

Relevance for You is Our Bottom Line: Field Services in the United States

Friday September 7, 2007

American Association for State and Local History Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia

	<i>History of Field Services in the State</i>	<i>Why at this agency</i>	<i>Services provided to local partner organizations</i>	<i>Notes on Needs of Clients</i>
Alaska State Museum	Field services began at the Alaska State Museum in the early 1980s (1983?) and grew out of a statewide assessment of all the museums in the state that was undertaken by the Alaska State Museum in the early '80s. The results of that survey showed a great need for technical support in all areas of museology and conservation.	Since the Alaska State Museum was the only museum in the state with a conservator and the resources to provide Field Services the program was officially started with the position of Curator of Museum Services.	<p>The Field Services Office of the Alaska State Museum has three key areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A granting program called Grant-in-Aid. 2. Technical support through telephone and email advice in all areas of collections management, conservation, general museum procedures as well as site visits (consultations and assessments) and workshops. 3. Organize National Programming for Alaskan Museums. Examples include: Performance Management (Alaska Managed Group) Incremental Standards (Pilot Museum Program), AAM Accreditation (Coordinate Alaskan Museum Accreditation Working Group) <p>Limitations: Conservation treatments are no longer offered for Alaskan Museums. Conservation treatments for Alaskan museums existed until the mid-1980s.</p>	There are over 80 museums and cultural centers in Alaska that utilize the Office of Museum Services at the Alaska State Museum.
Minnesota Historical Society	Minnesota Historical Society was created in 1849, and is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit partner (but not agency) of the State of Minnesota. MHS began field services in September 1916 as a way to organize the care of government records and other historical manuscripts. Early staff worked on a project basis until 1946 when a permanent position was created. Field Services has evolved with the growth of local history to include museum collections, governance, nonprofit management, interpretation, and more.	MHS saw a need to connect with history where it happened, to encourage local participation in history, and to foster a collegial relationship to further preservation and interpretation.	<p>Programs MHS offers to local historical organizations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Onsite, telephone, and email consultations. 2. State Grants-in-Aid program that funds most aspects of projects undertaken by local historical organizations preserving Minnesota history. www.mnhs.org/sgia 3. Free Publications: <i>Minnesota History Interpreter</i> – helps local historians understand current trends. <i>Local History News</i> – weekly e-newsletter takes advantage of technology to broadcast time-sensitive announcements. <i>Tech Talks</i> – in the <i>Interpreter</i> on technical aspects of the work. 4. Since 1922, a series of annual training workshops and occasional topic-specific workshops meant to build the capabilities of local historians. 5. Local History Services website: www.mnhs.org/lhs <p>Limitations: small number of staff (2), 400 organizations scattered over 87,000 square miles, and a small amount of dollars in the grant program.</p>	The roughly 400 local historical organizations all have individual needs, but generally the greatest is need to find increased financial stability for better operation of physical plants, compensation and benefits for staff, and collections care. Secondly, many organizations still need to make the transition from thinking that history is a hobby with no need for training to a more professional mindset of seeking training and building skills.

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Ohio Historical Society	OHS has had a field services program since at least 1953. Because OHS is the state’s historical society and receive some state funding (note that like MHS in that OHS is not a state agency), OHS is mandated by the state to provide programming services to and for local historical societies. OHS had an informal approach until 1981 when then-OHS director Gary Ness created the Local History Office to help administer the programs of the Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums (a private not-for-profit group).	Ohio has about 600 historical societies, mostly all volunteer groups. They need assistance.	Assistance comes via various programs <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Onsite visits 2. Daylong Needs Assessments 3. Strategic Planning 4. Technical workshops 5. Lending Library 6. Annual Meeting 7. Regional Meetings 8. Local Historian newsletter 9. Directory of Historical Organizations <p>Limitations—not enough staff to meet all the needs of local organizations.</p>	
Oregon Heritage Commission	<p>When field services formally began in uncertain, but informal field services started by the 1960s at the nonprofit Oregon Historical Society. In the 1980s, OHS had a full-time field services person. However, as OHS budgets got tighter, the program shrunk and finally ceased in 2001.</p> <p>Meanwhile the state created the Oregon Heritage Commission, a state agency, in 1995 to coordinate solutions to statewide heritage issues through grants, education and advocacy. The Commission is comprised of 17 people, nine of whom are appointed by the Governor and eight are ex-officio representing OHS, the State Archives, the State Library, K-12 education department, the Oregon University System, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Oregon Tourism Commission, and the Department of Land Conservation and Development.</p> <p>It is funded entirely by lottery funds.</p>	Field services are found with the Oregon Heritage Commission simply because the need is there, no other organization is providing the service, and former historical society directors and curators with the knowledge have been the past three Commission managers.	<p>A year ago, the State Historic Preservation Office and the Oregon Heritage Commission received distributions of funds from the Oregon Cultural Trust. Both agencies are in the Heritage Programs Division of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. The trust funds were used for regionally based technical services. Two of the four regions are covered contractually already, while the agencies work to cover the remaining two. This enables effective allocation of resources over the long distances of Oregon – it’s 540 miles from Astoria in northwest Oregon to Fort McDermitt in southeast Oregon.</p> <p>Technical services for historical organization are one facet of Oregon field services. OHC is still defining what that means. While currently targeted toward the museum field, OHC is expanding it to include structural preservation and historical cemeteries.</p> <p>Other services are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grants 2. Annual conference 3. Workshops on a variety of topics 4. Website 5. E-mail news 2-3 times a week. 	<p>Historical organizations would prefer to get their information delivered to them in their communities. Like Virginia, those in the smallest museums do not consider themselves “museum people” and are often reluctant to ask for help.</p> <p>Many clients lack sufficient operating dollars. Eleven counties are losing major federal funding, and are cutting funding for historical societies as a result.</p>

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Humanities Tennessee	<p>Humanities Tennessee is a statewide, nonprofit affiliate of the NEH, not a part of the state nor funded by any state funds, except the occasional programming grant.</p> <p>The state did not provide any formal field services for the past 20 years, until December 2005, when the Tennessee State Museum hired a curator (Myers Brown) to develop traveling exhibits and to provide technical, interpretive, administrative advice to other state agencies and museums and historical societies in Tennessee. Brown provides technical advice on a range of museum and collections issues, as well as overall assessments. Tennessee Association of Museums and word of mouth advertise the program.</p>	<p>HTN had no formal means of providing field services until 2004. Previous to 2004 our FS were largely informal and very interpretive, or content-oriented for humanities projects, and included sharing information about available resources when possible.</p>	<p>In 2004 the Community History Development Fund (CHDF) began, which provides its partners with comprehensive organizational assessments and, subsequently, nominal financial support to achieve many of the goals/recommendations laid out in the assessments. Rather than be limited to solely humanities based programming, this support can include professional/organizational development activities and topics—board retreats, collections policies, e.g.</p> <p>The CHDF followed an evaluation process that covered all HTN programs. Organizations that most benefit, and the most lastingly from dwindling federal dollars, were the small, all-volunteer history organizations. But, asking them to focus on programming and to complete successful grant proposals when they were dealing with often-basic issues (such as a dysfunctional board, nonprofit status, record keeping, etc.) was not the best approach. Thus, HTN developed the CHDF.</p>	<p>Small amounts of money provided through the CHDF and publicity about the program are the biggest challenges—some CHDF partners do not understand the program, and many TN organizations are still not aware of it. The program is new, and therefore changes may be made through the course of evaluation.</p>
Virginia Association of Museums	<p>The Virginia Association of Museums is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization, incorporated in 1968 as a professional membership organization for museums and museum staff and volunteers. The efforts at field service to museums began in the early 1950s when a group of museum staff at museums in Richmond and historical sites along the James River (primarily plantations) began informally meeting as the James River Federation. Their goal was mutual assistance, share experiences and work together on common challenges. The group incorporated and achieved IRS nonprofit status in 1968 as the Virginia History Federation. Growing to include non-history museums and sites, the name changed to the Virginia History and Museums Association in the 1970s, and to Virginia Association of Museums in 1988.</p>	<p>VAM currently has over 925 members throughout the Commonwealth and the District of Columbia (added formally to its service area in 2004). It is a strong organization with a full time staff of three, and a working governing board dedicated to promoting professionalism in the museum community.</p>	<p>The Association holds an annual 3-day conference, 4-6 daylong workshops every year on museum management topics, plus 2-3 summer workshops focusing on conservation issues. Each year, VAM targets a special program to a particular audience. These change from year to year and include the 3-day Virginia Museum Fundamentals Forum (a boot camp for museum staff and volunteers), the Senior Management Institute for directors and senior administrators, also 3-day, and the Museum Mentors project, which selects six museums for in-depth training and mentoring using a traveling exhibit from the SITES Museums on Main Street program as a hands-on experience.</p> <p>In addition, the Technical Assistance program pairs a volunteer museum professional with a museum for a particular project or problem of no more than six months duration. VAM provides an informal network of referrals for individuals who need advice or assistance with a short-term issue, and staff of VAM also serve as consultants for technical assistance in various ways – particularly with advocacy issues, budgeting and grant writing, prospect research for grants, starting a museum, board development, developing museum educational programming, etc. Although VAM does not have a formal grant program, but does advise others with granting (F.C. Vogt Company gives one or two conservation assessment grants each year).</p>	<p>The membership of VAM is roughly one-third small museums – (operating budget of under \$150,000), which are the target audience. Interestingly usually the “larger small” and mid-size museums use VAM the most. Volunteers and part-time staff at the smallest museums often do not consider themselves “museum people,” and are reluctant to seek assistance. Usually through the suggestion of others who are familiar with both organizations that both contact one another. Fear of judgmental treatment is often the biggest obstacle until they get to know VAM, and they see how we can help, that changes!</p>

