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American Association for State and Local History

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Historic House Museums

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE AASLH HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS AFFINITY GROUP

Issue 2, July 2011

Historic House Museum Affinity Group Survey Follow-up

You may recall participating in a survey from the Historic House Museum affinity group about a year ago. In an effort to better serve our community, we asked a large group of AASLH contacts to give us feedback. Questions asked about the visibility of the group, its webpage, listserv, and programs such as the Historic House Museum breakfast at the annual meeting.

From the survey we learned that many people were not aware of the affinity group's existence, or if they knew about us, they thought that there was a cost associated with joining or in signing up for the listserv. We also asked what we could do as a group to make a difference in support of our constituents. By far the greatest need was for written information – articles, technical leaflets, webinars, and blogs. This quarterly newsletter is a direct result of that survey.

If you would like to view the results of the survey, [click here](#).

The affinity group committee is currently conducting a brief follow-up survey that seeks to expand on our knowledge of those of you in our online community. We want to find out if the word has spread about the group and it's free offerings. And we want to hear more about specific topics that we can cover in the upcoming year to best help you who are working in all the historic house museums across the country.

[Click here to take the survey](#). Responses will be collected until **August 15**.

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History News Your Turn!

AASLH invites you to join the [AASLH History News Online Community](#). This free site features select articles from the latest issue of *History News* and invites their authors to expand on the topic and pose

As you will see below, evaluation of our “visitors,” “constituents,” or “followers,” will help us to keep you at the center of what we do. If we know what you like and do not like, what is relevant to you and why, we can do a much better job of providing that information.

Kendra Dillard, Chair, Historic House Museum Affinity Committee
Director of Exhibits
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Why Visitors Rule

There is a lot of recent information that puts the visitor at the center of what we do in museums, and by extension, historic house museums. With house museums looking for ways to remain sustainable, it can be beneficial to pay attention to how other historic organizations are making the visitor the center of attention. By giving visitors the experience that they want we can strengthen our programs both interpretively and financially.

Under the rubric of audience evaluation, museums and historic sites are seeking feedback from their customers. Whether in the form of a formal survey, visitor observation, focus groups, or on the floor testing of new exhibits or programs, there is much we can learn if we ask. Many articles, websites, blogs, and books offer information about visitor-centric tours and programs. Here are several of my favorites in no particular order.

1. [Visitors Studies Association](#) - From their website: “VSA is today’s premier professional organization focusing on all facets of the visitor experience in museums, zoos, nature centers, visitor centers, historic sites, parks and other informal learning settings. We’re committed to understanding and enhancing visitor experiences in informal learning settings through research, evaluation, and dialogue.” This website has a wealth of useful information including a bibliography for further reading.

2. [About Putting People First](#) - “This non-commercial experience design gateway is developed as a public service to all those interested in the broader field of experience design and user-centered design. All posts have in common that they reveal some insight on how to create products and services that are driven by an understanding of people.”

3. [Article about training volunteers and guides](#) from the National Park Service to put the visitor first - from InsideNPS.gov June 28, 2010.

questions to the field for further discussion.

The current topics are of special interest to the historic house community. They include **"Can We Make Historic House Museums Sustainable?"** and **"Washington Slept Here? Upsetting the Narrative Apple Cart at Historic Sites."**

We encourage you to visit the website, read the articles, and jump into the conversation. We want to hear your opinion and what you are doing at your historic site.

About the AASLH Historic House Affinity Group

Please feel free to forward this e-mail to colleagues. [Click here for more Historic House resources.](#)

To sign up to receive future issues of *Historic House Museum Affinity Group News*, join the AASLH Historic House Museum Affinity Group. **The Affinity Group is not a membership organization and there is no fee to join.** However, you will need to create a username and password and share your basic contact information. Go to the [historic house webpage](#) and click on **"Join the Historic House Affinity Group"** link at the top of the page and then on "Don't have a Login? Click here."

4. [Why Listen to Your Visitor?](#) by Minda Borun, The Franklin Institute and Museum Solutions. This website has many different levels to explore.

5. Family Learning Forum, Encouraging Family Learning in Museums, a project of the USS Constitution Museum. A resource for museum professionals to explore family learning! The types of evaluation HHMs can use for their programs or exhibits are delineated here by the USS Constitution Museum Team:

- [Front-End Evaluation](#)
- [Formative Evaluation](#)
- [Summative Evaluation](#)
- [Timing and Tracking: How Do Visitors Use Your Exhibitions?](#)

6. A book by Nina Simon, [The Participatory Museum](#), is a practical guide to working with community members and visitors to make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant, essential places. The complete text of the book is available for free online.

7. Finally, AASLH offers [Visitors' Voices](#), another AASLH affinity group for anyone interested in visitor data and evaluation.

If you would like more newsletter articles from the Historic House Museum Committee including information on such topics as making meaning, using social media, the Rembrandt rule, etc. please make your request on the listserv. To subscribe to the listserv, click on the following link - <http://www.aaslh.org/hhlistserv.htm>

Kendra Dillard, Chair, Historic House Museum Affinity Committee
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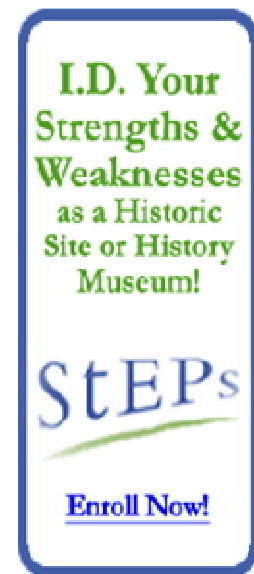


For more information about all of AASLH's programs and services, visit <http://aaslh.org/>

AASLH Membership

Not an **AASLH** member? [Check out benefits that our members enjoy.](#)

AASLH is the ONLY national organization dedicated to the field of state and local history. It is a membership association - A home for institutions and people who work in the field of state and local history. AASLH provides leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful.



Historic House Affinity Group Activities at the 2011 Annual Meeting

We hope you are planning on joining us in Richmond for the **2011 AASLH Annual Meeting on September 14-17**. Here are some of the highlights for historic house museum staff and volunteers. Remember, early bird registration ends on **July 29!**

- **Premeeting Workshop**-Preserving, Restoring, and Managing the Historic Landscape
- **Session**-Interpreting Divergent Voices and Challenging Narratives
- **Session**-New Beginnings: Historic House Museums Adapt for the Future
- **Session**-Closing a House Museum: From Lemons to Lemonade
- **Session**-Finding a Sustainable House Museum Environment
- **Session**-Hands-On vs. Hands-Off: The Rembrandt Rule Revisited
- **Session**-Sustainable Preservation: Balancing Collections, Resources, and the Environment
- **Session**-Beyond Numbers: What Does Success Look Like?
- **Session**-The Challenges and Opportunities of Interpreting African American History at Historic Places
- **Session**-How Do You Use the Collection at Your Historic House?
- **Post-Conference Lab**-Green Makeover-Environmental Sustainability at Historic Properties

We also would like to invite you to our annual **Historic House Museums Breakfast** on Friday, September 16. Dr. Laurie Ossman, Director of Woodlawn and Frank Lloyd Wright's Pope-Leighey House will describe a partnership with Arcadia, a start-up nonprofit, to revision a historic site as a center for sustainable agriculture.

For full session descriptions and to register, visit the [AASLH Annual Meeting website](#).



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