

Challenges

CHALLENGES

facing large and small history groups, museums and historic sites

by Anna M. Aschkenes *

History Community as a Whole

1. **Succession planning** - many organizations have boards that have been in existence for some time, and are not actively planning and pursuing succession to the next generation. Since a good number of historic groups were all formed at the same time - the late 70s and early 80s, this is going to be a huge problems when many boards throughout the state have their senior members retiring from board duties
2. **Board training** - one does not go through life and learn, from everyday living or standard education, how to be a productive board member, yet running a nonprofit is a unique type of "business" - it just happens that our product is research, documentation, historic programming, repositories/archives. So, how do we help boards to realize that they are in a competitive environment and must run their institutions as businesses?
3. **Diversity among professionals** - ask yourself, when was the last time you attended a statewide history conference? How many professionals in attendance were from diverse populations? The history community must diversify. When and if we do, some of the problems that relate to diversifying audiences will also be addressed.

Museums

1. **Mission planning** - many small and medium sized museums never have the opportunity or resources to revisited their mission. To revise their collection policies?. How many organizations have missions and collection policies that express the need to collect and interpret artifacts relating to newer immigrant populations? To the Industrial Age. To the 20th Century? Does one's mission include women, all classes of society? Whether it does or does not, does your museum actively include these populations segments in your interpretive policies?
2. **Technology** - this is a tool that can be very effective in preventing the loss of information, but only when small and medium sized museums arrange to periodically back up their registrar records. What will happen if hard copy registrar information is lost or for that matter computerized registrar data is lost? Museums that acquire or de-accession on a regular basis, are constantly changing or adding to this information. These museums must invest in a system or service that will back up your records.



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Historic Sites and Museums

1. **Visitor readiness** - the boards and staff (volunteer or paid) should formally assess the readiness of their institution for visitors. What is the visitor experience? What can be done to improve this? The history community cannot concern itself with cultural tourism unless it also addresses this issue and few are discussing visitor readiness or creating the tools to make such assessments
2. **Outreach** - historic sites and museums are destinations - what is the response of the field to the fact that school districts have dramatically cut back on busing, preventing many student groups from visiting local museums and historic sites. Is there a way to retain these school audiences or will they be lost to the field? Can technology be employed here to capture the student populations?