



Standards and Excellence Program
for History Organizations

A Program of the American Association for State and Local History

StEPs Resources for Field Service Programs and other Service Providers

StEPs Resource	How to Access
General information	https://aaslh.org/programs/steps/
“What is StEPs?” webinar	https://aaslh.org/programs/steps/ webinar recording (about 60 min)
List of StEPs certificate recipients	https://aaslh.org/programs/steps/certificates/
StEPs Community website	www.stepscommunity.org Offers sample documents, policies, job descriptions, resources, etc. When creating your username and password enter invitation code Da4Cj7o (case-sensitive and make sure there are no spaces before or after it). <i>Please do not share the link or code with others as the site is only for museums that have paid the StEPs enrollment fee (plus a few others like FSA colleagues)</i>
Workbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard copy: Purchase in AASLH Resource Center • pdf version: accessible in StEPs Community • Sample workbook page: http://download.aaslh.org/StEPs+Resources/StEPs+Sample+Workbook+Pages.pdf
StEPs Lab webinar recordings	Available for purchase in AASLH Resource Center
Other webinar recordings	<p>StEPs participants and FSA members can access the following webinar recordings free of charge via the StEPs Community website. All others \$15 (members) or \$30 (nonmembers) through the AASLH Resource Center.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling a Good Story (A good guided tour is a good story told well) • Creating Historic House Interpretive Plans that Connect • Redefining Audiences (ways in which history organizations can use valuable census data) • Hope Is Not a Strategy: Fundraising in Tough Times • Juggling Balls and Other High Wire Acts: How a Well-crafted Collections Management Policy Can be the Safety Net that Saves Your Collections • Roadmap or Wheel of Fortune? Which Would You Stake Your Organization’s Future On?

Workshop curriculum packages	<p>Curriculum packages are available free of charge in the AASLH Resource Center. They can help service organizations plan and present workshops. Each package includes instructor’s guide, PowerPoint slides and handouts for a one-day workshop (approx. 6.5 hours). You are free to adapt all materials to meet your needs. Titles include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a Meaningful Collection • Charting Your Organization’s Course for the Future • Money Matters: Building Better Budgets for Small Museums • Understanding Audiences and Visitors • The ‘Accidental’ Parlor: Balancing Museum Needs in Historic Structures • Can You Hear Me Now? Connecting to Visitors Through Real Stories of Artifacts and Place
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StEPs Groups & Other Initiatives

AASLH encourages the formation of StEPs communities of practice. This initiative is based on evaluative data and feedback collected when AASLH piloted StEPs. A number of the 47 test sites reported that interaction with other museums and with a state or regional museum association or other service organization greatly enhanced their experience and progress.

As with many other support group models, realizing that other museums and sites share the same challenges and concerns as your organization is not only validating but empowering. As FSA members well know, staff and volunteers at small history organizations can feel isolated especially if they are the only museum or site in their community. Joining a StEPs community of practice can make a huge difference because it offers networking, shared learning, and an accountability mechanism that promotes progress.

Here’s what is going on in states where a StEPs group has formed or efforts are being made to start one:

- The longest running and most structured group is sponsored by Connecticut Humanities and the Connecticut League of History Organizations with the Connecticut Historical Society. StEPs-CT offers professional development, facilitated conversation, and mentorship opportunities. Organizations that complete the two-year program receive exclusive access to competitive grant funds. Twenty-three organizations took part in the 2015-17 class; the 2012-14 class had twenty-four organizations. At last count, StEPs-CT organizations had earned 150 StEPs certificates—33% of all certificates awarded nationwide! More importantly, results include revitalized mission statements, updated and improved policies and procedures, strategic plans, and re-invigorated staff and board members. For more information, contact Scott Wands at CT Humanities.
- Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area in Kansas and Missouri is working with the Kansas Museums Association to form a StEPs group. FFNHA also offers grants for its partners to enroll in StEPs.
- In Tennessee, AASLH received funding from the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee to work with five history organizations from 2012-15. Although the grant

project has officially ended, the group continues to network and meet quarterly. Contact Bethany Hawkins for more information.

- *StEPs for Ohio* is an initiative of Ohio History Connection. The OHC Local History Office partners with AmeriCorps workers to offer workshops, webinars, and one-on-one consulting to help local history organizations with their work in StEPs. In August 2017, StEPs for Ohio completed its first full year and received funding for another year. The funding supports the work of seven AmeriCorps members located throughout Ohio. In their first year, the AmeriCorps members helped organizations earn five bronze, silver, and gold certificates.
- In western Massachusetts, the Pioneer Valley History Network, a consortium of history organizations in Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties, began working in September 2018 with eight history organizations after receiving funding from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts and Mass Humanities to conduct a workshop series for the group.
- The Missouri Museum of History launched a St. Louis area StEPs group in January 2019. The group will meet from 3-7 pm on Tuesdays in January, February, April, June, August, October, December and then the following January.

Other ways StEPs is being used or included in programs and services at the state and regional levels:

- The New Jersey Historical Commission requires that grant applicants be involved in an assessment program like StEPs. The Commission is also using StEPs to help it identify history organizations' most pressing needs across the state.
- Since the start of StEPs, Tim Hart at the Ocean County (NJ) Cultural & Heritage Commission purchased copies of the StEPs workbook to give away to small historical societies in his county. Now, with funding from the NJ Historical Commission, Ocean County has awarded grant funding that includes enrollment in StEPs, to ten local history organizations. Tim has created an incentive program that rewards these organizations with additional monies for each StEPs certificate they earn per year (\$100 for a Bronze; \$200 Silver; \$300 Gold). Organizations also earn points for attendance at workshops; the points count towards funding decisions in the next grant cycle.
- Minnesota's Historical & Cultural Heritage Grants Program offers grant funding for enrollment in StEPs. Applicants can request a maximum of \$7,000 to pay for the services of a consultant who guides them through the StEPs program. To date, approximately twelve organizations have received grant awards. The program is administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.

- Humanities Nebraska has provided funding for more than ten history organizations to enroll in StEPs. According to Mary Yager, HN Associate Director, “StEPs is a cost effective way to provide capacity building assistance to local history organizations. StEPs also has the challenge of being a self-paced program which means that many organizations won’t make the time to implement it unless we provide some kind of incentive. Our goal at Humanities Nebraska is to find meaningful incentives and build a strong StEPs community in Nebraska.”
- North Carolina Humanities Council funds StEPs enrollment for organizations that have participated in the MoMS traveling exhibits program.
- The Kentucky Local History Trust Fund, a grant program with funds raised through voluntary donations from citizens’ income tax refunds, assists with long-term growth, development, and sustainability of history museums and history-related organizations across the Commonwealth. Eligible applicants must be enrolled in a field-based standards program. If an applicant is not currently enrolled in one of these programs, it must use the initial \$290 of any grant award it receives to enroll in StEPs program or a similar program. The Local History Trust Fund is administered by the Kentucky Historical Society.
- Tennessee Humanities has established the expectation that local history organizations that receive the status of a Partner in Public Humanities (PPH) consider enrolling in StEPs. Partners enrolled in StEPs may request support for consultation or workshops, particularly needs related to the Interpretation and Audience sections of StEPs.
- West Virginia University’s Public History Program partnered with the Royce J. and Caroline B. Watts Museum, located on the campus, to introduce graduate level students to a museum assessment project. Using StEPs, students worked with museum staff to complete the StEPs workbook and compile a list of possible future projects that will enable the museum to better meet national standards. Students completed the project as part of Dr. Melissa Bingmann’s Public History Administration course.
- The State of Colorado recently amended its requirements for institutions applying for approval to serve as a repository for archaeological and/or paleontological resources held in trust by the Office of the State Archaeologist of Colorado. Institutions must now participate in either StEPs or AAM’s MAP, Core Documents or Accreditation programs.

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