



AASLH
American Association
for State and Local History

1717 Church Street
Nashville, TN 37203-2991
Phone: 615/320-3203
Fax: 615/327-9013
membership@aaslh.org
www.aaslh.org

FIELD SERVICES TASK FORCE MEETING, September 6, 1995

Minutes submitted by Katherine Child, Western Treasure Valley Cultural Center

PRESENT: Cyndie Roberts, Michelle Crow-Dolby, Debbie Kmetz, Linda Norris, Cheryl Kennedy, David Nystuen, Sarah Larson, Karla Nicholson, Jeff Allen, John Harris, Frances Rickard, Patricia Miller, Alvin Gerhardt, Lori van Handel, Jo Ann Williford, Ron Brentano, Tom McKay, Jean Cutler, Alice Knierem, J.D. Britton, Katherine Child. LuAnne Sneddon and David Donath attended as representatives of AASLH.

I. Internet Subcommittee Report, John Harris

John explained some of the technicalities of working on the Internet--such as technology, costs, functions, etc. Currently there are 10 members on the subcommittee. Meetings are via e-mail, though the work is being done manually (the committee does not have the software to do this automatically--messages are sent to John, who then forwards them to the rest of the list). The subcommittee uses the name "FSLIST" to identify itself. Discussion followed on possible uses of the Internet as it relates to the Task Force:

- it could be used to network with colleagues in field serves,
- it could provide rapid distribution of information among task force members,
- it could be used for posting announcements such as new publications,
- it could be used to publish technical leaflets (through the use of World Wide Web), and
- it could be used to promote rapid communication with and among constituents of field services offices.
- Options for where to go from here are:
 - discontinue the subcommittee,
 - continue the subcommittee as is and see if it grows to serve a real need,
 - investigate the possibility of setting up as a true automated list-serve, and
 - investigate the creation of a web-site converting leaflets, etc.

There was some discussion about the relative merits of face to face or voice communication over e-mail type contact. It was pointed out that e-mail does not replace personal contact, but that it is a fast, practical, convenient and useful communication tool, just like a telephone or letter. Jean pointed out that there is a difference between field service people working with each other on the list and working with their constituents on the list. The consensus was that the group should continue its efforts and report

back next year. John Harris agreed to continue serving as chair.

2. AASLH Council Report, David Donath

David began by expressing a very enthusiastic and positive feeling about this year's Council meeting and about changes taking place in the organization. He reviewed some of these changes for the Task Force:

- The National Training Initiative, to focus on total professional development in response to a needs assessment done in the field on the delivery of training and materials. Training and professional development will be the major focus of AASLH. After this meeting, the National Training Initiative will be replaced by a reactivated Education Committee. The committee is looking for input and advice, particularly from the Field Services Task Force.
- AASLH has received financial support from the Bay Foundation. A "Blue Ribbon Task Force" has been formed to raise funds for the organization.
- The AASLH publications program has been both a mainstay and a problem child of the association. The Council has been looking at this issue for a couple of years. To run a publications program, the association must print new titles, republish and update old titles. This creates budgetary problems that the association cannot handle. The Council has been looking for a partner to create publications in a way that helps the organization. They are near signing a contract with an organization that will purchase existing titles, market, and reissue titles working with AASLH. AASLH will maintain control over decisions like what to publish, when, etc. Sandra dark will chair the publications committee and, as "Series Editor," will be the liaison with the book firm.
- The Council, by "enthusiastic acclamation," appointed Terry Davis the new Executive Director of AASLH.

David and LuAnne Sneddon spoke to other questions and concerns raised by the group. Those present indicated how important publications are to the organization, as is professional training. LuAnne indicated that Terry is very interested in collaborations--working with the Task Force and other existing groups. J.D. expressed concern about the failure of AASLH in the past to reach very small historical societies. John inquired if the council had discussed getting AASLH on the Internet. David responded that AASLH doesn't have the means at this time, though they are planning to do so in the future. Pat reminded everyone that it would be necessary to make a "home page" or "web page" that would indicate who and what AASLH is, current programs, etc.

3. Technical Leaflet Subcommittee Report, J.D. Britton for Cherie Cook

Cherie has compiled a list of technical leaflets produced by members of the Task Force. The list is not complete, as some people have not yet responded to her request for information. Cherie thinks that we might want to consider ways to get this information out. She'd like to investigate pooling technical leaflets into a publication (not necessarily formal, binders would be ok) that could be made available for sale to constituents nationwide. They could be arranged thematically exhibits, boards, fund raising, etc. Everyone thought that this sounded like a good idea, but a number of questions were raised:

- Who would create the publication or sell it? Jean suggested that perhaps this should be a venture for the new AASLH publications committee. She also talked about the need to reach agreements on copyrights, etc.
- J.D. felt that the important decision would be what goes in it. He doesn't feel that AASLH should make that decision, though they should be included on the subcommittee. Field Services leaflets are much more basic than anything AASLH usually does.
- The question arose of why states wouldn't want to market their own technical leaflets themselves since they provide a potentially good source of income.
- There was also a question of whether some of these leaflets might need to be recreated.
- Pat was concerned with the amount of effort that goes into a publication. She says they have considered making money from theirs, but have been stopped by publishing costs. She wondered if there might be some way the proceeds could go back to the contributors.

Debbie suggested that we should take advantage of having a list of titles available. The Task Force should get some and read them--then revisit the question of embarking on a major editorial project. Jean suggested that the list could go on the FSLIST. Pat doesn't think that her board would be happy to put it out over the Internet--they have balked at sending all 70 of them to one place. Jean said that the Internet use would only be printed as part of or as a bibliography with addresses and phone numbers on them so people can order them from the source. There was a discussion about making primary sources available on the Internet and control over the information released on the Internet. It was pointed out that these are copyright issues that have not been resolved. It was further pointed out that there is a difference between someone asking for your research or for primary materials (source material vs. your notes/research). J.D. indicated that the Ohio Historical Society would like to make their leaflets available to a larger constituency, but would like to see something put together that is bigger than that. It was suggested that to start some dialog on this subject, a subcommittee might be formed to look into the possibilities/issues raised at this meeting. John suggested adding costs/prices to the existing list for those who need to charge. The document could be a WEB page on the Internet. It would be possible to build in a link so that free materials could be used or copies made of them. The group agreed to form a subcommittee to do this, with the stipulation that it be only investigative. Pat Miller and Cherie Cook will be the co-chairs of this subcommittee. Other members are LuAnne Sneddon. David Nvstuen. Cyndie Roberts. Karla Nicholson and Lori van Handel. A list of current projects (leaflets, etc.) underway would be helpful for the subcommittee. It was pointed out that there is value in researching/writing/updating these leaflets on an individual basis (rather than using someone else's work) as a means of keeping current and fresh. The subcommittee should address the issue of continually updating leaflets to keep current.

4. Newsletter Subcommittee Report, Ron Brentano

Last year's effort was informal, just to get something out and see how it might be done. Ron received information from about a dozen institutions. The original idea was to do two issues a year as a way to communicate among members of the task force and to keep others updated between annual meetings. It was suggested that everyone make an effort to put other members of the task force on their mailing lists. The newsletter could still be used to condense important items for quick and easy review. It was further suggested that the newsletter could serve as a statement for the field, creating a paper trail of what the work is about. LuAnne asked everyone to be sure to put her on their mailing lists so that she will get

their mailings, enabling her to share information as appropriate. The group agreed that the newsletter subcommittee should proceed with its efforts. Ron Brentano agreed to continue to serve as editor.

5. The Right Stuff," Tom McKay

There isn't a whole lot of theory to field service training

- We want to help
- We help our constituents improve
- We teach our constituents to be more professional in their work

At Wisconsin Office of Local History, many approaches are used (classroom, consultations, projects/collaborations, instructional materials), with the most success coming when an individual or institution participates in more than one training method/session. They do not always see the level of improvement they expect. The central question--why don't we see this change? He proposed that some training that works well with professionals doesn't work with volunteers. A professional undertaking (such as an interpretive exhibit) is not something that all volunteers are prepared to do or even want to do. We're trying to get them to do or understand something that took us years to learn/understand. The first premise of helping (helping people) doesn't necessarily go along with the second (helping them be more professional). Maybe we could better help them achieve what they want to do; help them master "volunteer standards." What are volunteer standards? What keeps us from looking at these volunteer standards?

- The idea that we need to challenge people. There's a lot of validity to this point--what if you set the goal/standards too low?
- The feeling that teaching them what they can achieve might not impress them--"we already know how to do that."

How do we go about establishing volunteer standards? What are the appropriate standards to consider (ethics, collections care, etc.) in developing our own field services literature? Maybe we shouldn't hold so fast to teaching people to be more professional, maybe we should concentrate on teaching them to do what they do better. For example, lots of institutions do something other than interpretive exhibits, producing something that offers an observation or insight. Some of these insights/observations are valid/valuable. Maybe we can improve these kinds of exhibits.

Questions/comments from the ensuing discussion:

* Correcting a major problem (rather than ignoring it--like a quilt thumb tacked to a wall). Tom thinks that a situation like that is a standard we should agree on, a standard that both "volunteers" and "professionals" should know.

* Concerns were raised about the use of the term "volunteer" in this context--being a volunteer doesn't free you of the responsibility to be just as good as a "professional"--you don't have to be paid to be professional.

* We have to start with where they're at--sometimes we forget how to get back to that place. But we start there and want them to get somewhere else.

* You have to think about where they are going. Do they want to present observations rather than interpretation?

* An example of "volunteer standards" for collections care was given using an archival reference. Archivists do assessments, etc. Volunteers don't necessarily need to do this assessment (disposing of unimportant things, etc.)they need to summarize, re-box, etc.

6. Other Business

Board of Trustees Manual--At the Miami meeting of AASLH, the Task force was asked to develop a Board of Trustees Manual . Tom and others have worked very hard to produce this manual. It is now ready to be sent to AASLH to see what they want to do with it (publish, etc.). Tom and J.D. will be meeting with Terry Davis to discuss this later in the week. It's uncertain if AASLH is actually ready to use this manual. If not, there might be another use for it or another way to distribute it.

Field Services Liaison to AASLH--J.D. will be talking with Terry about a representative or liaison between the council and field services task force.

Next year's meeting--The 1996 meeting of the Task Force will be held the day before the AASLH annual meeting begins, probably in the afternoon. The subcommittees will be reporting back on their finding. J.D. asked for input from the Task Force for other items to include on the agenda.

END