AASLH

TECHNICAL LEAFLET BUNDLE

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Special Help for Small Museums

BUNDLE 26

DESCRIPTION

This group of technical leaflets is designed to help small museums who may not have the staff with training or experience in the topics reflected here: Assessment programs, strategic planning, sustainability, and grant preparation.

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TECHNICAL LEAFLET #226
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

Maximizing the Benefits of a Conservation Assessment: Some Tips for the Small Museum

By Laurie Booth

INTRODUCTION

General conservation assessments of museums have been conducted for over twenty years, but confusion about their nature and purpose persists. This technical leaflet intends to clarify many of the issues associated with conservation surveys, with the goal of enabling those museums that wish to undergo the process to extract as much benefit from them as possible.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A GENERAL CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT?

A general conservation assessment is a study of a museum or cultural institution conducted by one or more conservation professionals, often in tandem with a preservation architect, which results in the production of a detailed report recommending actions the museum should take to improve the preservation of its collections and buildings. As the building is the first line of defense for the collections it houses, and often the museum's "primary artifact," an architect is often a critical member of the assessment team. In most cases the architectural assessor will generate a separate report concentrating on preservation issues specific to the buildings included in the survey. This technical leaflet, however, will concentrate on collections assessments, although some aspects of architectural assessments will be discussed tangentially.

Topics that are typically addressed in a general assessment include various collections management issues, including housekeeping and custodial services; general artifact handling; transport and shipping; collections processing and marking; museum staffing and administrative issues; and all pertinent museum policies and procedures, written or unwritten. The museum environment is also addressed, including light monitoring and control, temperature and humidity monitoring and control, internal and external air pollution sources and their filtration, and pest control. Exhibit and storage conditions are also critically important components of a general survey, and basic security issues and emergency preparedness issues should be addressed as well. A number of other topics may also be discussed if the assessor feels they are pertinent to the care of collections, such as funding and fundraising activities; special events and leasing activities; and educational programs. In most instances, a general conservation survey is not designed to address the condition or conservation needs of individual artifacts. Rather, the focus of a general survey is to illustrate ways the museum can better maintain its collections and the buildings that house them.

What do we do if we want a conservation assessment of our museum?

Fortunately, there are a number of granting agencies that will help fund general conservation assessments and some are relatively easy to secure. Most federal agencies have prerequisites for eligibility for funding, but generally these standards are fairly minimal. As the majority of museums fund general surveys using federal grants, these sources will be reviewed here. Institutions are, of course, free to use their own funds to hire conservation assessors, or approach state funding agencies or private foundations for assistance. If your museum is contemplating applying for federal grant funding for any project, all the federal agencies recommend that you contact a program officer to discuss your plans, *before beginning the application process.*

Conservation Assessment Program

The Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) administered by Heritage Preservation and funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), funds more general conservation surveys than any other source in the United States. In fact, Heritage Preservation was largely responsible for standardizing the general survey by recommending what CAP assessors should address in them. These grants are awarded on a first-come-first-served basis, so it is important to send your application in as early as possible, but as they are not competitive grants, an applicant that meets the IMLS statutory definition of a museum will eventually succeed in obtaining a grant. The grantee is required to provide some funding, which is determined by a sliding scale based on the size of the museum's budget. The grant money awarded by the IMLS for CAP assessments is limited (the maximum award is $6,540 for two assessors), and as the fees charged by assessors vary, your museum may find that the grant award is inadequate to cover all the expenses incurred. Generally speaking, CAP grant awards are usually enough to fund a survey for a small to medium-sized institution with only a few buildings housing collections. Larger institutions with multiple buildings, extensive collections and/or a large number of employees may prefer to seek alternate funding from the IMLS Conservation Project Support program or another granting source. In addition, libraries, archives, and similar institutions may not be eligible for CAP grants. As with most federal grants, museums must meet certain requirements to be eligible for funding. For instance, the IMLS requires that the institution have a fulltime staff person, either paid or unpaid, and be open to the public for a minimum of 120 days per year.

Heritage Preservation has established a fairly elaborate set of forms and procedures that help ensure that the grant awardees get a thorough and useful assessment. They recommend that assessors working for the CAP program address specific issues as outlined in their publication: *The Conservation Assessment Program,*

All photos courtesy of Harry S. Truman National Historic Site

A careful inspection of storage is a critical aspect of a general conservation survey.

Handbook for Assessors. Heritage Preservation requires that assessors and museum grantees sign a contract outlining the services to be provided, the costs involved, and the timeline for the site visit and completion of the assessment report. In addition, Heritage Preservation maintains a list of approved assessors; generally conservators and preservation architects working for the program are required to have performed a minimum of two general conservation surveys previously and have a minimum of five years of experience in their respective fields before joining the program. If your institution cares for one or more historic buildings (defined as buildings over fifty years old), you will likely be eligible to have a preservation architect survey the building(s) in addition to a collections assessor. Heritage Preservation will automatically send each successful grant recipient curriculum vitae for at least three prospective assessors. Assessors are typically matched to the institution based on geographic location and the type of collections the museum cares for. In addition, Heritage Preservation includes a longer list of approved CAP assessors sorted by geographic location. Keep in mind that you are not obligated to choose an assessor from the curriculum vitae provided to you. You may choose *any* assessor active in the CAP program. Heritage Preservation will forward to you additional information on other candidates if you request it. While you may be tempted to hire an assessor working close by, it is quite possible that an assessor further away may, in fact, be a better choice. The Institute of Museum and Library Services currently allows only one CAP or IMLS-CP general assessment per institution, so it is particularly important to choose your assessors carefully.

National Endowment for the Humanities, Preservation Assistance Grants

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) will fund general conservation surveys in the form of Preservation Assistance Grants. This is a competitive grant that will award up to five thousand dollars for the survey. These grants do not require a monetary contribution from the institution. As this is a federal grant program, museums must meet standard requirements similar to those for the IMLS to be eligible for funding. Unlike the CAP program, the institution is entirely responsible for choosing its own assessor(s) and determining every other aspect of the project, including the amount of time the assessors will spend on-site, what topics will be discussed, and what will be included in the report. In general, if your institution wishes to concentrate on a collections assessment and is not interested in hiring a preservation architect, the major advantage of using NEH funding is that the total amount available for funding a single assessor is larger than the CAP program provides. In addition, the NEH will provide funding to libraries and archives that may not be eligible for a CAP assessment. It is also possible to use NEH funds to update an out-of-date or inadequate general assessment conducted earlier, although the institution must present a compelling argument why a new assessment is necessary in order to convince the panel reviewers that the project is worth funding.

A careful inspection of storage is a critical aspect of a general conservation survey.

Institute of Museum and Library Services, Conservation Project Support Grants

For those institutions with extensive collections, numerous buildings or sites, or large numbers of employees, the best choice for funding a general conservation survey is often an IMLS-CP grant. These grants are competitive and require matching funds from the institution, but will award up to twenty-five thousand dollars per project. The institution is responsible for choosing its own assessor(s), and, as with the NEH grants, all other aspects of the project must be determined by the museum in conjunction with their chosen consultants. Many museums choose to apply for IMLS-CP funds so that a team of assessors can be brought on-site. Such an approach is the most efficient way to survey a large historical society, for instance, with multiple historic sites. In addition, many museums prefer to use a team of specialized consultants to concentrate on specific issues or collection areas.

National Endowment for the Arts

In theory, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) can be used to fund general conservation surveys, although they have rarely been used for this function in the past. Institutions interested in applying for conservation or preservation-related grants typically apply to the Museums Division of the NEA (this is a departure from previous years). These grants are competitive and require matching funds from the institution, but will award up to $150,000 per project. For this reason, these grants could (in theory) be used to fund surveys of exceptionally large institutions requiring a team of conservators for longer periods of time, for instance. While libraries and archives may not be eligible for funding from the NEA, organizations caring for a large range of decorative arts, crafts, folk arts, fine arts, and similar collections are eligible. These are competitive grants requiring matching funds from the institution.

How do we choose assessors for our museum?

Hiring an experienced assessor is probably the single most important factor in extracting the maximum benefit from a general assessment. Whether you are selecting conservators and preservation architects from Heritage Preservation's list, or must choose consultants on your own, it is definitely worth the effort to check into the backgrounds of those you are considering. Evaluate the following in making your decision:

1. *Is the assessor appropriately trained?* Does the assessor have a strong background in preventive conservation if he or she is intended for a collections survey, or in historic preservation if he or she will be your architectural assessor? Does the assessor have formal training in conservation, architectural preservation, or in other relevant areas?

2. *Does the assessor have sufficient experience performing general assessments?* Heritage Preservation has this information on file for their list of assessors and can provide it on request for museums undergoing CAP assessments. Has the assessor performed assessments for institutions similar to yours? Ask that the assessors you are considering provide a list of at least four to five institutions that they have surveyed with contact names and numbers. Keep in mind that the best collections assessors are usually those with strong backgrounds in preventive conservation. You will probably want to choose an assessor who has surveyed more than just a handful of museums. In addition, keep in mind that just because your museum has a large collection of textiles does not mean that you should necessarily choose a textile conservator as your assessor. It can be very useful to hire someone familiar with the types of collections you have, but it is also important to hire someone who is comfortable dealing with more general issues like climate control, emergency preparedness, collections management, and the myriad other issues that should be addressed in the assessment.

3. *Does the conservator have good references?* Contact other institutions that have used the assessor for general surveys. When discussing assessors with other institutions, and when interviewing the assessor yourself, you may wish to inquire about the following:

• *How long are the assessor's reports?* Beware of reports that are too brief. While this may be hard to gauge, a small, one-building historical society should expect a report at least thirty pages in length, and many will average over seventy. Some reports will include appendices with additional useful information, but appendices are not typically counted as part of the assessment report.

• *Was the assessor successful in addressing the institution's primary concerns?*

• *Did the assessor address all the required issues in a complete manner?*

• *Did the assessor understand the issues specific to that institution?* Try and determine if the assessors' attitudes, philosophy, and working methods will be compatible with yours.

• *Was the assessor on-site for enough time to meet staff and physically visit all pertinent buildings or areas to be included in the survey?* CAP surveys usually require a minimum of two days for this.

• *Did the assessor complete the report in the time allotted?* Ask prospective assessors to indicate how much time they will need to complete the assessment report.

• Also, keep in mind that conservators are typically the best judges of their fellow professionals, so you may want to ask that a prospective assessor include other conservators in their list of references.

4. *Can the assessor send you a sample report or a sample executive summary?* This can be particularly insightful when comparing more than one assessor's work. While assessors are typically not allowed to share assessment reports with others, assessors can usually edit out titles and place names to generate a sample report if necessary.

How should we prepare for an on-site visit?

One of the first things that needs to be determined is the amount of time the assessors will spend touring your site. Conservation Assessment Program guidelines currently require assessors to spend two days on-site. However, the time needed to complete an accurate evaluation of an institution may take longer, particularly for those institutions with multiple buildings or a large number of employees. CAP assessors are therefore allowed to determine how much time will be required for each institution. Prospective assessors should be given as much information about the size and complexities of your institution as possible, so they can accurately estimate how much time will be needed for both the on-site visit and for the preparation of the report.

Prepare a contract with the assessors to be involved in the survey and make sure that all pertinent aspects of the project are agreed to beforehand. Important components of the contract should include all fees, including estimates for supplies, per diem, travel expenses, and similar expenditures. If

Conservators should check both visible and ultra-violet light levels throughout exhibit and storage areas.

large firms are being used as consultants, the museum may wish to specify which individual(s) will be involved in the project. The schedule for the project should be outlined, including dates for the on-site visit and a due date for the draft and final report. The museum may wish to indicate if there are copyright restrictions involved with any photographs or videos of the building or collections.

One of the more important issues addressed in a general survey is the topic of environmental control. For this reason, assessors will want to see any records that are kept of your institution's temperature, humidity and/or light levels. Preferably, appropriate equipment should be purchased or borrowed well in advance of the site visit in order to generate environmental data that can be reviewed by the assessors and included in the report. These issues should be thoroughly discussed with your assessor before-hand, including the type of equipment recommended and the method to be used when monitoring.

Many museum personnel feel the almost irresistible compulsion to clean up and improve as much as possible before the assessor(s) arrive on-site. Not only is this not necessary, it can be counter-productive. For instance, one small museum decided to reline all their exhibit cases with a very attractive new fabric only to be told by their assessor later that the fabric was inappropriate for use with the artifacts on exhibit. Museum personnel should keep in mind that "skeletons in the closet" are not likely to shock their assessors (these folks have probably seen much worse), and on the contrary, these "eyesores" can usually be turned into compelling grant proposals. However, museum personnel should make sure that the assessors are able to access all pertinent rooms and spaces, such as overcrowded storage areas where artifacts stored on the floor may block access to other artifacts, for instance.

If you receive a CAP grant, Heritage Preservation will forward a Site Questionnaire to the institution prior to the assessors arriving on-site. This document is designed to formally record pertinent information likely to be useful to the assessors while they are on site, and usually improves the quality of the assessment report. This form also indicates to museum personnel the topics that should be addressed in the survey. Many assessors working outside the CAP program will provide similar forms for the institution to fill out.

All assessors will probably need at least thumb-nail sketches of the buildings to be surveyed, preferably with rooms either numbered or titled for consistent referencing. The architectural assessor will also want to examine any available blueprints for the building(s) if they exist. The collections assessor should be offered copies of pertinent collections management documents, such as the collections policy, collections manual, long or short range institutional plan, building use plan, conservation plan, emergency preparedness plan, environmental monitoring data, etc. The architectural assessor should be provided with any pertinent building preservation documents, including historic structures reports, previous building surveys, building maintenance schedules, etc.

In most cases, it is preferable to have both the collections assessor(s) and architectural assessor present together on-site for at least part of the survey. This is particularly useful if the assessors have never worked together before. In addition, you should make every attempt to schedule your on-site assessment for a period when most of your staff or appropriate volunteers are also available. In addition, board members should be strongly urged to meet with the assessor(s) if at all possible, for instance at the exit interview or during a working lunch or dinner.

What will the assessors do while they are on-site?

In most instances, it is usually advantageous to give the assessor(s) a brief tour of the facilities, pointing out specific issues that you wish addressed in the report. The assessors will typically need to interview a number of staff persons and volunteers. This should be discussed before-hand so that the appropriate personnel know when they will be needed. If necessary, create an agenda with meeting times for specific individuals. It is important for the appropriate staff to indicate to the assessors all problems and issues that they want addressed both on-site and in the report. The assessors should be made aware of events or issues not immediately apparent at the time of the visit, such as seasonal flooding or pest problems, special holiday events or festivals, or procedures for closing the museum during the winter months, for instance. The assessors should be allowed easy access to all pertinent areas of the institution, including attics, basements, mechanical rooms, off-site storage buildings, etc. Any security or logistics issues should, of course, be resolved before the assessors arrive on-site. Most assessors will need some time to inspect the facility on their own and will take time to record temperature, humidity and light levels in various areas of the museum, particularly if such data is otherwise unavailable. It is also typical, and, in fact, desirable, for assessors to take pictures (or videos) and notes while working.

Request that the assessors participate in an exit interview with pertinent staff before they leave the site. The assessor should provide an overview of their initial findings, usually stressing what they view as their top priority recommendations. As assessors may take several months to generate the assessment report, the exit interview should be used to discuss recommendations that may require immediate attention. This is also a good time for museum staff to reiterate what they wish to see addressed in the assessment report.

What should we expect from our assessment report?

The assessment report is very important to your institution, as it represents the most tangible result of the conservation assessment process. Your institution's ability to properly care for its collections and buildings may be compromised if the report is incomplete or in error. As a general assessment is a pre-requisite for the award of many other conservation-related grants, all or part of it will typically need to be included in these grant applications. An incomplete or inadequate assessment report can contribute to the denial of a grant award. It is obviously more difficult, for instance, to obtain grant funds for a project that is not mentioned or given a low priority in the assessment report.

Most general assessments generally follow the guidelines established by Heritage Preservation for use in the Conservation Assessment Program. These are well outlined in several Heritage Preservation publications, including *The Conservation Assessment, A Tool for Planning, Implementing and Fundraising*, and *The Conservation Assessment Program Handbook for Assessors.* In general, those topics that should be addressed in the report include the following:

1. General information about the museum;
2. Staffing and administrative issues, particularly as they impact collections care;
3. The facilities (this will be the heart of the preservation architect's report, while the conservator may only deal with this section tangentially or when facilities issues directly affect collections, i.e. when the roof is leaking or when an electrical hazard might increase the risk of fire);
4. Climate control and environment, including an evaluation of temperature, humidity, and light levels;
5. Pollutants and particulates, including methods for controlling both particulate and gaseous pollutants in the museum;
6. Pest control;
7. Collections policies and procedures, and general comments on the condition of the collections;
8. Exhibitions;
9. Collections storage;
10. Emergency preparedness;
11. Conclusions or summary;
12. Executive summary, which should include a prioritized list of recommendations.

The better assessment reports will clearly describe conditions that existed at the time of the assessment, including descriptions of rooms, exhibits, and buildings, and delineate deficiencies noted at the time of the visit. Usually, each section will include numerous recommendations that are detailed, and as specific as possible. Unfortunately, most of the problems encountered with assessment reports involve "sins of omission" that usually result in recommendations that are incomplete or simply left out of the report. In other cases, reports include recommendations that are too vague or leave doubt as to how the situation can be remedied. For example such a recommendation might state: "Humidity levels were noted to be too high in many areas. The museum should therefore take steps to lower humidity levels to fifty to fifty-five percent RH". A better recommendation would state: "Humidity levels were noted to be too high in Gallery A, B, and C, particularly during the months of June, July, and August of 2003. The museum should hire a HVAC engineer experienced with museum systems to inspect the air handlers servicing these areas and recommend repairs, upgrades, or replacement equipment as appropriate."

Recommendations in the report should be prioritized into at least three categories indicating their relative urgency. Heritage Preservation suggests that recommendations include a suggested time frame for implementation as well.

As mentioned previously, reports often come with attached appendices that are used to expound on topics addressed elsewhere in the report. Heritage Preservation recommends that appendices be included, but they are not required, and can take many forms. Because of copyright restrictions, many assessors will append their own material or use articles that

Most conservation assessors will rely heavily on notes and photographs taken on site when preparing the assessment report.

have no copyright restrictions.

By nature, assessment reports tend to be critical. While a good assessor will take time to praise the institution for their progress and accomplishments, the purpose of the assessment is to delineate everything the museum can do to *improve* existing conditions. It is useful to approach the assessment process as the first step in improving conditions at the museum and as a valuable tool for seeking assistance from outside agencies. Keep in mind that the report is essentially as private a document as you wish to make it. Only the assessor, specific grant agency personnel, and others you choose, have access to the reports.

In addition, the wise assessor will generate a report that is designed for a fairly generic audience. As many institutions have high turnover rates, assessors do well to assume that future readers may be totally unaware or poorly versed in the issues discussed during the on-site visit. For this reason, the assessment report may initially seem too “basic” for more informed viewers.

What happens after we receive our report?

In most cases, the assessors will forward an initial draft to you that should be carefully reviewed for factual errors. Do not be reluctant to discuss the report with the assessors and make sure that issues that are unclear or not thoroughly reviewed are revised to your satisfaction.

In most cases, museum personnel can use assessment reports to develop an institutional conservation plan. While this may sound like a daunting task, it usually only involves reviewing the recommendations made in the report and assigning them an institutional priority. This may or may not coincide with the priority assigned by the assessor. It is also useful to be able to indicate in the conservation plan whether the institution is acting on, or has completed, the task suggested in the plan. This is a wonderfully graphic method of showing interested parties the progress you have made in implementing your conservation plan. This type of document can be a powerful appendix to a federal grant application and can often be used in lieu of the general survey report.

Most institutions find assessment reports a powerful fundraising tool. As the reports represent an objective and professional analysis of the preservation needs of the institution, they can be most effective in convincing staff, board members, local governments, support groups, private foundations, state entities, and federal granting agencies of your particular needs.

While the assessors are, of course, under no obligation to stay in touch with you after the assessment process is complete, most assessors will encourage you to contact them with questions or concerns, particularly if you are interested in pursuing projects outlined in the report. Many assessors have considerable experience with grant applications and will welcome the chance to assist you.

SUMMARY

A general conservation assessment is a powerful tool that will help your museum integrate conservation practices and principles into the everyday activities of the institution. Implementing the recommendations generated from the assessment report will not only extend the life of your collections, it often helps prevent staff from pursuing inefficient or even damaging collections management practices. In addition, a general assessment is usually considered a prerequisite should the institution wish to apply for federal grant funds for conservation or collections management projects. At this level, the federal grants are highly competitive, however, and institutions will need a good assessment report or conservation plan in order to effectively compete. It is therefore critical that staff choose their assessors carefully. Informed staff will also be able to ensure that the entire assessment process is a productive and positive one. Ideally, the museum and their conservation assessors will develop a close relationship over time, allowing staff to keep abreast of future developments in preventive conservation, and thus further strengthening the institution’s ability to properly care for its collections.

RESOURCES

Heritage Preservation is a national non-profit organization organized to promote the conservation of our nation’s cultural heritage. 1625 K St., N.W., Suite 700, Washington D.C. 20006, 202-634-1422, www.heritagepreservation.org.

Institute of Museum and Library Services, Office of Museum Services, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 609, Washington, DC 20506, 202-606-8539, www.imls.gov.

National Endowment for the Arts, Nancy Hanks Center, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20506, 202-682-5576, www.nea.gov.

National Endowment for the Humanities, Division of Preservation and Access, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington D.C. 20506, 202-606-8570, www.neh.gov.

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Collections Care: A Basic Reference Shelflist. Heritage Preservation, 1625 K St., N.W., Suite 700, Washington D.C. 20006, www.heritagepreservation.org.

Guidelines for Selecting a Conservator. American Institute for Conservation, 1717 K Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington D.C. 20006, 202-542-9545, aic.stanford.edu.

Guide to Conservation Services. American Institute for Conservation, 1717 K Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington D.C. 20006 (202) 542-9545, aic.stanford.edu.

Hutchins, Jane, *Conservation Surveys.* Virginia Association of Museums, 301-A North Sheppard St., Richmond, VA 23221.

The Conservation Assessment: A Proposed Model for Evaluating Museum Environmental Management Needs. Getty Conservation Institute, 1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90049, www.getty.edu/conservation/resources/assessmodeleng.pdf.

The Conservation Assessment: A Tool for Planning, Implementing & Fundraising. Heritage Preservation, 1625 K St., N.W., Suite 700, Washington D.C. 20006, www.heritagepreservation.org.

Laurie Booth is an objects conservator and president of Midwest Conservation Services, Inc. She received a MS degree from the Winterthur Program in art conservation in 1983. She was a field reviewer for the Conservation Assessment Program and was invited to present a paper at the *Best Practices for General Conservation Assessments* conference organized by Heritage Preservation in 2002. She has performed over fifty general assessments for various museums and historical societies during her twenty-five years as a conservator. She can be reached at: Midwest Conservation Services, Inc., 10160 Queens Way, Unit 4, Chagrin Falls, OH 44023 440-543-2202, mwestcons@aol.com.

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DIY Strategic Planning for Small Museums

by Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko

In the spirit of "do-it-yourself" television shows, this technical leaflet offers a do it yourself (DIY) approach to strategic planning. Developed in 2003 at the General Lew Wallace Study & Museum, a small museum and historic site, in Crawfordsville, Indiana, this approach is especially appealing to small museums as it costs little to no money to implement and it can be completed in-house. This approach is also a good match for small museums as it accommodates "nuts and bolts" goals and projects.

For the purposes of this article, a small museum will be defined as having an annual budget of less than $250,000, operated with a small staff with multiple responsibilities, and employing volunteers to perform key staff functions. Other characteristics such as the physical size of the museum, collections size and scope, etc. may further classify a museum as small.

Many small museums operate with volunteer and non-professional staff. Some small museums are in caretaker mode—operating to keep the roof on and the doors open. They may not have had the opportunity to look to the future and make the best decisions for the organization in the long term. DIY strategic planning is an excellent way to start thinking about the future and improve the present.

At its core, this template is rooted in basic project management where it is important to determine tasks, resources, and deadlines ahead of a project's start date to lower the risk of failure. With a vision for your organization, an allocation of time for planning, public speaking ability, and a modicum of computer literacy, you can easily create a strategic plan embraced internally by staff and externally by donors, grantmakers, civic leaders, visitors, educators, and other interested parties.

Why Are Strategic Plans Needed?

A strategic plan is a map or chart that an organization agrees to follow for three or five years in order to reach their goals. Institutions need strategic plans to help direct efforts and resources in an efficient and strategic manner. Responding to community and audience needs requires a strategic plan.

The planning process is strategic because you are establishing the goals that make the organization dynamic in its community and allow it to keep in step with community needs. It is systematic because it is focused and evaluative in choosing priorities. Institutions make decisions about short- and long-term goals and secure consensus. And most importantly, strategic planning is about building commitment and engaging stakeholders. Once the plan is in place and you have met with all the stakeholders you can, you now have the authority to complete the work and a course of direction to take.

Strategic plans are different from long-range or operational plans. Plans are strategic when the goals are responding to the museum's environment, seeking a competitive edge, and looking for the keys to long-term sustainability. Long range or operational plans do not redefine the organization and position it in the community. These plans are more concerned with laying out immediate and future goals and are less concerned with organizational change. At the end of a five-year strategic plan, you will want to take the time to evaluate the success of the plan and consider next steps. If it was a complete success, changing course may not be necessary and you simply need to plan the next five years along the same course. This would warrant a long-range or operational plan.

Through strategic planning, pen is put to paper and major goals are defined. These goals may spur a sea change or a small shift in operations. It is important to realize at the beginning that the strategic plan is the means to an end. It is a living document and as such, opportunities that are good for the organization should be considered with the plan in mind, but not completely disregarded because "it's not in the plan." The *means* are flexible, while the *end* is not. ***The Strategic Plan is the means (flexible) to an end (not flexible). It is a LIVING DOCUMENT.***

Is Your Museum Ready for Strategic Planning?

Conditions must be right for strategic planning to begin. None of us has the time to waste on planning if the board does not support it or if the goals are unachievable. In these circumstances, staff and board will ignore any attempt at a plan. The proper strategic planning conditions depend on the organization, but the primary indicators for readiness include board and staff commitment and a vision for the future. There are two parts to guaranteeing the success of a strategic plan:

1. Creating a realistic strategy that matches current and anticipated resources.
2. Ensuring board and staff embrace the plan and agree on the articulated goals.

Before you get started, the director should evaluate organizational readiness. If the organization has serious issues—such as board in-fighting, major budgetary shortfalls, or cynicism regarding planning—take steps to resolve them before the process begins. The following table provides several statements to help you consider organizational readiness. Consider the statements provided in the left column of the table and check whether your museum is ready or not. When selecting a "No" response, make a note about whom to consult with to consider resolution (the board president, executive committee, etc.) If you realize you are not ready based on two or more negative responses, use the considerations in the far right column to determine how to get ready and when you might be able to begin strategic planning.

If you have any checks in the "No" column, consider addressing those questions before beginning strategic planning and determining when to start. If you cannot easily remedy these considerations, create an action plan based on responses. Work with key individuals to execute that plan and set a schedule for getting back to strategic planning.

If you are ready, consider if you have lingering comments or concerns to capture and share with the appropriate committee or person before you proceed. It's essential to address these concerns up front.

The Key Players

There are several individuals who should participate in the strategic planning process, but the actual number of participants and their function in the organization will vary from museum to museum. The goal should be to have all board members participate in the process, and depending on staff size, all or most of the staff should participate. It is also important to look beyond the internal players and think externally. The museum exists to serve the public, so what does the public want from your institution?

Depending on your museum's size, you could have the board, staff, and community leaders all sitting at

Readiness Issues	YES	NO	Considerations if not ready	*Start strategic planning*
The museum has enough money to pay bills over the next six months.			How can your museum get enough money? By when?	
The museum has a history of being able to plan and implement its plans.			What can be done to address this issue? Leadership development? Other ideas?	
Board members work well together. Staff members get along.			Problem in board? Problem with staff? What can be done?	
Board members are willing to be involved in top-level planning.			What can be done?	
Board members and staff will find the time to do the planning.			What can be done to free up more time?	
No major changes are expected in the next 1-2 months.			What changes? What can be done to get ready for strategic planning? By when?	
There is extensive support for planning in your museum (internally and externally).			What can you do to address any cynicism?	
Strategic planning efforts are underway because the museum is ready for change and not just because a grantmaker or funder is asking for it.			What should you do about this?	

Adapted from *Field Guide to Nonprofit Strategic Planning and Fundraising* published by Authenticity Consulting, LLC.

the same table during the strategic planning process. But realistically, splitting these groups up might be better. You could hold a joint board and staff session and a separate public focus group or you could hold three separate sessions. It depends on what the facilitator and/or the museum director find to be the best scenario for the organization.

Creating the Plan

The following is a step-by-step outline for Do-It-Yourself Strategic Planning developed at the General Lew Wallace Study & Museum. This approach has been successfully implemented in other small organizations and produced the same results. While it was a complete success for us, you may want to adapt some steps to match your organizational behavior. For example, at my museum, board members involved in the plan were unable to meet for a long period of time. For this reason, we compromised and shortened the first session to three hours (instead of the six we really needed). By the next strategic planning cycle, the board will be more accustomed to strategic thinking and implementing plans and we anticipate that we will spend more time around the table developing the next plan.

DIY Strategic Planning has three key processes:

I. Preparation
II. Facilitation
III. Formatting

I. Preparation

1. Gain board support for strategic planning. One of the key functions of the board is to set the strategic direction of the museum and ensure that the resources are in place to realize the goals. During the course of a regular board meeting, the president should lead a discussion about strategic planning, the methods you plan to use, board member expectations, and how much time the process will take. Once the groundwork is in place, the president should call for a motion to proceed with strategic planning. During that meeting, set the date for the first session.

2. Select project leader/facilitator. The museum director serves as the project leader/facilitator in the absence of funding for a consultant. While it is better to have an independent party facilitate brainstorming activities and guide the overall process (this allows the director to participate more fully and prevents the director from being "heavy-handed"), this is often not feasible in a small museum. To make sure the director has input in the process, he or she may meet with board members before the meeting, share ideas, and encourage them to spur these ideas during later brainstorming opportunities.

3. Determine length of plan. Decide along with the board whether this will be a three- or five-year plan. There is no magic formula for deciding the length of the plan. In the case of our institution, we chose five years because the board and director knew that resources would support a five-year plan and we knew that the amount of change needed to improve operations would be better affected by a five-year plan. However, we left the fifth year open and assigned no formal tasks, specifically for the purpose of leaving room for scope and timeline changes. During the strategic planning process, the staff consisted of only two part-time seasonal employees, the director included. As the implementation of the plan gained momentum, the board and staff worked together to negotiate deadlines and adjust the scope to fit resources. By year three of the plan, the fifth year was full of tasks.

If you are an all-volunteer organization, a three-year plan might be more suitable. Volunteer energy needs to be replenished more frequently and the planning process can be a tool for reenergizing and refocusing. An organization that has board members not completely convinced with strategic planning may choose three years to demonstrate organizational potential. Experts do not recommend plans shorter than three years because it takes at least three years for many changes to take root and for resources to align with strategic areas.

4. Identify five organizational categories. Identifying categories from the outset will help frame the overall planning process and the later brainstorming activity. You will need to distill museum functions and projects into five categories at most. (Education, Administration, Collections, etc.) These categories can be broad umbrella terms or they can be issues pertinent to your organization such as interpretation, a community initiative, or a major event (e.g., a centennial commemoration). To guarantee the development of a feasible plan, limit it to five categories and use them as guideposts during the planning process and as the backbone of the final plan.

At General Lew Wallace Study & Museum, we used the categories of Administration, Education, Collections Management, Building/Grounds Preservation, and Development. For our purposes, exhibits, educational programming, and guided tours fell under the Education umbrella because their ultimate intent is to educate the public. Development included fundraising, public relations, marketing, and staff training because these efforts develop the overall sustainability and visibility of the site. For us, these categories were most relevant in 2003, but in 2008, when we develop the next plan, they may not be.

5. Distribute a "warm-up" activity. Before the first scheduled strategic planning session, distribute a worksheet to participants to spur thinking about the future of the organization and prepare them for the brainstorming session. Email or mail the worksheet and instruct them to complete it and bring it to the first session.

WARM-UP WORKSHEET

Develop a worksheet that asks these questions:

1. What is your vision for the museum?
2. List five things you would like to see happen at the museum that will help make this vision a reality.
3. Where do you see yourself in this vision?
4. Where do you see the museum in five years?

II. Facilitation

1. Convene a brainstorming session. Ideally, the first gathering should be a five-hour session with a clear agenda provided ahead of time. During this first gathering, the lion's share of board work is completed. Board members will be sharing ideas, thinking of new ones, and begin placing them into concise statements.

For this first session, you will need two flip charts (preferably the kind with adhesive) and several colors of markers. Do not use a chalkboard or dry erase board. You need to keep the notes throughout the entire planning process—you will refer to them during the second strategic planning session and you will need them as you draft the plan. Plus, it is always a good idea to keep the evidence.

2. Begin with an icebreaker exercise. Although it may sound and feel corny, an icebreaker exercise is a good way to make everyone comfortable and ready to begin. If you choose the right icebreaker, you can learn something about the participants. Go around the room and ask what was the last museum they visited (it cannot be yours) and why. You'll learn something about what drives them to go to a museum, what kinds of museums they like, or how far they will travel to visit a museum. Or, you'll find out that some of them have no relationship to museums other than the one they serve. Both types of responses can be very enlightening.

3. Present ground rules. Adults need ground rules as much as children do. To keep the group charged with positive energy and encouragement, cover the ground rules and post them on a wall in the meeting room. Refer to the rules throughout the process to help control behavior issues. At no point do you want anyone to feel alienated, threatened, or discouraged. The brainstorming process works best when everyone is firing off ideas and working in a respectful manner.

4. Work in pairs. Before you start the open brainstorming segment, divide the group into pairs. Be sure to select pairs of people who may not know each other very well or individuals who rarely have the opportunity to work together. Send them to various locations (outside, down the hall, in the corner) with the "Before the Storm Worksheet." This worksheet is designed to build confidence among participants,

SAMPLE GROUND RULES

1. There are NO bad ideas!
2. One person speaks at a time.
3. Listen when another participant speaks. Allow him or her the floor.
4. Think about small, medium, and large ideas. No idea is too small.
5. Allow yourself to be inspired by another participant's idea.
6. When thinking of ideas, visualize yourself as a board member, a staff member, a volunteer, a museum visitor, and a donor.

SAMPLE BEFORE THE STORM WORKSHEET

For the purposes of this strategic plan, we are using five pre-determined categories of museum management and operation: Administration, Collections Management, Education, Building/Grounds Preservation, and Development.

1. Working with a partner, consider these categories and create a vision for the museum. What kind of museum will it be in 5, 10, 15 years? When the vision is realized, what will the museum be like for the visitor? This should be one sentence that imagines "a day in the life of the visitor" and makes a promise.
2. Use the vision and quickly brainstorm ideas that can make the vision a reality. These will be your notes for the group brainstorming session, which will ultimately reveal the main components of the strategic plan.
3. Finally, turn the sheet over and drill your brainstorm ideas down into five main strategic goals. You can come up with more if necessary.

You will have thirty minutes to complete this activity.

drill down the ideas, and begin the visioning process. At the end of the exercise, the pair will condense their ideas into five strategic goals.

5. Brainstorm as a group. The purpose of the group brainstorm is to gather as many ideas as possible, capture them on paper, and keep everyone engaged and excited about the ideas. Very simply, facilitation is about helping a group of people reach their goals. During the course of the brainstorming session, the facilitator will:

- Control the meeting
- Set rules and enforce them
- Ensure participation
- Allow for flow of thought
- Keep the ball rolling
- Keep the meeting on topic
- Act generally as a non-participant
- Be a subject matter expert
- Accurately sum up discussion
- Smile as much as humanly possible

Brainstorming sessions are fast, exciting, and creative. To warm up the group to the challenge, you may start the session with a mock brainstorm. Ask them to share ideas about what are the great moments in American history or what are the best movies of all time. Not only will newcomers to the process get the opportunity to see how it works (and you will get a chance to practice), you will see who the talkers and who the wallflowers are. This also helps you keep the conversation balanced and watch for domineering personality types.

Once the ball is rolling, these steps will take you through the process and help you gather the most salient points:

- The facilitator will jot ideas onto flip charts while keeping ideas flowing.
- Once momentum has slowed, review ideas for clarity and ask for a show of hands of how many people identified these ideas on worksheets ahead of time (mark the number of hands next to each one to show consensus—items with the most hash marks should receive highest priority in the plan). This quick break will likely inspire more brainstorming. Keep it going while ideas are hot!
- During a food break, categorize the brainstorm list onto separate flip chart sheets. Before getting started, write each operational category on a separate flip chart sheet (e.g., Collection Management). As an alternative, you can run through the lists and code the idea into a category, i.e., D for Development, E for Education, etc.
- Once everyone has eaten and had a break, reconvene the group to consider the categories and how you assigned them. Look for gaps. Did they have a million programming ideas but never mentioned collections care? You can take time at this point to restart the brainstorm if there are some obvious holes.

6. Initial visioning session. Once the brainstorm period has slowed down, it is time to start developing a vision statement. A vision statement is focused on the future and considers what the museum will look like down the road (What will the visitor experience be like? How will the museum function?) The vision statement incorporates the needs and desires of the board and staff and crystallizes them into a picture of the future. For some, it is the simple question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" This first visioning session will start with a conversation resulting in a first draft of a vision statement. To start the discussion, it is useful to create a word list on flip charts about what the board values and what can the museum can offer. Having a pool of words to refer to is helpful when drafting a statement.

7. Plan a follow-up session. Before the participants leave the first session, establish the date and time of the follow-up session. Get a sense of how many people will attend the second session. (For some reason, no matter what you do, expect fewer participants for this second session.) It will last about two hours.

During the follow-up, the facilitator presents the plan's initial draft and walks the group through the format. This will include ideas from the first brainstorm session and formalized strategic goals. It may also include proposed timelines and anticipated resources. This is another opportunity for idea clarification and consideration of the priorities and timeline.

SHOPPING LIST

- ✓ Snacks and beverages
- ✓ Lunch or dinner
- ✓ Flip charts (at least two)
- ✓ Easels (2)
- ✓ Open wall space
- ✓ Markers, two to three colors
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ Ink pens
- ✓ Tent cards (for participant names)

Once the group approves the first report, return to the vision statement drafted in the first session. Does it still hold water? Does anyone have revisions? If they do, take time to wordsmith, but do not allow the conversation to drag out longer than thirty minutes. You will want spend the bulk of your time in the session on developing the mission statement.

The mission statement is the most important series of words the board will consider, develop, and approve. It defines the purpose of the organization. It answers why you are here and why the museum matters to its visitors and community. The board must believe in the mission and enforce it. While the vision looks to the future, the mission establishes why the museum should continue and the strategic plan determines how it will reach the future. Your current mission statement might be aligned with your plan's direction, but the board needs to review and consider it during this process. If you decide to write a new one, it may be helpful to refer to the same list of words that the group used to develop the vision statement. Another excellent source of inspiration is to evaluate what visitors and program participants regularly say about the museum. What inspiration do they feel? What questions do they frequently ask?

As in the first session, the group should leave the table with a draft mission statement in their notes. At the next regularly scheduled board meeting, present the final draft of the plan for approval and ask them to formally adopt the new mission statement.

Overall, the strategic planning process can take between four and twelve months. We began planning in May and approved the final plan in September. For us, this short timeframe was essential because we had a great deal of "nuts and bolts" work to do immediately and the director wanted as much authority as possible to accomplish the work. The strategic plan allowed that to happen.

III. Formatting

The final document is simply a formal plan that speaks about the organization's value and makes a case for its future. It outlines the organizational goals and spells out the steps to realize those goals. Once formalized, this document should be shared with community stakeholders, donors, political leaders, volunteers, and whoever is interested in the plan. Post it on your website. Create an abbreviated version and turn it into a brochure. Make presentations in your community sharing the exciting news that your plan has produced.

The format of your plan will look like this:

1. Introduction – Provide information regarding how the plan was developed, who participated, and what the timeframe was.

2. History of the Organization – Start from the beginning. How did your museum develop? What are some of its milestones? The strategic plan is used as a way to build awareness of your organization and attract support for what you do. Present the whole picture.

3. Vision Statement and Mission Statement

4. Strategic Goals – After the first brainstorming session, the director will synthesize the ideas and themes into broadly stated strategic goals. All of the activities and projects the group decides to implement will have a relationship with these larger goals. This section requires the director to have some personal vision for the organization.

5. Evaluation – A plan works best when the board and staff refer to it and regularly evaluate its progress. Explain how you will track and measure the impact (see Tracking and Measuring the Plan).

6. Implementation Schedule – Staff develop, and the board approves as part of the entire plan, the last three sections. You may want to involve key board members in the process of assigning tasks, solutions, responsibilities, and deadlines. In this section, indicate the priority of the project. You will likely have some projects that are urgent and/or have the requisite resources to accomplish them. Assign these projects highest priority. Other tasks may be excellent ideas but funding sources are not clear at the moment and postponing the idea will not affect operations or endanger anything. This type of project will have a lower priority rating. Pick realistic timeframes—estimate on the high side—and whenever possible, assign responsibility to a person, not a committee.

7. Task Lists – To understand better what the institution will accomplish year-to-year, reorganize the implementation schedule into a listing of projects and activities by year and quarter. In this format, board and staff can track progress more clearly.

8. Action Plans – Used for major project and budget planning, action plans drill down details even further and are helpful tools for the board to review. A good action plan identifies the strategic goal addressed, solutions, action steps, deadlines, responsible parties, costs, and outcome measurements. In the final draft of the strategic plan, only include a template of an action plan. Create a new action plan each time you launch a project.

If you are still not sure how the plan should look, please email me at clegutko@ben-hur.com. I am happy to email you a copy of our first strategic plan.

When the Plan is Ready

Tracking and Measuring the Plan

Once the plan is in place and formally approved, track and measure its progress on a regular basis. Keeping tabs on the plan is a major concern of the board and staff and a formal reporting mechanism is useful. We use the task list and insert status updates on an annual or biennial basis. The board formally approves the revised task list.

On a semi-monthly basis, the director's report to the board is formatted to include each strategic goal and every item reported is placed underneath one of the goals. The staff also reviews the plan two to three times per year and makes adjustments to the regular work plan if needed. At year-end, we modify tasks not completed with a new deadline and justification for the change. This flexibility is essential because of our small staff size and funding limitations.

From the start of the plan in September 2003 to April 2006, we met sixty-eight percent of our goals. With the completion of a major capital project in 2006, we reached eighty-one percent of our goals with over a year left in the five-year plan.

General Lew Wallace Study & Museum Strategic Plan Achievements:

- We adopted a new name and developed an identity for the museum.
- The board of trustees restructured and grew from five members to thirteen.
- Fundraising efforts resulted in a 187% increase in income for the first twelve months. Each following year has netted similar results.
- Staff size increased from two part-time seasonal to two full-time and two part-time employees.
- We completed the Carriage House Interpretive Center, a full-service office and exhibit complex located in Wallace's 1875 carriage house. This major capital project utilized nearly $250,000 in donations and grants.
- The museum introduced and sustained new and innovative annual programs, including the Lew Wallace Youth Academy, the Artists-in-Residence program, and the Winter Historic Preservation Workshop Series.
- Each year, we offer special programming inspired by the annual exhibit theme.
- Museum visitation has increased ten percent or more each year since 2003.

Beyond the First Plan

DIY Strategic Planning is best used as the first strategic plan for a small museum. If you have implemented the first plan's goals and strengthened organizational capacity, the board and staff have greater options available when developing a second plan. For example, you may choose to use an outside consultant to facilitate and draft a new strategic plan. (Unbiased facilitation is always recommended.) Most importantly, with a fully implemented initial plan, chances are you can afford to pay for help when it is time for the second plan!

Variations in the Process

This approach is tailored for the smallest of museum staff and boards. At General Lew Wallace Study & Museum, we were a mighty bunch of two staff members and five board members using the approach. This model will work for larger board and staff sizes, but if the group becomes larger than eighteen to twenty people, I suggest you break up the group. You could brainstorm and do vision/mission with the board (with a few staff members participating) and then separately with staff. Follow this with a session with the board where you bring the perspectives of both camps together and look for differences and similarities. This approach is especially helpful when looking for disconnects in the organization.

Another variation is to use community focus groups to gauge interest and perspective on the organization. With a smaller staff and board, include community members in the entire planning process and have everyone working through it together. Or, if there are too many individuals involved, hold independent strategic planning sessions and limit it to a brainstorming session. During the last thirty minutes, field test the new vision and mission statements and see if they resonate with the public.

Managing Change

If this is the first strategic plan for your organization, you are facing a great deal of change over the next few years. Being sensitive to stakeholders and processes is half the battle when managing change. Once you decide to make a change, think through the impact of the change and do some troubleshooting. With a little thoughtful examination at the outset, the important changes you are making will last.

To orchestrate major changes at General Lew Wallace Study & Museum, we use charters and change documents. These tools open up communication channels and document the change. When appropriate, the board will formally approve the document, endorsing the change. Everyone starts out—literally and figuratively—on the same page.

- **Charters –** Charters are documents that outline responsibilities and structures, and they are tools for managing people, projects, and change. We use them primarily to define the purpose and goals of board and ad-hoc committees. With a charter, we make committee members aware of why they are there, chart out planned changes, promote accountability, and define budgetary impact. A charter typically has eleven components outlined and defined: project/committee overview, scope, objectives, relevant strategic goals, measures/deliverables, budget, customers, boundaries, milestones, deadlines, and supporting documentation.
- **Change Documents –** Informally referred to as a change document, these reports can be used to makes a case for change to the board, stakeholders, and government entities. The format we use defines the statement of need, the current state, and

the future state. It also offers a proposal, timeline, cost benefit analysis, barriers, and a final recommendation.

Both documents demonstrate you have done your homework and considered the impact of proposed changes. Essentially, if you cannot define what is requested in a charter or change document, you need to reconsider making the change.

Conclusion

This is just one approach to strategic planning. Other museum and non-profit professionals may stress varying approaches that may include SWOT analyses, more extensive visioning sessions, longer timeframes, etc. As a small museum director, I found that I really didn't need to be that reflective the first time. And, with just two staff members working part-time, we were always on the front line testing what visitors wanted and making quick decisions to meet needs. In addition, in the fast-paced small museum environment, we needed this first plan in place quickly so we could make major board-mandated changes to improve operations.

In developing a strategic plan, it is really time for "first things first." What will it take to do X? What will it take to do Y? Where do we start? Invariably it always ends up with fundraising and development. If you don't have income, much less a sustainable income, how can you do innovative programming and exhibits or improve collections care? If you are struggling with timeframes and which tasks take priority, maybe it would be best to prioritize the development goals first. With the completion of a strategic plan, you have a strong case for support. Use it.

About the General Lew Wallace Study & Museum, Crawfordsville, IN

The General Lew Wallace Study & Museum is a National Historic Landmark site owned and operated by the City of Crawfordsville and governed by the Lew Wallace Study Preservation Society. The centerpiece of the site is the freestanding study that General Lew Wallace designed. Best known as the author of *Ben-Hur*, Wallace was a renaissance man and notable Hoosier. The museum houses personal mementos from his service as a Civil War Major General, second officer of the Lincoln Conspiracy military tribunal, Governor of New Mexico Territory, and as U.S. Minister to Turkey. Wallace's artwork, violins, inventions, and library are on display, along with memorabilia from various adaptations of *Ben-Hur*.

Upon Wallace's death in 1905, the Wallace family opened the study as a museum and operated it until 1939. The City of Crawfordsville has owned the property since 1941. Today, annual visitation is over 5,000 with an annual budget of $120,000. A full time director and associate director, two part time employees, and a small corps of volunteers staff the museum. Programs are offered year round including the popular Lew Wallace Youth Academy, the fall Artists-in-Residence program, and a variety of themed programming in support of temporary exhibits. The museum also hosts the annual Taste of Montgomery County, a fundraiser for the Preservation Society.

Resources

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Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko has worked in small museums for over ten years and is currently the director of the General Lew Wallace Study & Museum. Since 2004, Cinnamon has served as chair of the AASLH Small Museums Committee and on the board of AAM's Small Museum Administrator's Committee. For more information contact her at clegutko@ben-hur.com.

AASLH
TECHNICALLEAFLET #244
A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

How Sustainable Is Your Historic House Museum?

By AASLH's Historic House Affinity Group Committee

Dateline: **Anytown, USA**
Headline: **Historic House Museum Permanently Closed**

Unfortunately this is an all too common story these days as funding for small museums becomes scarce, hours donated to docent programs and boards of directors decline, and the public has multiple educational and recreational venues from which to choose. As staff and volunteers at historic house museums, we understand the need to preserve and interpret local history and relate it to broader regional and national themes. But the myriad of challenges we face, including declining public visitation and mounting maintenance expenses, can sometimes be overwhelming.

How can your historic house museum avoid pitfalls and take advantage of help that is available? How do you even know if your organization is in trouble or if it is just experiencing a couple of bad years? The Historic House Committee of the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) is tackling these questions in an effort to forestall the decline of historic house museums in peril and outline a path back to a healthy and vigorous future.

Background

The purpose of this technical leaflet is to provide boards and staff of historic house museums with a tool for assessing the long-term strength, stability, and staying power of their own missions, governance, programmatic, financial, and stewardship responsibilities and activities. It is the result of work begun in 1999 by AASLH's Historic House Committee and with conferences sponsored by AASLH, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the American Association for Museums in both 2002 and 2006. The issue of "too many house museums" led to discussions of what makes a historic house museum sustainable and which historic house museums might serve as good examples of sustainability. In 2006, the Historic House Committee initiated a project to identify characteristics of sustainable historic house museums and to pinpoint characteristics of historic house museums at risk. The purpose of this leaflet is to generate ideas and discussion regarding long-term sustainability, defined as the long-term capacity of a stewardship organization to ensure adequate audiences and financial support to preserve and maintain its buildings and landscapes.

In developing this leaflet, the Committee asked for feedback from AASLH members at two AASLH Annual Meetings in 2007 and 2008, from leaders in the field, and from some funders. The Committee initially based the examples of sustainable historic house museums included in this leaflet on a thorough search for house museums to consider for examples of sustainability. Once we compiled a list of house museums to consider, we engaged in a comprehensive vetting process that included interviews with executive directors and other staff, review of some specific house museum documents including financial records, review of Guidestar and other public financial records, programmatic offerings, visitation statistics, community participation and value, professional and board development activities, the state of buildings and collections, and the state of board recruitment and staff turnover. In addition, staff at historic house museums chosen as examples of a particular characteristic were then asked questions specific to that area.

This list of characteristics is intended as a tool for self-assessment. Each sustainable characteristic is followed by a set of questions for reflection and discussion. It is unlikely that any one historic house museum would answer "yes" to all of these questions. However, more "yes" answers will indicate a higher likelihood of sustainability over time.

At the end of each set of questions, there is an example of a historic house museum that addresses those questions and associated solutions head-on. Most of the historic house museums cited as examples for one section could be used to as examples for any or all of the sections. In fact, in preparing this leaflet, it was difficult to assign these house museums to any one area.

This sustainability tool provides historic house museum leaders with the bookends needed to ask questions and evaluate responsive actions and it supplements the AASLH Standards Program currently in development. Staff, board, and volunteers of historic house museums who are asking questions and seeking answers might start with this tool, then use the Standards Program to develop and map corrections once it is available to the field beginning in June 2009.[1]

In presenting this tool, the Committee included historic house museums with a variety of governance and management arrangements. One is a property of the National Trust, one is a state-owned and managed site, several operate with independent boards, and one example is a consortium of historic house museums. The committee also considered geographic representation. We urge readers to contact us with other examples of sustainable historic house museums for possible inclusion in a future publication.[2]

Characteristics of a Sustainable Historic House Museum

The following eleven points summarize the signs of a healthy, thriving historic house museum. While few museums meet all of the characteristics, most strong and viable organizations embody a preponderance of them. By weighing your museum's structure and performance against these eleven points, you can gauge the vitality of your operation and devise a path to a stronger future.

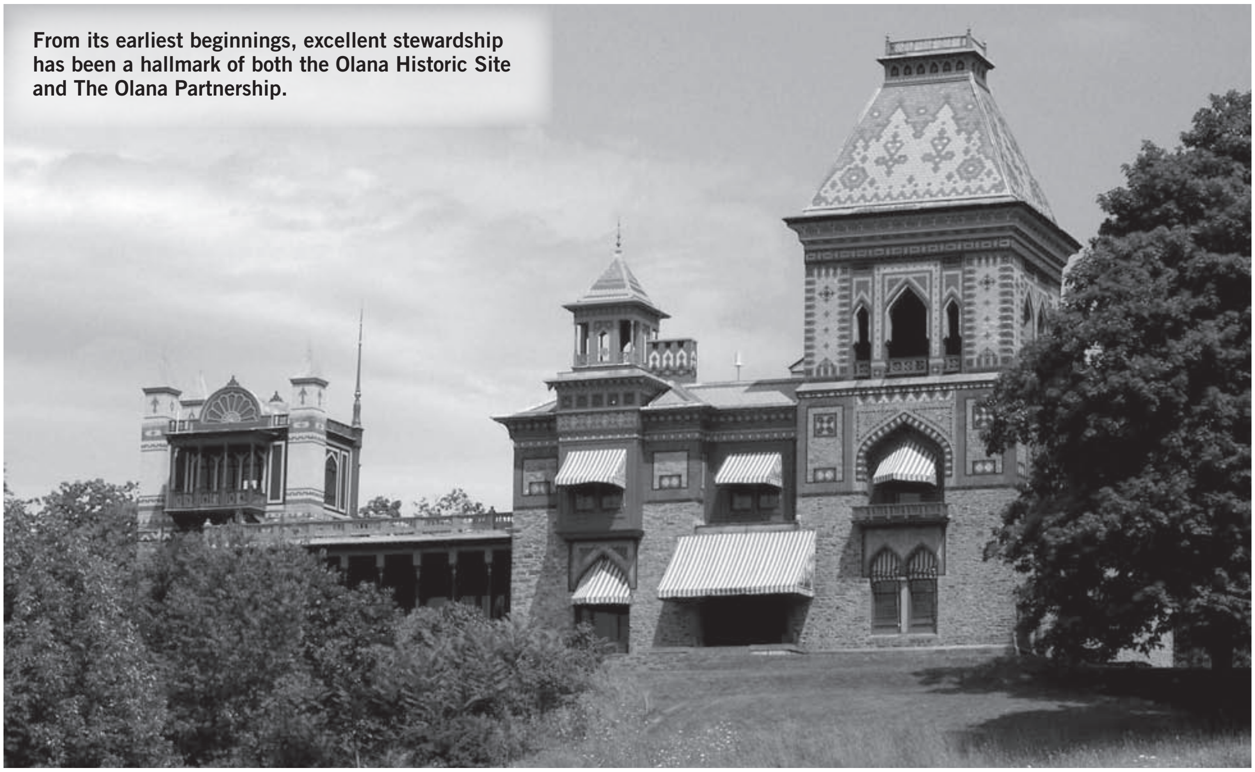
1. A sustainable historic house museum serves its audience and is valued by its community.

- Do historic house leaders:
  - Know the site's neighbors?
  - Identify audience needs and interests?
  - Regularly identify new audiences in planning programs and events?
- Do community groups and local institutions invite historic house leaders to participate in their programs and plans?

In Practice: Awbury Arboretum Association—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (www.awbury.org)

Mission: *The Awbury Arboretum Association's mission is to preserve and interpret Awbury's historic house and landscape, thereby connecting an urban community with nature and history.*

In Action: The Awbury Arboretum Association is located within the historic district of Awbury Arboretum. Homes surround this historic site and neighbors serve on the board. It strives to instill values of preservation, conservation, and sustainability of the natural and built environment, through job train-



NYS OPRHP, Olana State Historic Site

From its earliest beginnings, excellent stewardship has been a hallmark of both the Olana Historic Site and The Olana Partnership.

ing and educational programs endorsed and supported by the neighborhood and community. Beginning with educational programming geared to local children who rarely experience the outdoors, Awbury has been in the forefront of environmental education in the section of Philadelphia known as Germantown.

In 2005, the site expanded its programming to include job training for at-risk young adults from eighteen to twenty-four years of age. As a result of the success of the program, the organization developed a for-profit landscaping company where graduates may be employed. The for-profit group is now an established, successful landscaping company that provides services to other nonprofit sites and organizations as well as local residents. In developing both the educational programming and the for-profit company, Awbury Arboretum worked with many different community partners including the Olney Redevelopment Corporation, the Philadelphia Water Department Office of Watersheds, and Germantown High School. Awbury Arboretum serves approximately 5,500 schoolchildren per year and graduates eight to twelve apprentices from its program annually.

The makeup of the board is essential to maintaining strong ties to its local community. At least one-third of its twenty-one board members must live within two miles of the site. One board member belongs to the Olney Redevelopment Corporation and others are involved in local schools.

The site's organizational goals for the next two years include expanding the landscape company to provide more opportunities for employment for trained apprentices and to use the fifty-five acres of the Arboretum to expand its relevance to the surrounding neighborhoods by providing science education, community gardening, and other programs that will lead to a more sustainable community.

2. Sustainable historic house museums are inspiring.

- Has leadership developed a vision statement that is inspiring to board, staff, volunteers, and audiences?
- Does the statement provide direction for the future?
- Is this statement widely distributed both inside and outside the organization?
- Do staff members use this statement to guide their work on a daily basis?
- What about the site is inspiring and why?

In Practice: Harriet Beecher Stowe Center—Hartford, Connecticut (www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org)

Mission: *The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center preserves and interprets Stowe's Hartford home and the Center's historic collections, promotes vibrant discussion of her life and work, and inspires commitment to social justice and positive change.*

In Action: The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center uses the author's words to connect people with contemporary issues and actions in order to affect social change. The Center lists its mission statement on all publicly distributed materials and features it prominently on its website. Staff ensures that all programs address inspiration for action, financial viability, and increased visibility for the site. Programs are evaluated in part based on the actions people are inspired to take following their participation.

For example, the Center hosts a series of salons that draw participants from suburbs surrounding Hartford. Guest speakers begin each salon with brief remarks that present an issue to be discussed. Next, a staff moderator invites audience participation. Each session ends with a brainstorming discussion of the actions individuals can take. When participants attending a salon on human trafficking learned of a well-known website that enabled this practice, they contacted the website, ended their own use of it, and spread the word to others about this practice. Another salon on food distribution in urban areas inspired participants to become involved with local farmers' markets and the local food bank. These salons have been extremely well received and have grown largely by word-of-mouth. All programs, including teacher workshops, incorporate a section on "Inspiration for Action." Staff at the Stowe Center follow-up with teachers to learn how students are inspired to act.

3. Sustainable historic house museum leaders adhere to a standard of excellence.

- Do leaders:
  - Model excellence?
  - Encourage and provide for professional development and professional networking for staff?
  - Encourage and provide opportunities to visit and learn about how other historic house museums fulfill their mission and their stewardship responsibilities?
- Are professional museum and preservation standards practiced at the highest level?
- Is the historic house museum recognized by the field, by its funders, by its audiences and/or stakeholders for excellence? Has it received awards or other tangible evidence of its excellence?
- Does it attract new audiences and new support for its activities on a regular basis?
- Do board members bring their families and friends to visit?
- Does staff bring family and friends to visit?

In Practice: General Lew Wallace Study and Museum—Crawfordsville, IN (www.ben-hur.com)

Mission: *The mission of the General Lew Wallace Study and Museum is to celebrate and renew belief in the power of the individual spirit to affect American history and culture.*

In Action: The Museum is located on three-and-a-half wooded acres on the site where General Wallace wrote his masterwork, *Ben-Hur*. Wallace's personal study has been lovingly preserved for over a century and contains original artifacts from every period of his life. His carriage house, also on the property, contains a state-of-the-art collection storage facility, an annually changing exhibit space, rentable meeting space, a catering kitchen, and a gift shop. This small site, with an annual budget of $120,000 and a staff of four, provides leadership at all levels of the museum profession. Their director is active in AASLH and other professional organizations, serving as the chair of the AASLH Small Museum Affinity Group Committee from 2004 to 2008, presently as chair of the Seminar for Historical Administration Alumni Committee, and as the 2010 AASLH Annual Meeting Program Chair.

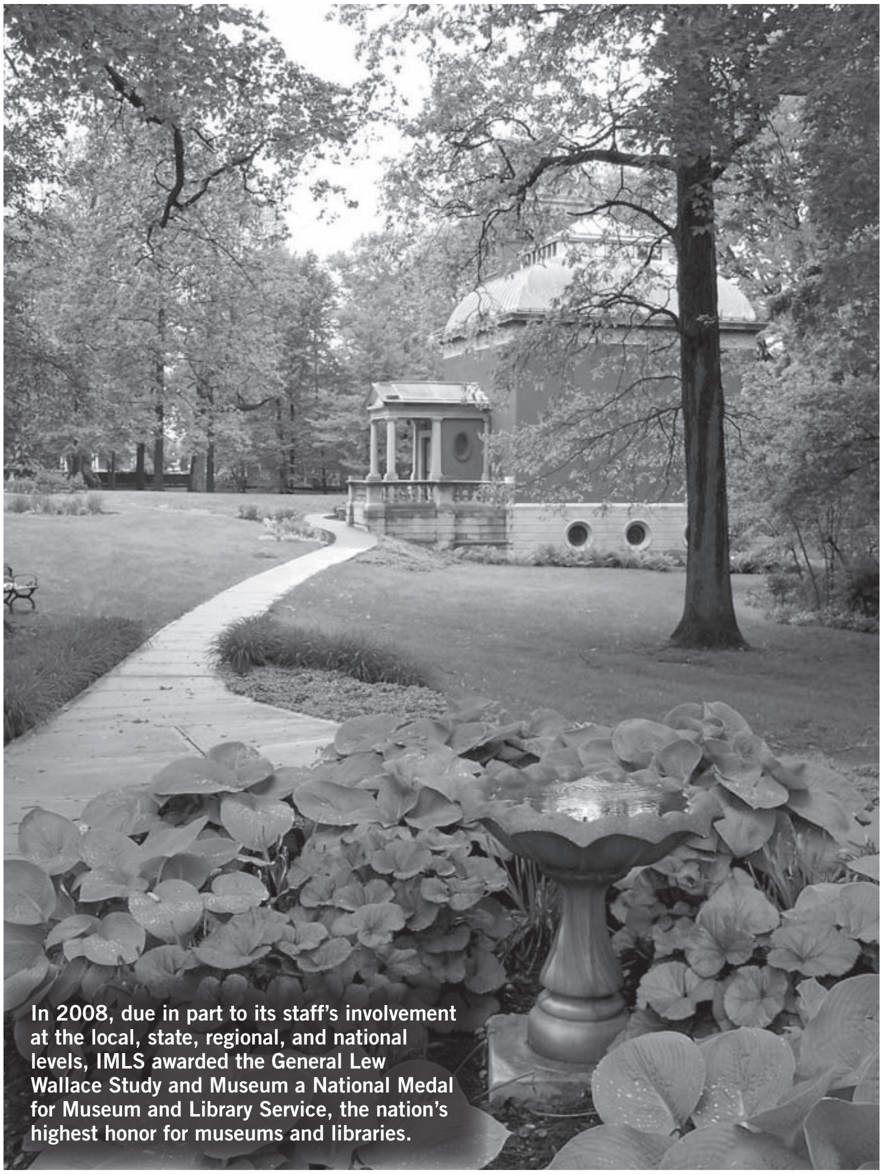
In addition to being involved on a local, state, and regional level with professional history organizations, the General Lew Wallace Study and Museum has been recognized nationally for its outstanding public programs. In 2008, IMLS awarded the museum a National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor for museums and libraries. IMLS honored the institution for its Lew Wallace Youth Academy, which incorporates Wallace's life story into lessons in problem solving, creating art, and serving others; its Taste of Montgomery County event that created an economic engine for small businesses in the area and brought new people to the museum's campus to celebrate local food and music; and its participation in the public forum "Build a Better Downtown." Additionally, the museum has ensured the lasting legacy of General Wallace with the recent rehabilitation of his carriage house as an Interpretive Center complete with a state-of-the-art collections storage facility. Through exceptional educational programming, collaborations with local and state organizations, active collections care, and community development opportunities, the General Lew Wallace Study and Museum fulfills its mission to "celebrate and renew belief in the power of the individual spirit to affect American history and culture."

4. Sustainable historic house museum leaders embrace a culture of learning and a spirit of inquiry.

- Is there a culture of learning in the organization?
- Is ongoing scholarly research expected and supported?
- Are board members engaged in learning about the history, preservation, and activities of the historic house museum?
- Are board members engaged in continuous learning about their roles and fiduciary responsibilities?

In Practice: The Kearney Park Project of the Kearney Historic Site and the Fresno City and County Historical Society—Fresno, California (www.valleyhistory.org)

Mission: *To collect, preserve, interpret, and hold in public trust the records and artifacts that document the history of the people of Fresno County and the Central Valley region of California, to provide the community with educational opportunities through excellence in programs, exhibitions, and use of its collections, and to encourage and*



General Lew Wallace Study and Museum

In 2008, due in part to its staff's involvement at the local, state, regional, and national levels, IMLS awarded the General Lew Wallace Study and Museum a National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor for museums and libraries.

promote the preservation and conservation of the community's historic and cultural resources with a commitment to an appreciation of our heritage and its place within our greater American heritage.

In Action: The Kearney Park Project of the Kearney Historic Site and the Fresno City and County Historical Society has a passion for California and its story, a desire to make history relevant, an interest in community building, and a commitment to create a center to address some of California's greatest challenges. The historic site includes five original structures and interprets the story of M. Theo Kearney, California's Raisin King.

Organized in 1919 predominately as a repository of the region's history, the Fresno Historical Society today houses an extensive archive that serves both academic and lay audiences. With a solid documentary foundation, the board's vision has evolved from building an urban museum in the mid-1990s to its plans for becoming an agricultural anchor today. Not rushing into planning meant that the leadership took time to educate itself, its staff, and its board members.

The staff arranged for three extensive week-long fact-finding excursions to historic sites and museums around the country, usually attended by twenty to twenty-five board members and spouses at their own expense, along with the director and one additional staff member. Staff carefully plans and orchestrates these junkets as learning opportunities to see what has worked and what has not at other cultural institutions. They prepare for each board member extensive research booklets containing pertinent information about each organization, its history, and governance. Meetings with staff and board members of the destination museums are set up in advance and are often the highlight of the experience. Being able to ask hard questions and learn from the many varied experiences of their host institutions has been invaluable in allowing the board to formulate a solid and viable strategy for the Kearney Park Project.

5. Successful historic house museums are connected to groups and individuals outside the organization who are leaders and decision-makers in their communities and in the professional field.

- Do historic house leaders regularly attend local events?
- Do board members belong to various local organizations? Do they use these connections to help the historic house museum?
- Do historic house leaders meet and correspond with elected officials?
- Do community leaders invite historic house leaders to participate in the activities of their organizations?
- Do historic house leaders and community leaders work together for common goals and agendas?
- Does the local news media report on the museum's activities and events?
- Do historic house leaders participate in regional

and national activities of the professional field?

In Practice: Cliveden-Upsala of the National Trust for Historic Preservation—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (www.cliveden.org)[3]

Mission: *To help people understand our shared history and motivate them to preserve it by providing access to the rich continuity of history and preservation in one community and family over time, and by offering direction and knowledge about preserving our built environment.*

In Action: Within the last ten years, Cliveden has moved from a traditional house museum to an active partner in the community and the region that surrounds it. Their strategy is to develop an approach that includes the highest museum and preservation standards for operating historic house museums and in-depth community engagement, resulting in economic revitalization. The site hosts several community-wide events on its grounds including the reenactment of the Battle of Germantown, jazz festivals, the police district's party for children, and a youth offenders program. The director serves on the board of the local community improvement association and other staff serve on committees of the business association.

Historic American Buildings Survey – 1972

Over the past decade, Cliveden has become an active partner in the community surrounding it including hosting community events such as a reenactment and a jazz festival and its staff volunteering with local boards and business associations.

In the last five years, leadership at Cliveden participated with several other community development corporations in urban planning for the area, and worked with multiple cultural, community, and neighborhood organizations to provide after-school programs, an esteemed young writers' program, and preservation workshops for homeowners in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. Its current exhibit on the one hundredth anniversary of an important local bridge has received city-wide coverage and other media attention. Finally, board and staff attend many local community events and fundraisers and participate in national professional meetings.

6. Sustainable historic house museum leaders are proactive governors and managers of their organizations.

- Do all board members understand and adhere to appropriate roles and fiduciary responsibilities?
- Are all board members involved in fundraising and/or building endowment?
- Do all board members make an annual financial contribution to the historic house museum?
- Are financial records timely and up-to-date?
- Are other records up-to-date and timely?
- Do board members attend community events? Do they serve as ambassadors of the historic house museum?
- Is board leadership recruiting new younger members?
- Does board leadership adhere to term limits and by-laws?
- Are there succession plans for board members, committee members, and staff?

In Practice: James K. Polk Home—Columbia, Tennessee (www.jameskpolk.com)

Mission: *The mission of the James K. Polk Memorial Association is to operate, maintain, preserve, and restore the Polk Ancestral Home and properties, its grounds and appurtenances, and to perpetuate the memory of the eleventh President of the United States.*

In Action: This historic house museum has an annual budget of $230,000 and manages the home of the nation's eleventh president. Mrs. Polk's great-great-niece founded the Polk Association in 1924. Through its first fifty years, the board's vision and persistence helped sustain the Polk Home as a volunteer-managed site. In the 1970s, the Polk Association hired its first staff members and began the Polk Home's transition into a professionally operated museum. Since then, the board has emphasized governance, fundraising, and long-range planning in the site's operation. To achieve its goal of site expansion, the board initiated a capital improvement

Characteristics of Historic House Museums in Peril

The AASLH Historic House Committee developed the following checklist to help identify the characteristics of historic house museums in peril. Use this list to highlight areas in which your museum may need to improve.

Vision

- ☐ Most people involved with the historic house museum believe that "keeping the doors open" or maintaining the status quo is acceptable.

Mission

- ☐ Few people involved with the historic house museum know or understand the mission.

Board

- ☐ Most board members are unaware of their fiduciary and stewardship responsibilities.
- ☐ Most board members believe that in "keeping the doors open" or maintaining the status quo, they are fulfilling their fiduciary and stewardship responsibilities.
- ☐ Recruiting and retaining new board members is challenging.
- ☐ There is not a full complement of board members.
- ☐ There are few, if any, active board committees.
- ☐ There is no succession plan for board members and no one is willing to be president or chair of the board.
- ☐ No one on the board lives in the community served by the house museum.
- ☐ No one on the board attends community meetings or events as a representative of the historic house museum.
- ☐ There is no regular board performance evaluation, either by the board or by an outside evaluator.
- ☐ There is no ethics or conflict of interest policy.
- ☐ There is no strategic plan or the plan itself is just a list of ideas.
- ☐ There are no regular treasurer's reports.
- ☐ The board is not aware of any problems and/or is taking no action to remedy them.

Financial

- ☐ There are no checks and balances in use for handling financial transactions.
- ☐ There is no audit.
- ☐ There is an operating deficit.
- ☐ There is no endowment **or** the endowment generates less than 15% of the operating budget.
- ☐ There is no planned giving program.

Staffing

- ☐ There is high staff turnover.
- ☐ Staff are reviewed irregularly or not at all or only at the time of crisis.
- ☐ There are no performance expectations for staff or these expectations are not communicated to staff.

Characteristics of Historic House Museums in Peril

- ☐ Staff performance reviews are usually carried out by the president of the board without consultation with the other board members.
- ☐ There is no one on the staff from the community in which the historic house museum is located.
- ☐ There is no one on the staff who attends community meetings or events as a representative of the historic house museum.

Programs

- ☐ There are no historic structures reports for any of the historic buildings under the care of the board.
- ☐ There are no landscape or garden surveys (if the historic house has a historic landscape).
- ☐ There is no little or no regular maintenance of buildings or grounds.
- ☐ Repairs are performed on an emergency basis.
- ☐ Visitation has been declining over the last five to ten years.
- ☐ There are few school groups visiting the house museum.
- ☐ The historic house is open to visitors on a very limited basis.
- ☐ There has been no new research on the house for more than five years.
- ☐ There is little or no interpretation of the facts or story about the house's history.
- ☐ There is no connection made between the history of the house and current events or issues.
- ☐ Docents/guides tell the same story that has been told for many years.
- ☐ Routine tours are longer than one hour.

Collections

- ☐ It is difficult to plan programs because collections are poorly cataloged or are in disarray.
- ☐ Gifts to the collection are accepted without review of collecting policies or knowledge of the current collection.
- ☐ There are multiple numbering systems for the collection.
- ☐ There is no active review of the collection for possible deaccessioning.
- ☐ Collections records are not digitized.
- ☐ Collections are not safely housed or stored.

Communications

- ☐ Computer equipment is more than five years old.
- ☐ There is no website and/or no email address or email is checked irregularly.
- ☐ There is no current 4-color brochure.
- ☐ There is no signage or other means of finding the historic house museum.
- ☐ Membership is declining.

page 2 of 2

fund, requested a "right of first refusal" from adjacent property owners, and eventually purchased an 1880s church building to develop as an exhibit hall.

Board responsibilities and term limits are included in the organization's by-laws and policies. One-third of the officers rotate off the board annually. All board members contribute to Polk Home operations and special projects (the Association also counts volunteer work and shared expertise as contributions). Although Association members elect the officers, the board offers the nominees for office. To aid in succession planning, most incoming board members are Association committee members and active organizational volunteers or contributors.

The organization maintains thorough financial records. Financial recordkeeping is handled primarily by the Polk Home's director, the board's treasurer, and a hired C.P.A. Although the Association's written policies do not mandate it, the site's budget committee annually prepares a balanced budget. The Association's budget from any single revenue source seldom exceeds twenty percent of its entire annual budget. Therefore, a shortfall in any single category might prompt institutional belt tightening but would not hinder ongoing operations. And although the Association uses only the interest from its Capital Improvement and Endowment Funds for operating revenue, the principal from these restricted funds serves as an institutional safety net. Policies allow the board to withdraw capital funds for maintenance emergencies and endowment funds for any financial crisis that threatens the organization's existence.

7. Sustainable historic house museum leaders are proactive stewards of their buildings, collections, and landscapes.

- Does historic house museum leadership assess and plan for the best use(s) of the building(s) as part of its strategic planning process?
- As uses change, do historic house leaders obtain professional expertise in assessing structural requirements, code issues, and occupancy requirements?
- Are building spaces available to the public beyond house tours? Are they truly public spaces?
- Is there a space plan and master site plan for the historic house museum?
- Are there cyclical preservation, maintenance, and landscape plans for the historic property?
- Are adequate funds for preservation, restoration, and maintenance of the historic property budgeted annually? Are there budget allocations for replacement costs and for emergency reserve funds?

In Practice: Olana State Historic Site and The Olana Partnership—Hudson, New York (www.nysp.org and www.olana.org)

Mission: *The Olana State Historic Site is committed to the preservation of historic structures, designed landscape, site views, historical and artistic collections, and the archeological resources of the Olana estate. This historic estate is maintained for public enjoyment and passive recreational use in such a manner that Olana's natural, historic, visual, and cultural resources shall not be endangered or compromised. Olana interprets its collections and the history of its property to the broadest possible audience. The mission of The Olana Partnership is to inspire the public by preserving and interpreting Olana, Frederic Church's artistic masterpiece.*

In Action: The Olana Partnership works in concert with staff at the Olana Historic Site to leverage preservation and funding opportunities for the restoration of Olana and to advocate for the site and its landscape.

In 1971, The Olana Partnership, a not-for-profit group, was established to assist the State of New York in raising funds for the preservation of Olana. This friends group implemented traditional methods of fundraising until the mid-1990s, when the group began to attract new board members who brought a diverse array of skills and experiences to the Partnership. In partnership with the Olana Historic Site, it raised funds to hire outside expertise to develop, support, and implement an ambitious strategic plan.

Since that time, The Olana Partnership has supported two part-time curatorial positions, and a part-time librarian and archivist. It has leveraged more than $12 million for restoration and conservation of the house and the collections. The Partnership has a budget of $1 million and supports six full-time staff, including its own executive director. In the last few years, it has advocated successfully for the site, its 240 landscaped acres and its viewsheds.

From its earliest beginnings, excellent stewardship has been a hallmark of both the Olana Historic Site and The Olana Partnership. The site's first director was a graduate of the Cooperstown Museum program. Since then, all staff, volunteers, and others associated with the site endorse and encourage the value of excellence in all of its preservation and program activities. Those involved with Olana consider their involvement to be an honor of the highest order, based on the sense of place that permeates the site.

8. Sustainable historic house museums are interpreted in innovative and creative ways that extend well beyond the traditional house tour. Sustainable historic house museum programs are developed in conjunction with new sources of revenue.

- Are programs based on a central idea or hypothesis that links past to present and connects the historic house museum to the world beyond its gates?
- Does interpretation build on and enhance the sense of place unique to each site?
- Are programs presented in different platforms (e.g.,

Web, audio, exhibit, interactives)?
- Are programs multi-disciplinary in nature (e.g., poetry readings, plays, education programs that address multiple curricula standards, dances, science projects that include historic elements)?
- Do programs charge adequate admission, produce products, or provide other sources of earned revenue?

In Practice: Lower East Side Tenement Museum—New York, New York (www.tenement.org)

Mission: *The Tenement Museum promotes tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of a variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America.*

In Action: For more than twenty years, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum has developed stories based on the lives of the inhabitants at 97 Orchard Street. The interpretation is highly researched and based on immigrant issues that are of concern to Americans today. The museum receives more than 140,000 visitors annually who come from fifty states and twenty-eight foreign countries. Its website receives more than 300,000 hits per year.

The work of the museum is designed to meet the needs of current visitors and local audiences including new immigrants. Staff screen all museum programs for the following: visitor interest and connection, fit with school curricula, financial sustainability, and historical accuracy. The museum makes available classes in English-as-a-second language and provides programming related to the topic of immigration. The museum earns revenue primarily through retail sales and visitor admission (general adult admission is $17). In this past year, visitation has increased more than twenty percent.

The museum's programming is diverse, varied, and cross-disciplinary. One of its web-based projects, *The Digital Artist in Residence*, awards virtual residencies to emerging and established artists for exploration of contemporary immigrant experiences. The museum provides work and display space for these artistic works.

Since its inception, the museum has involved itself in many productive partnerships on the local, national, and international level. Each partnership promotes recognition of the museum and its programs, while attracting new visitors and new support for its work. Major individual donors, earned revenue, and some program grants provide a majority of funding for the museum's programs.

9. Sustainable historic house museum leaders are strategic in their thinking and in their activities.

- Do historic house museum leaders understand the difference between a long-term and a strategic plan?
- Does the strategic plan include ideas and a test of financial feasibility for each idea?
- Has the board made choices about which ideas to pursue and which ones are not feasible?
- Does the strategic plan include a budget, timeline, assignment of responsibility, and workplan for each acceptable idea?
- Do members and other stakeholders have input into the strategic plan?
- Do historic house leaders involve neighbors and community decision makers in the planning process?
- Does the planning process include evaluations and feedback from audiences, outside consultants, other professionals in the field, funders, or others outside the organization?
- Is there an independent facilitator for the planning process?

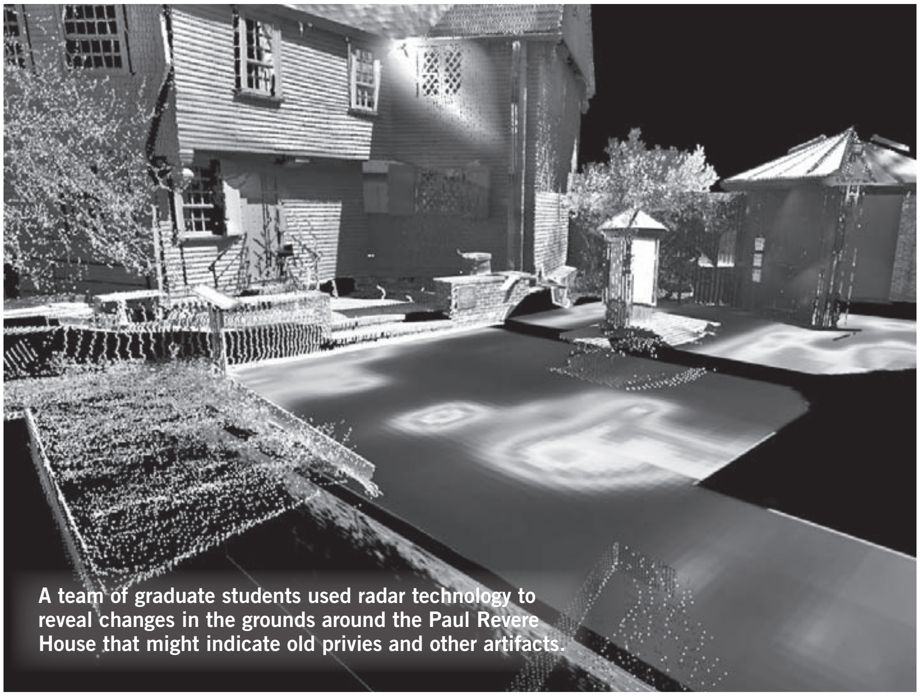
In Practice: Florence Griswold Museum—Old Lyme, Connecticut (www.florencegriswoldmuseum.org)

Mission: *The mission of the Florence Griswold Museum is to promote the understanding of Connecticut's contribution to American art, with emphasis on the art, history, and landscape of the Lyme region.*

In Action: In the last ten years, the Florence Griswold Museum has planned and implemented significant changes in its approach to visitors and their needs and interests. Leaders based all of these changes on comprehensive strategic planning that included participation by a diverse board, local community leaders, and sustained executive leadership over the course of the project. Staff worked with other outside experts on specific focused projects to ensure the highest level of planning. Beginning with a three-day symposium that included experts in several areas of historic site management and interpretation, the project has included restoration of the 1817 National Historic Landmark Florence Griswold House, a boarding house for the Lyme Colony of Artists.

Senior staff worked with outside consultants on focused aspects of the project and incorporated strategic planning for a larger visionary plan and capital campaign as well as for more concrete programs and events. The museum moved all of its ancillary functions like restrooms, meeting space, and offices out of the house and relocated them to other buildings on the property. An art gallery was built to accommodate a changing exhibition program and now the historic house offers a consistent and compelling visitor experience with seasonal changes to the interiors. Tours are self-guided, a major change that took time for docents and staff to agree on, but docents now are delighted with the new role they have that includes facilitation of conversations about the house and the art contained within it.

Several challenging decisions were met with some initial resistance. Yet in time, staff accommodated and embraced all strategic changes. Today, the museum's culture reflects the importance and continuation of


UMass Boston and Harry R. Feldman, Inc.

A team of graduate students used radar technology to reveal changes in the grounds around the Paul Revere House that might indicate old privies and other artifacts.

strategic planning for most of its activities. Visitors rate their experiences considerably higher than they did in the past and report them as much more meaningful. A balance of federal, state, private, and individual giving has supported the planning and the implementation of this major change.

10. Sustainable historic house museums that are well prepared for the future adapt current technologies to enhance their understanding of their resources, expand public access, and improve efficiency and effectiveness.

- Does the museum have computers and email addresses for each staff member? Are computers networked?
- Do the computers include software to facilitate word processing, spreadsheets, and databases for collections, membership, and donors?
- Are tours and/or other educational programming and collections information available electronically? Does the museum maintain a website and is it updated frequently?
- Does the museum use listservs, blogs, wikis, and/or electronic newsletters to communicate with members and supporters?
- Does the museum partner with technological-savvy partners who can extend uses and understanding of advanced technologies?

In Practice: Paul Revere Memorial Association—Boston, Massachusetts (www.paulreverehouse.org)

Mission: *The Association actively preserves and interprets two of Boston's oldest homes. It provides our increasingly diverse audience with remarkable educational experiences based on historical issues and social history themes relevant to our site, our neighborhood, and Boston from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century.*

In Action: In preparation for its centennial anniversary, the Paul Revere House began planning an addition to accommodate its 250,000 annual visitors. First, the Association purchased Lathrop Place, an adjoining site. Next, the staff and board developed a master plan and comprehensive land survey of both sites. This included exploring the entire historic complex using laser technology to explore what is above and below ground.

The director contacted the coastal geology and geophysics department at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and asked if there was interest in exploring the site. An enthusiastic response led to a team of graduate students pulling a radar skid plate over the entire site, revealing changes in the ground that might indicate old privies and other artifacts. At the same time, the president of a surveying company contacted the executive director and offered to do a free survey. The surveying team used three-dimensional laser technology to provide photographs of every inch of the house and grounds in their entirety. Now planning, design, and construction can begin with a never-before understanding of every aspect and dimension of the house and grounds, with a vision of what is at least ten feet below ground.[4]

11. Sustainable historic house museums are branded, promoted, and marketed using consistent graphic languages.

- Is there a marketing plan?
- Are there funds for advertising?
- Are there funds for distribution of rack cards and other marketing materials?
- Is the efficacy of marketing materials tested?

In Practice: Historic Hudson Valley, New York (www.hudsonvalley.org)

In Action: In the early twenty-first century, the marketing effort at several historic sites in the Hudson Valley was chaotic. Other than Kykuit and Sleepy Hollow, most were relatively unknown and without any branding or identity. Each one employed different messages and different graphics. Eventually, the marketing director at one site decided to work with the other sites to establish an identity and a consistent graphic look that could be applied by all the sites. Each site would speak with a consistent voice and develop its promotional materials using one design. The collaborative group of sites would be known as Historic Hudson Valley and the leadership at each site would provide full backing and support for these marketing efforts. Soon, the collaborative decided it would design marketing materials using the best resources and staff from each site (e.g., whichever site had the best website would provide the basis for the group website). The first product the collaborative produced was a coffee table book of each site with accompanying text and full color. (Individually, no one site could develop, print, or distribute a book like this and no one site could sell enough books to net a profit.)

Later efforts included a group website, a common logo, consistent-looking rack cards and websites, and a series of templates that could be used by any site or adapted by any graphic designer to create more materials. The key to success for this marketing program was rigorous enforcement of all marketing materials, including the placement of logos, font sizes, colors, and other graphic elements used by each individual site.

Conclusion:

In examining the issue of sustainability for historic house museums today, it is clear that those best suited to thrive in spite of challenges now and in the future are those that possess many of the characteristics described in this leaflet. The AASLH Historic House Committee intends that this tool will be used by historic house museum leadership who want to attract new audiences, new support, and find new purposes for their missions and historic properties. This tool can be used to quickly assess the qualities and values that are part of the culture of your historic house. It can help an organization to identify what might make a difference in organizational thinking that will lead to thriving (as opposed to only surviving) organizations. Depending on the state of your historic house museum, it may serve as a wake-up call for board members or staff leadership who can learn what the warning signs are for historic houses in peril. If your organization chooses to address some of its challenges, this tool can serve as a guidepost or benchmark along the road to progress. As organizational thinking and learning are progressing, this document can serve as a quick tool for evaluating progress.

For more information about this project and others from the Historic House Museum Affinity Group, visit www.aaslh.org/hhouses.htm.

AASLH Historic House Museum Affinity Group Committee:

Barbara Silberman, Heritage Partners Consulting, Gloucester, MA, Chair[5]

T. Patrick Brennan, Georgia Trust, Atlanta, GA

Liora Cobin, Evanston Historical Society, Evanston, IL

Terry Dickinson, Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport, RI

Kendra Dillard, Governor's Mansion State Historic Park, Sacramento, CA

Wendy Franklin, California State Parks, Sacramento, CA

Sara Harger, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY

Bethany Hawkins, AASLH, Nashville, TN

Benjamin Hruska, University of Arizona, Phoenix, AZ

Julie Parke, Decorative Arts Center of Ohio, Lancaster, OH

Beth Richards, Consultant, Concord, NH

AASLH Sustainability Kit for Historic Houses Advisory Committee:

Alice Smith Duncan, Hyde Hall, Cooperstown, NY

Mark Heppner, Stan Hewyet Hall and Gardens, Akron, OH

George Laughead, Ford County Historical Society, Dodge City, KS

Patricia Murphy, Oberlin Heritage Center, Oberlin, OH

Laurie Rayner, Connecticut Humanities Council, Middletown, CT

[1] For information on AASLH's Standards program, sponsored by IMLS, please see www.aaslh.org/IncrementalStd.

[2] See the AASLH Historic House Committee webpage at www.aaslh.org/hhouses.

[3] See David W. Young, "The Next Cliveden: A New Approach to the Historic Site in Philadelphia," *Forum Journal* 22, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 51-55.

[4] To look at the laser photos online and view a video, go to www.bostonglobe.com and call up "A Look into the Past, with Laser Precision," 19 May 2008.

[5] Silberman acknowledges the support of the William Penn Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Heritage Philadelphia Program for their support of the Alternative Stewardship project, which helped to inform her work developing this leaflet.

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The Gift of History

By Dennis A. O'Toole

History organizations, in these ways, make history a living presence in the lives of Americans and American communities.

History is an account of things said and done in the past. In this sense, each of us seeks to fashion and is part of a history—an account of where we come from, who we are, and how we got to be that way. Communities, likewise, have a history. So, too, do nations, families, and human groups of every sort. In this sense, there is not one history, but many.

Historical accounts serve us in many ways. They can inspire us with stories of exemplary lives or caution us with tales of human folly and wickedness. Accounts of the past can inform and educate us by providing contexts and perspectives that allow us to make thoughtful decisions about the future. And histories have the power to delight and enrich us, enlarging and intensifying the experience of being alive.

History is also a discipline, one that requires attention to the evidence, warns of the partiality of all accounts of the past—including our own—and offers methods for determining which are most tenable.

What History Organizations Give Us

History organizations help preserve, tell, and engage us in the stories of the past. All accounts of the past derive from memory and from the traditions, documents, images, artifacts, buildings, monuments, landscapes, and ruins that have survived. Since memory is fallible, and because all things eventually perish, preserving these traces of the past and providing access to them is vital to peoples' ability to experience history's gifts.

History organizations, in partnership with their communities, lead in preserving, researching, presenting, and interpreting the evidence of the past. By helping communities collect and conserve history's sources, and by joining with the public to study them and consider and debate their meaning, history institutions connect the people, thoughts, and events of yesterday with the active memories and abiding interests of people today.

By joining the present to the past through exhibitions, publications, public programming, aid to genealogists, websites, restorations, telecasts, conferences, school visits, interpretations, social media, and the like, history institutions help create the gift of history for present and future generations. They provide individuals of each generation a chance to search for their own answers, forge their own meanings, and decide on the significance of people and events of the past. In the process, they serve as places of individual learning and forums of civic engagement.

By connecting people with the past, history organizations make their communities healthier, and more attractive places to live, work, and visit. They are themselves travel destinations, employers, purchasers of goods and services, and recipients of gifts and grants. Sometimes on a small scale, sometimes with much greater impact, history organizations are economic engines in their towns, cities, and regions.

History organizations, in these ways, make history a living presence in the lives of Americans and American communities. When building and conserving collections becomes a joint venture with the public; when access is open and portals are many; when individuals and groups craft and immerse themselves in narratives of the past; and when they raise and debate questions of significance, meaning, and truth in their welcoming, neutral settings, then history organizations foster democracy and nurture freedom.

Since memory is fallible, and because all things eventually perish, preserving these traces of the past and providing access to them is vital to peoples' ability to experience history's gifts.

The State of History and History Organizations Today

The hundreds of thousands of volunteers and tens of thousands of paid professionals who do the work of the nation's history organizations today work for institutions that enjoy a high degree of trustworthiness, patronage, and support from the public. This may be their most important asset. Yet it is also true that a variety of pressures are creating challenges and opportunities for history organizations of perhaps unprecedented magnitudes.

In *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998), historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen present a clear picture of how Americans engage with the past and, incidentally, how they view the nation's history organizations. Working with the transcripts of in-depth interviews with 1,500 Americans, the authors report that the great majority of Americans—over 90 percent of the sample—engage regularly in activities that connect them with the past. They attend family reunions, take photographs and videos to preserve memory, practice hobbies, and work on collections dealing with the past. The authors asked those surveyed when they feel most connected with the past. Second only to gatherings with their families, they cited visits to museums and historic sites most often as the situation that makes them feel most in touch with history.

When asked what sources of their knowledge of the past they most trust, Americans put museums and historic sites first—ahead of grandparents, eyewitnesses, college professors, history books, movies, television programming, and high school history classes. America's history organizations are ranked by the public as the most trustworthy source of historical knowledge available to them.

These findings, now more than a decade old, have since been corroborated repeatedly. For instance, in the Institute of Museum and Library Services's *InterConnections: A National Study of Users and Potential Users of Online Information* (2008), visitors to museums rated museums along with libraries as the most credible sources of information available to them in a society that is awash in information, misinformation, and opinion.

The high regard in which museums are held is reflected further in studies that have been done of the popularity and reach of museums. In 2009, the American Association of Museums published its triennial survey and report on the state of U.S. museums, *Museum Financial Information 2009*. Among its numerous, well substantiated findings are these: there are more museums in the U.S. than there are McDonald's restaurants or Starbuck's cafes; Americans volunteer nearly one million hours a week of their time to museums; museums contributed approximately $20.7 billion to the American economy in 2008; and, based on AAM estimates, American museums receive more than 850 million visits a year, more than all professional sporting events and theme parks combined.

By connecting people with the past, history organizations make their communities healthier, more attractive places to live, work, and visit.

The prevalence of history in American popular culture—its wars, migrations, mysteries, heroes, catastrophes—provides further evidence that Americans have a real if imperfect grasp of their nation's past. The media, television, the Internet, Hollywood, and publishers are all hungry for content. History, they seem to believe, has it.

Still, there are worrisome signs and jarring realities confronting those who work every day to preserve, present, and interpret the past for Americans and their communities at history organizations. Consider these portents and realities.

Because education reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act left history out of its requirements, the nation's history museums, historic house museums, and sites experienced stagnant or declining school attendance during the first decade of the twenty-first century, driving admissions and other earned income down. The recession that began in the last quarter of 2007 and the collapse of the financial markets that followed did harm to endowments and annual giving. Organizations dependent upon appropriations from local, state, or national governments saw support from these sources severely cut or eliminated. Operating funds shrank, capital projects were put on hold, school group visits dwindled. Doing more with less has become the new normal.

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Digital technologies, now pervasive in homes, offices, and public spaces of every kind, pose another set of opportunities and challenges for history organizations. They afford history professionals and volunteers tools that can make collections, exhibitions, programs, and staffs accessible and interactive to degrees only dreamed of before. Some history organizations are learning how to wed digital technologies with other, more traditional means to carry out their mission of serving as exchanges for and connectors of people with the past. Remote visits to museums are ballooning. But are these technologically enhanced visits as effective as traditional encounters in fulfilling the core mission of history organizations? And how best do we measure effectiveness?

Demographic trends are another force changing American communities and the history organizations that serve them. The Baby Boom generation is entering its retirement years; minorities are on the way to becoming the majority; couples working full-time steadily increase as a proportion of households; and women are completing college in great numbers and higher percentages than men, are having fewer children, and increasingly the primary earners in their households. These trends are making and will continue to make big changes in the makeup of museums' audiences, workforces, collections, and programs.

History organizations, along with museums of every sort, have long viewed young audiences as a key to

Whether and how history organizations continue to find and be found by young people is a pivotal question for the future.

their future success. From them must come future patrons, volunteers, and supporters, as well as the voters and civic leaders of tomorrow. Most young people today share with their elders a feeble understanding of American history. This situation is worsening. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a powerful reform movement focused narrowly on testing for proficiency in reading and math with the result that history, science, and the arts were pushed farther to the periphery of the curricula of the nation's public schools.

What young people do possess in abundance, however, is a native ease with the digital, virtual world around them. They seek to inform and entertain themselves almost entirely via the Internet, with its proliferating sources, images, sites, and self-anointed authorities. Whether and how history organizations continue to find and be found by young people is a pivotal question for the future.

The Future of the Past

Each history organization faces its own particular set of circumstances and has its own distinctive mix of assets to work with as it goes about forging its future. Chief among these assets is the fact that a great majority of Americans regularly seek ways to engage with the past and find history organizations to be the most credible of all purveyors of history available to them. They are the most trusted keepers and tellers of the American story. This trust must be nurtured and built upon if history institutions are to thrive and their communities are to enjoy history's gifts in the years ahead.

People want, and communities need, what history organizations can give them: Real, tangible traces from the past and the human, flesh-and-blood stories they conjure and provoke; Accessible, welcoming places where families, friends, and strangers find food for thought, ideas to contend with, and moments of amusement and delight; Neutral forums where questions of significance, meaning, and truth can be raised, debated, and taken to heart by any who choose to engage; and A setting and a source where teachers and students can make direct, tangible contact with the American past.

If history organizations can meet these wants and needs, they will be healthy and their communities will be healthy with them. Knowing what those wants and needs in fact are is critical to success. Being able to articulate and measure the impact of means chosen to serve them is no less so. With informed, service-minded leadership, a compelling vision of history's value, a flair for forming and keeping strategic partnerships, and a commitment to learning and adjusting through trial and error, America's history organizations can be leaders in generating a new flowering of history in the land.

Dennis A. O'Toole is President and Co-Founder of Cañada Alamosa Institute, Monticello, New Mexico. He can be reached at dotoole@attglobal.net.

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Is Your Site Grant-Ready? How to Prepare to Attract Grants

By Sarah S. Brophy

How many times have you heard, "Let's get a grant to do that," or, "Did you see that X historic house got a grant to fix the roof; why can't we do that?"

Private foundation grant awards appear to be magic bullets, but of course they're not. Identifying appropriate grant projects and funders is highly resource-intensive as is designing the projects, preparing the grant applications and, if you're lucky, fulfilling the grant requirements. Grants are not easy money, so use fundraising triage to help you out.

Earned income, annual appeals, and special gifts will finance your first projects *and* the bulk of your projects. This is *family* money—meaning it comes from your board, staff, members, visitors, and those organizations with whom you already have a personal relationship. But grantors are outside the village that makes up your closest network. Developing your relationship with them requires establishing your shared interests, a worthy project, and your own credibility.

Self-Assessment

Making your institution grant-ready starts with assessment: your institution, your projects, your funders, and your competition. This way you are sure about what mission-related projects you have to offer to which interested donors, how to demonstrate the value and importance of your project, and if you can convince the donor you are the most worthy partner.

The Grant-Ready Checklist is a shorthand way to do this, and I encourage you to use it as a preliminary scan if you are gearing up for a first-ever grants program, or if you have a long-standing

Grant-Ready Checklist

Adapted from *Is Your Museum Grant Ready*

Do you do something important?

- ☐ Can you show the need for what you do?
- ☐ Can you show the impact of what you do, and how it is significant and appropriate?
- ☐ Does anyone else do it? Why or why not? Can you compare or contrast your work to theirs?

Is it for anyone in particular?

- ☐ Can you describe your audience(s) in detail?
- ☐ Can you show how they matter to you and to the door?
- ☐ Can you show how this is the appropriate audience—and not just a convenient one?
- ☐ Are there others you have served in the past, or will in the future, that you should discuss?

Do you make a difference?

- ☐ Can you describe your work in terms of *benefits,* not *features?*
- ☐ Can you explain and demonstrate the difference you make?
- ☐ Can you explain why that difference matters to you, the audience, and the funder?
- ☐ Do you have an edge over other applicants: a charitable, professional, or innovative edge?

Are you a smart investment?

- ☐ Is your mission statement clear? Does it inform the funder about the difference you make?
- ☐ Does your governing body have a clear purpose and clear and appropriate roles?
- ☐ Do you have qualified, staff, board, volunteers, consultants, collaborators, and advisors?
- ▶ Do you demonstrate best practices?
  - ☐ Do you have appropriate organizational and professional policies and plans at hand?
  - ☐ Is the institution accredited and the staff qualified in appropriate ways? (Or are you working toward those goals in any way?)
- ▶ Is your financial management appropriate?
  - ☐ Are financial conditions are reasonable and well-understood?
  - ☐ Do you undergo an annual audit and have guidelines for sponsorships, gifts, and grants?
  - ☐ Do you maximize the donor's investment by replicating or extending the project?

Are you a good partner?

- ☐ Can you show awareness and appreciation of your environment and your donor's?
- ☐ Can you demonstrate community partnerships and community-oriented work?
- ☐ Do you manage projects intelligently and well, with transparency?
- ☐ Do you provide donors with quotes and images for their own promotion?
- ☐ Do you say "thank you" for grants, and provide thorough, useful reports on time so that the funder will want to support you again?
- ☐ Do you stay genuinely connected to the funder even when not asking for funding?

one that may require some revitalization. AASLH's StEPs program (Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations www.aaslh.org/steps) is a more thorough approach. Its categories will help you assess your entire institution's performance for all sorts of good reasons including strengthening your appeal to individual and organizational funders. If you have completed, or are completing portions of it, that work will *definitely* tell you how ready you are to attract grant support.

First, complete those checklists and see where you have ready answers, or a bit more work to do. For example, in the StEPs Management Standard 1, the second self-assessment question is "Does the institution have a formally adopted budget?"[1]

- *Basic* performance is indicated by a staff-compiled budget recommended to a board which approves it and then reviews it with staff quarterly, at least. Being able to tell the funder you do this, satisfies basic financial requirements for accepting a grant.
- *Good* performance is indicated by aligning that budget with staff work goals and institutional strategic plan, among other things. Your ability to illustrate that the grant-funded work is part of institutional goals and action plans tells the funder you really will follow through on this project.
- Finally, *better* performance indicators include evidence of multiyear budget projections based on the strategic plan. Now the funder knows your institution is among the most responsible investments it can make with its grant money.

Very often museums find they can answer every question in the grant-ready checklist and many of the StEPs self-assessment questions positively, but not always with hard evidence to convince a proposal reader. That is where grant-ready work comes in. So before you start your funder search, take time to create the materials and collect the evidence that will make your case. This might include:

- Creating a multi-year budget and linking it to your strategic plan.
- Developing funding summaries that describe annual appeal and membership support and provide examples of initial grant funding that creates a track record. Applying first to a local arts council or partnering with someone else who gets a grant are good ways to get at least one award under your belt.
- Building lists of experts and community partners you work with, including summaries of their credibility and your work together. This shows your access to excellence and your connection to complementary organizations.
- Improving visitor information collection. Where do visitors actually come from, and who are they?[2]
- Taking pictures (with permission) illustrating who participates in the work you do. Keep these in a Flickr account (www.flicker.com), or save a few choice ones to drop into proposals (as small images).
- Collecting third-party information to show a need (e.g., free- and reduced-lunch percentages for your school districts), corroborate your case (clip articles calling for services such as yours or proving program losses in the schools), highlight public opinions, prove your expertise, and simply make it clear that you're not the only group that thinks this work is valuable or that you do it well.

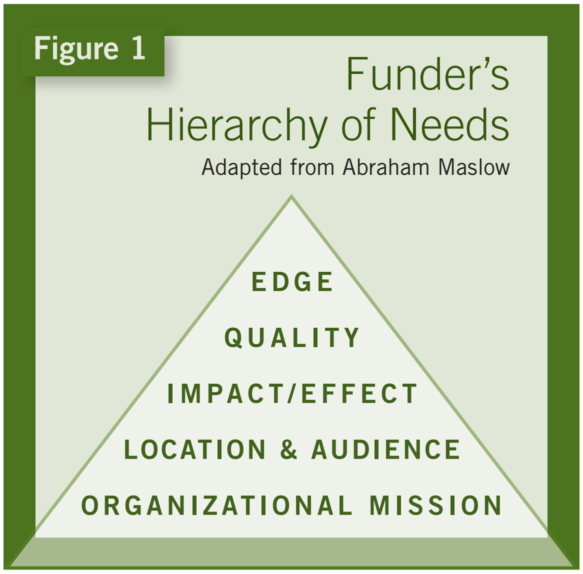
Next, turn your assessment approach to your possible funders.

Finding Funders

You will find your first grantors in your community, either by sneaking a peak at others' funder lists, by noticing supporters' names on event or program notices around town, by looking up your community foundation, and by doing background checks on the wealthiest individuals in your area.

While every nonprofit organization can apply for grant funds, not every grant opportunity is right for you. A deadline is no excuse for a grant proposal! As more nonprofits become more sophisticated in their work and their fundraising, funders receive many more competitive applicants and applications than they can fund. This means funders raise their

Figure 1



expectations, the competition is greater, and the applicant pools grow more crowded. You can improve your odds by making sure you have a very strong match between your organization and your funder's interests. The FCO information and material on the funder's website will give you nearly all you need to assess the match.

To make simplify this matching process I use a *Funder's Hierarchy of Needs* model (figure 1), adapted from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It is a tool for assessing the match between your organization, your project, and the funder's interests using those filters. Though it may force you to abandon about two-thirds of the funder targets that seemed like a good fit at first glance, the process helps you avoid wasted effort while fine-tuning your approach to the remaining funders. You will find that the Funder's Hierarchy of Needs chart and the Grant-Ready Checklist complement each other. Let's start at the bottom of the chart and work our way up. [3]

Organizational Mission

The first filter is a strong match between the applicant mission and the donor mission. This "mission match" is the trigger for any possible relationship with the funder. Does the applicant focus on work that is of equal importance to the donor? The donor may list its interests and include education, but its focus may be science not history. *Close is not good enough*. If the donor is interested in sustainable buildings, then token use of green construction materials is not a strong case for their capital support.

Location & Audience

Location: Many funders are specific about geography. Take them at their word, not their giving history. Their policy may allow a few friendly gifts to known groups outside the area, but the geographic restrictions are rigid for unknown applicants.

Audience: In most cases the funder has a specific population in mind already. Does your audience match the donor's? Can you demonstrate this? Ask groups if they are comfortable providing information on ages, income, etc. Or let the audience describe itself. Visitor or user surveys are the simplest way to learn who uses your services, and why. You can ask for zip or postal codes when people make purchases or register for programs. Remember, ethnicity is not the only way to describe audiences. Consider what categories make the most sense for your work, but imagine as widely as possible the types of information your funders will want to see.

Impact/Effect

The funder is only interested in awarding you a grant if your impact matches its intentions. To convince funders, you must describe your work three ways: scope, why you matter, and the difference you make.

Scope: Scope is about numbers. These do not have to be large, just appropriate and defensible. When you decide how many is right for your work, make sure the amount requested has the greatest impact possible. Make their money do more than teach one group or create one catalog. Extend the teaching by repeating or replicating the lesson, or helping others to do so. Use the images and text from the catalog to develop teacher manuals. The cost-efficiencies of implementing or reusing programs are often very important to your donor.

Tell Them Why You Matter: To attract funding you must fulfill a demonstrable need. Funders crave corroborating evidence to identify which needs are real and pressing. Prove the need with outside evidence of budget cuts, system failures, potential for loss or damage, or an unsolved issue. You may need to educate the donor on this topic—that's a good sign. When funders learn something new from your material, they often respond more favorably.

The Difference You Make: Sometimes you use numbers, sometimes descriptions of the experience, often

East Bay Newspapers

"When I reach out to grant organizations, I also try and lay out the incremental progress we have made with their past support. It's my opinion this strategy conveys a carefully developed thought process and plan on behalf of the board and the staff and serves to develop a track record with a foundation. With this approach we have been able to work with many funders on multiple projects including reconstructing a historic greenhouse, rehabilitating the historic carriage house, and maintaining the interior and exterior of the mansion at the highest level."

Karen Binder
Executive Director, Blithewold Mansion, Gardens, and Arboretum, Bristol, RI

both, to describe a difference. Visitor responses of "I never knew" are surefire ways to make a case for exhibits and programs on important topics. That difference is described through experience. Perhaps you are testing the efficacy of energy-efficient light bulbs in exhibit design. This difference is helping the museum field and will interest funders interested in the profession. In this case, qualitative and quantitative information will describe the difference you will make.

Let's stop here for a moment. Those three levels—mission, location, and audience, and impact and effect—are the gateway levels. If you and the funder match up on all three, then you can feel comfortable submitting an application; if not, do not apply. It is very tempting to tell yourself "Well, we're awfully close." *But that is not good enough.* Unless you have a personal invitation to apply, or you already know the donor very well, you must meet all three gateway categories completely on to make your proposal competitive.

When you are dead-on, it is time to assess your ability to differentiate yourself from the competition. The last two levels are where you demonstrate the quality of your organization and your programs, and show what edge you have over all other applicants. This is where your institution's character and talent shine through. At both levels, you can demonstrate quality and edge in different ways. You may have other equally appropriate ways to demonstrate these, but this describes three types for each category.

Quality

Value: Sometimes value is based on comparison. The funder needs to hear who else is doing similar or different work and why. For example, are there other historic sites addressing sustainable urban living? Are there other historic parks battling similar development issues? Has there not been an exhibit on the ethnic history of your neighborhood before? This takes some research and resourcefulness, but the information is necessary, anyway, in designing your project and working with your colleagues. By providing this information in the proposal, you make build the funder's confidence that you are the right one for this job.

Quality: Evaluation helps you demonstrate quality and value to funders and how you do your job well. If you are new to the evaluation process, take advantage of advice and examples from others. Choose evaluation tools or methods appropriate to your work and the information you need. You may use different ones for different programs. If the funder requests specific types of evaluation that do not suit your work, talk to the funder's staff about the formats you use. They may be very willing to accept them.

Financial Stability: Of course this is especially important today. Be ready to explain exactly how you fared during the recession, what choices you made and why, and the results. Then describe plans for the future. You must be able to convince a funder that you are a safe place to invest. If you cannot do that just yet, wait to apply until you do. Oh, I can hear you, "But I need money to be stable." That may be true, but that is not the funder's problem. What you need is a realistic financial plan to be stable—grants are the least reliable part of that plan. This makes your need for stability the weak spot in your case for grant support. When you are ready to apply, at least one paragraph in your proposal should describe this financial dependability because, with so many requests for support, most funders will choose the places where their money is safest and best-spent. That's why grant funding

"All this advance planning is really, really helpful and worthwhile—even if the grant doesn't pan out! I found that thinking through all the details of these projects helped us work out kinks in our initial planning or identify steps that we had forgotten about initially. I also really valued the opportunity to build relationships with contractors, consultants, and scholars. Through grant applications we were able to introduce Dumbarton House to more folks in the field, and identify a network of professionals who could prove useful on any number of future projects."

Karen Daly
Director, Dumbarton House, Headquarters for the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, Washington, DC

Dumbarton House/The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America comes in after family funding—the grantor does not know you the way your village knows you.

Edge

Edge is what sets you apart from other organizations and projects. An edge is critical in final decision making when many components are equal among the surviving proposals. Funders have the luxury of selecting only the best, or what they believe will be the best projects or organizations. You need not have all three of these edges, but having one can make the difference between a check or no check.

Charitable Edge: This is work that benefits others as well. If the local government agency helps you bring arts groups to your area, are some of the tickets free or priced so that disadvantaged groups can attend? Perhaps you can invite other nonprofits to use your newly finished meeting room at given times during the month, or allow a smaller museum's staff to use your new exhibit workshop? The charitable action should serve the donor's mission, yours, and the third party's. Take care not to create a management nightmare, but *do* try to extend the donor's gift in meaningful ways.

Professional Edge: This is work of such quality that it adds value and knowledge to the field. Is your project, which was once innovative, now so successful that others come to you for advice on replicating it? This is optimum performance. When you are performing at your best, let others know.

Innovative Edge: This is innovation on any scale, including your own scale. Describe how your actions or approach are innovative for you, your field, your audience. Are you resisting the trend of high ticket prices at new facilities by keeping a low fee or even reducing it? Have you chosen an unusual focus or audience for your work?

Confirming with the Funder/ Prioritizing Your Work

After you've done all your online, arms-length research, talk with the donor before you write a full proposal. There are two ways to do this. You can call directly, or you could also take a moment to speak with a representative during a Meet-the-Donor event held by your local grantmakers agency (or during some other event where a representative is approachable for brief private discussions). Do not write any proposals if the funder says, "Well, you can still apply" or "I wouldn't discourage anyone from applying, but…" If they give that response, there just is not enough interest on their end for you to invest the time in a proposal.

For phone calls, it is appropriate for the proposal writer, director, development manager, or a board member to represent the institution. If someone "in the family" know the funder well, that person can make the initial call on your behalf. Prepare the caller to describe the project accurately and engagingly, and to respond to a variety of questions beyond the basics. Remind the caller to take careful notes for you. Take just fifteen minutes of the funder's time to check to make sure your idea is worth your proposal-writing time and their proposal-reading time.

So, once you have a few good matches between funders and your projects or program, how do you decide which to do when? Consider all these variables as you prioritize your proposal-writing time:

- The importance of the project and finding outside funding for it
- How good you feel your chances are, based on your call to the funder
- The amount of time required to prepare the proposal and if you can reuse much of the information for other proposals

Write the most important ones with strong matches, for sure. Do the less important or weaker matches only if you can reuse the proposal text for other funders or similar projects. Then your potential

Lori DeSantis

The 1760 Loring-Greenough House sits on two acres of heritage landscape in the middle of the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. The Jamaica Plain Tuesday Club (JPTC) acquired the house in 1924 to save it from demolition and redevelopment. Thereafter through most of the twentieth century, the house served as a kind of club house without the community outreach that has well-served other historic house organizations. Following a 2008 strategic plan, a 2010 grants plan, and the institution of a robust grants program, the JPTC's efforts around programming and audience development have resulted in increases in volunteerism and use of the property by community members.

return on effort invested is a bit better. Here are some examples of how the triage might evolve:

Funder	Match	Chances	Effort	Decision
#1	Very strong	Decent	New Proposal	Yes
#2	Stong	Good	Adapt Existing	Definitely
#3	Okay	Okay (chances can never be better than the "match")	New or existing	No–not even if you use a near-exact copy of an existing proposal. This just tells the funder you don't know what you are doing
#4	Strong	Strong	New Proposal	Yes, if the project is a top priority.

Conclusion

Hopefully you are now raring to go with a few direct hits. I'll send you off with a few proposal development tips.

A few How-To's:

- Read the directions—twice. Highlight the important bits, and do exactly as they say. Add nothing extra because they will not read it.
- If you have questions, call and ask the funder. They really are there to help.
- Write in your own voice; "grant-ese" bores funders as much as it bores writers
- If you're worried about your writing, ask a colleague or two to read and comment.

And a few To-Do's and To-Dont's:

- Do consider grants as only a part of your institutional fundraising effort, never the focus—they are just too variable
- Do start with simple grant applications to funders in your immediate area. You can move on to more complex projects and proposals with other funders once you have shown you can attract grants and fulfill the responsibilities.
- Do not write one proposal and send it to many funders. Each proposal must be a targeted writing effort, and only 50 percent of any proposal text may apply to any other funders. Besides, funders can tell when you use the scattershot approach and they will not be impressed.

Success rates vary widely based on institutional maturity, local conditions, and the variations in funder resources and motivation, so develop your own guidelines for success. For a new grant program I tend to consider 50 percent yes/no success rate as very acceptable. For an established program 75 percent to 90 percent is my goal. Results outside the parameters require a grant program review—should you stretch further, should you change your writing approach, should you identify new funders, should you give some a rest? Your grant development program requires management, just as all your other efforts, but at least it gets easier the more you do it.

Sarah S. Brophy is an author, and a long-time grant writer for museums, zoos, gardens, and historic sites. In addition to *Is Your Museum Grant-Ready?* She is also co-author of *The Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice.* Write her at sarah@bmuse.net and www.bmuse.net.

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Credits

Some parts of this article first appeared in *Is Your Museum Grant-Ready? Assessing Your Organization's Potential for Funding* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005). They are reused here with permission.

[1] American Association for State and Local History, *Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations Workbook* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History), 248.

[2] See www.greenguestbook.com for an easy way to do this.

[3] I understand that Abraham Maslow's approach has been successfully challenged, but this hierarchy works for me. Converting this to a flow chart or decision tree would work as well.