

To receive email from Bethany Hawkins, add hawkins@aaslh.org to your [safe sender list](#)

[View as Web Page](#)

[Send to a History Lover](#)

[American Association for State and Local History](#)

American Association for State and Local History

# Big Ideas for Small Museums

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE AASLH SMALL MUSEUMS AFFINITY GROUP

Volume 8, July 2012

About Us

To view past issues, visit the [AASLH Small Museums](#) webpage.

## Are You Listening to the Echo?

*By Tony Vann, President, Vann & Associates*

Ever find yourself in a cave or canyon? What is the first thing you do? If you are like me, you yell to see if there is an echo. Imagine if you were at the edge of a canyon and instead of yelling and waiting for the echo, you just yelled repeatedly over and over again. Sounds crazy right?

Often, museums are caught in a similar situation when developing a communication plan. Short-staffed and often under-resourced, today's nonprofits and museums may only sit down once to develop an annual communications plan. After they check the plan off their "to-do" list, the advertising is placed, press releases are on auto pilot, and the plan is forgotten until next year. They never stop to hear the echo.

Today, consumers are techno-savvy and message-critical. Sending out the same advertisement, announcement, or letter simply won't do. Young audiences want interactivity, buy-in, and value. Compare your last three years of communications plans. Do you find yourself in a rut? Try some of these tips to bring some excitement back into your messaging:

- **Bring your kids to work.** They will let you know exactly what they think. Have them tour your location and fill out some easy questions. Most of all, take what they say to heart. They might be eighth graders today, but in seven years you will be begging their age-group for attendance.
- **Turn your museum inside out.** Can you communicate the amazing exhibits within to the outside world? Remember, interactivity and value are keys to capturing the next generation. Find a hook to bring young families into the museum.
- **Build buzz.** Sometimes the best way to get the buzz going is to create it yourself. Utilize your strengths by sharing strategic messages via media like YouTube

**Big Ideas for Small Museum** is a quarterly email just for people who work in small museums. Through this publication, the AASLH Small Museums Committee shares resources that are pre-tested and approved by actual small museum professionals. The articles are brief and practical - giving you the shortcuts you need when don't have enough time, money, or people.

## AASLH Resources

To sign up to receive Big Ideas for Small Museums, join the AASLH Small Museums Affinity Group. The Affinity Group is not a membership organization and there is no fee to join. Go to the [Small Museums](#) webpage and click on "Join the Small Museums Affinity Group" at the top.



**[JOIN AASLH TODAY!](#)**

Not an **AASLH** member? Check out benefits that our members enjoy.

**AASLH** is the ONLY national organization

and Facebook. A creative contest with prizes can ensure more exposure to potential new visitors.

- **Listen for the echo.** Track your campaigns. Buying or sending out information without tracking the return on investment is nothing more than lazy. Take the time to add color, another telephone number, or QR code to differentiate which campaigns are working.

Communication plans should be a map outlining media relations, advertising, and marketing strategy. Along the way, a variety of layered tactics, coupled with tracking methods, should enable the plan not only to be executed, but result in answers. Honest feedback will ultimately reverberate into the sweet sound of echoes for years to come.

## RESOURCES

*To learn more about communications strategy and plans:*

- [Communications Planning: Getting the Right Messages Across in the Right Way](#)
- [Communication Plan and Communication Strategy Templates](#)

*To learn more about social media contests:*

- ["The Spirit of Sharing"](#) from *New York Times* museum special section
- [How to Run a Successful Social Media Contest](#)
- [10 Steps to Create Social Media Contests, How to Do and Not Do a Contest](#)

*Tony Vann is the President of Vann & Associates, a full-service public relations and marketing firm based in Oklahoma City. Vann & Associates has been assisting the Oklahoma Museums Association this year with their 40th anniversary campaign which includes posters, social media contest, print, and more. Vann has served in high-profile capacities including the Oklahoma House of Representatives, the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation, the Office of Lt. Governor Mary Fallin and Frontier Country Marketing Association.*

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.



Small Museum Toolkit now available at [AltaMira Press](#)

## AASLH Annual Meeting Registration Now Open

**Thursday, October 4 is Small Museums Day!**

Registration is now open for the [2012 AASLH Annual Meeting](#) in Salt Lake City, UT, on October 3-6.

There are many great sessions geared toward small museums, especially on Thursday which is designated as Small Museums Day. Visit the [AASLH website](#) to download a PDF of the preliminary program guide or to register today.



**AASLH**  
American Association  
for State and Local History

1717 Church Street, Nashville, TN 37203 - 2991 | 615-320-3203 | Fax: 615-327-9013  
E-Mail: [membership@aslh.org](mailto:membership@aslh.org) | ©2010 AASLH