection to the house, whether the architect, contractor, plumber, owners, or occupants, will imprint his/her own history and emotional life on the house, giving it a deepening character over time.

Curiosity induced by emotional resonance will have you asking: Who designed this house? Who crafted it? When was it built? Who lived here? What were the circumstances of their lives? What happened in this house?

In order to answer these questions, expand your research to other sources.

What You Know

When it comes to the history of the people of your house, start with what you know. If you have lived in the house for any length of time, your own association with the structure is part of its history. Do not dismiss your family's history with the house because you assume that history is something that happened before you took ownership. Whatever happened yesterday is now history and, therefore, may be of importance to the task at hand.

In noting your history with the house, think about what future owners might want to know about you. When did you and your family move in? List everyone who lives in the household and their relationships to one another. From whom did you buy the house? Who owned it before you? How much did you pay? What changes have you made to the house or property and when did you make them? Recall special events that have taken place in the home, weddings, deaths, births, anniversaries, interesting visitors, large projects undertaken onsite (inventions created, books written, etc.). Include dates of the events, plus pertinent details. If you or another family member keeps a journal, use it to enhance your recollections.

With even a marginally good memory, the task of writing out your own relationship with your house could keep you busy for a long time. Do not feel you must write a full narrative of everything all at once. Add information during the course of your research. Even a sentence or two, as opposed to a complete essay, can be valuable to a future homeowner or researcher.

While you reminisce, sift through your personal photo collection looking for any past pictures of your house. It is common to not find any photos in which the house is the primary focal point. Typically, houses served as the backdrop for snapshots of people or events. If a significant portion of the house appears somewhere in a photo, study it closely to see if there have been any changes between then and now. You may also find value in comparing past furnishings with what you have today.

Investigating the Abstract

In searching for the previous owners of your house, the best place to begin is with the abstract. If you own the house you are researching, the abstract is the bound set of documents you received after you purchased the house. The abstract should be kept in a safe place because it costs a tidy sum to replace if it is lost or destroyed. The abstract shows all of the owners of your property, plus any legal proceedings that have taken place in relation to your property from the beginning of its recorded history. Because it shows the history of the property, but not the structures on the property, you will not necessarily be able to figure out when the house was built or remodeled from the document.

Rather than carry the abstract around while doing research, make notes from it, including the names you find, the types of legal transactions (mortgages, liens, etc.), and dates. If, in perusing the abstract, details about the history of your house, like the construction date or the name of the family who originally built it, come to mind, write these down, too, because it's time to head out into the wide world to find out more about your home, sweet home. Remember to take your notes and photos with you.

Historic House Research Websites

There are some specific house-related websites with which you should become familiar.

The National Park Service **(www.nps.gov)**, through the U.S. Department of the Interior, has a number of valuable Web pages related to building preservation, including a link to a list of each State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in the United States. Further, the NPS website contains a list of over forty articles from its *Preservation Briefs* series that discuss all manner of building preservation issues.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation **(www.preservationnation.org)** is a private nonprofit whose mission is also related to the preservation of historic places. Its website includes a page of frequently asked questions for homeowners interested in preservation issues.

If your house was built by a notable architect, one of the architectural archives found throughout the United States may be able to offer assistance.

The Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library **(www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/avery/)**, part of the Columbia University Libraries, has compiled a list of architectural archives, as has Carnegie Mellon University **(www.library.cmu.edu/Research/ArchArch/netsites)**.

The Sanborn Map Company is still in business **(sanborn.com)**. Rather than creating fire insurance maps by hand, the company has moved into the arena of digital mapping. Digitized historic Sanborn maps can be found online through a subscription service called *ProQuest*. To order a subscription, contact Environmental Data Resources, Inc. **(www.edrnet.com/sanborn.htm)**, which works with The Sanborn Library, LLC, to provide the maps.

Photos from the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society. Photo by Dan Hovland, August 18, 2003.

When taking photos for your house history, try to get views of each side of the house. This photo shows two sides of the Axel & Carrie Borgstrom House in Upsala, MN.

Photos from the collections of the Morrison County Historical Society. Knut Elvig House, Little Falls, MN. Photo Mary Warner, October 2007.

Little Falls is known for a distinctive local building material. Many of the homes and downtown businesses have a yellow brick veneer. When researching your house's history, look for evidence of local building materials.

Outside Research

There are several community resources available that include information on your house's history. You do not have to explore them in any particular order. Start where you like and be prepared to revisit a resource if needed.

One resource, right underfoot, could prove to be priceless—your neighbors. Long-term residents of your neighborhood can be especially helpful in providing you with information about your house and its past occupants, but don't discount short-term residents. Being new to a neighborhood might make short-term residents more observant about details that long-term residents overlook. Either way, what you uncover during conversations with the neighbors may make you thankful for their stereotypical nosiness.

Several government resources can help you tease out information about your house. These include the county recorder's office, the county assessor, the county planning and zoning office, and your city's planning and zoning office. Along with keeping vital records showing births, deaths, and marriages, a county recorder's office also contains land records. Like the abstract, these records track property ownership, not structures, but you may be able to deduce dates for construction based upon when mortgages were taken out. The records will tell you who owned your property and how much they paid for it, but won't give you information on renters.

The county assessor's office evaluates property values in order to determine the amount of property tax paid each year. As this is the revenue upon which county and local municipalities operate, current data should be readily available. Ask how to access archived tax assessments. Over time, the manner of property assessments changed, so you will likely find different information within the assessments from year to year. Details such as construction and remodeling dates, type of construction, materials used, square footage, and other buildings on the property may be recorded. Construction dates will not necessarily be correct, so you'll want to confirm this with other sources.

County and city planning and zoning offices issue building and remodeling permits containing a description and/or drawings of what was involved with a construction project. County offices deal with permitting for homes outside of city limits, whereas city offices issue permits for houses within city limits. The county office may also issue septic system permits, so if you're curious about your system's installation, this is the place to ask.

Government planning and zoning offices have different schedules for archiving past permits, with some offices keeping them for decades and others purging them after so many years. If there are no longer permits on file for your house, you might be able to find a discussion of building permits within the past minutes of the city council or county board. This is tedious work, especially if you are unsure of the year of construction, so saving this as a last resort is a wise move.

What's Available at Local Historical Organizations

Your work would not be complete without a visit to your area historical society or research center. County and city historical organizations tend to collect a wide range of materials. Knowing what to ask for will make things easier for you and the organization's staff. Unless you are trying to retrieve a specific piece of information, this is not going to be a one-stop shop, so plan to return from the outset.

If the area historical society caters to genealogists,

Online Resources for Building Codes

International Code Council develops and updates the International Building Code and other related codes, **www.iccsafe.org/news/about**.

National Fire Protection Association develops and updates the National Electrical Code along with other fire safety related codes, **www.nfpa.org/index.asp**.

International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) develops and updates the Uniform Plumbing Code and Uniform Mechanical Code, **www.iapmo.org/Pages/splash.aspx**.

there should be family information available for you to peruse. The names you gathered from the abstract and/or county recorder's office serve as your master research list. The historical organization may have oral histories, family history books, journals, scrapbooks, and other miscellaneous data that mentions something about your house in relation to those who lived there. Pedigree charts, census records, city and county directories, and phone books can help you to piece together any of the home owners' family members. The census records may also reveal that someone unrelated to the owner was staying in the house during a particular census. Could this have been a renter, a boarder, a mooching friend, or is there a direct familial connection between the guest and home owner?

Local historical organizations are likely to have a collection of the area's plat maps, typically bound in book form. Comparing plat maps over a range of years shows you not only the past owners of your property, but neighboring land owners, as well. It is not unusual to find close relationships between neighbors, particularly those that might have led to matrimony.

In addition to plat maps, the historical organization may have Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps™. These maps, produced by the Sanborn Map Company for over 12,000 cities and towns in the United States between 1867 and 1970, focus on the structures within a city and give details as to the use of buildings, their measurements, exits, number of stories, construction materials (brick, stone, iron, etc.), outbuildings, and other information related to fire risk. Sanborn Map Company employees were meticulous with their drawings, so these maps show highly accurate footprints of structures, streets, and town layout. If Sanborn maps are available for more than one year, comparisons between them will be instructive.[2]

With a large dollop of luck, your historical society will have documentation that is specific to your house, items such as photos of the house and/or its past owners, general architectural surveys in which your home is listed, or blueprints. If your house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a copy of the form and supporting documents used to achieve the designation may be on file. Perhaps staff or a previous owner already compiled information on your house and it is patiently awaiting your arrival.

While you may be tempted to focus solely on research about your house, do not discount general history books concerning the area. These will help put your home into the context of the larger community. Maybe there was a local building trend or architectural style your house followed, or a particular construction material that was endemic to the community. Perhaps one of the owners was an active leader in town, and local history books are littered with his/her name. Staff of the historical organization may know some of this information off-hand and should be happy to share it.

If you weren't able to find past records when visiting the aforementioned government offices, it behooves you to inquire about whether they have been archived at your local historical center. Sometimes past tax assessments, minutes of the county board or city council, and similar documents have made their way to such organizations for safekeeping.

When you've exhausted all of the obvious house history resources within the organization, there's one more you can turn to—the local newspaper. This one is a long shot in terms of gleaning information about the construction of your house, but it can pay off beautifully if you have the fortitude to wade through page after page of newsprint. While most newspapers today do not report on new house construction, early newspapers sometimes devoted articles to specific home construction projects, particularly if the owner was well known. Having an accurate date of construction is critical to reducing the amount of time needed for this task.

Online Resources on How to Do House History Research

There are plenty of good articles online about how to conduct house history research. Each of them has a different focus from this article and might lead you to resources that aren't covered here.

House History Checklist, Kansas State Historical Society, **www.kshs.org/genealogists/househistorychecklist.pdf**.

Your House Has A History: A Step-by-Step Guide to Researching Your Property, City of Chicago, Commission on Chicago Landmarks, **www.cityofchicago.org/Landmarks/pdf/Your_House_Has_A_History.pdf**.

Researching the History of Your House: A Bibliography Prepared by David L. Langenberg, University of Delaware Library, Local History Committee, History Section, R. U. S. A., **www2.lib.udel.edu/subj/hist/resguide/house-bib.htm**.

Drafting a House History, Compiled by Barbara Bezat and Alan K. Lathrop, University of Minnesota Libraries, 1979, **http://special.lib.umn.edu/manuscripts/HSEHIST_Complete.htm**.

House History Aid, Indianapolis Marion County Public Library, **www.imcpl.org/resources/guides/family/househistory/househistoryaid.html**.

How To: House History, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, **www.mnhs.org/localhistory/bldghistory/househistory.htm**.

Online Resources

By this time, you might think it strange that this article has barely touched on using the Internet for house history research. There's a good reason for that. While the growth of general online content continues

Blogs About Historic Homes

If you would like to start a blog in order to share the history of your house, or the process of discovering its history, here are some existing blogs related to house history you can look to as examples.

National Trust Historic Sites Weblog
http://historicsites.wordpress.com.

Rebuilding Place in the Urban Space by Richard Layman, Washington, D.C., **http://urbanplacesandspaces.blogspot.com**.

Time Tells: Vince Michael on history, preservation, planning, and more, Chicago, IL, **http://vincemichael.wordpress.com**.

CasaCARA: Old Houses for Fun and Profit by Cara Greenberg. Tagline: "Real estate, architecture, historic preservation, & interior design, from Brooklyn to Philadelphia, the Hudson Valley, the East End of Long Island and beyond. Updated daily!" **http://casacara.wordpress.com**.

Historic Homes of Minnesota by Jennifer Kirby. Tagline: "Historic homes and buildings in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Twin Cities, Stillwater, and Minnesota. Learn the local history of old real estate and the types of architecture seen in Minnesota since the early 1800's." **www.historichomesofminnesota.com**.

at exponential rates, content on the hyper-local level, say, the level of an individual house in a particular community, is spotty. The best technique for determining whether there is anything online related to your house is to cozy up to your favorite search engine and start entering terms. Try the names of past owners and the architect, if known. If your house is commonly referred to by a particular name, look for that.

Do a search by location, but don't just stick to the city. Try the county, state, or region as well. Government websites may have online resources, such as aerial maps or tax statements. The websites of historical organizations may provide basic local history, plus something related directly to your search. A blogger may be tracking the history of houses in your area and have information to share. If nothing useful is apparent within the surface pages of a website, drill down through the various links to see if the juicy stuff is below. If you're sure a website has more information, but you cannot navigate to it, contact the site owner and ask for help.

Should building codes, construction techniques, or decorating trends interest you, enter terms such as uniform building code history, wood framing, milk paint, or whatever you're curious about into a search engine and check the results. Play around with search terms, substituting alternate, but similar words for your original term, which may bring you different or more satisfactory results.

Share What You've Assembled

Once you have finished assembling the history of your house, do not keep it to yourself. Share what you know. You can do this in several ways. Consider making two additional copies of what you've collected, including photographs. Three-ring binders with sheet protectors make for inexpensive storage vehicles. Keep the original documents for your records; leave a copy in the house for future owners; and donate a copy to your local historical organization.

You can also share your house history knowledge online, thus expanding hyper-local content. The applications available for this are virtually endless. You can start a blog to present what you've learned, upload house photos to Flickr or Picasa, or make videos about remodeling projects for YouTube or Vimeo. In addition to these venues, the Minnesota Historical Society designed a website, *Placeography*, for sharing the history of houses and other buildings. *Placeography* is presented in a wiki format, which means that anyone can add to or edit the site, but is not limited to Minnesota. In fact, the tagline says it is "A website about any place anywhere that anyone can edit," so people the world over, including you, can contribute. *Placeography* can be found at www.placeography.org.[3]

Regardless of whether you want to dabble in house history or delve into its intricacies, plenty of resources exist to aid in your endeavor. The history of your house merely awaits your assembly.

Mary Warner is museum manager of the Morrison County Historical Society in Little Falls, MN, and is a member of the AASLH Small Museums Committee. She can be reached at staff@morrisoncountyhistory.org.

Footnotes

[1] National Fire Protection Association, "2008 National Electrical Code® Handbook dedicated to Jack Wells," 5 February 2008, www.nfpa.org/newsReleaseDetails.asp?categoryid=1734&itemId=37760 (3 March 2009).

[2] Ristow, Walter W. and Library of Congress, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps," 15 December 2003, www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/snb-intr.html (3 March 2009); The Sanborn Map Company, Inc., 2002-2007, sanborn.com (3 March 2009).

[3] Minnesota Historical Society, *Placeography*, www.placeography.org (6 March 2009).

AASLH
TECHNICALLEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#242

Preserving Historic Cemeteries

By the Texas Historical Commission

Editor's note: This technical leaflet was adapted from "Preserving Historic Cemeteries: Texas Preservation Guidelines." The original document is available online from www.thc.state.tx.us/publications/guidelines/Preservecem.pdf

Cemeteries are among our most valuable historic resources. The definition of a cemetery may vary from state to state; the Texas Health and Safety Code defines a cemetery as a place that is used or intended to be used for interment, and includes a graveyard (including single graves), burial parks, and mausoleums. They are reminders of settlement patterns, such as villages, rural communities, urban centers, and ghost towns. They can reveal information about historic events, religion, culture, and genealogy. Names on gravemarkers serve as a directory of earlier residents and reflect the ethnic diversity and unique population of an area. Gravemarker designs and cemetery decoration and landscaping represent a variety of cultural influences that shape the history of a locale: a neighborhood, town, city, or community. Established in large part for the benefit of the living, cemeteries perpetuate the memories of the deceased, those who bequeathed to their communities the amenities that give a place character and definition. In communities with a strong sense of history, people are more likely to protect and maintain cemeteries.

Unfortunately, historic cemeteries do not necessarily remain permanent reminders of our heritage. They are subject to long-term deterioration from natural forces such as weathering and uncontrolled vegetation. Neglect accelerates the process. Development activities and construction projects are also a threat to these precious resources. Vandalism and theft continue to plague both rural and urban burying grounds across the nation as well. What follows is a survey of strategies to aid in the preservation of historic cemeteries. None of these strategies, however, will be successful without the involvement of individuals who have an interest in local culture and history and a commitment to saving the physical remnants of their community's heritage.


All photos Texas Historical Commission

Intricately cast metal gravemarkers indicate a region's ethnic heritage.

Several federal laws protect cultural resources in the United States. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, is the statutory tool for protecting cultural resources. The Act promotes a national policy to preserve historic properties, significant historic and prehistoric sites, buildings and objects that are either eligible for or listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies that fund, license, permit, or approve construction or similar projects to consider the effects of the undertakings on historic properties. Section 101(b)(3) of the Act states that one of the responsibilities of the State Historic Preservation Officer is to advise and assist federal agencies in carrying out their historic preservation responsibilities and to ensure that all are taken into consideration at each level of planning and development.

Cemeteries are one kind of cultural resource that must be considered by federal agencies during such an undertaking. The 1980 and 1992 amendments to the Act further reinforce cemetery protection measures by requiring federal agencies to develop preservation programs for identifying and protecting

The Example of the Historic Texas Cemetery Designation

A cemetery that is deemed worthy of recognition and preservation for its historic associations is eligible to be designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery. The Texas Historical Commission (THC) is the state agency for historic preservation with the responsibility of identifying, interpreting, and protecting our historical resources. The THC works with interested citizens, county historical commissions, and heritage groups to preserve historical resources, including cemeteries. The following provides an overview of the criteria, research methods, and documentation necessary to apply for a Historic Texas Cemetery designation.

For many years, the THC has received telephone calls and letters from concerned citizens about the preservation of historic cemeteries that are located in both urban and rural settings. With the expansion of many urban areas, historic cemeteries are increasingly threatened. Sometimes these cemeteries disappear over a long period of time with the removal of one headstone at a time, while others disappear completely overnight. In rural areas, historic cemeteries are threatened by the breaking up of large tracts of land for residential development, by the absence of fencing allowing livestock to topple and break up headstones, and by the expansion of cultivated acreage. Cemeteries often are the last reminders of early settlements whose historical events, religion, lifestyles, and genealogy are threatened and could be lost forever.

The Historic Texas Cemetery designation was developed to address the problem of the destruction and illegal removal of historic cemeteries in Texas. This designation cannot guarantee that a historic cemetery will not be destroyed, but official recognition of these family and community landmarks highlights their importance and promotes an attitude of respect and reverence by neighboring landowners and the general citizenry. This encourages further preservation of these unique resources.

Two basic criteria govern the approval for the Historic Texas Cemetery designation: One, the cemetery must be at least fifty years old; and two, it must be deemed worthy of preservation for its historic associations. The very nature of a cemetery being a landmark of a family's or community's presence is considered to validate the criteria of historical associations.

The Designation Process

Applicant researches the history of the cemetery, fills out the application, and develops or finds a map for recordation.

Applicant submits application, attachments, and processing fee of $25 to the THC.

THC staff reviews the application and attachments. THC staff may request additional information. When all of the material is in order, the staff will review the application and, upon approval, the Affidavit of Dedication will be mailed to the applicant.

Applicant takes Affidavit of Dedication to the county clerk for recording. The applicant will secure copies of the recorded document(s) indicating the volume and page number of other recordation references and send it/them to the THC.

THC staff issues the applicant a certificate upon receipt of the copy/copies of the recorded Affidavit of Dedication. A cemetery or burial site that has received the Historic Texas Cemetery designation is also eligible to display the Historic Texas Cemetery medallion and an optional name and date plaque or interpretive plaque at the cemetery or burial site. Application for these medallions and plaques are available upon request following the bestowing of the Historic Texas Cemetery designation on a historic cemetery or burial site.

historic properties, and by expanding and maintaining the National Register of Historic Places in a way that considers the preservation of their historical, archeological, architectural, and cultural value.

These preservation laws can affect cemeteries if they are within the boundaries of a federal project area, if they have been determined to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register and if they are to be affected by the development project in some manner. Sometimes cemeteries in a project area must be moved.

The agency involved is usually requested to have professional archeologists make a map of the cemetery and document the gravemarkers and any other features (depressions, fencing, and vegetation) associated with the cemetery. Archeologists and physical anthropologists may be present to identify and study human remains and grave artifacts during manual excavation of the interment. Often information is recorded from the gravestones to provide historical documentation, such as the length of occupancy of a land tract or ethnic affiliations in the community. This documentation can assist archeologists and historians in interpreting other historic properties within a federal project area.

Protection for Historic Cemeteries

Communities can begin to protect historic cemeteries by documenting their locations. Enlist the support of county historical commissions, genealogical societies, Junior Historian chapters, scout troops, or area historical societies. The U.S. Geological Survey publishes topographical maps that identify sites such as cemeteries. These resources are available at store.usgs.gov/locator and maps are available at various subscription sites.

A good way to begin your research is to check with local genealogical groups, libraries, and museums for information, such as early surveys, newspaper archives, vertical files, books and other publications, maps, and photographs. Some cemeteries are small and not identified on area maps; these are often difficult to locate. Talk to the older people in the community, as well as representatives of funeral homes and churches for their recollections of burial grounds. These oral histories are often an invaluable aid to locating small family cemeteries.

Once located, historic cemeteries can again become an integral part of the community. Stage periodic preservation or maintenance events or contribute articles to the local paper about the lives of individuals or families buried in the cemeteries. Encourage students at all levels to explore historic cemeteries and write essays about tombstone design, burial and decoration customs, or community history, including infant mortality, local epidemics, or catastrophic events.

In all cases, however, balance common sense with practical considerations. There are times when publicizing the location of a cemetery is detrimental to its preservation. Vandals can desecrate secluded cemeteries that are located away from the eyes of the protective community. Keep statistical and historical information readily available for public use, but be discreet about the exact location of vulnerable cemeteries.

National, state, and local historical markers provide a focal point for drawing public attention to cemeteries. Historical markers provide an overview of the individuals or institutions associated with a site. In addition to cemetery preservation events and publicity efforts, historical markers also function as tools that will increase public awareness of these important cultural resources. Such awareness and education are among the best ways to guarantee the preservation of a cemetery.

What to Do if a Cemetery Is in Danger

Should you see a cemetery being disturbed by vandals, looters, or construction equipment, regardless of whether it is marked by headstones or a fence, call local law enforcement authorities at once. Be familiar with state laws and how they protect cemeteries and provide a legal framework for removing the grave remains in a dignified manner. Question if a proposed removal of a cemetery is necessary or can remain in its historic context. If removing a cemetery is the only option, all burials must be removed according to legal statutes before the landowner can use the property for any other purpose. The same protection applies to isolated burials. Be sure to inform the authorities of pertinent cemetery laws they might not be familiar with.

After contacting local law enforcement, notify the county historical commission or city historical society, local heritage society, and local newspapers about the destruction of a cemetery. Stay involved. Do not condone the willful destruction with silence or by turning a blind eye. The memory of those who have lived before us should not be forsaken for reasons of expediency or economic gain.

There are some cases in which criminal action is not appropriate, and a civil lawsuit may be the only means of resolving a conflict involving a cemetery. For instance, a county historical commission in Central Texas undertook a survey of the historic cemeteries in the region, and several years later historic fencing and gravestones from one of the surveyed sites were removed. No markers remained to provide evidence of the graveyard, and only the survey could prove the cemetery's existence. Since the site was being considered for development, the records of the county historical commission were crucial to the future disposition of the land. In this case, the descendants of those interred in the cemetery filed suit and were compensated in an out-of-court settlement.

While it is disturbing to lose cemeteries to development pressures, it is perhaps even more disturbing to lose them to criminal acts of vandalism and looting. Vandalism can range from intentionally pushing over gravemarkers to spray painting graffiti on gravestones. The demand by collectors for vintage artifacts and architectural and landscaping antiques has contributed to the increasing disappearance of elaborately carved gravestones, sculptures, urns, finials, benches, gates, and fencing from cemeteries. This demand also leads to the digging and looting of graves for valuable objects such as jewelry, firearms, buttons, and buckles.

Detailed stone carving turns some gravemarkers into works of art.

If a cemetery is destroyed, use that fact as a rallying point for the preservation of a community's remaining cemeteries. Nothing can substitute for the preservation efforts of individuals. You and other interested people and groups must develop an active role in the preservation of local cemeteries today in order to walk among the gravemarkers and read the tender thoughts of enduring human emotions tomorrow.

Cemetery Preservation

Even though the most disturbing threats to any cemetery are the acts of vandalism and theft, simple neglect of maintenance is perhaps a more common and damaging problem. The following suggestions offer useful information and guidance for individuals and groups who are considering cemetery restoration.

Get Permission. Find out who has legal jurisdiction over the cemetery and get written permission for restoration. If it is on public land, contact the federal, state, or local government entity with the authority to protect the property. If the cemetery is on private land, contact the landowner or his or her representative and descendants and negotiate access, in addition to obtaining the necessary written permission. Cemetery associations are common in most states. If a cemetery association is involved, become familiar with its rules and regulations. If a cemetery is not clearly established in the county deed records, consider recording its existence—this may be the single most valuable act of preservation for any cemetery.

Security. Before any plans are made for preservation or maintenance activities, secure the cemetery. Contact law enforcement officials and ask them to add the cemetery to their route patrols. Request their advice when creating security measures for the cemetery. Develop a good relationship with the local police department or sheriff's office. Create a neighborhood cemetery watch group. Ask them to report

Definition of Terms Used in Surveying Cemeteries

Condition of Carving

Mint: carving is in perfect condition, as though it were just carved.

Clear but worn: carving shows some wear but legibility is not affected.

Mostly readable: carving is difficult to read without directing light across the surface with the aid of a mirror or a flashlight.

Traces: parts of the carving are visible but difficult to read or to determine the whole design.

Illegible: none of the carving can be read.

Underground: stone is laying face down or buried so carving cannot be read.

Overall Condition

Soiled: the surface is covered with dirt but can be easily washed off with water.

Stained: the surface exhibits stains that cannot be easily removed with water.

Delaminating: the stone is splitting off in layers, similar to what happens when interior plywood is subjected to moisture.

Graffiti: designs not part of the original design are drawn, painted, sprayed, or scratched on the stone.

Biological activity: lichen, mold, or mildew is found on the surface.

Erosion: sections of the stone are worn off, usually from wind or water.

Blistering/flaking/scaling/powdering: small or isolated areas are missing or surface of the stone is loose.

Cracked: stone is cracked but not broken into separate parts.

Tilted/fallen/sunken: the stone is not in its original alignment or is partly below the surface.

Open joints: the mortar in the mortar joints is missing.

Fragmented: sections of the stone are broken into many parts.

Losses: parts of the stone are missing, such as a finial (terminating detail on the top of the gravestone).

Previous Visible Repairs

Adhesive repairs: repairs to the stone with epoxy or some other adhesive have not been cleaned off the surface following repairs (may have turned a butterscotch color because of ultraviolet light).

Replacement: total replacement of the original stone, which can be determined by the date of death or the newness of the stone.

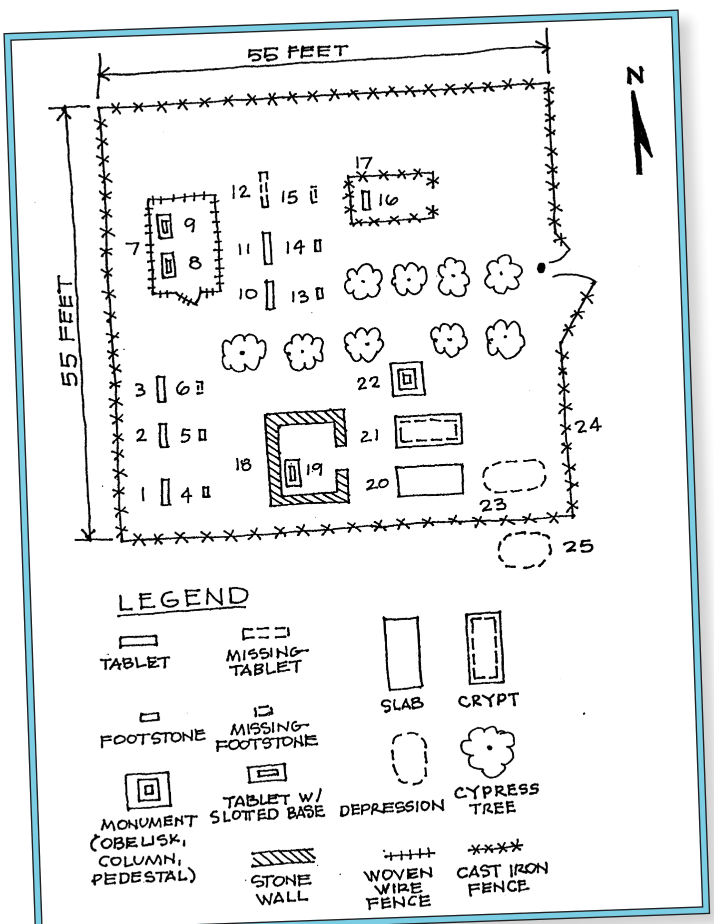
Portland cement: a hard gray material improperly used to repair gravestones or encase fragments (this material is commonly used to construct sidewalks and foundations of buildings).

any suspicious activity to the police. Let the neighbors know that an effort is underway to preserve the cemetery and tell them who to contact if they notice any problems. Establish a written theft and recovery plan, including an emergency contacts list.

If a fence is not in place, erect appropriate fencing that will keep livestock out of rural cemeteries (livestock can knock down and trample gravestones) and deter vandals from entering, while allowing people to see in. Be certain you know the history of the cemetery and are aware if unmarked graves might exist to include them inside the new perimeter fence. When appropriate and practical, use lights to illuminate the dark corners of the cemetery.

Do not restrict access to cemeteries, but consider posting visiting hours, rules, and regulations. Post signs at entrances to let visitors know who and how to contact for access, and to show that the cemetery is maintained.

Survey and Inventory. In order to fully document a cemetery, gravemarkers, fences, and buildings must be recorded. One especially effective strategy is to create a map of the cemetery grounds that includes the location of trees, bushes, fences, gates, and other landscape features (see an example below). Note the location and orientation of each gravemarker, mausoleum, crypt, and monument. Include the orientation of all marked and unmarked graves. Assign each physical feature (headstones, footstone, fences, benches, etc.) a control number that will tie together the written, photographic, and map records.



Sample cemetery map.


Bounced light can illuminate difficult to read inscriptions.

Make a written record that includes the following information: control number, date of record, name of cemetery, type of marker, size of marker, description of material used to make the marker, condition of the material, name of deceased, vital dates, description of carving, exact inscription, and any other identifying characteristics.

Record each gravemarker in a systematic method. Divide the cemetery into sections and record the graves down the rows. After completing a section, spot check it to make sure nothing was missed. Have another person recheck the recorded information against stones to make sure no errors are in the transcription.

In order to read partially obscured inscriptions, try recording information in the morning. Most gravemarkers face east. The morning sun may make inscriptions more legible. When it is not practical to record in the morning, use a mirror to angle the sun onto the gravemarker to illuminate indistinct letters and numbers. Never use chalk, talc, flour, etc., as an aid to reading inscriptions on the face of any gravemarker. These materials do not always wash away and may contain chemicals, oils, emollients, or bacteria that can damage the delicate markers.

If time and money allow, photograph each gravemarker, labeling the photograph with the control number. If a computer is available, the inventory information can be easily stored and retrieved using word processing or database software.

Master Plan. Before a blade of grass is cut, before a stone is leveled, before any work is done, it is essential to develop a master plan for the preservation of the cemetery. The master plan will act as a framework for preservation activities and allows for the examination of the interrelationships among the different elements of the cemetery. A step-by-step guide will identify the scope of the work, as well as necessary workers needed to perform it. Trained volunteers may handle some projects, while others will require professional expertise. The plan should attempt to estimate accurately how much money is required for services and materials. Additionally, the master plan should include goals, priorities, and a realistic time frame for the completion of all project work.

When creating the master plan, consider the customs of those buried in the cemeteries. Often cemeteries contain burials from many different ethnic and religious groups with diverse burial customs. Cemeteries are an expression of a community, including the varied cultural beliefs that make the community unique. Respecting the dead means extending that respect to their living descendants. Input from relatives and other interested individuals should be solicited.

Evaluate the skills of the volunteers working on individual components of the plan. Some aspects of the project will be better left to professionals. Archeologists, architects, historians, and landscape architects are some examples of professionals who could be useful in a cemetery preservation project.

Take into consideration the aspects of the cemetery, including landscaping, and how they will interact. Will grading a road create runoffs that might undermine a monument's foundation? Will stone repair accelerate natural weathering? Should a blown down tree be removed or replaced? Is it part of the overall landscape plan, a memorial tree, or a volunteer sapling? Develop a philosophy of cemetery ecology and incorporate it into your master plan. Some of the worst restoration disasters have been brought about by well-intentioned attempts at improvement.

Preservation and Repair

Historical gravemarkers, fences, and structures are delicate artifacts that must be repaired with care and expertise. Modern repair methods and materials will often harm items created fifty or more years ago. Specially trained craftspeople and conservators should undertake most repairs, though careful volunteers can repair some artifacts within cemeteries.

Gravemarkers. Most historic gravemarkers are carved from one of three different types of stone: marble, limestone, or sandstone. These stones are relatively soft and easy to carve. As a result, they were used extensively in cemeteries during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, because the stones are soft, they are more susceptible to the effects of weathering than harder stones such as granite.

Before beginning any treatment on a gravestone, check it for soundness. Is the surface grainy and crumbling? Are there any large cracks? Are the vertical strata of the stone separating into sheets and flaking off? If the stone has any of these problems, or appears in any other way to be unsound, do not clean or repair it. The marker will require expert care from a stone conservator.

If the stone appears to be sound, cleaning and sim-

Cleaning Stone

Before cleaning any stone, carefully check its condition. If the surface readily falls away, or you notice other conditions that indicate the stone is brittle or vulnerable, do not clean it. Cleaning may irreparably damage the surface.

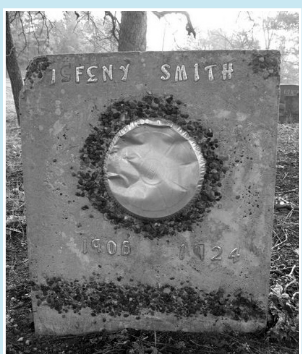
The Cleaning Process

Use a non-ionic soap. One of the most readily available soaps is Orvus®, commonly used in association with horse and sheep husbandry, found in feed stores. Mix a solution of one heaping tablespoon of Orvus® to one gallon of clean water (it comes in both liquid and paste form). Biocides, such as D-3 Antimicrobial and Enviro Klean Biowash can be used to assist in the removal of biological growth.

Pre-wet the stone thoroughly with clean water and keep the stone wet during the entire washing process. Work from the bottom up, using plenty of water and not allowing the cleaner to dry on the stone.

Thoroughly wash the wet stone using natural bristled, wooden handled brushes of various sizes. The use of plastic handles is not recommended, as color from the handles may leave material on the stone that will be very difficult to remove.

Be thorough. Wash all surfaces and rinse thoroughly with plenty of clean water.



Handcrafted gravemarkers share historic cultural value.

When cleaning marble or limestone, one tablespoon of household ammonia can be added to the above mixture to help remove some greases and oils. Do not use ammonia on or near any bronze or other metal elements.

Lichens and algae can be removed by first thoroughly soaking the stone and then using a wooden scraper to gently remove the biological growth. This process may need to be repeated several times.

Not all stains can be removed. Do not expect the stones to appear new after cleaning.

Do not clean marble, limestone, or sandstone more than once every eighteen months. Every cleaning removes some of the face of the stone. Occasionally rinsing with clean water to remove various accretions, however, is acceptable.

Keep a simple treatment record of the cleaning, including date of cleaning, materials used, and any change in condition since the last cleaning (such as missing parts, graffiti, and other damage). These records should be kept at a central location where the condition of the stones can be monitored over time.

Developed from data supplied by John R. Dennis, Dallas Museum of Art Conservation Lab.

ple repairs may be possible. Test any treatment on a small, hidden portion of the stone. Wait a few days or weeks and evaluate the results. If the test is successful, begin cleaning the whole stone.

The main reasons to clean gravemarkers should be to allow reading of the inscription and carving, as well as removal of dirt and pollutions from the surface. This can be accomplished by using appropriate tools described in the side bar on cleaning stones. Never sandblast a gravestone or spray it with an excessive force of water as it will permanently damage the surface. Chemical cleaners (other than those mentioned) and sealers will also permanently damage the stone. Finally, concrete should not be used in association with historic gravestones. Concrete is stronger than the stone and contains impurities that will harm it. Placing stone fragments in a horizontal position in concrete will increase damage associated with lawn mowers and foot traffic and allow water to collect in the carved portions. Water is the universal solvent.

Other Preservation Concerns. Gravemarkers are the focal point of most cemeteries and are given the first consideration when repairs are needed. Do not forget other cemetery features such as gates, fences, chapels, tabernacles, mausoleums, crypts, gravehouses, and even historic landscaping. Consult with a preservation architect or other specialists before restoring these complex structures or cemetery features. Contact your State Preservation Office for assistance in locating a specialist.

Maintenance. Appropriate maintenance can happen prior to fixing and/or repairing markers. Focus attention on *proper* maintenance. When possible, clear brush by hand. When hand cleaning is impractical, use hand mowers, but not close to the gravestones. For close work, use hand tools.

Be careful when using pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. Acidic chemicals can deteriorate granite. In most instances, organic methods of eradicating weeds and pests are better than chemical methods. Do not burn brush or rubbish near cemeteries. Uncontrolled fires could severely damage gravestones and destroy wood markers or structures.

Funding. Funds for the care of historic cemeteries are particularly difficult to obtain. Yet obtaining funding remains one of the most important tasks in preserving cemeteries, since much of the restoration and maintenance of old gravemarkers and cemetery structures can be costly. Among the most effective ways to secure funding for cemetery preservation and maintenance are:

- Forming a nonprofit cemetery organization.
- Soliciting donations from descendants of the deceased buried in the cemetery.
- Researching bank records for unused trust funds designated to maintain specific graves.
- Requesting help from county commissioners, courts, and city councils. Though they may not be able to allocate funds, they may be able to use county or city equipment and personnel to maintain cemeteries for health and safety reasons.
- Requesting donations from associated businesses, including funeral homes and monument companies. Businesses often look for ways to give back to the community.
- Planning an annual fundraiser.
- Researching area foundation opportunities.

Conclusion

Establishing a cemetery association and perpetual maintenance are the best long-term solutions to the survival of any cemetery. The hard work of maintaining, researching, and recording a cemetery may be worthless if the community is unaware of its existence. Cemeteries are lost to development and vandalism because only a few family members, if anyone, may know of their locations and importance. The community as a whole can take an active part in the preservation, maintenance, and protection of local cemeteries. Civic organizations, church groups, scout troops, and historical societies are all potential assistants in efforts to care for cemeteries.

Educate city and county officials about cemetery preservation issues. Inform state legislators of the need for stronger state laws. Elected officials, who are not always aware of historic preservation problems in the community, will welcome the input. A working knowledge of federal, state, and local cemetery laws is essential, as is an effort to publicize attempts to protect and care for cemeteries when possible.

References

The Boston Experience: A Manual for Historic Burying Grounds. Boston: City of Boston Boston Parks and Recreation Department, 1993.

Jordan, Terry G. *Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.

Preservation Guidelines for Municipally Owned Historic Burial Grounds and Cemeteries. Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, 2002.

Strangstad, Lynette. *A Graveyard Preservation Primer*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1988.

_____. *Preservation of Historic Burial Grounds* (Information Series No. 76). Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1993.

AASLH Resources

Newman, John J. "Cemetery Transcribing: Preparations and Procedures." Technical Leaflet #9. Nashville, TN: AASLH, 1971.

Jones, Mary-Ellen. "Photographing Tombstones: Equipment and Techniques." Technical Leaflet #92. Nashville, TN: AASLH, 1977.

Additional Cemetery Preservation Resources

Source: Preservation Maryland
preservationmaryland.org/pdf/Cemetary%20resources.pdf

Books

Anson-Cartwright, Tamara. *Landscapes of Memories: A Guide for Conserving Historic Cemeteries, Repairing Tombstones*. Ontario, Canada: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1997.

Gayle, Margo and David W. Look, AIA. *Metals in America's Historic Buildings: Uses and Preservation Treatments*. Washington DC: U. S. Department of the Interior. 1980; Revised reprint 1992. To order a copy, write: Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9325.

Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places. National Register Bulletin #41. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1992. www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb41.

Little, M. Ruth. *Sticks and Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

London, Mark. *Masonry, How to Care for Old and Historic Brick and Stone*. Washington DC: The Preservation Press, 1986.

McGahee, Susan H. and Mary W. Edmonds. *South Carolina's Historic Cemeteries: A Preservation Handbook*. Columbia, SC: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1997.

Sloane, David Charles. *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Thompson, Sharyn and Lynette Strangstad. *Florida's Historic Cemeteries, A Preservation Handbook*. Tallahassee, FL: Historic Tallahassee Preservation Board, 1989.

Wright, Robert Hughes and Wilber B. Hughes III. *Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1996.

Other Resources

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works
aic.stanford.edu
Maintains a referral list of professional conservators for treatment of monuments and sculpture.

Association for Gravestone Studies
gravestonestudies.org
A resource for the study of the history of cemeteries and gravestones and their preservation. The AGS annual meeting includes a conservation/treatment workshop.

Chicora Foundation
chicora.org
Chicora is a Columbia, South Carolina, nonprofit heritage preservation organization. Their work includes archaeological and historical research, public education, and work in conservation and preservation with museums, libraries, archives, historic organizations, and private citizens. Chicora offers preservation planning, grave location and mapping, inventory and assessment, research, treatment, and educational workshops for cemeteries.

Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites
rootsweb.com/~mdcpmbs/coalition01.htm
The Coalition was formed in 1991 as a nonprofit organization committed to the protection of human burial sites from unauthorized and unwarranted disturbance by man or nature. Its membership includes historians, genealogists, archaeologists, cultural preservationists, Native Americans, legislative members, and citizens of Maryland who care about their heritage and ancestors.

National Center for Preservation Technology and Training
ncptt.nps.gov
A national preservation center within the National Park Service, which conducts preservation technology research, provides grants, and training workshops. Many workshops involve the appropriate technologies to preserve cemeteries.

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
nps.gov/frla/oclp.htm
Promotes the stewardship of significant landscapes through research, planning, and sustainable preservation maintenance.

The Political Graveyard
potifos.com/cemeteries.html
This page is a part of a larger site about U.S. political history and cemeteries. The page includes links to resources on cemetery history and preservation organizations, publications, educational programs, discussion groups, and cemeteries.

South Carolina Department of Archives and History
state.sc.us/scdah/cemetery.htm—A page on cemetery preservation.

state.sc.us/scdah/hstcm.pdf—A full cemetery preservation handbook.

Texas Historical Commission
thc.state.tx.us
THC is the author of the original publication on which this Technical Leaflet is based and home of the Texas cemetery preservation program. The website contains information on the preservation of threatened cemeteries and a printable booklet on cemetery preservation guidelines. Click on "cemeteries" and "preserving cemeteries."

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#284

101 Ideas for New Revenue at History Organizations

By AASLH Members and Staff

Nearly every organization faces financial challenges of some kind. Whether the challenge is pursuing a new strategic direction or just keeping the lights on, history organizations often have to think creatively about bringing in new sources of revenue. Beyond admissions and memberships, there are myriad ways history organizations can bring in additional revenue to help them advance their missions. AASLH, through the help of our State Historical Administrators Meeting—which brings together the leaders of major state history organizations throughout the country—as well as our Historic House and Small Museums affinity group committees and the AASLH Council, has compiled more than a hundred ideas for new revenue that we hope will serve as models and inspiration.

Darah Fogarty

Start an annual Christmas or holiday ornament series that features a different historic structure or event in your community each year.

Whether it's new products, programs, tours, reevaluating existing offerings, or seeking out new business or community partnerships, the list that follows offers proven, scalable examples of ways that history organizations of all sizes around the country have brought in new revenue to support their work.

Maybe you could serve as "home base" for a vintage baseball team, offering discounted admission and selling refreshments on game days. You could partner with a local winery or brewery for a special edition beverage to sell at your site—and share the returns. Even something as simple as replacing free admission with a suggested donation can make a big difference in the bottom line.

This Technical Leaflet has dozens of other ideas, provided and tested by colleagues in all corners of the profession. We've organized them into six different categories:

1. **Programs and Tours**
2. **Facilities and Policies**
3. **Partnerships**
4. **Reevaluating Existing Offerings**
5. **Community Relations**
6. **Products**

Peruse the examples that follow and imagine: what could your site do with a little more cash flow?

Programs and Tours

- Do a special eighteenth-, nineteenth-, or twentieth-century "date night" event where couples try period-authentic courtship rituals, dances, and writing different types of love letters to their partners. Schedule the event early enough in the evening so couples can go out to dinner afterwards.
- Host a classic movie night in the museum or on the lawn. Charge admission, or make admission free and charge for snacks that fit the movie theme.
- Do a summer outdoor concert series on the lawn ($5/guest), or try a limited entry indoor "unplugged" concert series using an indoor venue ($25/guest, only 30 tickets).
- Offer archaeology tours by the state or local archaeologist. For one site that did this, the events sold out repeatedly. People love to participate in and do archaeology in the field.
- Become "home base" for a vintage baseball team. On game days, offer discounted admission and sell refreshments in your museum store.
- Offer a Civil War bus tour, which is always popular for history buffs.
- Design a historically themed escape room at your institution, and sell tickets to this adventure experience wherein small groups of guests must work together to solve the mystery by finding clues and figuring out puzzles.
- Create and sell a small boat cruise tour, with your (and neighboring) historic sites as the stops along the route.
- Have a tiny museum, tiny kitchen, tiny whatever-room or whatever-location concert, modeled on NPR's Tiny Desk concert idea, featuring local musicians in a cozy space. This uses your location's uniqueness and broadens your audience by featuring a special experience.
- Open some of your historic sites for family camping.
- Establish behind the scenes tours—people love the greater access and it makes them feel special.
- Make two lists: one of things your team and/or your institution excels at and one of topics in which your community and/or the field needs training. Identify the overlap and cultivate the skills to train others in that area, and begin offering workshops or one-on-one training for a fee.
- Create a series of historically-inspired social events, focusing on the history of food and alcohol. In many cases, you can use historic recipes from your archives to recreate drinks and dishes for modern enjoyment.
- Offer antique car rides for a fee.
- Start a pre-school program at your site—many of the families involved will join your organization at the "family" level of membership.
- Organize a simple date night for couples with open exhibits and serve alcohol and chocolates. This can not only be profitable, but also generates new members.
- Develop a book-reading experience in your historic space keyed to a title that was written or popular during the period of your site. Participants might read Jane Austen for several hours in an early nineteenth-century setting you establish in your site, or have gin while reading F. Scott Fitzgerald on a day when the space is closed to the public. Pair with historically-appropriate lighting, refreshments, and perhaps a group discussion at the end, and price accordingly.
- Host 21-and-up after-hours events combining history, unique hands-on activities, discussions, and drinks, music, or games. Ticket sales and sponsored or in-kind support from local partners will turn a profit. Give people a place other than a loud sports bar to gather in your community.

Start a pre-school program at your site—many of the families involved will join your organization at the "family" level of membership.

- Organize a "Wine, Eats, and Artifacts" event built around a spectacularly interesting piece in your collection about which you can tell a deeply moving story. People are hungry to have this intimate connection to the past.
- Introduce tours of the historic landscape as a discrete element to combine with the historic house. One site does this in three versions (digital $5, walking $12, and electric vehicle $25) and has created $25,000 in new revenue in the first two years, as well as new opportunities for sponsorship.
- Improve the visitor experience and the quality and range of options for interpretation with highly specialized tours led by senior staff. These can go for $50 per person. These tours are in addition to many free and low price options for general audiences.
- Have your State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) lead tours. These specialized events are very popular.
- Create motor coach tours to historic sites outside your city, county, or state, to destinations such as your state capital, a large museum in your region, or a national attraction like Colonial Williamsburg or New Orleans. One site netted $50,000 in one year doing this. The focus of the program is mostly history outside the local community.
- Deck the halls of your site for a holiday lights tour.
- Train local seventh-grade guides to give "For Kids by Kids" tours, a short, twenty-minute program designed by the student volunteers for other children.
- Create a historically themed miniature golf course at your site. You can still serve your core audience while attracting a broader one.
- Open at night on Halloween for tours and treats, or a more elaborate special event.
- Purchase the franchise for the local tourist trolley and use it as an opportunity to create a museum without walls in your community while making more visitors aware of your organization. Place your interpreters on board to offer engaging material.
- Create a golf series combined with historical tours, visiting nearby or faraway courses.
- Plan a trivia night fundraiser. Sell tickets by the table or individually (individuals are formed into teams). Teams choose a creative name and bring decorations for their table. Add a wine pull raffle,

silent auction, craft beer tasting, or other fun activities that increase the total amount of money raised.

- Try an "Attic to Basement Tour" that not only opens up the whole museum and its normally off-view spaces to public tours, but that lifts the curtain on questions and challenges your staff are facing: "Why is this artifact displayed but not those ten other similar items? What used to be exhibited in this space thirty, fifty, or one hundred years ago?"
- Start a Relevant History Coffee Talk to catch people on their way to work. Invite a guest historian to help put the day's or week's news in historic context or to lead a conversation that unravels a present-day local issue's historic roots (thirty minutes maximum).

Facilities and Policies

- Establish a "suggested donation" admission program in place of a free admission program.

Install coin-operated lockers, which you can buy online in a stack of various sizes. Twelve lockers rented for fifty cents each, three times a day, six days a week, over fifty weeks a year is $5,400.

- Create a simple form to send to special event rental clients who are owed their full security deposit after the event that gives them the option of donating it in whole or part as a tax-deductible contribution.
- Rent out your facility every Sunday to a church group that doesn't have its own building. One site does this and generates $35,000 annually. Lots of church congregations across the country are interested in renting space.
- Have a full-service conservation center and run it on a pay-for-itself basis.
- If your organization does not already offer planned giving, research the topic and begin offering it as another option for donors.
- Make your rental space available (for a fee) for legislative or other government office receptions, particularly if the location is convenient, historically inspiring, or visually stunning.
- Hold high school proms at your facility. Surprisingly, proms can be less messy and intrusive than weddings!
- Open your site for wedding rentals (even if it's just the barn or lawn).
- Rent spaces in your institution's parking lot for other special events to use. Partner with an outside parking company to handle the logistics.
- Put together corporate retreats (including programming, not just renting space) for local businesses. Those folks don't mind paying a premium for a unique experience, and this might be a way that your board members can contribute by shepherding their business contacts in this direction.
- Require that book printing be sponsored, so money has to be raised in advance of the book's publication. Books are easy to attract sponsors for, and then these sponsors can be on your radar for other fundraising needs.
- Merge multiple vendors into one contract to lessen administrative headache and increase profit margins for the vendor and you.
- Make the time to finally focus on a capital campaign, which bring in much larger one-time gifts and bequests.
- Sell ad space on the scrim/mesh covering on building construction or renovation sites. These very large, very visible spaces can be prime real estate for major sponsors, corporate funders, and other advertisers.
- Charge for processing family collections, with digital images created by the historical society becoming part of its overall collection.

National Park Service

Work with area scouting groups to offer badge workshops and/or modify existing programming to align with badge requirements. Scouting Councils might be able to handle workshop promotions.


Aja Bain

Have a tiny museum, tiny kitchen, tiny whatever-room or whatever-location concert, modeled on NPR's Tiny Desk concert idea, featuring local musicians in a cozy space. This uses your location's uniqueness and broadens your audience by featuring a special experience.

- Rent extra space in a storage facility to a fine art moving company.
- Sell parking passes for your parking lot to a nearby professional firm, restaurant, or other business that needs the spaces on a regular, workday basis.
- Allow a city park system to turn a block of your land into an urban garden/park area which they will now maintain, saving you the costs of mowing or other landscaping services.
- Leverage your history and the fan base for it that might lie far outside your town: try a Kickstarter, IndieGoGo, GoFundMe, etc. campaign backed up with strong social media efforts. Pick a specific goal and raise the cash with a strong pitch, perhaps as a video, and some incentives (e.g., coffee cup for $25 gift or $100 for a private tour).
- Repurpose an offsite historic property, which is outside your mission, to serve as a retreat center and event rental location.
- Buy equipment that scans newspapers to make second-generation microfilm (for institutions that purchased your microfilms the first time in 1950s-1980s). Digitize microfilm and sell to institutions and patrons.
- Cater to quinceañeras, bar and bat mitzvahs, sweet sixteens, and related coming-of-age events, offering event space for rentals as well as historic settings for photographs.
- Encourage members and supporters to make purchases through AmazonSmile, Amazon.com's program that donates a percentage of a person's purchase to the nonprofit of their choice.
- If your organization does not have an endowment fund, plan a campaign to start one. Identify potential donors including one or two people who are willing to match all contributions up to a specific total.
- Do you have unused acreage that you have to maintain at your historic site? Work with your local agriculture extension office to lease it to a local farmer to raise a cash crop appropriate to your site's history. In an urban area? Lease space for community gardens.
- Create a grandparent membership that allows them to bring up to two or three grandchildren per visit as part of the benefits.
- Have extra office space, or can you invest in renovating or creating some extra space? Become a small business or nonprofit incubator, and let or sublet workspace to a team smaller than your own.

Partnerships

- Partner with a for-profit tour company for a food tour. They take groups to different sites around town and then end at your site for a tour and a taste of a traditional food item from your town, state, or region. You get a per-person fee for each tour.
- Work with area scouting groups to offer badge workshops and/or modify existing programming to align with Scout badge requirements. Scouting Councils might be able to handle all workshop promotions and registrations.
- Establish digitization agreements with a variety of major library resource vendors, including ProQuest, Project MUSE, JSTOR, NewsBank, Cengage, FamilySearch, and Google Books, which in many circumstances includes both the royalties and complimentary licenses for new electronic resources.
- License and sell visual materials on your website and through a non-exclusive licensing agreement with Getty Images.
- Pay for scanning equipment with a grant or other funding for a specific large project, and then use that equipment to handle additional smaller scanning projects for other agencies or entities, and charge them a fee for doing so.
- State historical societies can create a statewide website into which local history organizations can put their digital images and records. Digital images can be purchased by the public, and the state historical society shares revenue with local organizations.
- Start a happy hour program in which you partner and share the profits with a local restaurant that harvests produce from your historic kitchen garden and uses it on the menu offered at the event. Each program is a different theme, and your organization can connect to a different set of community partners based on the rotating topics.
- Partner with Ancestry.com to digitize your records and work out a deal for residents or members to have limited-time free access.

IMAGINE: What could your site do with a little more cash flow?

Reevaluating Existing Offerings

- Bring in a consultant to assess all of your retail operations and help you to segment your offerings based on the specific customers at each retail location. One organization that did this tailored its products to customers and is on track to increase revenue 45 percent this fiscal year.
- Do a regular analysis comparing your services to other entities in your area or state to be sure you are not undervaluing things such as space and event rentals and admission prices for walk-ins and school groups.
- Shift marketing dollars from traditional media, such as billboards or magazines, to online, which allows you to target audiences and reach outside of your area, state, and country to fans of local musicians, food types, writers, political leaders, etc. One site doubled its online revenue over the past year using this strategy.
- Reexamine a long-ago program that made money, or almost made money, for your institution and recondition it to be more inclusive and relevant to people in your community today.
- Try a "Stay at Home Tea. " Rather than attend another fundraising function, donors can use the teabag you have sent them, make some tea at home, and send a donation to the museum.
- Hire a local artist or clever craftsperson to construct a unique collection box related in theme to your site or collection. Maybe it has moving parts to grab bills or allows coins to roll through a model of your building to encourage contributions.
- Scrutinize existing programs and consider if they serve the mission and whether or not they are financially sustainable. Eliminate those that score low on both counts to make room for something that will generate revenue.

Community Relations

- Make classroom and auditorium space available for rent to other nonprofits and businesses in your community.
- Create an opening reception for trustees and advisory council anytime there is an exhibition, and line up local businesses to be the sole sponsor to cover the full cost of the event. Include special incentives for the sponsor including signage, employee tickets to the event or exhibit, and logo placement on exhibit literature.
- Start a preservation program to advise businesses on archiving their papers, photographs, and records, and then offer to store them for a fee.
- Honor a select number of business leaders in your state or community each year in a program named after people or events significant to the history of your locale or community. Have a gala event for the induction with sponsors (including friends of the inductees) covering costs.
- Build your endowment by allowing individuals to support staff positions, just like named chairs in a university setting. This creates a source of revenue for the endowed position that allows the institution to reallocate funds previously spent on this position to other areas.

Symi81

Do you have unused acreage that you have to maintain at your historic site? Work with your local agriculture extension office to lease it to a local farmer to raise a cash crop appropriate to your site's history. In an urban area? Lease space for community gardens.

- Launch a business history initiative that discusses the role of business in shaping the state's or region's history. Companies can pay for sponsorship to be involved.
- Is there a local business that has an animal mascot that could be housed in your animal program space? A hotel that has a llama mascot will be paying for a new barn, upkeep and staff time, a management fee, and cross-branding at one urban historic site.
- Find a local business to sponsor field trips for Title I schools in your area. Be sure to include admission/program costs as well as the cost of the bus.
- Solicit local services (such as a cleaning service for someone's business for a year—something that puts a spotlight on the donor's company) and then raffle it off during one of your institution's events. If the service isn't donated, consider purchasing it (at a discount) and then raffling it off at a higher price.
- Do an annual distinguished award banquet and give an award to a local celebrity or well-known figure whose presence will draw a crowd. Have an all-volunteer committee make the arrangements and raise the money for expenses to make ticket sales all-profit.
- Focus on intentionally growing your email list with contacts that are interested in local history and offer them interesting content before making targeted membership and donation pitches.
- Get legislation passed authorizing a new state income tax check-off to support local history. For one state historical society who administers this grant program, contributions from individual income tax returns grew to more than $25,000 in the second year.
- Volunteer your site as a polling place to increase your visibility in the community and draw return (paying) visitors.

Products

- Find a local winery to create a special edition wine for sale at your site and share the returns.
- Establish your own online store on your website for history-related items, especially ones unique to your organization or locale.
- Create a state history textbook for the grades in your state that focus on state and local history and sell that to schools, including alternate language versions.

Aja Bain

Become "home base" for a vintage baseball team. On game days, offer discounted admission and sell refreshments in your museum store.

Corporate support can help fund the development, along with ongoing financial assistance from individual supporters. An electronic version can be licensed for classroom use on a sliding scale (size of the district, number of students, etc.), with a typical fee of $10 per student per year.

- Start an annual wall calendar series using images from the collection.
- Launch a proprietary beer based on a recipe associated with your historic site using old-fashioned brewing methods.
- Add your gift shop to Shopify, BigCommerce, Magento, or another e-commerce provider.
- Hire a local artist to paint a scene of a feature of your site, make prints (perhaps with the printmaking donated or sponsored), and sell on site.
- Start an annual Christmas or holiday ornament series that features a different historic structure or event in your community each year.
- Set aside a special corner in your store for donated items from local artists. Handmade pottery, toys, and housewares, premium priced with a tag explaining that all proceeds are used for interpretation. The offerings change over time, but add a very nice 100 percent profit boost to retail sales.
- Find someone to design a "tropical shirt" that includes drawings of prominent lost buildings in the city that you can use for advocacy and sell to raise funds.
- Encourage in-visit purchasing through use of special tokens at a living history site: a "time travel token" can be a $5 copper coin that guests purchase. Visitors use it to step into the past and interact with the businesses in your outdoor campus, such as a general store or blacksmith's shop, or for taking a carriage ride. This is an interactive element that puts the focus on guests' engagement with the people and stories of your museum, while supporting in-visit purchasing, that doesn't feel heavy-handed or distracting from the sensory-rich environment of your site.
- Invite a local artist, school, or other community group to make a t-shirt design related to your site or collection, which you sell online with Volusion, Teespring, or other companies. Be sure to first research the sourcing and labor practices of the company.
- Work with your state to create a commemorative license plate that generates revenue for historical projects.

Do you have any revenue-generating ideas that have worked well at your organization? Let us know on Facebook or Twitter @AASLH.

Several AASLH groups and committees contributed the ideas that make up this list, including the State Historical Administrators Meeting, Historic House and Small Museums affinity group committees, and the AASLH Council.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET #283
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Fundraising Basics for Local History Organizations

By Jamie Simek

While small- and mid-sized museums may find excellent strategies from fundraising resources available online and in-print, it can be challenging to scale this information. Many are written for a target audience of professional fundraisers. When tactics are designed for the pros, who have training, experience, and additional resources under their belts, it can seem overwhelming and sometimes downright impossible for organizations with a small staff or all-volunteer team to adopt their practices. However, even the smallest shop can make a few changes and implement new tactics to professionalize their fundraising approach. This leaflet will introduce those in charge of local history organizations—whether paid or volunteer—to some fundraising basics and practical tips. It's not designed to overhaul your charitable giving efforts overnight, but to offer useful information to help you be more confident and diligent in your fundraising efforts.

The first thing to understand is that fundraising is about people, not money. It's about understanding the wants, needs, and desires of those you serve and directing precious resources toward meeting those expectations. It's also about knowing your prospective donors well enough to match their passions and goals with the impact your organization is trying to achieve and the people you serve. That doesn't happen by accident. Building mutual give-and-take relationships requires work. With the right outlook and approach, it's fun work. As we approach the subject of fundraising and try to make it relevant to organizations of all sizes—but especially to small shops—we'll be grounded in one overarching principle:

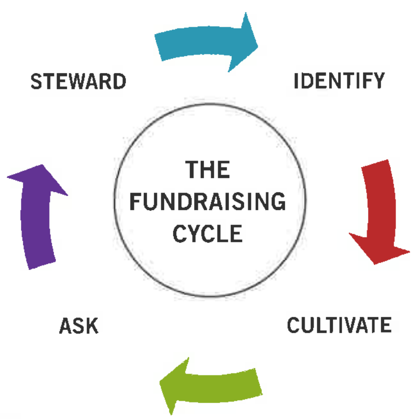
Fundraising is an intentional, people-focused process built on genuine, personalized relationships.

Start with the Basics

Whether you're baking a three-tier wedding cake or a dozen sprinkled cupcakes, you start with the same ingredients. The same is true for fundraising. As in baking, your designs can get fancier and more complicated as you gain more experience, but you're always going to start with the same basic process. We're going to frame this using *the fundraising cycle.*

The Fundraising Cycle

Depending on the reference, you can find fundraising cycles that range from three to fourteen steps. We're going to look at a four-part cycle. While each action is separate and defined, remember that all your fundraising efforts are not going to be in the same phase of the cycle at the same time. They are ongoing and overlapping. You may be identifying potential grant opportunities, mailing solicitation letters, hosting behind-the-scenes tours, and thanking current donors with a special event, all at the same time. Look at your organization as a system. Each part influences the next, but they all operate at the same time.



Four (Okay, Five) Simple Questions:

As you look at the theoretical fundraising cycle, consider these practical questions which get to the heart of each phase in the cycle:

1. **Identify.** Who are your friends and supporters (past, current, and potential)?
2. **Cultivate.** How can you build and strengthen genuine relationships with them?
3. **Ask.** Which needs align with their interests? How would they like to be asked to help?
4. **Steward.** How can you show them gratitude?

If you want some good news, the cultivation or "romance" phase of your fundraising efforts should take up about 60 percent of your time. If you add the estimated 10 percent spent on stewardship (saying thanks), that's 70 percent of your fundraising time spent building relationships. With 25 percent spent on identifying and researching prospective donors, only approximately 5 percent of your time is spent asking for money![1] Let's look more closely at each of these phases.

Identify

Fundraising is about people and the relationships built and nurtured around the mission of the organization. Nothing can replace genuine relationship building—reaching out, making connections, understanding others' values and desires—but there are tactics to make that process simpler and more fruitful.

Contacts Management

Would you be able to call your friends without their numbers in your phone? Or send a birthday card to a relative without easy access to their address? The same is true with your organization's friends. If you're not collecting and managing their contact information, you will miss out on even the simplest opportunities for engagement. All organizations, regardless of size, need to have a system of constituent management in place. These are frequently called CRMs, or constituent relationship management databases. There are many to choose from, and they range from free, open source platforms to expensive, proprietary programs. Some organizations may be able to build their own database using software such as Microsoft Access, while others may find that they already have this capability through their

Consider your fundraising goals:

1. What does your organization need to fund?
2. How much money do you need to raise?
3. How much money has your organization raised in the past?
4. How much money can you raise now?
5. What are your likely funding sources?

PastPerfect contacts module. Others may need to explore options that fit their budgets.

When deciding what information to capture and maintain, define your "must have" info and your "nice to have" details. Examples of must-haves could be name, address, email, phone number, membership history, and gift history. Nice-to-haves might include employment info, volunteer history, event attendance, solicitation history, and a section for notes. However you decide to manage your contacts, remember a few tips:

- Create a formal process for entering and updating information. Train key personnel.
- Keep your contacts in one place. Don't have several versions of different lists in different locations (whether physical or digital).
- Draft a policy to address how sensitive information will be kept safe and who will have access to it.
- Keep the system in a centralized location where it's accessible to key personnel who will use it.
- Consider how this program might be integrated with other systems in the future. For example, if you want to offer online donation processing, will these two systems talk?

Prospect Management

In fundraising, your goal is to attract new donors, and to renew or upgrade current donors. To do this, you need to have a handle not only on the people inside your contact database (your current and past members, supporters, and donors), who are your best prospects, but also on those outside your current contact list. This is going to take some effort and a little research.

Prospect management means segmenting prospective and current donors by their links to the organization, their interest in its work, and their giving ability. This helps fundraisers make informed decisions about which donors might be interested in which projects. Your goals are to 1) identify and learn more about potential prospects, 2) gather more information about current prospects, and 3) continue to use research to inform relationship building with current donors.[2]

Your research involves looking both inside and outside the contact database to identify new fundraising opportunities. This means identifying potential

Scott Mason

At its heart, fundraising is about building relationships that connect people to a common cause.

donors and funders whose philanthropic goals align with your mission and vision (Interest), who have a connection to the organization, whether through people or programming (Linkage), and who have the means to contribute to your cause (Ability). Successful prospects will usually have some combination of all three. Identifying who these people are and to what degree these factors exist is called qualifying your donor. Some will be more qualified for specific funding initiatives than others. Determining who these prospects are will help you decide how to focus your time.

Cultivate

Cultivation is intentionally and thoughtfully building relationships based on donor-centered touchpoints. This part of the fundraising process is about having a genuine desire to know donors better, and in turn, to help them feel more connected to the nonprofit's work. This relationship building leads to mutual understanding, loyalty, and commitment. It's the fun stuff! And luckily, it's what should take up most of your fundraising time.

The fundraiser's goal is to move donors up the giving ladder from suspect to prospect to donor to progressively higher and more frequent levels of giving. But the donor has goals for cultivation too, and it's important to keep these front and center when planning cultivation strategies. This helps us focus on relationships instead of transactions. Remember, the donor wants to:

- Understand the organization's work
- View this work as successful, important, and well-planned
- Perceive that money is spent wisely
- Feel appreciated
- Believe that their gift could make a difference
- Feel individually noticed and cared about

The Four I's

We build and strengthen relationships with people every day. As a fundraiser, your role is to build these relationships intentionally, always looking for ways you can connect the organization's work with the interests and desires of prospective donors. You need to know them well enough to match potential opportunities with supporters that would be most interested. And that relationship needs to be in place long before the opportunity presents itself. The goal is proactive, rather than reactive, fundraising. Here are four strategies to keep in mind as you proactively engage your current and potential supporters.

1 **Inform.** Make sure prospects know about your organization and understand its mission. Utilize multiple engagement channels (face-to-face, email, web, social media, word of mouth) and use them diligently and deliberately.

2 **Invite.** Encourage supporters to be present and engaged through programs and special events. Invite them to learn more about your organization and the importance of everyday best practices, especially for those harder-to-fund priorities like collections care and general maintenance.

3 **Involve.** Help your supporters match their interests and passions with your needs. Create stakeholders through volunteer opportunities (whether occasional or consistent), committee work, and even service on the board of directors. Help them see firsthand how and why your organization fills a critical role in the community.

4 **Inquire.** There's a saying in fundraising: "If you want advice, ask for money. But if you want money, ask for advice." A well-informed donor who's invested in the organization's success, understands the importance of the mission, and backs efforts to move the organization forward (including the need for funds to do so) is a person whose opinion is helpful anyway.

Donor Segmentation

Donor segmentation sounds technical and challenging, but it's easily achieved with the right contact management system. Segmentation is simply putting people into different groups to tailor your messaging or funding requests. This allows for personalized communication and improved ask strategies. If you're doing an annual fund request, you might tailor your new prospect letters differently than those to loyal donors, lapsed members, or attendees of your big annual event. If you've tracked this information in your contact management system, you can craft different messages for different audiences.

It's never too late to begin donor segmentation; you can start small and build on your strategies. Consider frequent givers, those who've given larger gifts, and longtime, loyal supporters. From there you can further inform your strategies with more advanced segmentation. For example, include a reply device and addressed envelope to donors who are more likely to write a check and send it by mail. Then try an email campaign to those who are most likely to click a link and donate online.

Donor segmentation and contact management go hand-in-hand. By tracking data about your donors and prospects, you can make better informed, more strategic decisions about how, who, and when to ask for support.

Don't shy away from face-to-face funding requests—these can be effective and rewarding conversations.

Ask

When making a request for funding, the goal is to make the "right" ask. But what is that? It's when you ask the right person for the right amount to support the right program at the right time. The stars don't always align, but asks based on research, relationship building, and a sound case for support are a good starting point.

When planning ask strategies, balance resources going out with resources (hopefully) coming in. You're likely to yield better results from more personalized appeals. A face-to-face meeting, personalized note, or phone call from a board member may be better received than a form letter or a request through social media. Let's look at a few strategies for three of the most common appeals: face to face, direct mail, and email.

Face to Face

When we think of fundraising, we often think of face-to-face asks. Looking a person in the eyes and asking them for money can be uncomfortable. But for most fundraisers, it's inevitable because some requests absolutely must be done in person. Just remember that by the time you find yourself sitting across the table from a prospective donor, preparing for a big ask, you've already built a relationship with this person, shared your ideas and dreams, and asked many questions to understand their priorities and passions. You've probably already talked to them about the initiative you're hoping they'll fund. When you sit down for a face-to-face ask, it should never be a surprise to the donor. It's your job as the fundraiser to move the relationship to that point. Here are a few tips that can be helpful in preparing for a face-to-face request:[3]

Set an appointment. Don't just stop by. Get a meeting on their calendar for a set date and time.

Tell them why you're coming. Let the donor know that you'd like to discuss XYZ project.

Determine who, if anyone, should accompany you. Think about key relationships at work in the organization.

Ask for a specific amount. It can be tempting to ask "for support," but it's better to be specific, if possible. This is where good research will be helpful.

Don't speak first after the ask. It will feel awkward, but it's important to give the prospective donor a chance to process your request. Hold your tongue until they're ready to talk it over.

Offer monthly giving or multiyear pledges. If your organization has the capacity, offer to set up monthly giving or allow the donor to pay a pledge over a few years.

Get permission to follow up. If the prospective donor has given you a yes, or even a maybe, be sure to explain how and when you will follow up with them (and then do it).

Don't burn bridges if you get a "no." No one likes to be turned down, and a negative response can be disheartening and maybe even embarrassing. But this

Actively maintain engagement with your supporters—they are your best ambassadors.

is when it's most important to nurture the relationship. A no could mean "not right now" or "not this project." Continue asking questions and engaging with prospective donors until you find the right fit.

Appeal Letters

Direct mailings fell out of favor for a while due to the high cost of printing and postage, the ease of sending emails, and the assumption that people open their mail standing over a garbage can. However, with email open and click-through rates in decline, the good old-fashioned letter is making a bit of a comeback. Here are a few tips to help keep your request top-of-mind rather than bottom-of-the-recycling-bin.[4]

Write simply and straightforward. Avoid a lot of jargon and flowery language. Make the tone conversational.

Get their attention. Use images or colorful inserts to illustrate the organization's impact.

Make it personal with pronouns. Use words like "you" and "we."

State why you're writing. Be specific about what their support will mean in terms of impact.

Talk about benefits, rather than need. Speak in terms of opportunities for the donor, as well as the folks you serve.

Create a sense of urgency. Offer a call to action. You want the reader to make a gift now, not put the request in a junk drawer for later.

Ask for money (rather than "support"). Be specific about the request for funding and how it will be used.

Entertain (tell a story, offer news). Make your letter worth their time to read. Talk about a new program or visitor experience, or let them in on the latest news. Give them a reason to start and finish your letter.

Highlight your SMIT (single most important thing). If they take nothing else from your letter, what should it be? What's the bottom-line most important thing?

Include a reply device. Make it easy for them to respond. Include a form and envelope, a phone number, or a website where they can make their gift.

Email

Emails are quick, relatively easy with the right program, and can offer analytics about open and click-through rates. This means you can access data to help you determine how effective they are in your cultivation and appeal process. There are many strategies to guide your email campaigns, and recommendations change as communication trends change—especially when it comes to email, text, and social media. Here are a few things to keep in mind:[5]

- Most emails should be used to build relationships, rather than raise money. Three to four cultivation emails should be sent for each solicitation email. Use email to send newsletters, make announcements and updates, provide resources, and extend invitations.
- Realize that, like letters, most readers will skim emails. Pay special attention to the email subject line, the first sentence, and the P.S. Include pictures when possible and use headlines, as well as bolded or underlined words. Also, remember that less is more, and keep emails shorter than letters (fewer than 400 words).
- Don't forget to ask. Emails should still have a call to action, whether it's a membership renewal reminder, an appeal for funding, or an invitation to learn more on the organization's website or social media account. Be sure to include links in the email that will get folks where they need to be.

While it may not be the most labor-intensive part of fundraising, making the ask is certainly the most intimidating. It helps to realize that most of us are not only fundraisers, but also givers. And we (hopefully) give because we want to—because the organization's mission speaks to us, because we know someone who is better off because of it, or because we were asked by the right person for the right project at the right time.

Steward

Stewardship is the final phase in the fundraising cycle, but it's by no means the end. Good stewardship is what sets the organization up for another successful turn around the fundraising circle. Stewardship is a combination of gratitude—genuine gratitude thoughtfully expressed to givers—and accountability, or "the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to the care of others."[6]

Fundraising Stewardship Is Often Expressed through Four Measurable Strategies:[7]

1. **Reciprocity.** Gratitude expressed in exchange for the gift (whether of time, talent, or treasure).
2. **Responsibility.** Acting in a socially responsible way (including using gifts in the way they were designated by the giver).
3. **Reporting.** Keeping donors and the public informed about developments within the organization (in line with the transparency that is expected of a public charity).
4. **Relationship nurturing.** Paying attention to those who give, even after the gift has been processed and spent.

As with most processes in a system, stewardship will run more smoothly and effectively if you formalize the procedure and make it part of your institutional culture—that is, knowledge that is passed down from employee to employee, from volunteer to volunteer. To receive gifts gratefully and gracefully, take time to identify and write out your gift processing procedure. These are all important to the logistics of stewardship:

- Process the gift quickly and update the donor records immediately.
- Ensure that designated gifts (i.e. funds given for a specific project or initiative) are properly identified and deposited in the correct account.
- Generate a proper thank you and send it in a timely manner.
- Schedule regular updates with donors—whether by mail, email, telephone, or in person—and put them in your calendar.

Tips for thank you letters:[8]

- Personalized—like you're writing a friend
- In the mail within forty-eight hours
- Reference gift amount and date
- Cite what the gift was for and what you are going to do with it
- Include a "P.S." to drive donors to your website, Facebook page, etc.
- Provide your contact info
- Include applicable tax-deductible language

Conclusion

Fundraising rarely happens by accident. It certainly never happens that way when we really need it, or frequently enough that we can count on chance to meet the needs of our organization, and by extension, the people we serve. You don't have to be perfect at fundraising right out of the gate (or ever, really), and you don't have to do everything all at once. Identify a few small changes you can make to your fundraising processes (or identify a few you can try if you're just getting started). Once those become ingrained, pick a few more. Even if by small steps, make fundraising a priority and remember these tips:

- Make your case for support. Know what you want to fund and why.
- Be transparent about your organization's goals and objectives.
- Do a little research to help you engage with prospects both proactively and reactively.
- Commit to contact management. Keep track of your friends.
- Know why your work is important and be prepared to talk about it.
- Engage your current supporters. Not only are they your best prospects, but they are also your best ambassadors and advocates.
- Plan, plan, plan, ask.
- Always demonstrate gratitude and accountability to donors, members, and supporters.

Above all else, remember that your cause is important and worthy of support. The outcomes you are trying to achieve are bigger than the organization, which exists to serve the people of your community. Fundraising is about building connections and relationships between people, for people. Be intentional, stay outwardly-focused, celebrate small victories, and have fun!

Additional Resources

- American Association for State and Local History Small Museums Community: https://aaslh.org/resources/affinity-groups
- Indiana Historical Society Heritage Support Grants – Resources: https://indianahistory.org/across-indiana/heritage-support-grants/resources
- American Alliance of Museums Financial Stability Resources: www.aam-us.org/programs/resource-library/financial-stability-resources
- Donor Search Prospect Research: The Ultimate Guide: www.donorsearch.net/prospect-research-ultimate-guide
- The Next Generation of American Giving (Blackbaud): https://institute.blackbaud.com/asset/the-next-generation-of-american-giving-2018

Acknowledgements

The author would like to recognize the Indiana Historical Society and the Heritage Support Grants Program, made possible by Lilly Endowment Inc. This innovative program offers fundraising training and grants to local history organizations in the state of Indiana. She developed the content of this leaflet, which was presented as a workshop at the 2017 AASLH Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas, while serving as the Fundraising Educator in Local History Services at the Indiana Historical Society. Sincere appreciation goes to colleagues there for their professionalism, creativity, good humor, and willingness to embrace logic models.

Jamie Simek handles grants and special projects at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum. She can be reached at jsimek@brickyard.com.

[1] "CASE - Fundraising Fundamentals, Part 2, Section 7," *Council for the Advancement and Support of Education*, accessed May 21, 2018. www.case.org/Publications_and_Products/Fundraising_Fundamentals_Intro/Fundraising_Fundamentals_section_7/Fundraising_Fundamentals_section_71.html.

[2] For more information, see Jennifer Filla "Prospect Research—Even with Limited Resources," *Advancing Philanthropy* (Summer 2013), www.afpnet.org/files/ContentDocuments/54-56%20Prospect%20Development.pdf.

[3] Adapted from Mark A. Pittman, "Major Gift Fundraising," *The Essential Fundraising Handbook for Small Nonprofits* (Louisville, KY: Nonprofit Academy, 2014), 229-59.

[4] "How to Write an Annual Fundraising Appeal Letter," *Bloomerang*, accessed May 21, 2018. https://bloomerang.co/blog/infographic-how-to-write-an-annual-fundraising-appeal-letter.

[5] Joe Garecht, "How to Write Fundraising Emails that Get Results," *The Fundraising Authority*, accessed May 21, 2018. www.thefundraisingauthority.com/internet-fundraising/e-mail-fundraising-letters.

[6] William G. Enright and Timothy L. Seiler, "The Practice of Stewardship," *Achieving Excellence in Fundraising* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 268.

[7] Many sources cite four fundraising stewardship strategies identified in Richard D. Waters, "Measuring Stewardship in Public Relations," *Public Relations Review Journal* 35, no. 2 (2009): 113-119.

[8] Adapted from Pamela Grow, "Keep 'Em: Retaining Your Donors with a System for Stewardship," *The Essential Fundraising Handbook for Small Nonprofits* (Louisville, KY: Nonprofit Academy, 2014), 59-82.

AASLH
TECHNICAL LEAFLET
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
#269

Improving Financial Management

By Stacy L. Klingler and Laura B. Roberts

Budgeting is the tip of the financial management iceberg; it is the right place to start. Technical Leaflet #268 outlined the steps for developing a solid budget. Once your organization has a budget in place, the ongoing challenge is monitoring financial performance on a regular basis and developing mechanisms for making sound financial decisions.

Financial management is not the responsibility of any one person. Rather, it should be a shared responsibility among the board and staff. The board has fiduciary responsibility for the health and perpetuation of the organization—that is, they are expected to prudently take care of the nonprofit's assets on behalf of the general public. They cannot do that job without accurate, and timely, information.

There are two categories of financial reports: 1) internally produced budget and other financial reports that are generated monthly or at some other regular interval, and 2) the summaries that are part of an annual audit. Financial management goes far beyond providing and approving reports. The board and staff should also be assessing and considering how to improve financial performance, monitoring cash flow projections, and ensuring that proper checks and balances are in place.

Internal Financial Reports

In general, smaller organizations need to focus on preparing accurate, timely, and informative *internal financial reports* on a regular basis for the director and board. The format should remain consistent from board meeting to board meeting so that members can quickly find information they need. However, if reports are confusing or present the wrong level of detail, they should be revised. The treasurer or whoever prepares these reports should regularly ask for feedback on whether they meet the board's needs. Reports should also provide the director with the information required to monitor the financial health of the organization. One simple test: if the same questions get asked repeatedly, the reports are in some way confusing or inadequate.

As people who work with the public, we know that folks (including our board members) learn and absorb information in different ways. Financial reports tell a story; to get that story across to everyone, you need to use numbers, words, and pictures.

Figure 1 shows an example of a budget report, listing revenue and expense. It should include the following columns, using the same revenue and expense categories, in the same order, in each column:

- Prior year actual revenue and expenses
- Current year annual budget
- Current year budget to date (matching how far you are into the year; so six months in, this would be half the budget)
- Actual revenue and expense, year to date (YTD)
- Difference between budget to date and actual to date

At the bottom of each column, note the difference between revenue and expenses for that column.

Those are the numbers in the budget story. What about the words? For any item that is significantly off budget (either higher or lower), add a note that explains the difference. This not only helps those who are not facile with numbers, but it also draws the board's attention to the most significant and important issues.

Adding pictures means mastering the graphing functions in your spreadsheet or other software. Graphs are best for comparing data. You may want to create a bar chart that compares data (e.g., paid admissions, membership renewals, attendance at the annual house tour) from last year to this year, for example, or—if you run multiple sites—comparing statistics from each (library patrons versus historic house visitors, for example). Or if the mix of revenue or expenses is changing, you might want to create comparative pie charts. And sometimes reports or charts on subsets of your financial information may be appropriate. It can be easier to judge the success of a fundraising event, membership campaign, educational program, or other activity when the relevant information is pulled out from the main report.

Does a board need to review the budget report line by line? Absolutely not. It is the job of the treasurer and director to draw board members' attention to significant variations from budgets and projections. Time should be spent discussing responses to welcome and unwelcome surprises, not examining each and every number.

External Financial Reports

The *audit*, or a less exhaustive and extensive *compilation*, is prepared by someone from outside the organization who reviews all of the bookkeeping, financial transactions, and internally-generated reports. Audits have mainly external audiences—funders, public agencies, etc.—that require an objective review of operations. They also typically include a "management letter," which notes any deficiencies or questions about the financial management of the organization. In larger organizations, an audit committee receives the audit and management letter, reviews the findings, meets with the auditor, and reports back to the rest of the board about any significant issues or concerns.

The main report in the audit is the "statement of financial position," also known as the balance sheet. (The Financial Accounting Standards Board—FASB—changed all the report names several years ago, but many people still use the old names out of habit.) Some accounting software packages can readily produce these snapshot reports of organizational health anytime, throughout the year. Before the easy availability of such reports, they were only generated annually, as part of the audit. Balance sheets provide an overall picture of the organization: how much does it have and where (e.g., cash, investments, property), how much does it owe (e.g., accounts payable, loans payable), and how much is it owed (e.g., accounts receivable). As with all good financial reports, they compare the current and prior years. They are most useful when used to identify issues that need to be addressed, such as "we owe more

January–June 2014 Financial Report

Revenue

	Prior Year Actual	Current Budget	Budget YTD	Actual YTD	Difference	Notes
Memberships	$9,000	$10,000	$10,000	$9,500	-$500	*Campaign less successful, need targeted mailing*
Annual fund	$15,645	$15,000	$0	$0	$0	*Mail October 30*
Admissions	$7,965	$8,000	$3,000	$2,800	-$200	*Major storms in May; free advertising for new exhibit?*
Group tours	$4,568	$4,000	$2,000	$1,860	-$140	*Additional tours scheduled for July*
Student tours	$1,890	$2,000	$2,000	$2,154	$154	
Shop sales (net)	$4,367	$6,200	$2,325	$1,987	-$338	*New merchandise arriving August for auction support*
Town grant	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000	$5,000	$	
Wine tasting (net)	$1,980	$2,300	$2,300	$2,411	$111	*Three leftover cases purchased by committee members*
Auction (net)	$4,756	$4,200	$0	$0	$0	
Investment income	$3,678	$3,600	$1,800	$1,800	$0	
Revenue Total	**$58,849**	**$60,300**	**$28,425**	**$27,512**	**-$913**	

Expense

	Prior Year Actual	Current Budget	Budget YTD	Actual YTD	Difference	Notes
Director salary + benefits	$36,000	$36,000	$18,000	$18,000	$0	
Guides' hourly wages	$6,120	$6,000	$2,250	$2,250	$0	
Insurance	$3,600	$4,000	$2,000	$2,000	$0	
Maintenance	$2,655	$3,000	$1,500	$800	$700	*Roof tile replacement put off for one year*
Utilities	$3,689	$3,300	$1,800	$1,689	$111	*Heating savings better than anticipated, despite cold snap*
Temporary exhibit	$0	$4,500	$4,500	$4,612	-$112	*Replaced interactive panel*
School program supplies	$824	$800	$400	$552	-$152	*Purchased materials in bulk; will reduce overall cost*
Printing, postage, office	$856	$1,500	$700	$800	-$100	*Printed more letterhead than planned; second membership mailing*
Website contract	$2,850	$1,200	$600	$600	$0	
Expense Total	**$56,594**	**$60,300**	**$31,750**	**$31,303**	**$447**	
Net	**$2,255**	**$0**	**-$3,325**	**-$3,791**	**-$466**	

Figure 1

than we have in the bank." Because they are snapshots, capturing the financial picture on the day they were generated, balance sheets must be used in conjunction with other, more dynamic, reports.

The second audit report is the "statement of cash flows," which is not to be confused with the cash flow projection described below. The statement of cash flows is essentially a reconciliation of what came in

Reading Budget Reports for the Novice

While five columns of numbers for a myriad of revenue and expense categories may seem overwhelming for those unfamiliar with financial reports, for those with nonprofit or other business experience, these reports provide most of the necessary information and are relatively standard.

The columns are organized with the oldest information in the first or left column (column 1, prior year actuals) and the most immediately relevant information in the last or right column (column 5, difference between current year budget and actuals to date, otherwise known as over/under budget).

Here are some strategies for reviewing the report for items that may need to be questioned or explained:

1. Review the last column for large negative or positive numbers that represent *immediate* issues. These large differences between where you predicted you would be (column 3, current year budget to date) and where you are (column 4, current year actuals to date) need to be addressed. In some cases, the difference is due to timing and will correct itself shortly (as in the case of a membership renewal letter going out a few weeks later than planned), and so there is little to worry about. In other cases, the difference is a real issue (as in the case of fewer renewals) and so needs to be addressed by the board and staff.

2. To understand if your *long-term* strategies are working, consider where you are in the current year in comparison to the past (prior year actuals) and with your goals (annual budget). Prior year's actual revenue and expense (column 1) reminds you of how you did last year. Are you doing better or worse? Why? The annual budget (column 2) reminds you of what you planned to do this year. Are you on target with your plans, or do you need to make a change?

during the year and what went out, again compared with the prior year. It demonstrates exactly how and why the cash position of the organization changed.

Audits also account for the FASB-defined categories of funds: permanently restricted, temporarily restricted, and unrestricted. These categories are strictly defined and mandatory. Permanently restricted funds are those whose use (and occasionally, investment) are dictated by the donor in perpetuity. Temporarily restricted funds are also designated by the donor, but once the restrictions are satisfied, they are transferred to the unrestricted category. These may include grants designated for a particular program or funds raised for a specific project, like a new exhibition or capital repairs. Everything else is categorized as "unrestricted." This is confusing and annoying to nonprofit managers. What about the proceeds of de-accessioning, which we've restricted to direct care of the collection and new acquisitions? Or the recent bequest that the board voted to put in the endowment? Or the revolving fund we use to seed funding for the next publication? Or the small surplus from last year we voted to put into a maintenance reserve? FASB says that unless the donor put restrictions on those funds, they are, in truth, unrestricted and actually available for any and all purposes. So there may, in fact, be an additional report appended to the audit, explaining all of the policies and organizationally adopted restrictions on the "unrestricted" funds.

Improving Financial Performance

Organizations are searching for the holy grail of "sustainability"—finding a diverse and stable mix of revenue sources that can be counted on year after year. Most historical organizations understand that overreliance on any one source of funding is inherently unstable. There is no simple formula for sustainability beyond this: look at every revenue source and do the hard work to protect and grow those sources.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Organizations with sizable endowments saw their investment income drop after 2008. Those that enjoyed strong public support from their communities, counties, or states are finding those appropriations increasingly vulnerable. Foundation funding has not only become more competitive, but the funders themselves are demanding more accountability for demonstrable impact of the programs they have funded. We recognize the importance of identifying and cultivating donors with the capacity to be generous, but who in our organization has the skills and contacts to do that work?

Probably the area where historical organizations can make the most significant change is in the area of earned income. Many already have shops or publications programs. Some have profitable programs like symposiums or summer camps. But with some

Assessing Performance

The mnemonic "CASH" captures the four ways to benchmark an organization's performance. A well-managed organization keeps track of all of the four in parallel because together they provide a full picture of how the organization is functioning. It is worth noting that board members tend to relate well to this idea of benchmark data, particularly if they come from data-driven professions. They are often frustrated that historical organizations cannot provide good industry data against which they can assess performance.

C – Comparables. Every nonprofit should be able to identify a handful of organizations that are comparable to its operation: organizations with similar budgets, program offerings, and facilities along with similar communities and audiences. For example, the larger outdoor living history museums collect and share comparable data (not just financial data). Consider creating a small information-sharing network among peer institutions to collect and compare performance data.

A – Averages. Even though the wider community of museums and historical organizations includes organizations that are not directly comparable, there is value in understanding how an individual organization compares to the entire universe of similar nonprofits. State or national surveys are useful for finding good industry averages.

S – Strategic goals. As part of planning, an organization should set goals for performance. These goals should be challenging yet achievable. If your budget is built around your goals, failing to achieve goals will have a negative impact on the budget.

H – History. Snapshot data is almost useless; an organization needs historical data to assess patterns and trends. If an organization does not have good data about past performance, the most critical step in developing a good management performance program is setting up systems that will efficiently and accurately collect key data.

Look at one number—your paid admissions. Last year, you brought in $12,500. Is that a good or bad number?

Your group of friendly comparable organizations report $5,000 to $18,750, so you are doing better than average. But the AAM data report for the most recent year says that average admission revenue for institutions of your size is $22,300, so you're not doing well in those terms. But you also know that history museums generally have lower fees than children's and science museums of the same size. Your strategic plan called for increasing admissions to $20,000 over five years, and you are in year four of the plan, so you are not meeting those goals.

Then you look at the historical numbers:

Year 1: $950

Year 2: $12,000 (special traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian)

Year 3: $10,400

Year 4: $12,500 (special exhibit from your own collections)

You figured out that special exhibits boosted numbers significantly and consequently developed the capacity to do exhibits in house. So the trend lines are all positive. If you can continue to devote resources to developing an annual exhibition that gets people to visit, you probably can increase admission revenue over time. You won't meet the goals in your plan (and there may be financial implications from that), but you are now in a much better position to plan and budget for next year. And if you cancel the annual special exhibition, you can be pretty sure that admission revenue will drop again.

entrepreneurial focus, an organization can increase its earned income. The first step is to identify those programs for which there is a strong market and to figure out if they can be expanded. If you moved the symposium to a local church, could you accommodate more people? Would a fourth session of the summer camp fill? The second step is to look carefully at the price of revenue-generating programs. Are your fees competitive? When was the last time they were increased? The third step is to identify unmet needs and see if you can enter the market at low cost and/or charging a good price. Can you contract out senior staff to complete corporate histories or set up an oral history program? Can your staff advise on selecting appropriate wallpaper for historic house owners? But be cautious: sometimes "no one is doing…" because the market for that service is weak.

Most fundraising events (and programs) that don't change get stale and lose their attendees after just a few years. Perhaps the most painful change is pruning away those programs that were designed to be money-makers (versus those that are mission-critical) but which, in fact, are not. However, cutting programs that are not very profitable frees up time and energy for new or expanded programs that have greater potential to generate funds. Acknowledging that the historic home tour or lunchtime lecture series doesn't generate funds is the first step in making room, not only for new donors and funds, but also for new audiences. One popular idea is the non-gala: basically, you tell your supporters that there is no event—no need to get your best clothes dry-cleaned and hire a babysitter. Still give us the ticket price, but then take all the money you saved and either add it to your donation or take the family out for dinner.

Cash Flow Projections

No matter how you generate income or track your money, you must consider timing. You can stick to your budget and still find there's not enough cash to get through the month. Even worse, if the majority of your income comes in toward the end of your fiscal year and you fall short of projections, you haven't had time to change your spending. One tool that helps prevent you from going too far off the rails is an accurate *cash flow projection*. Monitoring the budget monthly or quarterly requires that you have a sense of when money comes in and goes out of the organization. Most software programs allow you to enter your budget by month in order to accommodate seasonal influxes (e.g., fundraising events or membership renewals) and irregular outflows (e.g., an exhibit build-out or insurance premiums). From that, your accounting software may allow you to create a cash flow projection, which lets you see how much cash you'll have at the end of each month.

You can also do this with a simple spreadsheet (or even by hand with a calculator), with the budget in the first column and then twelve more columns, one for each month. Take each line of your budget and project which month the revenue and expenses will hit.

Look at the example in figure 2. Start with revenue. Membership renewals go out right after the first of the year, so revenue arrives in January, February, and March. Because the museum is closed for four months, admission revenue and shop sales are projected evenly over eight months. But student tours only come in the spring, and group visits in the spring and fall. Funding from the town arrives in March. Now look at expenses. The director's salary is spread evenly over the year, but guides only work in the eight months the museum is open. Insurance is billed every six months, in April and October. Utilities are higher in the winter and drop in the spring and summer. The temporary exhibit has to be done by re-opening day, April 1, so those expenses all fall in March.

Then you do the math: how much did you start with that month, plus how much will come in, minus how much will go out. The total of that calculation becomes the starting point for the next month. In this example, when do things start to unravel? In April, when membership revenue has ended and the insurance bill comes due. So even though you have a balanced budget, by the end of the month, you are running in the red. Although you make it up in May, you then go through six months of negative cash flow, where you don't have enough cash to pay your bills, before recovering in December, when expenses are lower and revenue from the annual fund comes in.

What can you do? You need to think about shifting the timing of revenue and expenses. Your fall fundraiser (an auction) makes more money than the spring wine tasting. Can you retool the spring event to make more? Or add a summer fundraiser? Perhaps the board can make their annual fund gifts earlier in the year. Have you tried to get underwriting for the temporary exhibit? Try negotiating with the insurance company to change their billing schedule. If you can't move enough revenue and expenses to fix your cash flow, you might need to apply for a line of credit at a local bank. The point is that with a strong, accurate cash flow projection, you will know when you will fall short and find ways to make ends meet.

Cash flow projections also help you make better decisions. For example, suppose a board member observes that it seems counter-productive to have membership renewals go out right after the annual appeal. That may be true, but if you were to shift renewals later in the year, your cash flow would be even worse. You'd need more of a reserve to get you through the first few months of the year. Or perhaps someone observes that the town should send you

Cash Flow Projection

Budget	Month	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
		Museum closed December 1 to April 1				*Wine tasting*				*Auction*			
	Opening balance	**$1,200**	**$2,550**	**$2,000**	**$950**	**-$1,775**	**$0**	**-$2,125**	**-$4,450**	**-$6,775**	**-$4,100**	**-$7,625**	**-$5,150**
Revenue													
Memberships	$10,000	$5,000	$3,000	$2,000									
Annual fund	$15,000											$5,000	$10,000
Admissions	$8,000				$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000	
Group tours	$4,000				$1,000	$1,000				$1,000	$1,000		
Student tours	$2,000				$800	$1,000	$200						
Shop sales (net)	$6,200				$775	$775	$775	$775	$775	$775	$775	$775	
Town grant	$5,000			$5,000									
Wine tasting (net)	$2,300					$2,300							
Auction (net)	$4,200									$4,200			
Investment income	$3,600	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300	$300
Total Revenue	**$60,300**	**$6,500**	**$5,850**	**$9,300**	**$4,825**	**$4,600**	**$2,275**	**-$50**	**-$2,375**	**$500**	**-$1,025**	**-$550**	**$5,150**
Expense	**Month**	**January**	**February**	**March**	**April**	**May**	**June**	**July**	**August**	**September**	**October**	**November**	**December**
Director salary + benefits	$36,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000
Guides' hourly wages	$6,000				$750	$750	$750	$750	$750	$750	$750	$750	
Insurance	$4,000				$2,000						$2,000		
Maintenance	$3,000	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250	$250
Utilities	$3,300	$400	$400	$400	$200	$200	$200	$200	$200	$200	$200	$300	$400
Temporary exhibit	$4,500			$4,500									
School program supplies	$800				$200	$200				$200	$200		
Printing, postage, office	$1,500	$200	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$200	$200
Website contract	$1,200	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100	$100
Total Expense	**$60,300**	**$3,950**	**$3,850**	**$8,350**	**$6,600**	**$4,600**	**$4,400**	**$4,400**	**$4,400**	**$4,600**	**$6,600**	**$4,600**	**$3,950**
	Ending balance	**$2,550**	**$2,000**	**$950**	**-$1,775**	**$0**	**-$2,125**	**-$4,450**	**-$6,775**	**-$4,100**	**-$7,625**	**-$5,150**	**$1,200**

Figure 2

their check right after the first of the year. While it's always nice to have a larger balance in the checkbook, moving that earlier in the year won't, in fact, improve your cash flow. So perhaps it would not be worth expending political capital on that request. Can you manage with fewer guides in the fall, when there are no school tours? It would definitely be worth looking at attendance statistics. Although admissions and shop revenue are projected out evenly over eight months, in fact those may be slower months.

Checks and Balances

A basic principle of financial management is to ensure that no one person has sole control of the finances. There are several reasons for this. The first is to reduce the risk of fraud. If one person closes the cash register, counts the cash, and makes the deposit, there is little to prevent him or her from skimming cash. If the director approves all the invoices and signs all the checks, he or she could readily authorize fraudulent payments to friends or imaginary vendors. The second reason is to improve accuracy. Simply having two or more people double-checking math and data entry is an easy step. The person who keeps the checkbook might have someone else check the balance when the monthly statements come in. Finally, checks and balances protect everyone responsible for handing finances. Many people will reasonably refuse to be responsible for a nonprofit's finances if there's no one else making sure things are done properly and accurately.

There are some simple steps you can take. On the revenue side, make sure that cash and credit card transactions are not compromised. Two people should separately count cash receipts and reconcile the totals with documentation of sales (e.g., admissions, shop, etc.). If the organization deals with significant cash, deposit slips should be checked against revenue records by someone other than the person who made the deposit. Ensure that credit card information is properly encrypted on your website and that no hard copy records of credit card numbers are kept after the transaction has been processed. For example, don't keep a credit card number on file for memberships or annual fund donations. On the expense side, limit the authority any one person has over spending the organization's money. Checks over a certain amount should require a second signature (generally the president or treasurer). Any unbudgeted expenditure should be approved by someone other than the director: the treasurer, president, or executive committee, for example. Checks should be kept securely locked away, and no one should ever sign blank checks (even before taking a four-week vacation!).

If your organization has an audit or a compilation, the accountant will review your written or unwritten financial management policies and procedures and make recommendations for improvements. If you do not have an auditor, an accountant in the community may be willing to develop a policies-and-procedures document for your organization. Just be certain that procedures are appropriate to the size and scale of your organization.

Use Your Board Wisely

You may have avoided a career path that required a command of math and numbers, but there are many in your community who have just the skills you may lack. You don't have to do this work alone! Recruit a qualified, committed treasurer for the board and help him or her create a working finance committee that monitors financial performance carefully and helps you and the treasurer think ahead. Prepare clear financial reports and present them simply and clearly. If there are no questions, figure out if the board is confused or complacent! Focus the board's attention on the questions where they can add perspective and insights, not on minutiae. You may never be as comfortable with finances as you are with education, collections, or public relations, but providing good financial management is vital to generating trust within your donor community and ensuring your organization has the resources to accomplish your mission in the near and long term.

Stacy Klingler is the Executive Director of the William Butterworth Foundation in Moline, Illinois, and co-editor of the *Small Museum Toolkit.* She has over a decade of experience translating museum standards and best practices into manageable steps for all-volunteer and minimally-staffed organizations. Stacy chaired the AASLH Small Museums Committee from 2008 to 2012. She can be reached at sklingler@butterworthcenter.com.

Laura B. Roberts is the Principal of Roberts Consulting. She has been teaching graduate students in arts and nonprofit management since 1991. Currently, Laura is an adjunct faculty member at the Harvard University graduate program in museum studies and Bank Street College of Education's leadership in museum education program. She can be reached at laura@lauraroberts.com.