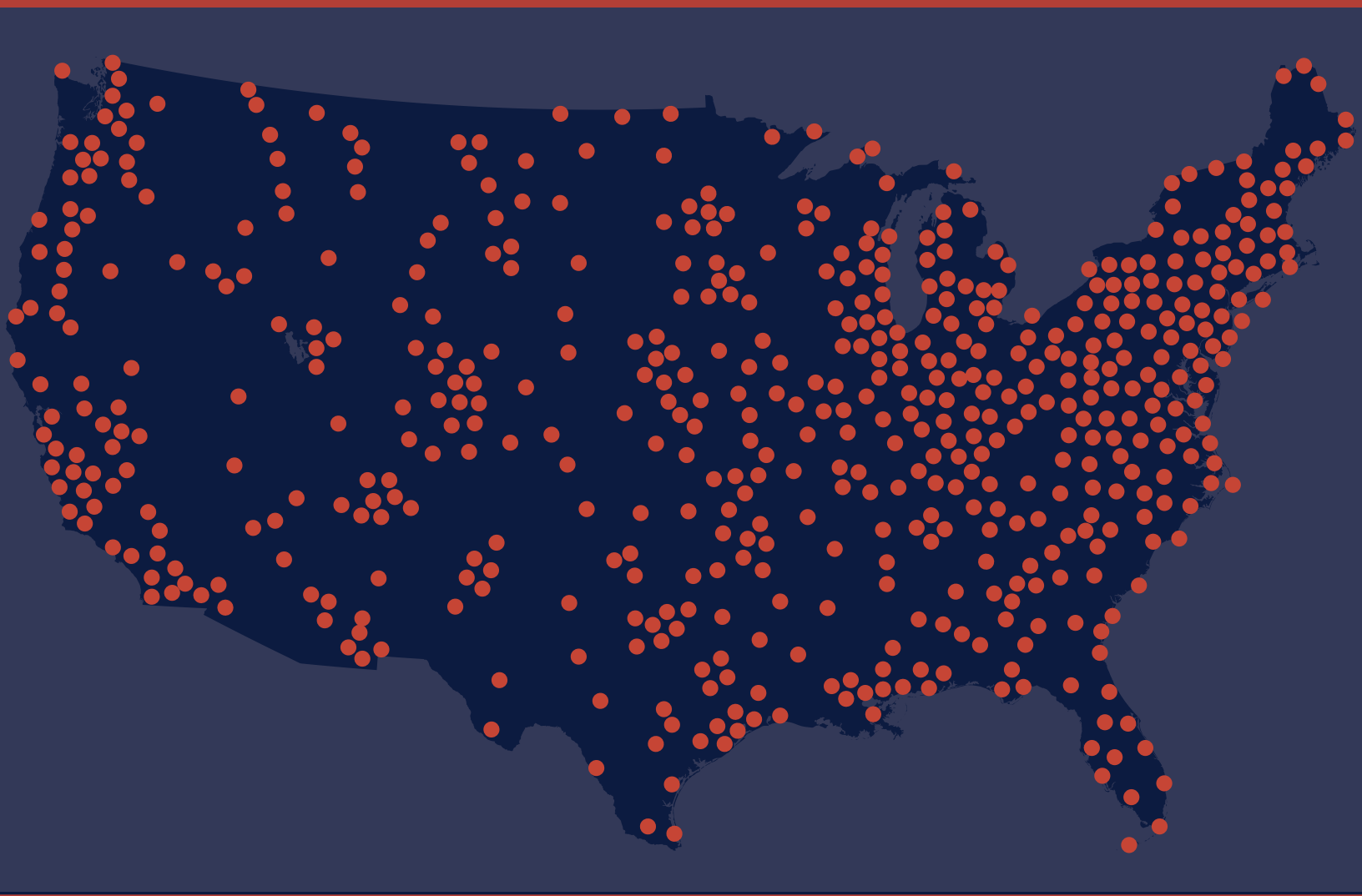# 2022 National Census of History Organizations:

A Report on the History Community in the United States

by Carole Rosenstein, PhD and Neville Vakharia

AASLH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
for STATE *and* LOCAL HISTORY

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), a national nonprofit association, provides leadership and resources to help the history community thrive and make the past more meaningful for all people. AASLH serves the tens of thousands of history organizations, professionals, and volunteers around the country who help people of all ages develop critical thinking skills and understand how learning history helps society make progress toward justice. Through research, advocacy, and our field-leading professional development program, AASLH advances public history practice and connects history practitioners to critical issues in the field and to one another.

2022 National Census of History Organizations: A Report on the History Community in the United States

The research team:

Carole Rosenstein, PhD, Principal Investigator
   Professor of Arts Management, George Mason University
Neville Vakharia, Senior Research Analyst
   Associate Dean for Research and Planning, Drexel University
   Associate Professor of Arts Administration & Museum Leadership

Rachel Vest, Research Associate
Christina Papanicolaou, Research Associate
Eric Thornton, Research Assistant
Alexandra Mattson, Research Assistant

How many history organizations are there in the United States?

I t seems like a simple question, but it is remarkably difficult to answer it with precision. Understanding the size and scope of our field, however, is essential for demonstrating the impact of our work. That's why, over the past two years, the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and in collaboration with field-leading researchers, took on this question and produced the *2022 National Census of History Organizations*. In the report that follows, our researchers share the major findings from this effort, offering the most detailed analysis of the U.S. history community in decades.

Put simply, this research reveals that history organizations are *everywhere*, encompassing a broad array of institution types, structures, and sizes. Through careful work with a wide range of data sources, the "History Census" has identified more than 21,000 history organizations in the United States—more than all other museum types combined. From the smallest local historical societies—and there are a lot of them!—to the very largest museums, history institutions are ubiquitous, often serving communities

other arts, culture, and humanities institutions struggle to reach. This research helps make clear the vast and varied nature of the history community in the United States and the incredible reach of our institutions.

The "History Census" provides a snapshot of the U.S. history community at a crucial point for the field and the country. Most of the data used in our research reflects a period before the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a baseline to revisit in future years to assess the impact extended closures and other shifts have had on the field. Looking to the future, the History Census also helps us understand the makeup of the field in advance of the country's 250th anniversary in 2026. Nearly fifty years ago, the Bicentennial era spawned thousands of new museums, historical societies, and preservation efforts. Returning to this research in the years after 2026 will enable us to assess the impact of the Semiquincentennial.

The National Census of History Organizations also points the way toward new research. *How can we best provide resources to support the staff and volunteers at such a large number of history organizations?* How can we use the History Census as a tool to assess and address issues of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in the public history and museum field? What are the biggest challenges currently facing institutions both large and small? While this report offers several recommendations based on the analysis presented here, it also provides a jumping-off point for many other questions about the scope of our field and the role of history institutions in American life.

> **The 2022 History Census identified 21,588 history organizations in the United States.**

I believe this report will equip history professionals, researchers, and advocates everywhere with new, high-quality data to support their work. From grant proposals to advocacy to community partnerships, I expect this national assessment of the size and scope of our field will be useful to history organizations of all kinds and all sizes. By demonstrating the reach of our field, along with some of the major challenges we face, this research will empower history practitioners to more effectively make the case for the essential nature of our work and the need for continued support.

John Garrison Marks, PhD
Director, AASLH Public History Research Lab

Introduction

The 2022 *National Census of History Organizations*—hereafter the "2022 History Census" or "History Census"—is the first national effort to produce an up-to-date, comprehensive, and high-quality data file of history, historic preservation, and history-related organizations and historic sites in the public and nonprofit sectors of the United States.

Prior to this research effort, the U.S. history community lacked a way to assess the overall development of the subsector above, benchmark its basic characteristics, locate strengths and gaps, and compare the subsector to other, related fields. The 2022 History Census represents an important step toward these capabilities. Every field or industry needs to know this basic sort of information in order to establish priorities and addresses weaknesses. This is particularly important in fields like history that serve fundamental public purposes.

In that spirit, we have deliberately chosen to call this project a "census." Similar to what the U.S. Census Bureau does for the U.S. population at large, the goal of the History Census is to provide timely, accurate, high-quality information about the scope and characteristics of the history subsector in the United States. Like the Census, we approached this research effort to uncover trends about this complex field,

> **The History Census is a snapshot in time at a critical moment for the field.**

make information about history organizations more accessible and actionable, and inform decisions about how to improve the allocation and distribution of resources, training, and services for U.S. history organizations. The History Census is a snapshot in time at a critical moment for the field, assessing the scope of the history community before the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are reflected in the data and before the U.S. Semiquincentennial alters the size and scope of the field.

It is important to register, though, that while we call this study a *census*, it was conducted primarily through work with the very best, already-existing lists of history organizations produced by federal agencies, national associations, state-level institutions, and others. Collection of new data for the History Census was limited, and we did not go out to "knock on doors" to find new institutions. Nevertheless, we believe the high-quality character of the list we have compiled offers the clearest picture of the U.S. public history community yet available. *Please see "How we built the History Census" below for more detailed information about the methodology behind the History Census.*

The 2022 History Census identified 21,588 history organizations in the United States. Together, these entities make up the vast majority of the country's public history infrastructure. The organizations included in the History Census are:

- nonprofit and public sector history museums;
- nonprofit historical societies, historic preservation organizations, and other history-related organizations;
- historical societies that are a part of state, county, or local government; and
- historic sites that are administered in the public sector by a state park system or a state government historical society.

If there was any doubt that history organizations are necessary and wanted, it was dispelled in this research. Everywhere we looked, people had formed a history organization of some kind or other. They are astonishingly widespread and various.

This research reveals not only that there are many more history organizations than previous efforts have identified, but that they hold a unique place within the arts and culture sector. Among the major findings of this analysis of the 2022 History Census:

> **If there was any doubt that history organizations are necessary and wanted, it was dispelled in this research.**

- History organizations are ubiquitous in the United States, with a presence in nearly every community around the country. History organizations exist even in places that often are underserved by other arts and culture organizations.
- Public history operates through a deep and distinct hybrid model, a partnership between government and private nonprofits. This hybridity is a source of strength for the field, but also poses challenges for data collection, comparison, and collaboration across different communities and states.
- Engagement with and access to history is imbued with a sense of public purpose. All sorts of organizations—from the smallest to the largest, within the discipline and outside of it—place community and public benefit at the center of the ways in which they define their work.

In the analysis that follows, we provide additional details about each of these findings. We hope that this report helps history practitioners, researchers, and advocates to better understand what makes the history community unique and the ways we can strengthen it moving forward.

THE COUNT

We have a high level of confidence in the scope of the History Census—it has been carefully deduplicated and cleaned to ensure that each record belongs to an organization that:

1. has a primary or substantial mission related to history;
2. has recently filed IRS paperwork (if required); and
3. shows evidence of being actively engaged in programming or other mission-related activity in or around the years 2020–21.

The count should be regarded as conservative. Researchers erred on the side of **removing** the records of organizations that appeared to be engaged in work that is not primarily history-related or that appear to be defunct. We have a high level of confidence that the counts in this census represent a *floor* rather than a *ceiling* in terms of the population of history organizations in the United States.

History organizations are ubiquitous around the nation.

History organizations can be found everywhere. From urban centers to rural outposts, history organizations exist in just about every community around the country. Even in places with relatively sparse populations, history organizations provide a basic level of service and access to members of the American public, preserving structures and artifacts, hosting public exhibitions and programs, and providing opportunities for community members to share an appreciation for the past.

In general, the presence of history organizations aligns with the population: the more people we find in a state, the more organizations we will tend to find there. That is what we would expect since organizations typically emerge in response to on-the-ground needs and activities (unless some sort of systemic barrier gets in the way). Where there is more need and more activity, we would expect to see the development of more organizations.

That is very clearly the case when we look at the distribution of history organizations. Figure 3, a map that shows the density of history organizations, very closely mirrors what you would see on any map of the U.S. population: highest numbers in California, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Florida; lower

numbers in the Dakotas, Montana, and Vermont. From this point of view, there may be something of an underpopulation of history organizations in Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and Florida.

What is striking about the distribution of history organizations, however, is that even in places where populations are low, we still find a comparatively large number of organizations (see Figure 4). The widespread distribution of history organizations ensures that needs for historical services and programs can be met, at least at a basic level, everywhere in the country, even where there are relatively few people. This pattern is unusual in the broader arts, culture, and humanities sector—the industry sector where history sits—where we tend to find parts of the country underserved. The ubiquity of history organizations in the United States enables them to serve populations and communities more comprehensively than their counterparts in other subsectors.

Among arts and culture organizations, history is distinctive in its ubiquity. One reason for the striking reach of history organizations may be that the subsector features markedly strong partnerships between government and nonprofits.

Figure 1: Comparison of History Organizations to Other Entities

In the United States there are:

21,588 History Organizations

16,607 Public Libraries

15,188 Starbucks

13,452 McDonald's

4,668 Walmarts

Figure 2: Map of History Organizations
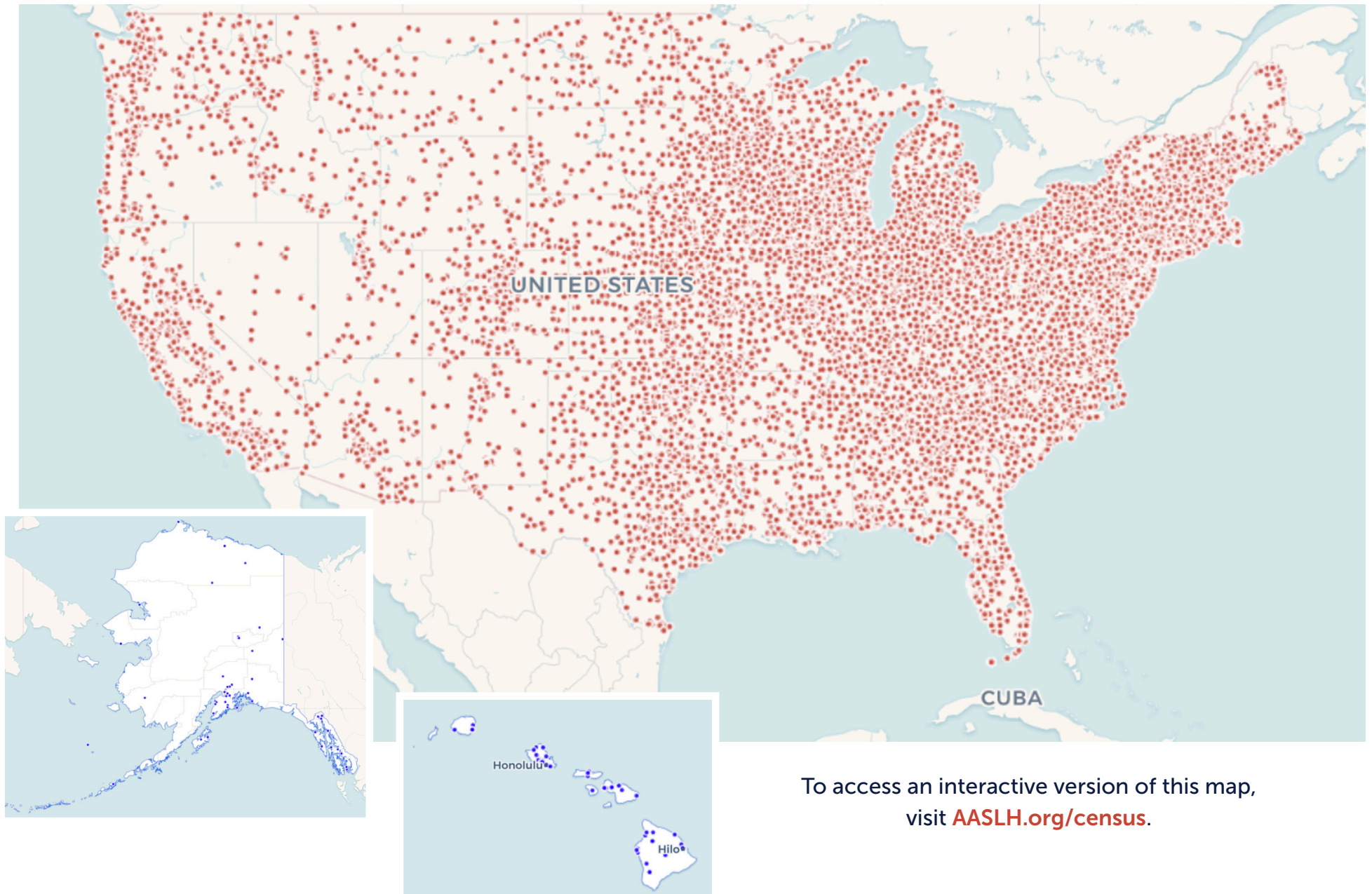
To access an interactive version of this map,
visit **AASLH.org/census**.

Figure 3: Density of History Organizations by State

78   423 (Avg)   1,306

Figure 4: History Organizations per 100,000 People, by State

2.6   10.5 (Avg)   40.8

History is deeply and distinctly hybrid, a partnership of government and nonprofits.

More than any other subsector in the arts, culture, and humanities, public history is maintained through a partnership between government and nonprofits. On the one hand, history work of variou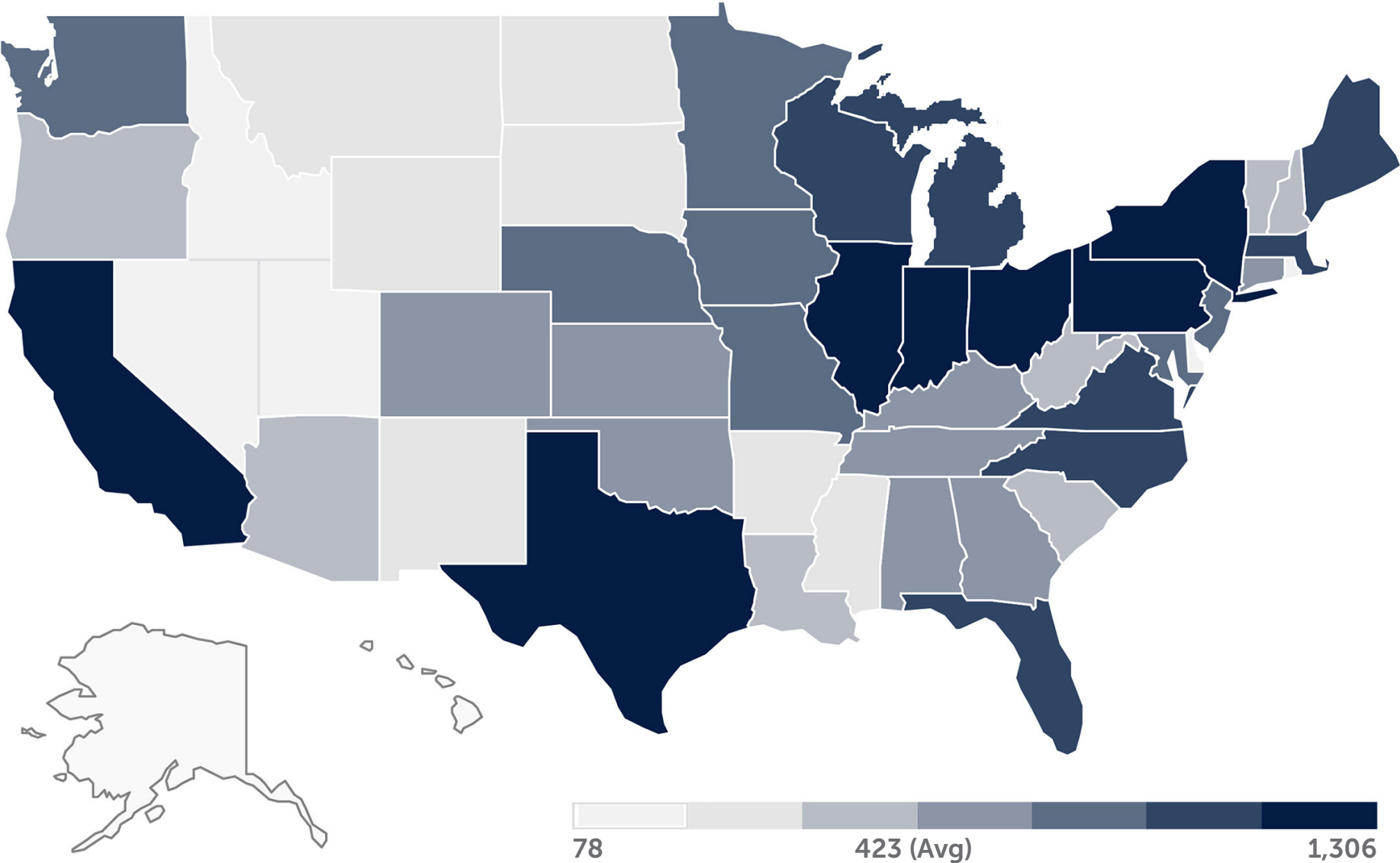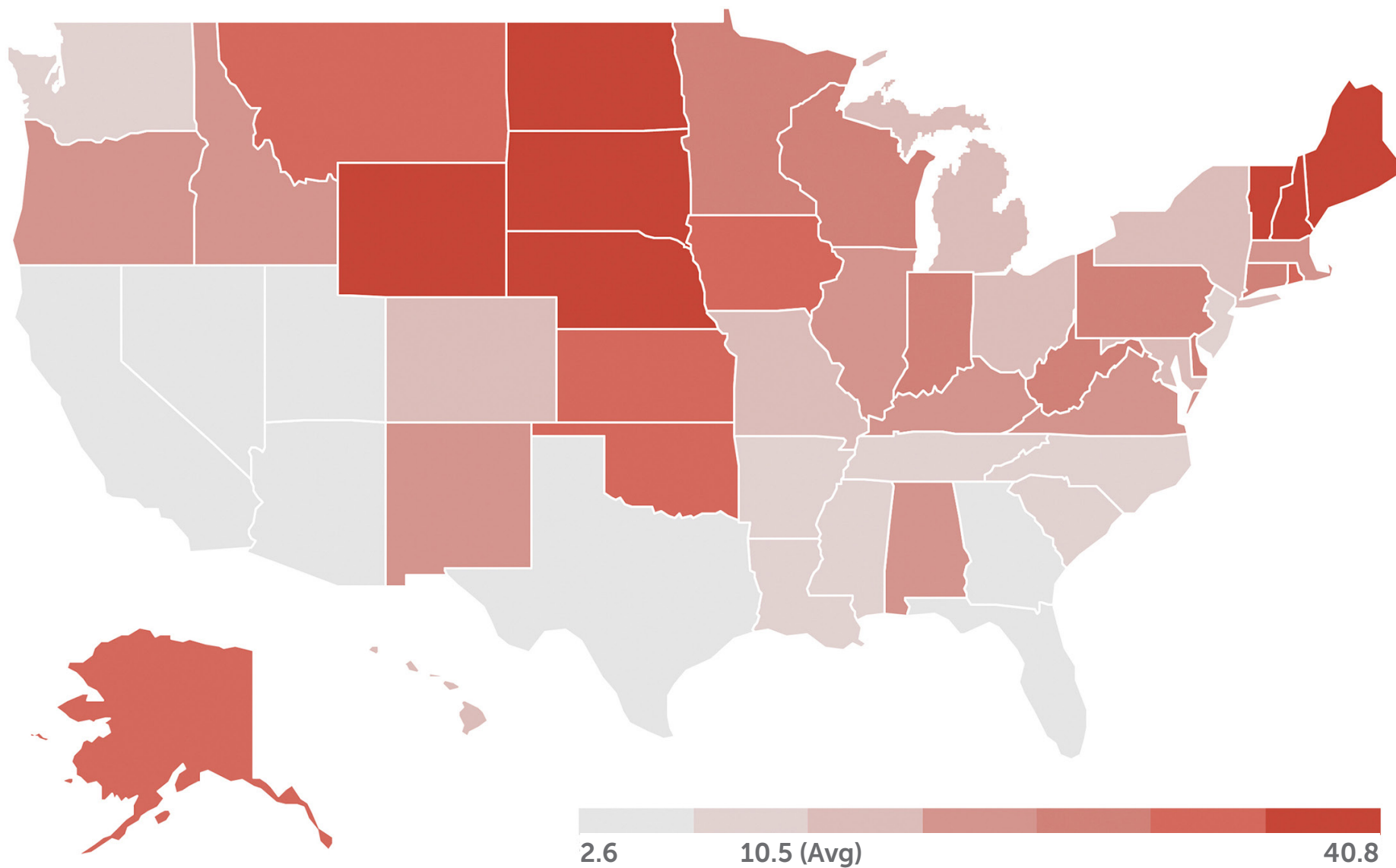s kinds is carried out by government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. In government, parks departments and historic preservation offices from federal to local engage in stewardship, research, and programming. Many state history museums operate as a part of state government; some local history museums do as well. Some state and county historical societies—multi-functional entities that carry out a range of overlapping history programs and services, including exhibits, publications, public programs, historic preservation, historic sites, and more—are included within government structures in many states.

At the same time, many historic sites, historic preservation organizations, history museums, and historical societies—at least two-thirds of the U.S. history organizations in this History Census—operate as private nonprofits. These institutions run the gamut from large museums that are national in scope to intensely local historical societies maintained with few funds and the energy of volunteers. It also includes a number of nonprofit state historical societies and other state-level entities that carry out functions similar to those of their state government counterparts.

Many institutions blur the lines between "public" and "private," defying easy categorization. Even where history is taken up by private nonprofits, for example, it is often the case that these organizations have close ties with government entities. Private nonprofits hold government contracts, receive significant public funding, or enter into other sorts of long-lasting partnerships with government entities. Other public agencies, meanwhile, are only partially funded through government appropriation, making up the difference through earned income and private fundraising. We also find that hybrid organizations of a variety of kinds have important roles in the subsector. For example, in the field of historic preservation, we find many, many Historic Preservation Commissions led by private citizen appointees rather than civil servants or elected members. Yet these commissions still fulfill government functions, such as formulating regulations in order to implement law.

There are many strengths to be found in a system that is so characteristically hybrid. As a part of government, history can tap government's nationwide infrastructure, financial resources, ability to share expertise, wide-reaching communications capacity, and regulatory authority and instruments. And of course, some of the most important parts of the patrimony or shared inheritance are owned by government and so are best overseen by civil servants working within government and in the public interest. To this, nonprofits contribute diversity, innovation, expertise, relative flexibility and

responsiveness, and additional financial and material resources from wealthy donors, volunteers, and a dedicated workforce that often will accept wages and other benefits at lower rates than we would find in government or the for-profit sector.

At the same time, such hybridity can make fieldwide action difficult since professional networks may not integrate across sectors and entities may come into competition for resources or authority. Government employees managing historical resources within public parks agencies, for example, often encounter difficulty explaining the nature of their work in professional communities more focused on natural preservation and recreation.

The fact that even within government, the configuration of history and historic preservation entities is quite different across states means that even figuring out who to communicate with can be vexing and make inter-state collaborations difficult. This would hinder, for example, a national effort to provide public history grants to states, because differences between state-level history infrastructure makes categorically identifying an appropriate state-level recipient very difficult.

The management of historic site systems offers a prime example of these challenges. For this study, we sought to find historic sites run by a state government historical society or a state park. As government owned and operated entities, these historic sites tend not to be included in readily available data sources that focus primarily on nonprofits; for the 2022 History Census, we wanted to ensure historic sites embedded within government agencies were counted.

Looking state-to-state, however, we found no regularity in the composition or con-figuration of departments and offices that oversee historic sites. In many states, the state park system does oversee historic sites, in others it does not, and in still others management of historic sites spans multiple agencies. Historic sites that are a part of state government are overseen by a range of entities: tourism offices and commis-sions; historic preservation divisions; state history museums; historical societies; departments of historical and cultural affairs; and natural resources departments.

It was interesting to find that in some circumstances, the primary state-level contact we could identify had a good deal of trouble even understanding the question we were asking about whether they administer historic sites and which sites they have responsibility for. Many history administrators at the state-level confused our query with a question about all sites of historic significance in a state (i.e., as having to do with the National Register). Or they seemed incredulous that, for example, a state government historical society would own or operate historic sites at all.

The hybrid governance structures of history organizations—coupled with the lack of consistency between states—poses a major challenge for data collection in the sub-sector. This set of challenges made the present research effort particularly important.

UNDERSTANDING NONPROFIT DATA

Although it does include both nonprofit and public sector organizations, at least two-thirds of the history organizations in the 2022 History Census are private nonprofits. The Census enables us to draw out details about the field's many private nonprofit organizations and to describe more accurately than ever some baseline characteristics of the history subsector. The analysis and description on pages 15–18 does not include history organizations operated as part of government, nor those embedded within parent organizations; nevertheless, it provides the most thorough assessment of the U.S. nonprofit history subsector possible with currently available data.

In the United States, organizations requesting tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) are required to provide certain types of data to the U.S. government to verify that they are engaged in tax-exempt activities and to provide an annual accounting of their financial activities. Organizations applying for tax-exempt status—most commonly under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code—must demonstrate that they are "organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes," a requirement that involves selecting the organization's core purpose from the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE).[1] NTEE codes have broad classifications (A for "Arts, Culture, & Humanities," B for "Education," and so forth) as well as more specific categories within them: A54 for "History Museum," A82 for "Historical Society & Historic Preservation," along with hundreds of others.

Once an organization has received exempt status, they are provided with an Employer Identification Number (EIN) (regardless of whether or not they presently employ professional staff) and are thereafter required to annually file a financial return with the IRS. Organizations with annual revenues of less than $50,000 are simply required to submit Form 990-N—the "postcard"—which states that the organization continues to be actively engaged in exempt activities and certifies that they are below the threshold that would require a more complete financial filing. All other organizations file some iteration of the IRS Form 990 with a more detailed accounting of their finances.

Together, these forms of data—classification identifiers in the form of NTEE codes, the unique identifier of an EIN, and the financial information on the IRS Forms 990—provide powerful tools for describing the characteristics of any nonprofit subsector. The History Census has used these data, made available through the National Center for Charitable Statistics, to conduct the analysis that follows.
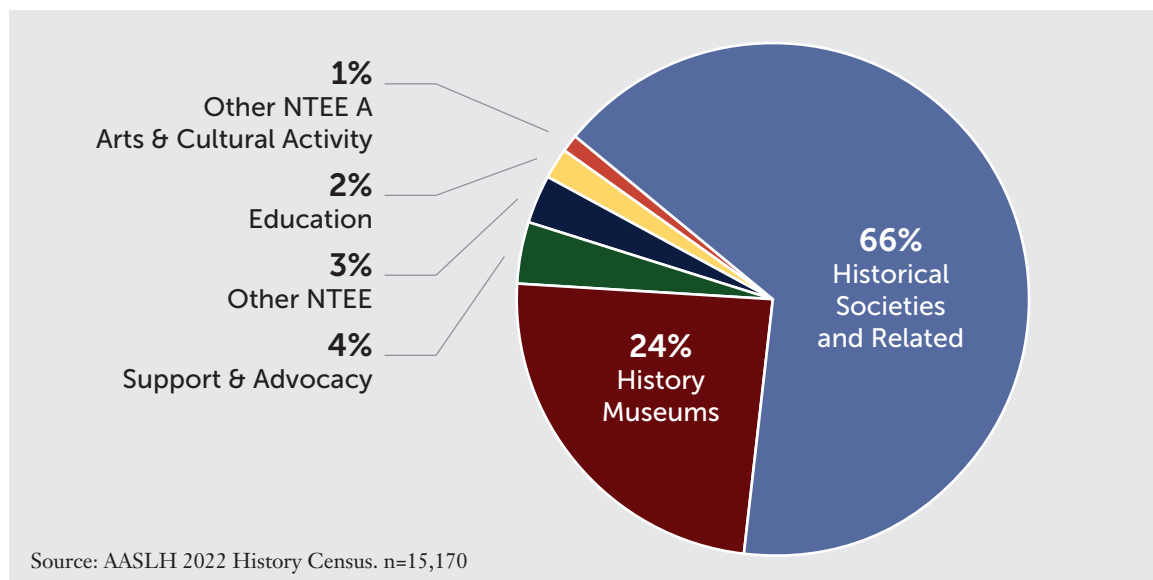
---

[1]   See https://nccs.urban.org/publication/irs-activity-codes.

Basic characteristics of nonprofit history organizations.

Of the 21,588 records in the History Census, 16,149 of them include an EIN; of those, 15,170 (94 percent) also include an NTEE code. The great majority that have both an EIN and an NTEE code (14,444) are classified under NTEE code "A" for "Arts, Culture, & Humanities." The relatively few remaining organizations that have an EIN and an NTEE but are not coded under "A" are most frequently classified as NTEE "B" organizations, for "Education." It is interesting to note that some of the organizations in the data file are coded with an NTEE A code in the artistic disciplines, such as "performing arts center" or "art museum." The great majority of these are arts organizations that own and have refurbished an historic property. They are included in the data file because they engage in significant historical preservation work through stewardship of their facility.

NTEE codes enable us to identify the primary activity areas of the nonprofit history organizations in the History Census (see Figure 5). The majority of nonprofit history organizations are historical societies, followed by history museums. It is important to register the composition of the subsector in this way because it reflects basic ways the data are structured.. At the same time, we must acknowledge that even though the names that nonprofit history organizations go by—"museum" or "historical society" or "preservation association"—may differ, it often is the case that the sorts of programming they engage in is similar. In particular, many organizations described as historical societies in fact steward and exhibit collections and many include a museum. When we look at the specific activities of different history organizations, the lines between these various institution types tend to blur.

Figure 5: Activity Areas of Nonprofit History Organizations

1%
Other NTEE A
Arts & Cultural Activity

2%
Education

3%
Other NTEE

4%
Support & Advocacy

66%
Historical
Societies
and Related

24%
History
Museums

Source: AASLH 2022 History Census. n=15,170

15

Eighty percent are very small or very, very small.

One of the clearest takeaways from the History Census is that the vast majority of history organizations are small (see Table 1). More than half (63 percent) are so small that, while they are required to return a 990 postcard to the IRS, they do not have to report their income or assets. Although they may in fact control some annual revenue, most of these organizations show up in our data as having income and assets of $0 because they are not required to report on their finances. Of the 14,444 nonprofit, stand-alone, NTEE A-coded history organizations, just 5,123 report revenue $50,000 or greater; these are the organizations that are required to report on their finances.

In nonprofit industry studies, there is no agreed upon set of measures to use in classifying nonprofit organizations according to size. Many research studies do not consider very, very small organizations—those with annual revenue less than $50,0000—at all because we don't have any information about their finances other than knowing their relationship to the filing threshold (either above or below $50,000) and because other data on these organizations tend to be low quality.[1] However, most studies consider organizations with revenue between $200,000 and $1 million to be small organizations.[2] Organizations with revenue $1M-$10M are medium-sized, $10M-$100M are large, and those greater than $100M are very large (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: A Common Classification of Nonprofits by Size

---
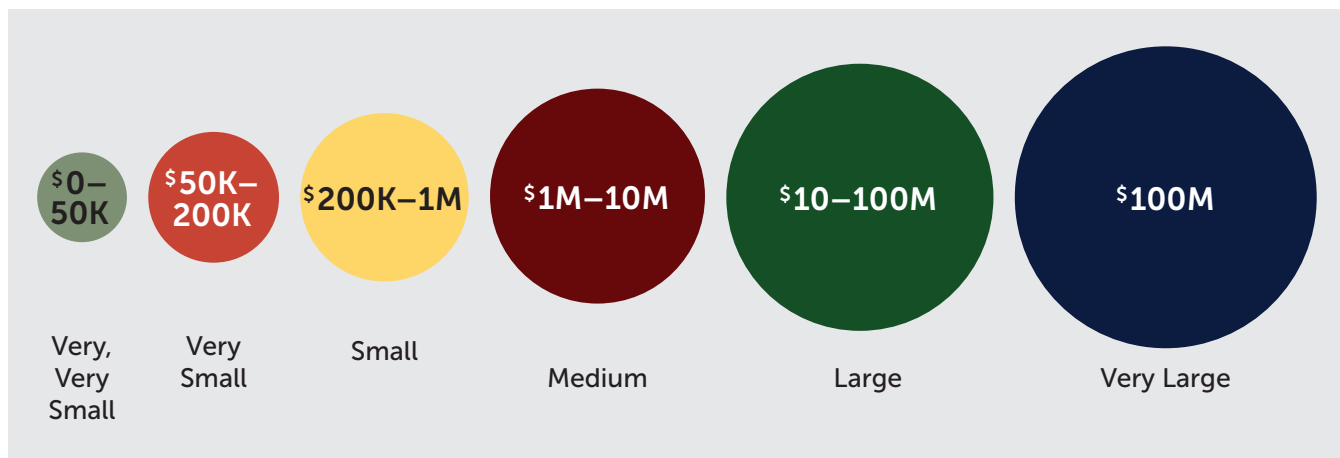
[1]   For example, NTEE codes and other classification identifiers tend to be "dirty" among these very, very small organizations; many of these organizations are misclassified. Also, they tend to drop out of exempt status with frequency.

[2]   This may seem strange given the enormous number of organizations with revenue less than $50,000. However, keep in mind that the whole of the nonprofit sector includes very, very wealthy organizations such as universities, hospitals, and some museums, and this skews the framework toward some very large classifications.

Table 1: Income Categories for History Census Nonprofit Organizations, "A" Code Subgroup

Revenue	Number	Percent
< $50,000	9,190	63.6
$50,000 – $199,999	2,375	16.4
$200,000 – $999,999	1,773	12.3
$1,000,000 – $9,999,999	832	5.8
$10,000,000 – $99,999,999	133	.9
> $100,000,000	10	.1
Total	14,313	99.1
No Value	131	.9
Total	14,444	100.0

The range seen here among history organizations is fairly typical in the nonprofit sector, where more than half of all nonprofit organizations are very, very small. However, there do appear to be fewer large and very large organizations than might be expected in our subset of data.[3] It is likely that this is the case because we are reporting on the finances of nonprofit organizations alone and many large history museums are a part of the public sector, so they are not reflected in this particular analysis. Also, some large history museums and other organizations are likely to be embedded in universities or university systems and so are not included here.

It is useful to classify organizations by size because this can give us some important information about their various capacities. For example, an assumption in nonprofit sector studies is that at around the $200,000 revenue threshold, nonprofit organizations will tend to have a full-time, professional staff member running an operation. The threshold of $200,000 is just below the definition set by the AASLH Small Museums Committee, which (in addition to other criteria) considers organizations with annual revenues less than $250,000 to be small. That is a useful lens through which to view these AASLH data (see Figure 5).

Among nonprofit, stand-alone, NTEE A-coded history organizations, more than 80 percent of institutions have annual revenues of less than $200,000. If we align our analysis with that of other nonprofit sectors and consider only those organizations with revenue greater than $50,000, we find that 2,375 or around 46 percent are *very small* ($50,000 - $200,000). These are organizations with revenue high enough that

---

[3] Appendix B provides a listing of the twenty-five nonprofit, stand-alone history organizations in the AASLH History Census that have revenue greater than $50M.

> Among nonprofit, stand-alone, NTEE A-coded history organizations, more than 80 percent of institutions have annual revenues of less than $200,000.

they probably are engaged in regular programming but low enough that they probably are not run by a full-time staff member. Likewise, just over half of nonprofit history organizations with revenues above the $50,000 threshold—around 54 percent—are likely to be run by full-time employees. If we consider this within the larger subset—one that also includes the very, very small organizations—the result is just 19 percent.

In other words, only about one-fifth of the nonprofit, stand-alone history organizations in our data file are likely to be run by full-time staff.[4] Likewise, it is likely that nearly 100 percent of the subsector's full-time staff are employed by fewer than 20 percent of the organizations.

Figure 7: Nonprofit, Stand-alone, NTEE A-coded History Organizations with Revenue > $50,000 by Revenue Size

3%
Large & Very Large

16%
Medium

35%
Small

46%
Very Small

Source: AASLH 2022 History Census. n=15,170

---
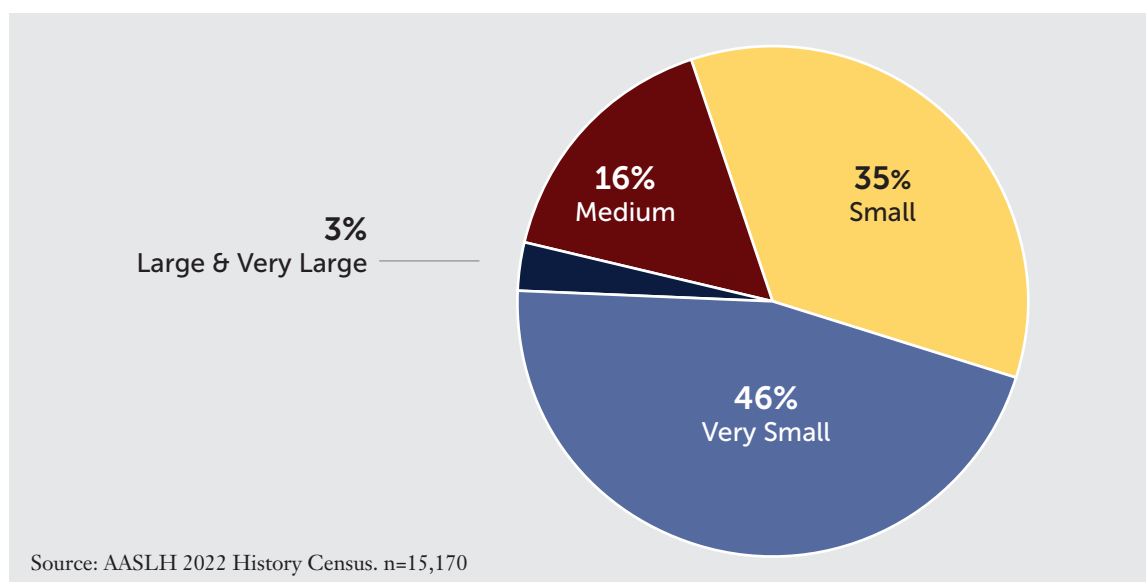
[4]   Public sector entities are more likely be administered by full-time staff. However, many of the public sector entities included in the data file are overseen as part of a system and so an individual record may not be associated with any dedicated staff member.

EMBEDDED ORGANIZATIONS

R ecords that include an EIN can be used to report and analyze financial data on organizations.

However, this data file includes some records that we cannot employ in that way. Some history organizations are stand-alone entities while others are *embedded* in larger organizations or systems. The AASLH History Census includes many records of embedded organizations, organizations that have a *parent*. For example, a history museum that is part of a university is an embedded organization with a parent. In this data file, parent organizations include: state governments; state parks departments; state historical societies, both those in government and those that are incorporated as nonprofits; other nonprofit history-related organizations that administer multiple sites; and nonprofit and public institutions of higher education.

We do not have financial information on embedded organizations. For embedded organizations in the public sector, we had no access to data on their finances. For embedded organizations in the nonprofit sector, we have access only to data on the parent organization. Among records with EINs, parents include nonprofit historical societies, other nonprofit history-related organizations that administer multiple sites, and nonprofit institutions of higher education. The history museum that is part of a university will be identified with the EIN number of that university and financial and other information available to us will be about the whole of the university and not just the embedded museum. However, we do know that many of the records in the AASLH History Census that are coded "NTEE B – Education" are embedded organizations. There are 326 such records in the History Census. It is likely that many of the records coded with NTEE codes other than A or B also are embedded organizations. There are an additional 400 such records in the Census.

Given these characteristics of the data, we report above only on records that have an EIN and an NTEE – A code. There are 14,444 such records, representing 67 percent of the whole History Census. That is a good amount, but it is important to keep in mind that a great many records are not included in the preceding analysis.

There is a pervasive sense that history has a public purpose.

Compiling the 2022 History Census involved hundreds of hours examining thousands of history organizations. The focus of the research was to gather and check quantitative data about history organizations in the public and nonprofit sectors. However, because we looked so carefully at so many organizations, even the smallest ones, three striking aspects of the field emerged that go beyond our quantitative analysis.

First, it became abundantly clear early on that it is very difficult to draw boundaries around history, historic preservation, and history-related activity because so many people and organizations include history in their overall view of how their work and organizations serve the public good. Even when an organization's primary mission is to contribute to youth development or fire safety education, for example, people see the provision of history programming or the preservation of a local collection as important or even vital to that goal. Looking at all of the ways that people incorporate history into the missions and programs in their organizations gives a powerful sense of the way people think of history as fundamental to community and public purpose.

Second, in one way or another, people preserve collections and events that are important to them, even outside the boundaries of formal organizational structures. As we checked to see what was happening with very small organizations—Were they still active? What programs had they recently engaged in?—we found that many of the most local collections and history-related events did frequently pass out of formal incorporation in the nonprofit sector, losing their tax-exempt status and the important benefits that go along with it. However, we also found that the history and preservation activities that these organizations were formed to engage continued, sometimes merging into another nonprofit, sometimes being absorbed into a public sector municipal museum or archive, sometimes becoming associated with an unincorporated social or membership group, or sometimes being adopted by a for-profit business such as a coffee shop, book store, sporting goods store, or bed and breakfast. Looking at the formal, incorporated dimension of the history subsector in some ways serves only to show how much history and preservation activity goes on *outside of it:* in families, through social media, in friend and enthusiast groups, and in the everyday life of a community.

Third, although history pervades so much of associational and public life, conducting meaningful analysis of the nation's history organizations did require us to define what types of institutions will be counted as a history, historic preservation, or history-

related organization. Because those boundaries had never been drawn very clearly, previous data collection and analysis in this subsector has been less than useful.

Drawing this boundary has revealed new challenges in conducting quantitative analysis of the field, challenges the present study was not designed to address. Specifically, our research has made clear that although utilizing traditional boundaries around history enables clear—and much-needed—analysis about the scope of the history community, it also risks leaving out many organizations engaged in history activities in communities of color and among working people. For example, nonprofit organizations related to cemeteries are important in African American communities. These cemetery organizations are not history organizations as defined by our parameters because their primary programs are mutual benefit programs that provide or have provided aid for burials and funerals. However, many of these organizations do engage in historic preservation activities. Similarly, halls of fame play important roles preserving histories of ethnic communities and police and fire museums play important roles preserving histories of working people and communities, even though they are primarily devoted to other purposes.

The History Census has helped provide greater clarity on these fraught definitional issues, even though it was not designed to address them. Below, we identify some ways future research can build on the History Census to ensure the inclusion of organizations that are not history organizations but do consider history important to their work and represent historically marginalized people and communities.

Next steps and recommendations

Our analysis of the 2022 History Census points toward several areas of possible action. Some are immediately actionable, like educating nonprofit leaders about the importance of their IRS classifications, while others—like calls for additional research, partnerships, and resource development—will take many more years and additional funding. Each of these recommendations will help strengthen the U.S. public history community.

Recommendation 1: Explore additional ways to provide focused, tailored support to the nation's thousands of small history organizations.

More than 90 percent of all nonprofit history organizations operate with less than $1 million in revenue. A great number of these are very, very small, community-based voluntary associations. But even when we remove those organizations from consideration and count only organizations with revenue greater than $50,000, very small and small organizations still constitute the overwhelming majority of the subsector. Small nonprofits have special sorts of needs and face special sorts of

challenges.[5] The very small organizations likely are operating with no full-time professional staff. The small organizations likely struggle to develop new programming and stay financially stable. These challenges are very likely to have increased during the pandemic. This research points up the need for focused attention to and tailored support for very small and small nonprofit history organizations.

Recommendation 2: Pursue further research about public-private partnerships in state-level history institutions to strengthen sector-wide collaboration.

One of the great strengths of the history subsector is that it represents a partnership between government and nonprofits. It appears that this partnership could be even stronger with better communication and understanding among state history administrators. AASLH already contributes to this effort by convening an annual "State Historical Administrators Meeting," which brings together leaders of a diverse range of state-level history entities. As a critical national convener, AASLH is well-positioned to build knowledge about the different ways in which government and nonprofits come together around history in the individual states and to share models and administrative tools throughout the profession. This sort of knowledge can help to build an administrator's toolkit and professional development. It also can be helpful when history administrators work across sectors with parks or humanities councils at local, state, and national levels.

Recommendation 3: Educate nonprofit history leaders about the importance of the NTEE classification. Activate them to check and, if necessary, update their organization's NTEE.

The NTEE is an essential tool for tracking the scope and character of the nonprofit sector. Nonprofit organizations receive an NTEE classification from the IRS when their nonprofit status is adjudicated. Many times, these classifications are incorrect or are not optimal to reflecting the organization's actual work. A process is in place for organizations to review and revise their NTEE code. An effort led by peak associations in the field showing organizations how to review and revise and encouraging them to do so would contribute to data health in the subsector as well as promoting more wide-spread data literacy and use.

Recommendation 4: Plan now to revisit the Census in future years and address challenges identified in this report.

---

[5]   For a useful discussion, see Amy Kitchener and Ann Markusen, "Working with Small Arts Organizations: How and Why it Matters," *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 23/2 (2012). And for an example of how these unmet needs and challenges can amplify systemic inequities see Propel Nonprofits, *Minnesota's Culturally Specific Organizations: Equity in the Sector* (2017), at https://www.propelnonprofits.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Propel-Nonprof-its-Equity-Research-Builder-Report.pdf

The 2022 History Census is a valuable tool for understanding the history subsector. Now that a foundation has been laid, it will need to be reinforced in three-to-five years. Most important, new organizations will need to be added to the data file. Organizations that have ceased operations will need to be removed. In that way, the data file can provide a valuable benchmark, helping the field to measure the effects of COVID on the subsector and, later, the effect of the Semiquincentennial anniversary on the establishment of new organizations.

In the next iteration of this research, it would be useful to add to the data file in two ways. First, it would be useful to find, where they exist, numerical identifiers (like EINs) for those records that currently lack them. Second, it would be useful to explore the whole of the IRS Business Master File (BMF) to gather the records of history organizations that reside in classifications beyond those that we searched in this iteration. For example, just as it was the case that some cemeteries were mistakenly classified as history organizations, it may be the case that organizations engaged primarily in historic preservation and history programming related to historical burial grounds have been obscured from this analysis because of their classification as cemeteries. It is a substantial undertaking to rake the IRS BMF, but it can be a particularly useful way to find organizations in immigrant communities, communities of color, and under-resourced communities.

Recommendation 5: Pursue research specifically focused on identifying history organizations in historically marginalized communities to better understand their needs and strengthen their representation in sector-wide analysis.

Indeed, the 2022 History Census has discovered that the organizations built by immigrant and ethnic communities, communities of color, and under-resourced communities—organizations that, while engaged in critically important history work, tend to be highly interdisciplinary and address multiple community needs—are often excluded through more conventional or more streamlined approaches to quantitative research and analysis. As history and nonprofit organizations prioritize sharing histories more representative of the country's diverse population and supporting organizations serving communities otherwise underserved by the arts, culture, and humanities, strategic initiatives to network with small, cross-subsector organizations should be a special focus and a priority. These organizations may not be a part of established history networks, and including them will require targeted strategies and resources. Most important, members of those communities must be a part of the design and roll-out of ongoing research collaborations. This should be a particular priority as planning for the U.S. 250th anniversary, which will be largely driven by the interest and activities of these kinds of grassroots organizations, comes into focus in the coming years.

The critically important task of increasing inclusion in the subsector was not addressed by this particular study; it did, however, provide new clarity on the necessity for the work of reaching out to organizations that see history as an important component of their work and the need for future work to address inequalities in the collection and analysis of data on the history community.

How we built the History Census

The *2022 National Census of History Organizations* was primarily constructed by compiling lists from a variety of sources; that compilation was supplemented by a very limited amount of primary research by our team (see Table 2). Our approach to building a comprehensive and clean data file involved three stages.

First, we imported and compiled all relevant records from a number of large-scale data sources and deduplicated the resulting file.

Second, we added records from a number of targeted sources, checking that those records were new to our growing draft data file.

Third and finally, we cleaned the entire file so that only history, history-related, and active organizations remained.

Table 2: History Census Organizations by Source

Source	Number	Percent
AASLH	1,144	5.3
HENTF	211	1.0
HISTORICAL SOCIETY LIST	30	0.1
IMLS	16,264	75.3
NCCS	137	0.6
NIHO	283	1.3
PARKS LIST	70	0.3
PRIMARY RESEARCH	145	0.7
STATE LIST	3,139	14.5
Total	21,588	100.0

The most important and comprehensive source of records in the 2022 History Census was the 2018 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) *Museum Data File* or MDF.[6] The 2018 MDF comprised three files: File 1 – Museums with Discipline Codes; File 2 – Uncategorized or General Museums; and File 3 – Historical Societies/Historic Preservation. File 1 had been cleaned by IMLS, but Files 2 and 3 had not been cleaned or checked for quality. In particular, File 3, the very large file containing records of historical societies and historic preservation organizations and sites was known to demand attention in order to be usable. To build the History Census, we included: from File 1 – History Museums; all of File 2; and all of File 3. This amounted to 24,518 records.

In addition, we included records from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences *National Inventory of Humanities Organizations* or NIHO. From NIHO, we included records in the following categories: Higher Education and Scholarly; Humanities Agencies, Commissions, and Councils; Museum; and Public History.

Further, records were gathered from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) data file of IRS Form 990s filers. These data were necessary because the IMLS MDF was last updated with records in 2014. We gathered data from the 2020 IRS Business Master File for entities that were new filers during the period from 2013 through 2020. We gathered records for new filers in the following classifications: A54 – History Museums; A80 – Historical Organizations; A82 – Historical Societies & Historic Preservation; A84 – Commemorative Events. The NCCS data comprised 1,116 records.

There were 52,447 total records in our data file once the compilation process was complete. The data file was then deduplicated. Where records shared an identical EIN number and came from different sources, all but one record was removed. The resulting draft file comprised 26,667 records.

Additional records were then added to the draft file. These came from the following sources: AASLH member lists; a list from each U.S. state provided to AASLH by state-level history, historic preservation, or museum association administrators;[7] lists of historic sites owned or operated by a state historical society provided by state

---

[6] For further information on the IMLS MDF and its 2018 revamp, see Frehill, L. M. and Pelczar, M. (2018). *Data File Documentation: Museum Data Files, FY 2018 Release*. Institute of Museum and Library Services: Washington, DC. https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/museum_data_file_documentation_and_users_guide.pdf

[7] In every state, a state-level history or historic preservation administrator was contacted to provide a list, but not all agreed to participate in this component of the data collection.

historical society administrators;[8] lists of historic sites owned or operated by a state park system provided by state park administrators;[9] and a list provided by the Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF).[10]

Adding the records that were included on these lists resulted in a draft master file of 33,431 records. We proceeded to clean that file, removing three types of records:

1. any remaining duplicate records;
2. records of organizations that appear to be defunct;
3. records of organizations that do not fit the definition of "history organization" in use to construct the AASLH History Census; that is, organizations that do not have a primary or substantial mission related to history.

We wished to include only *active* organizations in the data file. Researchers used two methods to determine whether an organization appeared to be active. First, for records with an EIN number, researchers checked the GuideStar Pro database for the date of the most recent filing of the IRS Form 990 or for a flag indicating that an organization's nonprofit status had been revoked for failure to file the IRS Form 990. Flagged organizations were removed from the data file.[11] Researchers also checked organizations that did not have a 2018 or 2019 IRS Form 990 listed on GuideStar to see whether they appear to be active. They did this by visiting the web address listed in the GuideStar record to gather information about the activities of the organization. If that web address was incorrect, researchers searched the web using the name of the organization. Organizations with an out-of-date website were removed from the data file. Organizations that had lost tax-exempt status and had

---

[8] Researchers were either provided a list or a contact from AASLH or did a Google search to find the best way to contact state historical society administrators via email and eventually by telephone if no email response was received. Each organization was contacted up to three times with the aim of finding a specific contact person to provide information. To preserve the integrity of the data set, it was determined that the organization needed to self-identify sites that met the research criteria. Unless directed by the organization, no information about historical sites was copied from an organization's website. The following states **did not** contribute data for this component of the research: Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Vermont. As a result, it is possible that they are under-represented in the data file.

[9] Researchers were either provided a contact from AASLH or did a Google search to find the best way to contact state parks administrators via email and eventually by telephone if no email response was received. Each organization was contacted up to three times with the aim of finding a specific contact person to provide informa-tion. To preserve the integrity of the data set, it was determined that the organization needed to self-identify sites that met the research criteria. Unless directed by the organization, no information about historical sites was copied from an organization's website. The following states **did not** contribute data for this component of the research: the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Nevada. As a result, it is possible that they are under-represented in the data file.

[10] https://culturalrescue.si.edu/hentf.

[11] Organizations receive this flag in Guidestar when they have been included on the IRS list of organizations whose federal tax exemption was automatically revoked because they did not file a Form 990-series annual return or notice for three consecutive tax years. Organizations that do not file a required annual information return or notice for three consecutive years automatically lose their tax exempt status by operation of law. (See https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/tax-exempt-organization-search-bulk-data-downloads.)

moved to a virtual platform (e.g., those currently operating as a Facebook group) were removed from the data file. Organizations that had lost tax-exempt status and were currently operating as an unincorporated membership group were removed from the data file. Organizations that had lost tax-exempt status and were currently operating as a for-profit entity were removed from the data file as well (for example, we found historic houses that had converted from nonprofits into for-profit B&Bs or for-profit businesses such as car dealerships with a private collection of antique cars that had held nonprofit status in the past).

Of course, we also wished to include only *history* organizations in the data file. We removed organizations that clearly are not history organizations but that had been included simply by mistake. We also used GuideStar and web searches to determine whether an organization's mission and primary activities focus on history.

We found many of the following sorts of organizations included in our draft master file and removed most of them:

1. halls of fame;
2. police museums;
3. firefighting museums;
4. cemeteries; and
5. reenactors.

Having reviewed the missions and activities of a very large number of these sorts of organizations, it became clear that, while many do possess some sort of collection of historical material or reference historical events in their programming, most properly belong in Youth, Education, Leisure and Recreation, Mutual Benefit, and other classifications rather than History (though they had nonetheless been coded as history organizations in the source files). However, individual organizations that had a strongly stated mission related to history were retained.

We also found many entities focused on particular industries or technologies such as medicine, computing, maritime, air and space, military, fashion, railroad, agriculture and husbandry, automotive, et cetera. In general, we found that entities in these subject areas that have **collections** or that call themselves ***museums*** do have a strong history focus. Other organizations in these subject areas tend not to have strong history focus, but they nonetheless had been coded as history organizations in the source files. For example, based on this review of a great number of such records, it appears that an *aviation museum* tends to be an organization that has a collection of historical airplanes and sponsors activities that include flying demonstrations as well as educational programs related to the development and historical use of items in their collection. On the other hand, most *air shows* and *aviation halls of fame* do include historical planes that engage in demonstration flights but these organizations

do not tend to sponsor significant history programming. In building the 2022 History Census, we included industry- and technology-focused organizations that sponsor significant history programming and removed those that don't.

Here are some examples of organizations that fall into our excluded categories but **are included** in the data file because of the importance of history to their mission or programs.

- **Quilters Hall of Fame, Marion, IN**: The mission of the Quilters Hall of Fame is to celebrate quilting as an art form, by honoring the lives and accomplishments of those people who have made outstanding contributions to the world of quilting; by restoration and preservation of the home of quilt designer Marie D. Webster in Marion, Indiana; by promoting educational programs, exhibitions, publications and research; and by collecting, preserving and documenting materials related to the Honorees of the Quilters Hall of Fame.

- **Parting Ways Cemetery, Plymouth, MA**: The graves on this land remained unmarked and unnoticed for nearly 200 years until 1975 when a group of Plymouth residents began working on improving the small cemetery where several Black men, slaves and Revolutionary War soldiers, are buried. Four young African American men from Plymouth served in the American Revolution: Plato Turner. Turner, Prince Goodwin, Quamany Quash, and Cato Howe; African-Americans from Plymouth, served in the American Revolution. Following the War, the town of Plymouth granted them acreage near the Kingston border in an area known as Parting Ways. Howe, Turner, Goodwin and Quash, with their families, established a settlement there known as the New Guinea Settlement. The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was, at one time, home to the Museum of Afro-American Ethnohistory.

- **Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, PA**: In 1978, Drayton and Jane Smith and John Francis Marion founded the Friends of Laurel Hill Cemetery, and in 2018, the Friends expanded to become the Friends of Laurel Hill & West Laurel Hill Cemeteries. The Friends is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and their mission is to assist the Laurel Hill and West Laurel Hill Cemetery Companies in preserving and promoting the historical character of Laurel Hill and West Laurel Hill Cemeteries. In addition to developing and implementing educational programs at the cemeteries, the Friends produce special events, including Laurel Hill's famous Halloween festivities, and offer both public and private tours of the sites, often in collaboration with local schools, nonprofit groups, and historical organizations.

- **Long Beach Firefighters Museum, Long Beach, CA**: The mission of the Long Beach Firefighter's Museum is to collect, preserve, and display the deeply rich history of the Long Beach Fire Department. Housed in Fire Maintenance Station No. 10, a city-designated historic landmark, it is site of the city's first drill school and training tower. The Department was first on the West Coast to use mechanized equipment. Also, the Lucas valve, a valve that allows firefighters to switch from one water source to another without interrupting the water supply directed at a fire was developed by the local fire department. This valve is now used all over the world. In Long Beach, oil and gas production and shipping both from Signal Hill and the harbor area make fire prevention and suppression critical elements in the city's heritage and development.

The resulting AASLH History Census comprises 21,588 records of active nonprofit and government history organizations.

Of these 21,588 records, 16,684 include a numerical identifier. 16,149 records have an EIN number and 535 have a DUNS number (see Figure 8). It is likely that every record identified with a DUNS number in the data file is associated with a public sector entity. EINs, on the other hand, tell us if an organization is (or has been) an incorporated nonprofit.

Figure 8: Records with numerical identifiers in the AASLH History Census

75%
EIN

2%
DUNS

23%
None

Source: AASLH Data File 2021. n=5,123.
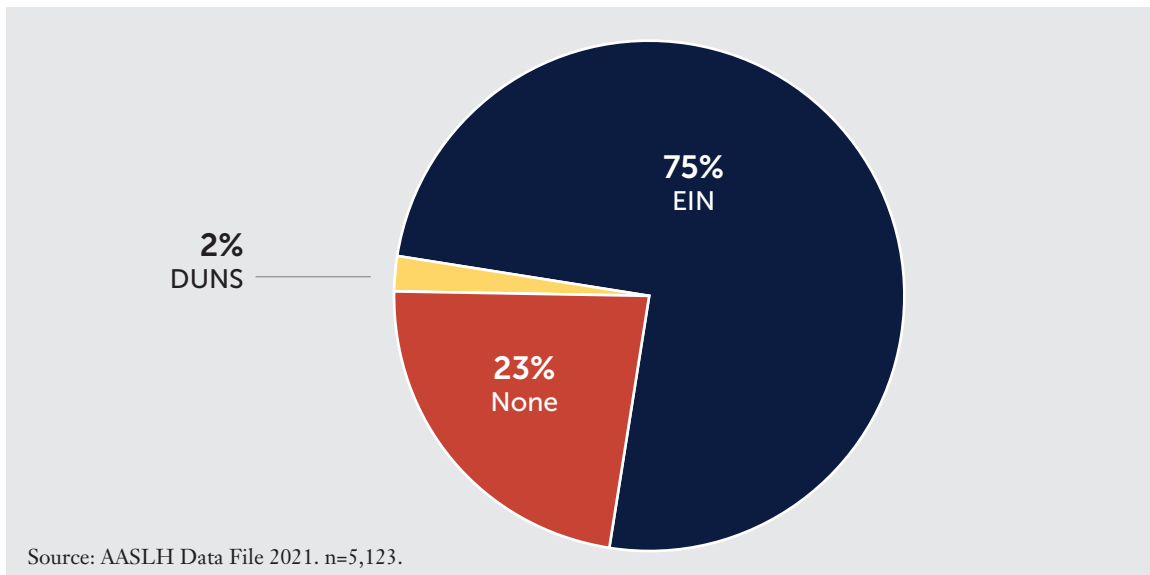
Records that lack a numerical identifier don't have one because the source list that provided the record did not include that field. In other words, the fact that the record lacks an identifier doesn't tell us anything else about the organization—only that it came from a source that had not gathered that information.

Appendix A

Distribution of AASLH History Census Records by State[1]

State	Number	Percent	State	Number	Percent
CA	1,306	6.0	KY	371	1.7
NY	1,273	5.9	KS	358	1.7
PA	1,141	5.3	CT	355	1.6
TX	1,114	5.2	OR	330	1.5
IL	988	4.6	SC	268	1.2
OH	796	3.7	VT	249	1.2
IN	707	3.3	NH	237	1.1
MI	661	3.1	AZ	233	1.1
VA	640	3.0	LA	221	1.0
WI	604	2.8	WV	177	0.8
FL	596	2.8	NM	173	0.8
MA	568	2.6	SD	171	0.8
ME	545	2.5	MT	162	0.8
NC	533	2.5	ND	162	0.8
IA	517	2.4	AR	160	0.7
MN	497	2.3	WY	159	0.7
NE	468	2.2	MS	148	0.7
NJ	465	2.2	ID	137	0.6
WA	447	2.1	UT	125	0.6
MO	439	2.0	RI	120	0.6
MD	438	2.0	DC	107	0.5
GA	437	2.0	AK	102	0.5
OK	425	2.0	DE	100	0.5
CO	418	1.9	HI	91	0.4
AL	389	1.8	NV	78	0.4
TN	382	1.8	Total	21,588	100.0

[1] Among the states with the lowest reported number of records, the following states did not participate in some or all of the data collection outreach for this study: District of Columbia, Hawaii, Nevada, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Dakota, and Rhode Island. As a result, it is possible that they are under-represented in the data file.

Appendix B

Nonprofit, stand-alone history organizations with revenue > $50,000,000[2]

NAME	INCOME
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE	$2,102,055,266
ACADEMY MUSEUM FOUNDATION	$1,561,357,329
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION	$398,253,369
PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM INC	$206,563,514
UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL COUNCIL	$191,813,584
THE BARACK OBAMA FOUNDATION	$181,518,959
MUSEUM OF THE BIBLE INC	$142,478,354
THE EDISON INSTITUTE INC	$134,932,740
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY	$123,588,746
MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY	$106,382,838
CARNEGIE INSTITUTE	$96,592,468
NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION	$96,137,256
CINCINNATI MUSEUM CENTER	$90,202,670
NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM INC	$83,665,969
THOMAS JEFFERSON FOUNDATION INC	$81,167,220
MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION OF THE UNION	$71,490,404
POLYNESIAN CULTURAL CENTER	$69,675,748
SOC. FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NEW ENGLAND ANTIQUITIES	$64,172,078
THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM	$63,912,625
INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY	$63,568,129
GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM	$63,415,026
NEWSEUM INC	$60,159,706
STATUE OF LIBERTY ELLIS ISLAND FOUNDATION INC	$59,575,481
SEVENTH REGIMENT ARMORY CONSERVANCY INC	$54,209,391
INTREPID MUSEUM FOUNDATION INC	$52,113,821

Source, AASLH 2022 History Census. n=25.

---

2   Please note that some organizations are included in the data file because they engage in historic preservation activity by way of being housed in and stewarding an historically significant facility. Names drawn from IRS filings may not reflect an institution's public-facing identity.