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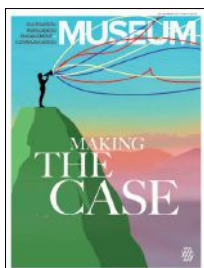
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# Dialogue and Democracy

**I first witnessed the power** of the museum field through Museums Connect, a joint initiative of AAM and the US Department of State that fueled connections between museums and their communities in the US and abroad. In managing the program, I saw how effectively museums united people across gulfs of geography and culture, building understanding through conversation and collaboration.

One project, for example, paired underserved students in Philadelphia and Kabul to create a joint photography exhibition exploring the similarities and differences in their daily lives. The exhibition went on view at both the National Constitution Center and National Museum of Afghanistan. The results were a moving document of cultural exchange—particularly in hearing the students discuss how the experience had changed their perception of life in each other's countries.

Thirteen years later, I still remember those students often. In the time since, it's become clear that the misperceptions they spoke of exist not just across international lines, but also within our own country. Too often, we rely on secondhand stories to decide what other people are like, which can exaggerate our sense of how deep our differences really are. Chances are, if we were to spend more time together actively listening and learning about each other's lives, we would discover more nuanced, truthful stories. This could make all the difference in our divided country, where misguided ill will can have disastrous consequences.

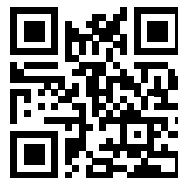
Where can we find those opportunities? As I saw firsthand, museums can be the ideal venues to bring communities together, providing a sense of safety and credibility that can lead to meaningful learning and connection. As you'll read in this issue of *Museum*, many are already taking this responsibility

to heart, sharing narratives and programming that aim to restore our wounded democracy, bit by bit, story by story. In a landscape of dangerous misinformation and hostility, museums can provide the antidotes of truth and empathy.

This vital work needs and deserves support, but it too often goes unnoticed by those who don't work in museums every day and underestimate how dynamic and impactful they are. We need to use our voices and show policymakers that supporting museums means supporting a healthy democracy, as well as quality education and a thriving economy.

I hope these articles will inspire you to advocate for the museum field. You may not realize it, but your stories, your experiences, and your voices are exactly what supporters need to hear. AAM's resources, developed by our Advocacy and Government Relations experts, make it easy, whether you want to send an email or a letter to your representatives, invite them to visit your museum, or even go speak to them on Capitol Hill yourself. Take the first step today and sign up for Alliance Advocacy Alerts by scanning the QR code below to learn more. Our future depends on it.

7/20/2023



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Brooke Leonard is the Interim CEO & Chief of Staff at the American Alliance of Museums.

# Advocacy

28%

US adults who  
have visited a  
museum in the  
past year.

85%

US adults who  
think museums  
have a role to  
play in building  
our civil society.

4 out of 5

US adults are sporadic, casual, or frequent  
museum-goers.

Sources: 2023 broader population sampling of U.S. adults (AAM + Wilkening Consulting)

By the Numbers was compiled by Susie Wilkening, principal of Wilkening Consulting, [wilkeningconsulting.com](http://wilkeningconsulting.com). Reach Susie at [Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com](mailto:Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com).



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Every February for the past 15 years, Museums Advocacy Day has provided the essential training and support museum advocates need to meet effectively with members of Congress and their staff. AAM would like to thank Museums Advocacy Day Supporter organizations—their support, enthusiasm, and expertise help make it all possible. Below, representatives of Museums Advocacy Day 2023 Co-Convenor and Leader organizations share advice on how to effectively advocate for their institutions and the field. Mark your calendars for the next Museums Advocacy Day: February 26–27, 2024, in Washington, DC.

**Bonnie W. Styles, Ph.D.,  
Executive Director,  
Association of Science  
Museum Directors  
(ASMD)**

“Always start from the positive. When speaking with your legislators or their staff, remember to thank them first—for any federal or relief funds your museum has received, for any ways they have supported your museum or the museum field, or, if nothing else, for taking the time to meet with you and learn more. Let them know all the good work you have done with any funds you have received, and share personal stories about how you and your museum serve your community.”

**Vedet R. Coleman-  
Robinson, Ph.D.,  
Executive Director,  
Association of African  
American Museums  
(AAAM)**

“One of the things that I love to do is just to connect with politicians. Remember that politicians and their staff are people too. Look for any common ground or common interests you may have with legislators and their staff. Asking if they have visited the museum or what their favorite museum is can also be a great icebreaker. Be yourself, share your passion, make your case, tell the truth, make advocacy a habit year-round, and enjoy yourself!”

**Arthur G. Affleck III,  
Executive Director,  
Association of Children's  
Museums (ACM)**

“Similar to cultivating donors and other stakeholders, the more clearly and concisely you can share your story, the better. Having a combination of critical data and a compelling personal story can be powerful in helping to make an impact with very busy legislators and staff. All offices are juggling a wide range of competing issues; it's important to use legislator and staff time wisely. Offices expect you to make an ask. Know your ask and be ready to make it.”





**Christofer Nelson,  
President and CEO,  
Association of Science  
and Technology Centers  
(ASTC)**

“Make advocacy a habit. Connecting with elected officials and their staff is an excellent opportunity to either start or continue a conversation, and to build valuable relationships with your elected officials and their staff. Building relationships is the best way to communicate over the long term about the work that your institution is doing and the impact that you are having on your community. So make advocacy a part of your habit to build and strengthen critical relationships, and continue doing it year-round.”



**Richard A. Doran,  
Marketing and  
Communications  
Manager, American Public  
Gardens Association  
(APGA)**

“When meeting with your legislators, always be courteous to them and to their staff at all times, even if you may personally disagree with them on certain issues. When advocating for museums, you are not there to advance a personal agenda; you are representing your museum and the museum community. Whenever possible, include specific examples of how government funding has provided a direct benefit to your organization. Be specific and polite, and remember you have a right to communicate with your legislators.”



**Andy Finch, Director  
of Policy, Association of  
Art Museum Directors  
(AAMD)**

“Using your voice as a constituent is a powerful way to make a difference for our field. Follow-up is an important step after you’ve met with an elected official or their staff. Send a thank you note where you can remind them of issues discussed, share an invitation to visit the museum, and provide any needed follow-up material. Also remember never to speak negatively about any office before or after a meeting or while you are in legislative offices!”

**What’s New  
at Your Museum?**

Do you have a new temporary or permanent exhibition, education program, partnership/initiative, or building/wing? Tell us at [bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM](https://bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM), and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.



# Letting the Outside In

When we welcome diverse backgrounds and perspectives, we can increase our reach, relevance, and impact.

By Lonnie G. Bunch III



Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III stands in the museum he built, the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

Anthony Wright for the Smithsonian Institution



## Countless times at the dinner table

growing up, my father would tell me, “Only fools believe they have a monopoly on wisdom.” As I was creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture, his words echoed in my memory, guiding me as they had done so often during my unexpected career in museums. Besides its personal significance, his advice also teaches a universal lesson about how our organizations can more effectively serve the greater good.

Museums protect cultural heritage, conduct important research, disseminate knowledge, and create fascinating exhibitions and

educational programming. The way our cultural institutions have stepped up recently in times of great need—during the pandemic, in response to climate change, addressing racial and social inequities—attests to their power to do good in the world. But it’s only when we listen to others that we can become more than community centers and truly reside at the center of our communities.

We must embrace the collective wisdom generated by diverse backgrounds and perspectives. We must challenge our assumptions about the way museums have operated in the past. And we must listen to all. By doing so, we can



Representative John Lewis, sponsor of the bill to create the National Museum of African American History and Culture, speaks with Lonnie Bunch.

be respectful of tradition without being bound to it.

## Broadening Our Perspectives

The origin of museums can be traced to the “cabinets of curiosities” or “wonder rooms” of the early 17th century. These spaces, created by wealthy elites and featuring a wide variety of art, natural history

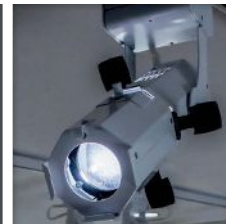
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“It’s only when we listen to others that we can become more than community centers and truly reside at the center of our communities.”

Secretary Bunch being interviewed in the Commons of the Smithsonian Castle in Washington, DC.

specimens, and religious artifacts, were inaccessible to the public. They were antithetical to my father’s axiom, knowledge doled out from on high to certain audiences.

It wasn’t until English antiquarian Elias Ashmole donated his wonder room collection to Oxford University in 1682, creating the Ashmolean Museum, that the template for modern museums was created. In the 18th century, other public museums, like the British Museum and the Louvre, followed suit. Still, they weren’t representative institutions in the way modern museums are. Access was typically limited to privileged white men, their collections often acquired in unethical ways rooted in colonialism and racism. Moreover, employment within these museums was largely inaccessible for women and people of color.

By the time I was hired by the Smithsonian as an education specialist at the National Air and Space Museum in 1978, museums were more open and attentive to diversity, but it was clear that much still needed to be done. In 2000, I wrote an essay for the American Alliance of Museums’ (AAM) publication *Museum News* that detailed some of my thoughts on the changes needed to prod our field in the right direction: tying accreditation and funding to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) benchmarks; increasing opportunities for minority candidates to enter the museum field; and leveling the playing field for women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in cultural institutions.

A pivotal moment for the museum field came during the

2020 protests about George Floyd's death. Museums across the country were galvanized and made commitments to become more diverse and inclusive institutions. And it wasn't just rhetoric; we've followed through. According to a 2022 Mellon Foundation survey of art museums, the representation of people of color (POC) on staff increased by nine percentage points, from 27 percent in 2015 to 36 percent in 2022. Notably, there was a seven-point increase in POC representation among conservators, curators, and directors and an eight-point increase in women in museum leadership, rising from 58 percent to 66 percent. Moreover

in 2021, 45 percent of newly hired employees identified as POC.

I'm proud to say that AAM is leading the way in making a robust push for a more diverse profession. Last October, it unveiled a multi-year DEAI initiative to transform the standards that guide museums' best practices and accreditation. The results will be the first update to standards across the museum field in two decades.

### Assessing Our Collections

As a historian, I've always felt that to make progress as people, as nations, and as institutions, we must be willing to truthfully examine our history. At a time when many

history books and curricula are under attack, it's more important than ever. As stewards of heritage and history, cultural institutions have a special obligation to honestly appraise the past. To do so, we must first look within.

In recent years, museum collections have increasingly come under scrutiny. It's up to us to assess what we have, how we acquired these items, and whether they are still worth having. Scholarship and educational value can no longer be the sole determinants of what we keep in our collections. If objects under our care were acquired unethically, no matter how long ago, we are obligated to assess whether



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they belong to other communities, not only legally but morally. We must glean the wisdom of source communities, actively listening to their guidance and engaging in good-faith efforts to respect their culture and address their concerns.

At the Smithsonian, we instituted a comprehensive ethical returns and shared stewardship policy that authorizes Smithsonian museums

to return collections to their communities of origin based on ethical considerations, including how they were originally acquired. By acknowledging and rectifying our historical missteps, by forging more equitable relationships with source communities, and by putting ethics first, all of us can better embody the nation's ideals of fairness and justice.

### Engaging New Audiences

We should also seek wisdom from people who have traditionally been underserved by museums. The proliferation of new technology has made that more achievable than ever. I think of all the examples of museums making their exhibitions and educational offerings accessible during the height of the pandemic. For example, Toronto's Van Gogh immersive exhibition of massive, projected artworks was turned into a drive-through experience so people could safely enjoy it from their cars.

Outreach by more traditional means can also make our institutions more accessible to people outside our normal spheres of

### RESOURCES

Lonnie G. Bunch III, "Flies in the Buttermilk: Museums, Diversity, and the Will to Change," *Museum News*, July/August 2000  
[aam-us.org/2019/05/29/flies-in-the-buttermilk-museums-diversity-and-the-will-to-change/](https://aam-us.org/2019/05/29/flies-in-the-buttermilk-museums-diversity-and-the-will-to-change/)

Liam Sweeney, Deirdre Harkins, and Joanna Dressel, *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2022*, Mellon Foundation  
[bit.ly/42JPss6](https://bit.ly/42JPss6)

## AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo

Baltimore • May 16–19

Thriving museums,  
healthy communities.

For the millions of people who visit museums annually, whether to learn or seek solace and inspiration, our institutions uniquely facilitate social connections, physical and emotional health, and empathy. As the museum field continues to prioritize well-being as a value of museums, recognizing the intrinsic link between personal, community, and institutional well-being is crucial.

Join thousands of museum professionals at #AAM2024 to dive into the personal, organizational, community, and societal well-being strategies and outcomes that can lead to thriving museums and healthy communities.

Find more on the #AAM2024 theme and Call for Proposals: [annualmeeting.aam-us.org](https://annualmeeting.aam-us.org)



influence. The Smithsonian is working to reach more rural areas of America, including through a partnership with 4-H clubs and our affiliate museums throughout the country, to share resources about democracy and civics, DEAI, STEM learning, and career development.

If we are to have greater reach, relevance, and impact in the years ahead, we must continue to connect with people where they are, whether through cutting-edge technology or through old-fashioned networking, collaboration, and creative programming.

When I was a child, my interest in museums was sparked during a

road trip from our home in New Jersey through the still-segregated South. I was already enthralled with history and asked my dad to stop at some of the Civil War sites along the way. Aware of the risks we could face due to the color of our skin, my father made the difficult decision to decline my request. However, on the way back home, he took a detour into the nation's capital and brought me to the Smithsonian. He explained that this was a place where we could learn about science, history, and culture without worrying about being treated differently.

The experience was life-changing, leaving me with an enduring

sense of wonder, possibility, and belonging. It's a reminder that any interaction with a visitor, online or in person, presents an opportunity to foster such connections. And it's a reminder that no matter how well established our institution or how venerated our reputation, we can continually expand our capabilities by seeking out the wisdom of others.

**Lonnie G. Bunch III** is the 14th Secretary of the Smithsonian, where he oversees 21 museums, 21 libraries, the National Zoo, numerous research centers, and several education units and centers.

## Exhibition

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# Partners in the



# Humanities

Former AAM President and CEO Laura Lott in conversation with NEH Chair Shelly Lowe.

NEH Chair Shelly Lowe (middle), NEH Senior Deputy Chair Anthony Mitchell, and Georgia Humanities President Laura McCarty participate in a lunch counter sit-in simulation at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights.

**In February 2022**, Shelly Lowe (Diné) was confirmed as the new chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the second woman and the first Native American to serve in the post. Here she speaks with former AAM President and CEO Laura Lott about her background, what brought her to NEH, her priorities and aspirations, and ways museums can support and advance those aims.

**Lott:** What brought you to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)?

**Lowe:** A phone call. Prior to coming to NEH, I served as the Executive Director of the Harvard University Native American Program, an interdisciplinary initiative to recruit Native students to Harvard, support them and their success at Harvard, and connect tribal communities to the resources at Harvard. I was in my office at Harvard, and my phone rang. The caller said President Barack Obama had looked at my resume and was very impressed and would like me to serve on the National Council on the Humanities. I was in disbelief. I expressed my interest, and that began the long process of being confirmed, which took four years.

**Lott:** Now that you have completed your first year as chair at NEH, what have you learned? Were there any surprises?

**Lowe:** My first conversations in this role were about aligning the priorities of the Biden-Harris administration with what I felt the agency should advance, and I was happy to say that they aligned. As a council member reviewing NEH grant applications, I got a better sense of who was and wasn't recommended for funding. Often, I felt that we were not reaching the communities we needed to. In the agency's new Equity Action Plan, NEH created the Office of Data and Evaluation. Through this office, we can gather high-level data from our grant applicants to better assess how we can make a broader impact.

The plan includes creating an Office of Outreach to eliminate barriers and serve all communities, especially rural and small ones that may have felt overlooked. We will also hire a Chief Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Officer to inform what it means to be accessible to everybody, be inclusive, and overcome our own biases.

**Lott:** As museums are often thinking about hiring these positions, I think they're really struggling with what they look like, what they need, how to set up those in these positions for success. Do you have any thoughts or advice?

**Lowe:** NEH can be a resource and forum for museums to have these conversations, make plans, and identify positive ways for that work to move forward. We can also provide individual grants to institutions, for instance, through the Public Impact Projects at Smaller Organizations program. In this program, organizations can assess audience engagement to broaden impact in their operations, programs, and practices.

**Lott:** Any other priorities you'd like to highlight?

**Lowe:** When I became chair of NEH, my main priority was to fund as many organizations as possible. With NEH staff, I developed the American Tapestry Initiative, which aims to leverage the humanities to strengthen our democracy, advance equity for all,



NEH Chair Shelly Lowe (right) at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta with Laura McCarty, President of Georgia Humanities. Below: McCarty, Lowe, and NEH Senior Deputy Chair Anthony Mitchell pose in front of a mural at the center.



and address our changing climate. We successfully launched the initiative with several new programs, and this summer, I reviewed the first applications. I was truly impressed with the proposals we received.

**Lott:** After your first year or so on the job, what are your thoughts on the future of museums, what you generally see them doing well, and what they might do better?

**Lowe:** In the US, we sometimes fail to think beyond what we've been taught. However, through museum visits, I've come to realize that there is so much about this country I don't know. Museums serve a powerful role in providing us with information, particularly when we may have assumptions or misunderstandings. Museums offer accurate interpretations of what we're looking at and trying to understand, countering our assumptions with reliable narratives.

With the support of NEH funding, museums have done an exceptional job of reevaluating their exhibitions. They ask themselves whose version of history they are portraying and whose version is being left out. For example, the Sand Creek Massacre exhibit at the History Colorado Center faced concerns from Native American tribes. Using NEH funding, the museum dismantled and reinstalled the exhibition with input from tribal communities, presenting the story in a more accurate, intentional, and inclusive manner than before.

**Lott:** Are there specific ways that museums can better assist NEH in its aims and some of the priorities you were talking about earlier?

**Lowe:** One of the most significant challenges we face is effectively communicating what the humanities entail in a way that is easily understood by the public. The humanities encompass the subject matter of museum exhibitions and what museums provide—a resource and teachings into the human experience. However, many people leave museums without thinking they were exploring the humanities.

We rely on organizations like the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) to effectively communicate information about our initiatives and funding opportunities to museums of all sizes and disciplines.

NEH is always looking for examples of museums' projects, challenges, and experiences. By collaborating and exchanging knowledge, we can further our shared goals and priorities.

**Lott:** I was delighted that you spoke at AAM's Museums Advocacy Day a few months ago. As Congress is currently in the process of finalizing the federal budget for fiscal year 2024, what do you feel are some of the most compelling messages when making the case for the humanities?

**Lowe:** Whether sharing information on a museum exhibition, a film screening and conversation, or a reading program, our grant recipients demonstrate how federal funding and taxpayer dollars are at work across communities. Also, 40 percent of our program funds go directly to the State and Jurisdictional Humanities Councils to develop programming and events that are specific to the needs of their communities. For example, Texas and Georgia are working with museums, universities, and humanities scholars to develop robust teacher training programs that impact thousands of students in their states.

Our Challenge programs also allow organizations to leverage NEH awards toward matching goals for state and private funding for renovations, new buildings, and resources. I recently traveled to Idaho with Representative Mike Simpson (R-ID-02) to visit some institutions we funded. The Museum of Idaho in Idaho Falls received a challenge grant from NEH to expand its museum space to accommodate large traveling exhibitions. I was heartened to know we supported this in partnership with other donors.

**Lott:** At AAM's Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo in Denver and Museums Advocacy Day, you talked about museums being vital spaces for stories. Can you say more about museums as storytellers?

**Lowe:** Museums are doing a great job in using digital resources and technology to enhance how they tell a story. I had the opportunity this year to visit Greenwood Rising in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with our Senior Deputy Chair, Tony Mitchell. In that exhibition, Tony sat down in a barber's chair and

had a conversation with a barber from the era of Greenwood Rising via augmented reality.

At the Japanese American National Museum, I had a conversation via augmented reality with an 80-year-old Japanese man who had survived the internment camps and has since passed. It was mind-bending. It makes history more human.

**Lott:** Any NEH initiatives that you want to make sure museums know about other than the ones that we've talked about today?

**Lowe:** The Biden-Harris administration has called on all federal agencies to strengthen communities after incidences of hate-fueled violence ... to heal and rebuild. We are also supporting the Department of the Interior on its Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative through the digitization, research, and cataloguing of records. This project will create a deeper understanding for communities and families to process, learn, and heal.

**Lott:** Is there anything else that you want to tell the museum field?

**Lowe:** We encourage museum staff to sign up to be panel reviewers for our grant-funded initiatives. We rely on their expertise to inform us. To do this, visit the NEH website, search "application review process," and complete the form online.



NEH Chair Shelly Lowe and NEH Senior Deputy Chair Anthony Mitchell tour the Museum of Idaho.



# COLLECTIVE ACTION

Working with the California Association of Museums, a fundraiser with the San Diego Natural History Museum gained valuable advocacy experience.

By Katrice Lee









## Prior to the 2017–18 legislative session,

my professional involvement with state and federal government was limited to writing grant proposals for the San Diego Natural History Museum (The Nat) as the Senior Director of Philanthropy. While my position would remain the same, my advocacy experience was about to grow by leaps and bounds.

At that time, The Nat, where I have worked since 2015, had just completed a strategic planning process with our new President and CEO, Judy Gradwohl. We were looking forward to our 150th anniversary in 2024, and we created a road map that would best equip the museum to serve future generations in our region.

The Nat is a collections-based institution that focuses on the natural history and unique biodiversity of our binational region. We welcome nearly 400,000 people to the museum annually, host environmental education programs in the community, and are engaged in scientific research throughout Southern California and the Baja California Peninsula of Mexico.

One of the strategic priorities we identified during that 2017 planning process was to expand our leadership role as the authority on the natural sciences in this region. This included actively engaging with policy makers, including elected officials, and serving as a trusted go-to resource for credible science information.

The Nat did not have a position dedicated to government relations, but with the support of museum leadership, I volunteered to explore what it could mean for us and create a plan to build stronger relationships with our delegation of elected officials and their staffs. The California Association of Museums (CAM) would be my conduit for learning more and taking action.

## Statewide Advocacy and Legislation

The Nat is a member of CAM, which works to unify and strengthen California's museums to expand their collective impact. In 2019 I joined CAM's government relations committee as a volunteer with no prior experience with advocacy or lobbying at the state level.

At that time CAM contracted with Fearless Advocacy, a Sacramento-based firm specializing in advancing the policy agendas of mission-based and

cause-oriented organizations. The group helped us monitor legislation and determine the impact of taking a position to support, oppose, or remain neutral on key state Senate and Assembly bills. Through volunteering I learned the rhythm of state legislation and gained perspective on how our locally elected officials operate at that level.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CAM's advocacy in 2020–2021 focused on securing funding for the over 1,500 museums in the state and ensuring that it was distributed in a way that was equitable to all institution types and sizes. For example, we advocated for and received \$50 million specifically for nonprofit cultural institutions, and CAM helped eligible institutions apply to the program. Through this advocacy and outreach to the museum community, many institutions received direct state grants at a critical time.

Building on this advocacy energy, CAM decided to garner statewide support for a bill to benefit museums. Introduced by Senator John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) in March 2022, California Senate Bill 963—the California Culture and History Investments Act—updates the statutory language governing the Museum Grant Program within the California Cultural and Historical Endowment Act. In short, our goal was to modernize the language and funding priorities of a 20-year-old program to better reflect the need for capital improvement and program funding in California's museums.

The specific updates to the funding priorities included a focus on projects and programs that:

- serve underserved communities
- fight misinformation
- promote understanding of critical issues
- improve access, safety, and resilience of important cultural and natural collections and historic buildings
- broaden exposure to the state's diverse history
- support the ethical stewardship of sensitive art and artifacts, including, but not limited to, consulting with Indigenous Californians or repatriation

In addition to updating the priorities of the grant program, CAM requested \$125 million in one-time funding for awards from the updated program and

administration of the state agency that houses it. CAM's board and membership were committed to advocating for these joint initiatives.

## Direct Advocacy Efforts

With the guidance of Fearless Advocacy and Arianna Z. Smith Public Affairs, another consulting firm, CAM's staff, volunteers, members, and subscribers undertook the following advocacy activities to gain public support for the bill and funding request.

**Sign-on letter.** After drafting the bill with Senator Laird's staff, we drafted a sign-on letter of support for the bill and solicited museums and industry associations to add their institution's signature. Ninety-five institutions joined by name, including the American Alliance of Museums, the Western Museums Association, and scores of California museums, zoos, aquaria, and cultural centers.

**Letters of support.** In addition to participating in the sign-on letter, several institutions, including the California Association of Nonprofits, the Oakland Zoo, and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, sent letters to Senator Laird supporting his leadership on the bill, and later to Governor Gavin Newsom requesting his signature on the Senate-approved bill. A bipartisan group of 19 legislators also joined Senator Laird's letter to the Senate budget committee requesting the \$125 million in funding support.

**Op-ed commentary.** While the sponsored legislation was being drafted, CalMatters, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that is widely read in Sacramento, published an op-ed post we wrote focused on the importance of the updated funding priorities for California museums.

**AAM Museums Advocacy Day.** Like in 2021, the virtual format of the AAM Museums Advocacy Day in 2022 allowed a greater number of Californians to participate in calls with elected federal officials and their staffers. The training and tips that AAM provided through this program were also applicable to the legislative action we took in the state.

**California museum month.** Joined by dozens of other legislators and staffers, Senator Laird advocated on behalf of SB 963 and the proposed funding at an event hosted at Sacramento's California Museum during California's museum month.

## NO TIME FOR ADVOCACY?

It can be challenging to make time for advocacy when it's not your job. Here are five low-effort steps you can take to increase your museum's profile and influence.

1. Identify the entire delegation for your museum's physical address using a finder tool (see Resources on p. 24). Include your city council, mayor, county/district council, state legislature, governor, and federal members of Congress. Be sure to note the end of their term in office so that you know when to update your list.
2. Send the entire delegation your annual report or other key messages that you share with your constituents. While the elected official may not read it, someone on their staff might, and you'll be a familiar name when you invite them to your museum.
3. Invite the entire delegation to your museum during Invite Congress to Visit Your Museum Week in August. Many will not be able to attend, but they may offer to visit another time. Schedule the visits and be ready to tell them why your organization matters.
4. Stay in touch with the offices that show interest by inviting them to your major openings or events, sharing news articles about your museum, and tagging them on your key social media posts.
5. Send a congratulatory letter to newly elected officials and invite them to your museum before their term is in full swing.



**Legislative testimony.** CAM staff and museum leaders from across the state provided testimony both in person and virtually at Assembly, Senate, and joint committee hearings in Sacramento. CAM created sample scripts to support everyone willing to share their 60-second reasons why SB 963 should be passed.

**Social media campaign.** Near the close of the legislative session, we recruited individual supporters and museum social media accounts throughout the state to post messages asking Governor Newsom to sign the legislation. CAM drafted the posts to make it easier for everyone to participate. CAM also posted appreciation for individual legislators who voted for the bill and publicly supported the funding request.

**Advocacy action hour.** CAM hosted a series of live virtual workshops to help individuals complete three direct advocacy activities in real time. After directing participants on how to locate the email, phone number, and Twitter username for their state Senate representative, we provided scripts for sending an email, leaving a phone message, and posting on social media. We completed each activity together, and by the end, taking direct action had been demystified for all participants.

## A Successful Outcome

After nine months of advocating for SB 963, Governor Newsom signed it into law in September 2022. This was a great victory for CAM and its member institutions, which will be able to apply to the Museum Grant Program for capital projects and programs that are more relevant to today's museums, such as connecting with underserved communities, improving

access to historic structures, and mitigating the effects of climate change on buildings and collections.

Unfortunately, the legislative budget proposal of \$125 million in one-time funding to support the Museum Grant Program did not pass. While the program has allocated funding, the one-time funding would have maximized the number of museums able to pursue the competitive grant opportunity in a year when California had a historic \$55 billion budget surplus.

The passage of SB 963 represented a full-circle moment for me as well. I had applied to the Museum Grant Program in the past, but I now have an in-depth understanding of how my future applications to the program help California achieve its goals, and I will be able to articulate that.

In addition, being involved in the legislative process has shaped how I do my fundraising work, which is personally empowering. Through my advocacy work I learned to prep for meetings with legislators by writing an internal agenda and script for the meeting that anticipates their questions and objections. I also learned to get a few “easy” yeses to requests, which creates positive energy as I build to the big request at the end. I employ these tactics in all my major donor meetings now.

When I first explored government relations in 2017, I would not have imagined myself providing testimony to the state Assembly and Senate, writing op-eds and articles, or taking any direct legislative action. In hindsight, I view all of my advocacy work with CAM as professional development that has improved my fundraising career. The skills I gained advocating with state elected officials translate to local and federal elected officials as well. We have had increased success connecting with the entire delegation of people who represent The Nat, from our city councilmember to our US House representative. Advocacy has created a new audience for engaging our community about regional biodiversity.

**Katrice Lee** is the Senior Director of Philanthropy at the San Diego Natural History Museum in California and a Board Member for the California Association of Museums. Reach her at [klee@sdnhm.org](mailto:klee@sdnhm.org).

## RESOURCES

California Association of Museums  
[calmuseums.org](http://calmuseums.org)

Full text of SB 963  
[bit.ly/43UImDs](https://bit.ly/43UImDs)

AAM Museums Advocacy Day  
[aam-us.org/programs/advocacy](http://aam-us.org/programs/advocacy)

AAM's Elected Officials Search  
[congressweb.com/AAM/legislators](http://congressweb.com/AAM/legislators)

CalMatters op-ed  
[calmatters.org/commentary/2022/01/museums-have-a-role-to-play-in-climate-resilience/](https://calmatters.org/commentary/2022/01/museums-have-a-role-to-play-in-climate-resilience/)

# HFMA/25

Hallie Ford *Museum of Art*

WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

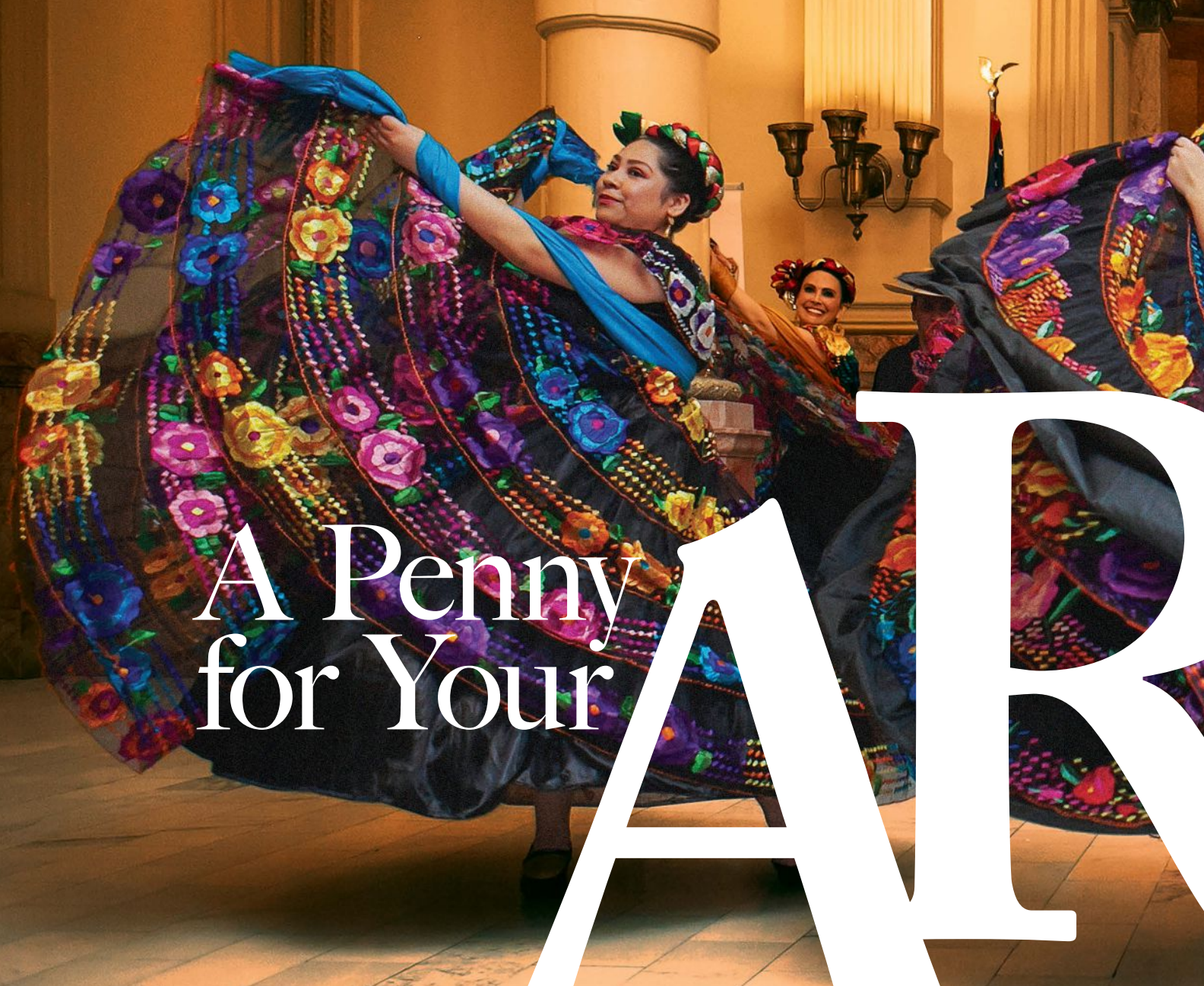
## Highlights from the Permanent Collection

September 19 – December 16, 2023 | Melvin Henderson-Rubio Gallery



Images from top left to lower right: Frieda Diesing, *Male Portrait Mask*, 1990, gift of George and Colleen Hoyt. Carl Hall, *Earth, That is Sufficient (Willamette Valley)*, 1950, Maribeth Collins Art Acquisition Fund. Etruscan Antefix, 525 to 500 BCE, Maribeth Collins Art Acquisition Fund and the Department of Art History's Verda Karen McCracken Young Fund. Lucinda Parker, *Star (in the Winner's Circle)*, 1979, gift of Marilyn and Robert Shotola. Klickitat-style gathering basket, ca. 1900, the Bill Rhoades Collection, a gift in memory of Vay and Murna Rhoades. Single-handed Pitcher with Swirled Body, 1st - 3rd Century CE, Roman, gift of Richard C. Brockway.





# A Penny for Your

The Denver arts and cultural community has built an ecosystem that encourages voters to fund its work, one penny at a time.

**The 1980s were tough** times in Denver.

After a more than decade-long oil boom in Colorado, the bottom had officially fallen out. Skyscrapers that had begun to sprout in place of the older western-style architecture on the city's south end were suddenly halted. New suburban housing sprawl on the city's east and west slowed to a crawl.

Leaders were struggling to fund just about every city need. Among the assets the city held were its five cultural gems: the

Denver Art Museum, the Denver Botanic Gardens, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and the Denver Zoo. These nationally recognized institutions were in real danger: at various points, it was unclear whether there would be enough money to feed the animals at the zoo or maintain the mechanical systems that protected priceless works of art.





Dancers from Fiesta Colorado perform at the Colorado State Capitol building for SCFD Day.

By Michele Ames

Photo courtesy of the SCFD

Civic leaders closely tied to theater, opera, the symphony, visual arts, and every other major cultural institution hatched what seemed like a crazy plan. They would ask voters to create a taxing district and use that dedicated revenue stream to fund arts and culture.

This was crazy for many reasons. First, Colorado as a state was in economic turmoil. What could possibly motivate people to vote for an additional tax during a time of economic decline in a state that was, at that point, reliably anti-tax? And second, the most feasible way to get the measure onto the ballots of the initial six counties was a referral by the state legislature to those ballots. At the time, both chambers of the Colorado legislature were controlled by the Republican Party, which was traditionally opposed to tax measures.

Seemingly against all odds, and after multiple legislative

sessions, state lawmakers referred the measure to the voters in 1988, and they approved the tax. The Denver Metro Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) launched operations in 1989. In its first year, the six-county taxing district of about 1.8 million residents raised \$14 million in support of 134 organizations. Today, more than three decades later, the district provides about \$84 million to more than 300 organizations.

### How the SCFD Works

As lawmakers worked to pass the measure and move it to local ballots, they made refinements to ensure the district had something to offer every county and all voters. In the end, leaders settled on the following general structure:



- A single, six-county metro sales tax district that collects one penny for every \$10 spent in sales tax and provides that revenue as general operating support for eligible arts, cultural, and scientific organizations. Organizational eligibility includes specifics on amount of programming, nonprofit status, and years in operation.
- A small administrative staff that oversees the distribution of the collected taxes based on a formula that includes specific percentages for the largest organizations, a sliding percentage for regional organizations, and a lump sum to counties for local grant making.
- County cultural councils, overseen by county commissioners that make funding decisions for the local organizations that apply.

Initially, the legislation set a 10-year sunset period for the tax. Once the district was up and running, supporters and leaders in the arts and culture sector realized they needed to cultivate an ecosystem that could amplify the work the funded organizations were

doing to maintain the goodwill of both legislators and voters for future ballot measures.

The group that carried out the initial campaign, Citizens for Arts to Zoo, formalized its structure by becoming a 501(c)(4)—a nonprofit social welfare organization—and met regularly to discuss the district's impact and fundraising strategy to ensure continued support for future ballot campaigns. Because Colorado taxing districts are statutorily prohibited from engaging in political activities, a fully separate entity that could carry out those activities was created. To date, three successful reauthorization campaigns have been conducted; in the most recent one, in 2016, voters approved the district by nearly 63 percent and extended the district's sunset period to 12 years.

### Focusing on Capacity Building

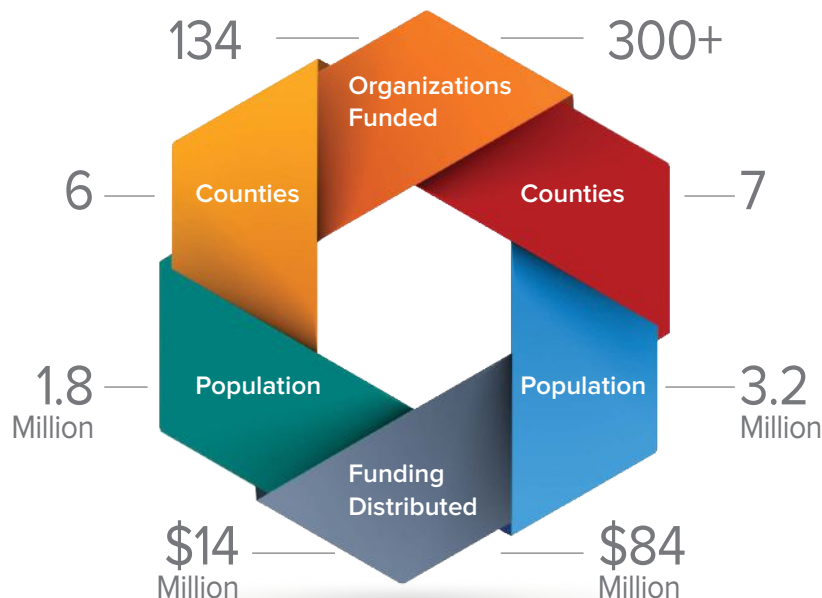
As the political aspects of reauthorizing the district were developed during the first campaign, cultural and civic leaders recognized the importance of defining the economic benefits of arts and supporting capacity building among the funded organizations.

## THE SCFD THEN AND NOW

With more than three decades of support for arts, culture and scientific wonders in the seven-county Denver metro area, the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) has grown into a leading funder of experience for millions.

SCFD Origins:

1989



SCFD Today:

2022



SCFD staff greet Dr. Jandel Allen-Davis, CEO of Craig Hospital, at the 2022 Engage-Empower-Connect Summit for SCFD-funded organizations.

The funded organizations identified marketing and education as their main capacity-building need. Many of the organizations had few marketing dollars and limited staff capacity and expertise to manage marketing campaigns. These same organizations also wanted to provide educational programming for schools but didn't have the experience or relationships within the school districts. Colorado maintains a largely decentralized public education system that includes 179 school districts with autonomous, elected school boards.

A few years after the district was created, the funded groups pooled resources and relationships to form The Collaborative of the SCFD, a nonprofit organization that allowed the groups to expand their expertise. The new organization also had the important byproduct of encouraging collaborations of all kinds across organizations and arts and culture disciplines. These collaborations include efforts connecting Denver's larger national venues with smaller, community-based organizations as well as unexpected cross-discipline experiences.

Now almost 30 years old, The Collaborative now has a formal structure, overseen by a board of organizational representatives and operating on membership fees from organizations based on their size. Pre-pandemic, funded organizations touched every school in every school district in the now seven-county Denver metro area. In-school programming has included everything from live cultural performances to science-based classroom presentations and curriculum.

While programming has not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels due to ongoing school restrictions and organizational capacity loss, the rebuilding is well underway. The need is clear: voters in each of the seven districts identified educational programming as a primary reason they supported the district tax.

## Engaging Critical Partners

In addition to creating an internal structure to support capacity building, district founders and leaders knew they needed to engage the business community to ensure its support for the district. To achieve this, leaders partnered with the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts, founded in 1985, to highlight the regional economic value of the arts. Today, the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts conducts a biannual economic study to quantify the district's economic impact,

including job creation, economic activity, cultural tourism impact, as well as a host of other factors like general attendance and volunteerism.

The SCFD leadership continues to maintain strong relationships with state lawmakers, county commissioners, and city council members as well as other civic groups. In addition, organizations that receive funding from the district—many of the most beloved events, facilities, and experiences in the state—support ongoing efforts to elevate the visibility and value of the district through, among other things, signage and information about the district in their venues and digital spaces, curtain speeches that remind attendees of their part in funding culture, and regular updates in newsletters.

Residents and the cultural community have understood the district's value for decades. But its specific and foundational importance was put in stark relief when many organizations in Colorado had to cease operations during the pandemic. During the two years of closure or restricted attendance, the SCFD provided about \$75 million annually in general operating support to its funded organizations. This proved to be a lifeline that kept arts and culture alive in the Denver metro area and aided in the recovery of hundreds of organizations, particularly the smaller ones that are the cultural backbone of their community and neighborhood.

The SCFD's history and resilience demonstrate the transformative power of consistent and sustained investment in arts and culture. From its origin in difficult times, the district has contributed to the well-being of the Denver metro area, serving as a testament to the value of arts and culture for all.

**Michele Ames** is a Denver-based writer who provides communications support for the SCFD. Reach her at [michele@micheleamesconsulting.com](mailto:michele@micheleamesconsulting.com).



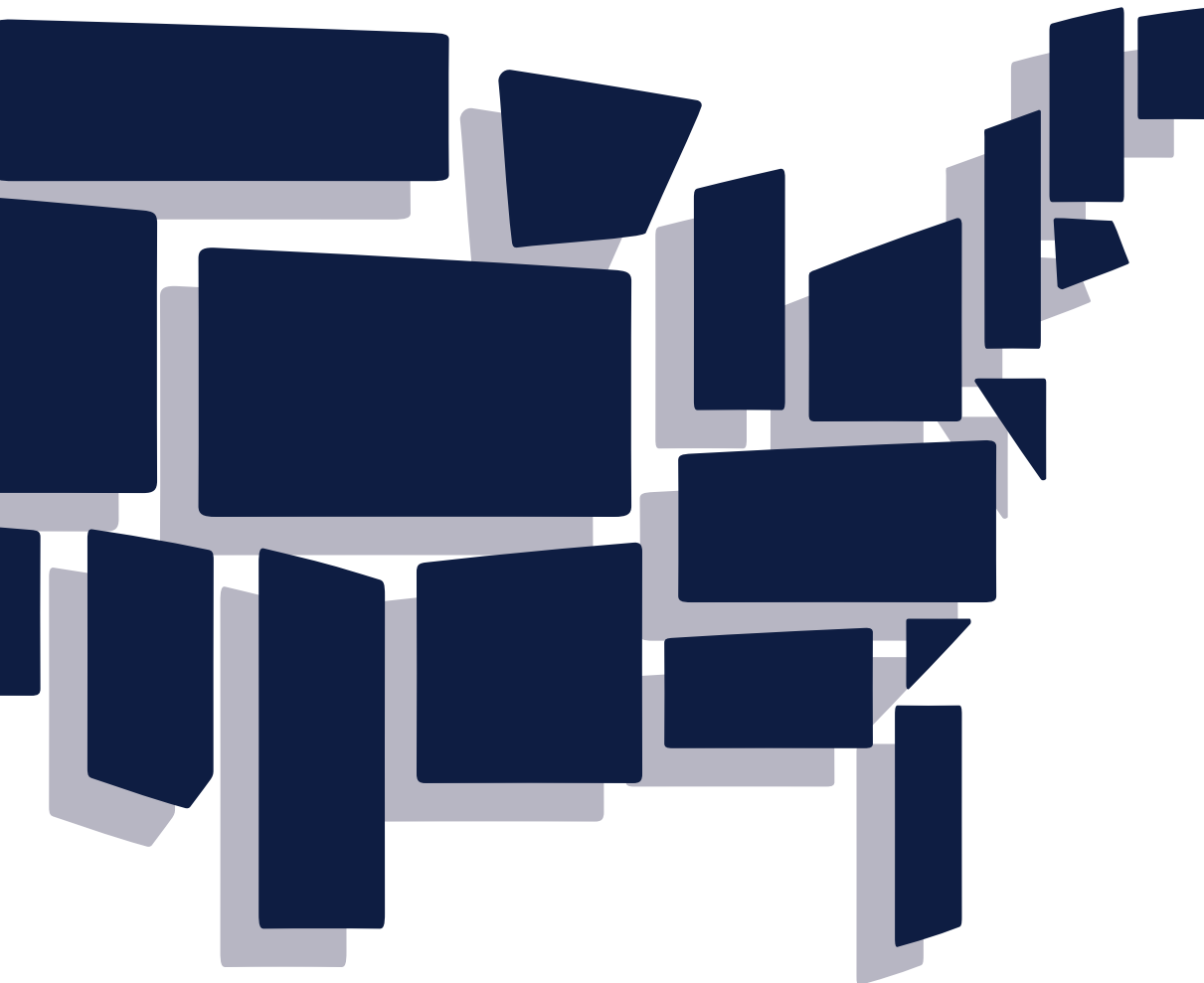


# A TIME TO UNITE

The US Semiquincentennial is an opportunity for museums and cultural institutions to bring people together in the quest for liberty, equality, and justice.



By John R. Dichtl



**Fifty years ago**, a museum on wheels made America's Bicentennial tangible to my classmates and me. Tall ships and snippets of history on TV were exciting, Bicentennial quarters and stamps were everywhere, and mass commercialization of the Spirit of '76 made the commemoration inescapable.

But it was the American Freedom Train rolling through Albuquerque in February 1976, with its railroad cars showcasing artifacts and documents, that made the celebration resonate with us.

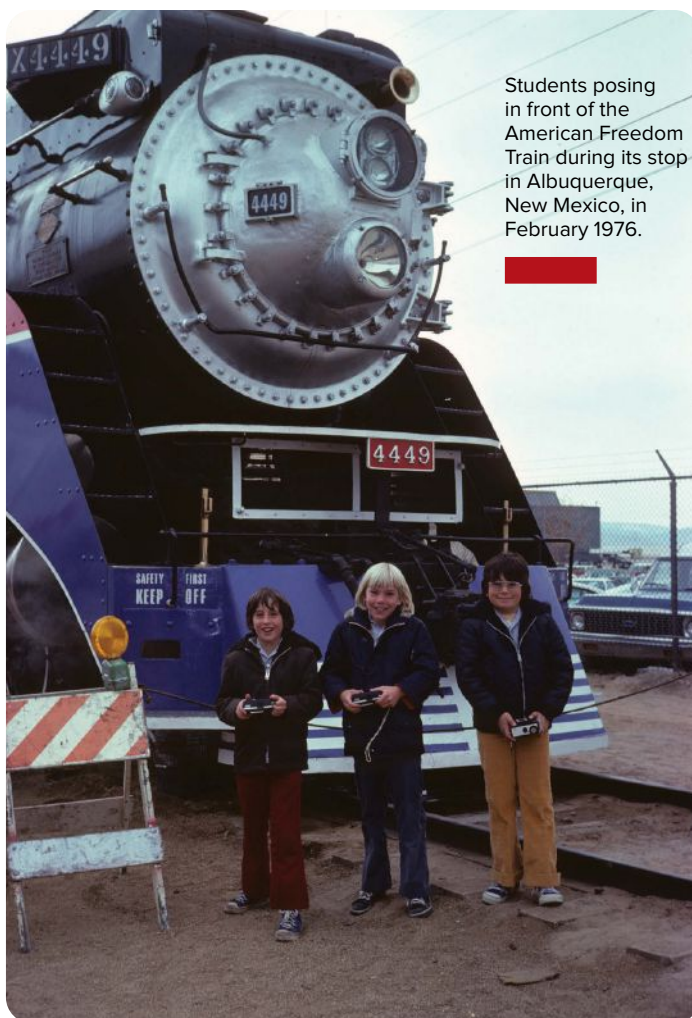
In less than three years—July 4, 2026—the US will mark the Semiquincentennial. Museums and cultural institutions can use the excitement and attention inherent in this once-in-a-generation event to engage visitors and build stronger institutions. We have two key opportunities here. First, the nation's 250th anniversary is a chance to help American society progress toward

justice through an inclusive approach to history. It is also an opportunity to strengthen our museums and related cultural organizations by attracting new interest and investment.

By offering a chance to learn about and reflect on the full sweep of our nation's past, the







Students posing in front of the American Freedom Train during its stop in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in February 1976.

Semiquincentennial commemoration can ensure people of all backgrounds see themselves in American history. A fuller grasp of past events also helps young and old alike understand how their democracy should work. For our 250th we can explore how different groups have been included in “We the People,” how the American experiment in constitutional democracy continues, and how the revolution for liberty, equality, and justice—the fight—is ongoing.

### Planning So Far

Several years ago, Congress created the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission and its nonprofit administrative arm, the America 250 Foundation, to lead the planning for the anniversary. According to

the commission’s first report in 2019, it would be “engaging all Americans in what is expected to be the largest and most inclusive celebration and commemoration in our nation’s history.”

Unfortunately, the path has been rocky. Internal friction within the commission has hindered its progress. Today, the commission and foundation are chaired by former U.S. Treasurer Rosie Rios, who has restructured both organizations to more clearly define their roles. Commission staff focus on relationship management with the federal government and strategic partners. Foundation staff focus on procurement, fundraising, program planning, and marketing. In July 2023, Rios announced new plans around the theme “America’s Invitation.”

Still, the commission’s and foundation’s structural and programmatic reset was built on years of useful work. Since 2019, the America 250 Foundation staff has conducted numerous surveys and listening sessions around the country, including AAM Edcom, sought to engage tribal communities and US territories, established corporate and federal agency relationships, and begun to identify national signature programs,

such as the “Young People’s Continental Congress” that is slated for Carpenters’ Hall in Philadelphia in 2024. For five summer days, high school students from all over the country will gather “to discuss contemporary issues of democracy and civic engagement and make recommendations for how to address them.”

For the Semiquincentennial as a whole, what comes next will depend on America’s receptiveness to America 250’s message. That’s because the commission and America 250 Foundation—as well as the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), the national association for history institutions and the staff and volunteers that make them run—foresee a decentralized commemoration with most of the action at the grassroots level.



Fifth-graders embracing the country's Bicentennial at Holy Ghost Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Like the American Freedom Train in 1976, museums, historic sites, and other cultural organizations in tens of thousands of communities across the nation will connect people to the 250th. People of all ages and backgrounds, in every state and territory, should see themselves and their communities in this shared history and cultural occasion, experiencing it locally. This path to 2026 can help us show audiences not just that history matters, but that their history matters.

Thirty-three states now have a state 250th commission or similar lead planning group to shape, promote, and coordinate activities, with related legislative action pending in a handful of additional states. These planning bodies are at various stages of organization and have wildly different levels of funding. In general, the dollars aren't there, which is even more reason to count on the Semiquincentennial being a grassroots commemoration. If your state does not have a 250th commission, now is the time to approach your state representatives or governor's office. If your state is set, then reach out to the commission to help and perhaps coordinate starting a city- or county-level commission.

At the federal level, a dozen major federal agency heads serve on the Semiquincentennial Commission,

and in 2021, 21 agencies signed an interagency memorandum of understanding that commits them to planning, creating, and collaborating on 250th anniversary programming. While many agencies have not yet made their plans public, some early signs of their involvement have emerged.

- The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) recently announced a partnership with PBS Books to produce "Visions of America: All Stories, All People, All Places." This series of virtual conversations and videos will "explore ... our post-pandemic nation with a renewed interest in the places, people, and stories that have contributed to the America we live in today."
- Expanding on its "A More Perfect Union" initiative, which focused on projects that enhance our understanding of the country's founding period, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has launched a much broader agency-wide program. NEH's "American Tapestry: Weaving Together Past, Present, and Future," which incorporates the earlier initiative, will "use the humanities to



strengthen democracy, advance equity for all, and address our changing climate.”

- For 2024, the National Park Service (NPS) has dedicated funds for “diverse programming that promotes shared stories and experiences and strengthens common bonds ... leading up to July 4, 2026.” NPS also offers preservation-based support through its Semiquincentennial Grant Program.

### What Museums Can Do

At AASLH, we believe the Semiquincentennial presents a valuable opportunity to advance justice in US society through an inclusive approach to history. To do this, we will need to promote a complete story of our past—one that encourages critical thinking and asks us to consider how lessons of the past can help us continue to pursue liberty and justice for all.

We should also seize this moment to think about the long-term health of the field. The 250th offers a rare opportunity to invest in the institutions and people that make up the nation’s historical infrastructure, ensuring our stories, objects, documents, buildings, and landscapes are preserved and shared

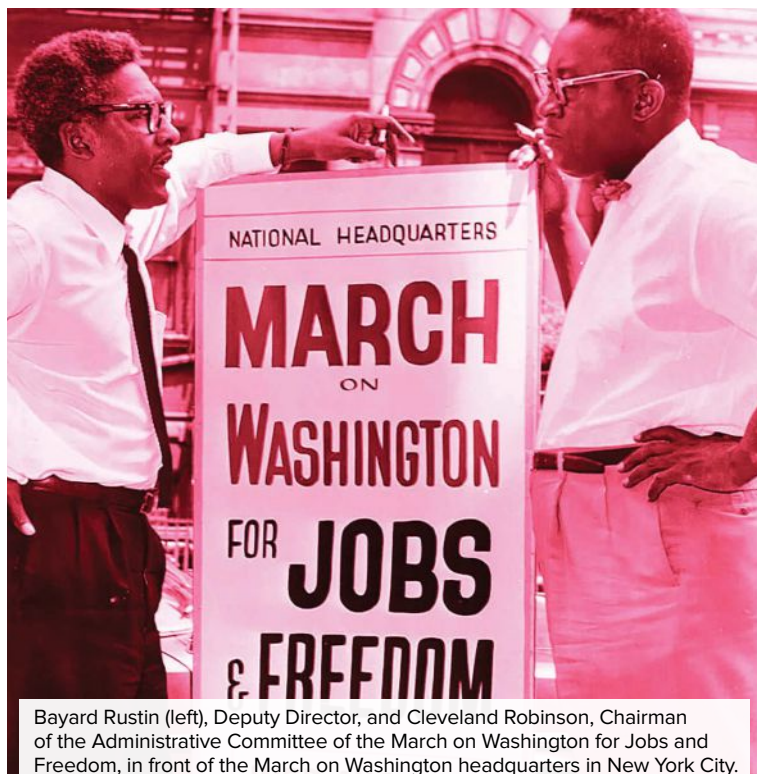
for generations to come. The Semiquincentennial is a chance to prioritize history and civics funding for museums, libraries, and education in a way that can have an impact long after the celebration ends.

Undergirding this vision, AASLH has been circulating five historical themes for the 250th: “Unfinished Revolutions,” “Power of Place,” “We the People,” “American Experiment,” and “Doing History.” These are guiding ideas that we think will open up multiple avenues of questions and introspection. Released in 2021, our *Making History at 250: The Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial* explores these themes and readies them for different contexts. We have distributed more than 20,000 print copies and have received a second NEH grant for another printing. (You can download a copy at [aaslh.org/Making+History+at+250+Field+Guide.pdf](https://aaslh.org/Making+History+at+250+Field+Guide.pdf).)

Several states have begun to borrow and expand on these five themes. Taken individually and in combination, these approaches foster an honest, inclusive, and comprehensive understanding of the past. With many institutions using and amplifying these themes, we can enhance each other’s programming and reinforce the public’s engagement in the 250th.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Review the fascinating research from Made By Us about engaging Gen Z in the 250th at [bit.ly/MadeByUS-GenZ](https://bit.ly/MadeByUS-GenZ).
- Create a lead 250th commission or committee in your state or connect to an existing one: [aaslh.org/programs/250th/](https://aaslh.org/programs/250th/).
- Start a 250th commission or committee in your local community. Download the free AASLH Technical Leaflet to learn more: [download.aaslh.org/AASLH\\_Technical\\_Leaflet\\_300.pdf](https://download.aaslh.org/AASLH_Technical_Leaflet_300.pdf).
- Urge your members of Congress to join the Congressional America250 Caucus to support the 250th anniversary. Learn more at [aaslh.org/america250-caucus](https://aaslh.org/america250-caucus).
- Map your 250th programming onto the US Department of Education and NEH’s “Educating for American Democracy” inquiry-based education framework for building civic knowledge and action at [educatingforamericandemocracy.org](https://educatingforamericandemocracy.org).
- Learn more about “America’s Invitation” at [america250.org](https://america250.org).
- Download the Reframing History toolkit to understand how Americans think about history and how our field can more effectively explain history’s value: [aaslh.org/reframing-history](https://aaslh.org/reframing-history).
- Use one or more of the five 250th themes in AASLH’s *Field Guide*: [aaslh.org/programs/250th](https://aaslh.org/programs/250th).



Bayard Rustin (left), Deputy Director, and Cleveland Robinson, Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, in front of the March on Washington headquarters in New York City.

be taught. “Americans of all political orientations want their children to learn a history that celebrates our strengths and also examines our failures. Americans overwhelmingly agree that the experiences of minority groups are an important part of that history. And they agree that if students are better informed about America’s past there’s a better chance of not repeating past failures.” That is a vision of inclusion and belonging.

Despite many shortcomings, the Bicentennial 50 years ago had a tremendous impact.

Thousands of us working in

museums, education, and related fields today were inspired—or provoked to do better—because of what we experienced during the Bicentennial. State humanities councils were established in that era, and the museum side of what became IMLS was launched in 1976. There was a huge flood of general public interest in the American story, local history and culture, and genealogy and historic preservation. The tide turned for broadening attention to diverse histories, too, spawning deeper, grassroots appreciation for local history and the creation of thousands of local history projects, organizations, and museums. The “public history movement” itself was a creation of the Bicentennial era. What kind of legacy can we cast for this Semiquincentennial?

With 2026 less than three years away, let’s seize this moment to ensure that this anniversary exceeds our aspirations. Each day we delay diminishes the likelihood that we will reach the full potential of this commemoration. Despite the ongoing 250th activities happening around the country, there is much more we can do.

**John R. Dichtl** is the President and CEO of the American Association for State and Local History. Reach him at [dichtl@aaslh.org](mailto:dichtl@aaslh.org).

### Why This Anniversary Matters

With the country as ideologically divided as it is today, museums, historic sites, and other cultural organizations can use the Semiquincentennial to help bring people together: across racial and ethnic divides, across cultural divides, and across political divides. Doing so will contribute to the mending of our civic fabric, the restoration of and respect for evidence and good-faith-based arguments, and the revitalization of interest in and support for third-space organizations, making them increasingly integral to people’s lives and communities.

At the end of last year, a survey group, More in Common, released a fascinating and heartening report, *Defusing the History Wars: Finding Common Ground in Teaching America’s National Story*. It studied polarization in the national conversation over how US history should be taught to future generations. This report confirms findings in AASLH’s *Reframing History* research and in national surveys done by the American Historical Association and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, which show there is great national support, across political lines, for inclusive history and humanities.

According to More in Common’s report, 86 percent of Americans—the vast majority of both Republicans and Democrats—agree on fundamental ideas about our national history and how it should



Kim Rudolph,  
Chief of Staff to  
Representative  
André Carson (IN),  
addresses museum  
advocates during  
Museums Advocacy  
Day 2023 in  
Washington, DC.



American  
Alliance of  
Museums

# MUSEUMS ADVOCACY DAY 2023



# A Mini Master Class in Advocacy

Key lessons on how to effectively engage elected officials from a Capitol Hill chief of staff.

By Ember Farber

**Meeting with elected officials** and their staff is an incredibly important and impactful way to advocate for any cause. It's critical to democracy—and to sustaining a thriving museum field—that elected officials hear directly from the museum people they represent. While it may initially feel intimidating, there are proven techniques for effectively presenting your case to elected officials.

In recent years, Kim Rudolph, Chief of Staff to Representative André Carson (IN), has spoken to museum professionals during Museums Advocacy Day. Kim has nearly 27 years of experience on Capitol Hill—including as Chief of Staff and Legislative Director and working with the House Appropriations Committee—and oversees the operations of Representative Carson's congressional offices in Washington, DC, and Indianapolis. Kim and her boss are great friends of the museum community, and Kim's wit, wisdom, and expertise inspire and resonate deeply with Museums Advocacy Day attendees.

This is a summary of key tips and takeaways from her past Museums Advocacy Day remarks. Consider this a mini master class in advocating to legislators and their staff.

## A Unique Opportunity to Educate

Kim always thanks museum advocates for their work “making sure that we have safe places to learn history, history of our country, history of other countries” and “for being beacons of truth in our communities.”

She also reminds us that speaking to legislative staff is a critical education process. Legislators and staff may know some things about your issues, but not everything. Meetings with legislators and staff are unique opportunities to tell them the story of your museum, in your own words.

Before meeting with legislators or their staff, take some time to prepare. Visit the legislator's website and social media to learn about their background and what committees and caucuses they serve on. Review their recent press statements, events, and public appearances to get a sense of that office's interests, priorities, and ongoing engagement in the community. Having this background information can assist you in identifying common ground between your issues—such as education, history, or economic impact—and the legislator's priorities. See AAM's “Getting to Know Your Legislators” in the “Key AAM Advocacy Resources” on p. 39 for additional information.



Museum advocates  
participate in  
Museums Advocacy  
Day 2023 in  
Washington, DC.



**Pro Tip:** Every office is its own environment with its own standard operating procedures. For example, offices might differ in how duties and issue portfolios are divided among office and legislative staff, how they manage and schedule constituent meetings, what information they gather ahead of time about the issues to be discussed at the meeting, and how the legislator is staffed during meetings and events. Be flexible and follow their lead to get the most out of the relationship.

As a constituent, you have a unique advantage: serving constituents is always top of mind for legislators. Members know their districts and want to understand how your work and issues impact the district or state. Inform elected officials about the number of people you reach and serve in their district or state. Let them know how you add value, who your partners are, and how you educate their constituents. Share information that is as district- or state-specific as possible.

For example, tell legislators and their staff how many people in the district and state come to your organization every year and how many students you reach annually. Invite them to visit, and offer your museum as meeting space. You want to bring them into your organization to help get them invested in supporting it.

### Basics of a Successful Meeting

A successful advocate knows who the member is, understands the issues in the district and state, and comes with a clear message. Be direct, honest, and concise in telling legislators and staff why you are there and what you or the field needs. Don't waste legislator or staff time being shy about making your case that museums are important and worthy of public investment.

Worried about seeming pushy? Don't be. As Kim says every year, "It's very, very important to have an ask and to always bring and leave really good information." **Legislators and their staff expect advocates they are meeting with to have an ask.**

You may not get a specific commitment during an individual meeting, but your asks are important for other reasons. They keep your issue on the radar, make the needs of your museum and the field clear, and set the foundation for ongoing communication with legislative offices. And as Kim reminds museum advocates, even if you get an initial no, keep asking. You have a right to say what you need and how you would like your tax dollars spent.

**Use your time with legislators and staff wisely and, most importantly, tell your museum's story.** Your story should let legislators and staff know how your museum is serving the community and its economic impact in the community. Explain that you are counting on them to help ensure museums are sustainable into the future.

Your meetings and interactions with legislators may be at their office, at your museum, or at a community event, lasting anywhere from a few minutes at the member's event to a longer meeting or a tour of the museum. Prepare shorter (60–90 seconds) and longer (2–5 minutes) versions of your story depending on the circumstances.

Telling your story, with your own words and passion, not only makes an impression on the people you are meeting with, but also helps them become your surrogates and advocates within their office and with fellow legislators. Staff and legislators want and need to hear what you're doing in the community they represent and how your work and your organization add value to their constituency. Reminder: As noted earlier, learn about your legislators' priorities and

previous activities prior to meeting with them to help inform and frame your message.

Leave your contact information so that offices can reach out if they have questions. Especially if you are meeting with staff, you want to leave materials that explain the issues you raised, how they impact you and your work, and what your needs and asks are. Providing this critical information to staff, physically or electronically, can help ensure that your message stands out among the various competing interests the offices handle.

Remember, this is your democracy, and you participate in it when you tell the people that represent you what your museum needs and what you would like to see your public dollars spent on. You're doing really important work, and legislators and staff need to know about it.

**Pro Tip:** In addition to answering any questions they have, ask staff and legislators questions as well, such as how they intend to support the museum moving forward or what else they need from you to do so. If feasible, also offer the museum space as a resource. Rep. Carson's office held its staff retreat at an Indianapolis museum and had a wonderful experience there. As Kim notes, "When people engage with museums, you can't help but fall in love with museums." When legislators and staff spend time in your museum, they will feel more invested in it.

### The Value of Working with Legislative Staff

Do not perceive meeting with staff instead of the legislator as being pushed aside or a reflection of your issues' importance. Legislative staff are hard-working public servants, continuing to work through very intense times. Meeting with staff is an opportunity to educate the people who have the legislator's ear. You're essentially talking to a legislator when you're talking to a staffer.

Legislators' schedules are generally jam-packed, and meetings with staff are often lengthier and more substantive. It's critical to leave staff members with good information so they have your key points and specific requests when they report on their meeting with you.

Hearing from Kim is always empowering and inspiring, including her words of hope that "we have many, many more things in common than not." As

Kim always reminds us, this is our democracy and we are doing our part by coming to legislators and making our voices heard. She says we are all "influencers" when we speak up for museums and participate in democracy in this way.

As Kim reaffirmed again in February 2023, "The House of Representatives, where I work, is *your* house. You belong there. You have every right to be there."

**Ember Farber** is Director of Advocacy for the American Alliance of Museums. Reach her at [efarber@aam-us.org](mailto:efarber@aam-us.org).

## KEY AAM ADVOCACY RESOURCES

Meeting with an elected official may seem daunting, but AAM is here to help. The following AAM Advocacy Resources, and many more, are available on the AAM website to help all museum advocates speak up for museums.

### Getting to Know Your Legislators

A brief guide to help you learn about your legislators.

### Museums as Economic Engines

The economic contribution of museums and your state's snapshot.

### Museums and Public Opinion

National public opinion polling showing that Americans approve of lawmakers who take action to support museums.

### Advocate from Anywhere

Resources to speak up and advocate for museums from wherever you are.

### Alliance Advocacy Alerts

Timely updates, calls to action, and tools to help you communicate with your legislators.

### Public Policy Issues

Detailed information about public policy priorities for museums and how policymakers can advance them.

Visit [bit.ly/AAMAdvocacyResources](https://bit.ly/AAMAdvocacyResources) to access all of AAM's advocacy resources, including tools and ideas for year-round advocacy and engaging your trustees in advocacy.



# A Time Line for Advocacy All Year Round!

## January/February

- The start of the year is an ideal time to reach out to elected officials who represent your museum. Also make sure your museum has plans to be represented at Museums Advocacy Day, either by you, a colleague, or one of your museum's trustees.
- Learn more about reaching out to legislators (during a new or returning session of Congress) in the **AAM Guide to Working with a New Congress**,\* available in AAM's online Advocacy Resources ([bit.ly/AAMAdvocacyResources](https://bit.ly/AAMAdvocacyResources)).
- Prepare or update your **Economic Impact Statement**\* and **Educational Impact Statement**\* so they are ready to share with elected officials throughout the year. And, remember, you don't have to be in Washington, DC, to **Advocate from Anywhere!**\*

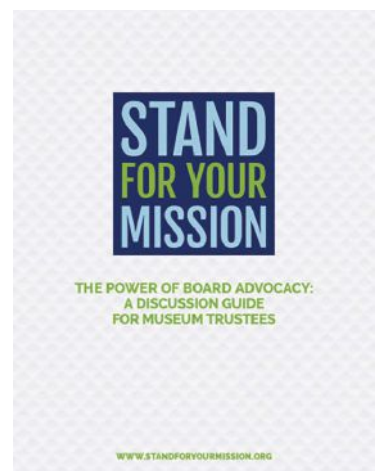
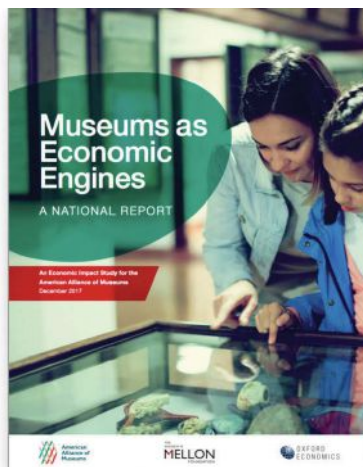
\*This resource is available in AAM's online Advocacy Resources at: [bit.ly/AAMAdvocacyResources](https://bit.ly/AAMAdvocacyResources).

## March/April

- Throughout the year, AAM engages in direct contact with Capitol Hill to support our fieldwide appropriations priorities, which are also highlighted in Alliance Advocacy Alerts. This year, Alliance Advocacy Alerts have generated more than 2,000 messages to Congress in support of Office of Museum Services (OMS) funding. (See the "Advocacy in Action" sidebar on p. 42 for another example of this work.)

## May/June

- Sign up for **Alliance Advocacy Alerts**,\* which provide timely advocacy, legislative, and policy updates as Congress works through appropriations and other issues.
- Familiarize yourself with helpful advocacy resources, such as **Getting to Know Your Legislators**,\* **Making the Case with Elected Officials**,\* and **Ten Rules for Engagement**,\* to interact effectively with your elected officials.



## July/August

## September/October

## November/December

- Prepare for and participate in Invite Congress to Visit Your Museum, the national **#InviteCongress effort**,\* and invite federal, state, and local legislators and stakeholders to your museum. Our detailed, step-by-step **How-To Guide**\* makes it easy to participate.
- Congress returns to a busy fall legislative calendar and communities prepare for upcoming fall elections.
- Engage your trustees in making the case for your museum by exploring our **Trustee Resource Center**.\*
- Learn about nonpartisan voter engagement activities through **AAM Nonprofit Voter Resources**.\*
- Stay tuned for developing advocacy updates and critical opportunities to speak up for museums before Congress adjourns for the year.
- Explore the **Year-Round Advocacy**\* resources to help make advocacy a habit. To develop your advocacy skills and find motivation for the year ahead, check out the full online suite of Alliance Advocacy Resources, including **Advocacy for Museums Matters**,\* **Why Advocacy Should Be a Best Practice of Museums**,\* and additional tools and materials.

### Museum Facts: At A Glance

#### Museums Are Economic Engines



Museums support more than **726,000** American jobs.

Every direct job at a museum supports an additional job in the economy. This is a higher rate than many other industries.\*



Museums contribute **\$50 billion** to the US economy each year.

Museums and other nonprofit cultural organizations return more than \$5 in tax revenues for every \$1 they receive in funding from all levels of government.\*



The economic activity of museums generates more than \$12 billion in tax revenue, one-third of it going to state and local governments. Each job created by the museum sector results in **\$16,495** in additional revenue.\*

August 14–18, 2023

## INVITE CONGRESS

to Visit Your Museum 2023



 American Alliance of Museums **#InviteCongress**




# Advocacy in Action

As part of our advocacy work this year, AAM drafted letters for Congressional champions to circulate requesting fellow legislators sign on to support the House and Senate FY 2024 Office of Museum Services (OMS) funding support letters. This spring, Amy Templeton, President and CEO of the McWane Science Center in Birmingham, Alabama, testified in person on behalf of AAM during a hearing before the House Labor-HHS-Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee in support of FY 2024 OMS funding. AAM was chosen over many other organizations that also submitted requests to testify. Following is an excerpt of this written testimony:


Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Amy Templeton, and I am President and CEO of the McWane Science Center in Birmingham, Alabama, testifying on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). I urge you to provide the Office of Museum Services (OMS) within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) with at least \$65.5 million for fiscal year (FY) 2024, a much-needed increase of at least \$10 million accounting for inflation and public need for museum services. In light of museums being banned from this year's House Community Project Funding, which we strongly oppose, increasing funding for competitive grants for museums is all the more critical.

AAM—representing more than 35,000 individual museum professionals and volunteers, museums of all types, and corporate partners serving the museum field—stands for the broad scope of the museum community. I want to express the museum field's gratitude for the \$55.5 million in funding for OMS in FY 2023, and we applaud the bipartisan group of 136 representatives who wrote to you in support of OMS funding. . . . Here are examples from the McWane Science Center of how OMS helps museums better serve the public. . . . (The rest of her Alliance-drafted oral and written testimony is available at [bit.ly/aam-public-witness-2023](https://bit.ly/aam-public-witness-2023) at the 1:15:05 mark and at [bit.ly/aam-mcwane](https://bit.ly/aam-mcwane).)


## Advocate from Anywhere




**VISIT** [bit.ly/advocate-anywhere](https://bit.ly/advocate-anywhere)




Check out dozens of additional resources.  
How Tos | Videos | Best Practices | Toolkits | Ideas




Contact your legislators at any time.  
Templates | Directories | Step-by-Step Guides



Share your stories.  
Advocacy Media Kits | Submit to our Blog



Get familiar with—and share—critical data reports.  
Museums & Public Opinion | Museums as Economic Engines



Watch and share inspirational videos!  
"Using Our Voices" | "Telling Our Powerful Stories"

# Launching the new AAM Member **Resource Library!**



As a part of our investment in the museum community, we're proud to announce the launch of our new member resource library, redesigned with new functions to help you find the resources you need and the inspiration you want!

Browse **over 2,000** articles, tip sheets, guides, and on-demand programs across 23 topic areas and filter by resource type or sub-category.

## Explore the new Resource Library today!

Log in to unlock member-only resources. Visit: [aam-us.org/resource-library](https://aam-us.org/resource-library)

*Our newly redesigned resource library is in beta, with additional features—including search functions—coming soon.*



**Advocacy**



**Audience Engagement & Visitor Experience**



**Career Management**



**Collections Stewardship**



**Community Engagement**



**Curatorial Practice**



**Development & Membership**



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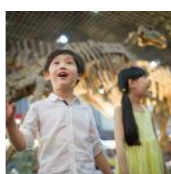
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**Marketing, Comms, & PR**



**Mission & Strategic Planning**



**Public Programming**



**Social Impact**



**Volunteer Management**



**Workforce & Labor**



**All Resources**

Read more about AAM's investment in the museum community: [bit.ly/museum-community-investment](https://bit.ly/museum-community-investment)



## AT A GLANCE

The 2023 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo May 19-22, 2023, generated a memorable, vibrant gathering of the museum field!

NEARLY

**4,000**

museum professionals came together in-person to learn, reconnect, and experience Denver.

**300**

speakers offered **130+ interactive sessions** with interactive and innovative ways to learn together about the 2023 theme, Social & Community Impact.

**300+**

exhibitors filled the show floor for another great year partnering with the Museum Store Association!

**140**

volunteers helped create a great experience in Denver.

**55**

scholars and subsidized registration recipients joined us.

**83%**  
of attendees

expressed that they feel more connected to the museum field as a result of attending the Annual Meeting.

# Thank you!

## You made #AAM2023 a success.

Over the course of our four days together in Denver in May, attendees from around the world were connecting, learning, and forging a brighter future for the museum field. You helped make the 2023 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo experience an unforgettable one.

Every year, the AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo is organized by the dedicated AAM staff, Content Advisory and Local Host Committees, and volunteers. The Annual Meeting wouldn't be the meaningful, educational, and inspiring experience it is without them, all of our attendees, and our generous supporters.

Check out the #AAM2023 **photo album** (maybe you'll find yourself in a photo!) and see what attendees are saying at:

[bit.ly/aam2023recap](https://bit.ly/aam2023recap)

**From all of us at AAM, thank you!** We hope you save the date for May 16-19, 2024, when we reconvene in Baltimore, MD for the 2024 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo.

*Brooke, Megan, Grace, Kaitlyn, Elizabeth, Natanya, Dean, Cecelia, Joseph, Rachel, Carys, Jennifer, Eileen, Michelle, Julie, Danyelle, Brianne, Martha, Susan, Carol, Amy, Vanessa, Alana, Ember, Barry, Joshua, Anthony, Carlos, Tiffany, Tieyara, Ryan, Shelon, Grace, Shelagh, Kristin, Kyle, and Ren*







# Annual Meeting Sponsors & Supporters

The Alliance wishes to express appreciation to the following organizations and individuals that have generously supported the museum community and the 2023 Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo.

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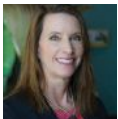
## New Jobs



**Leslie Anne Anderson,**  
*Chief Curator, National  
Nordic Museum, Seattle, WA*



**Nile Blunt,** Ph.D., *Senior  
Director of Museum  
Learning, Museum of Fine  
Arts, Boston, MA*



**Andrea Durham,** *Executive  
Director, SMUD Museum  
of Science and Curiosity,  
Sacramento, CA*



**Ryan Eichler,** *Director  
of Marketing and  
Communications, National  
Corvette Museum, Bowling  
Green, KY*

## Retired



**Kinshasha Holman Conwill** retired as Deputy Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in December 2022. Conwill came to NMAAHC with more than 25 years of experience in museums and cultural organizations, beginning her museum career as an arts educator and activities coordinator for the Frank Lloyd Wright Hollyhock House while she earned her M.B.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles. She then spent 20 years leading the Studio Museum in Harlem, first as the Deputy Director and then as its Director. During her time at NMAAHC, she continued to fulfill the museum's vision of expanding its collections, fostering external partnerships, and developing exhibitions and programs. She was the lead editor and co-editor for projects ranging from exhibition catalogues to books on the museum's collections. Conwill is a past chair of the National Museum and Library Services Board and served on the boards of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, American Alliance of Museums, and the Association of Art Museum Directors, among others. She also served on the faculties of the Virginia Management Institute, the Harvard University Program for Art Museum Directors, and the Salzburg Seminars. AAM named her one of the 100 most influential museum professionals of the 20th century.

### WHAT'S YOUR CAREER NEWS?

Tell us your news at [bit.ly/CareerNewsAAM](https://bit.ly/CareerNewsAAM).

# MUSEUMS ADVOCACY DAY 2024

Washington, D.C.

**FEBRUARY 26-27, 2024**

## Save the Date!

Sign up for updates as they become available, including registration, program, and more:  
**[aam-us.org/museums-advocacy](https://aam-us.org/museums-advocacy)**



American  
Alliance of  
Museums



# Announcing the new Standards for Museums with Native American Collections

Developed by the School for Advanced Research in collaboration with the American Alliance of Museums



## SAR and AAM would like to thank:

- Deana Dartt and Elysia Poon for their leadership of this important initiative
- The core working group writers and editors: Antonio Chavarria, Cynthia Chavez Lamar, Deana Dartt, Stacey Halfmoon, Janine Ledford, Elysia Poon, Landis Smith
- And the nearly 100 people who vetted content and usability, and authored the case studies

## This guide to all aspects of work within museums holding Native collections features:

- Framed around the AAM Core Standards for Museums
- 130 recommended practices and benchmark indicators
- 14 case studies
- Glossary and resources

## What can you do?

- Download your copy today at [sarweb.org/smnac](https://sarweb.org/smnac)
- Share widely with colleagues and museums in your community
- Contribute your case study
- Provide feedback to make it a living document



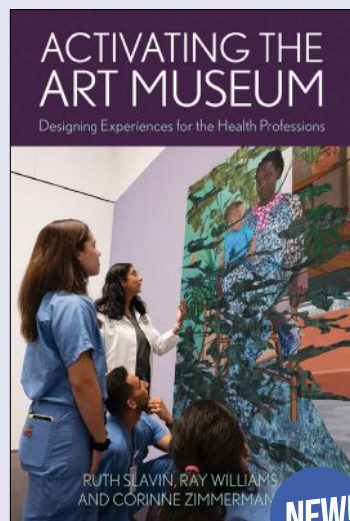
More information about strategies for support and implementation coming soon



“The SMNAC document is a game-changer in the museum field. It provides long-overdue guidance for museums of all sizes to create positive institutional change while also contributing to the cultural continuity of Indigenous communities. Congratulations on this remarkable achievement!”

— Susan Feller, ATALM President & CEO

# NEW RESOURCES FOR MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS



**NEW!**

## ACTIVATING THE ART MUSEUM

### Designing Experiences for the Health Professions

By Ruth Slavin, Ray Williams,  
and Corinne Zimmermann

"In this timely and inclusive new work, Slavin, Williams, and Zimmerman provide a holistic look at how thoughtfully designed art museum experiences are fostering well-being, empathy, and humanity among healthcare professionals, patients and museum practitioners. The creative and affirming personal narratives and practical applications in each chapter illustrate the value of art museums at a time when their innovative thinking and resources are needed more than ever."

—Brenda Cowan, professor, SUNY FIT.

This book offers a framework for collaboration between art museum educators and health professionals.

2023 • 216 pages  
978-1-5381-5854-8 • \$55.00 • Paper  
978-1-5381-5855-5 • \$52.00 • eBook



**NEW!**

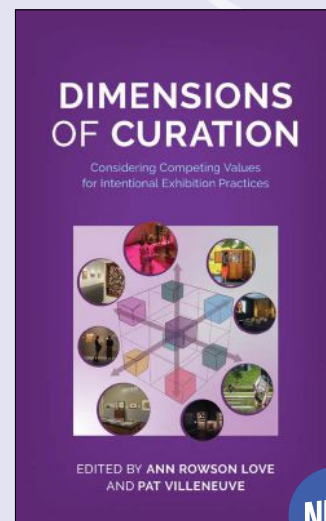
## THE EXHIBITION AND EXPERIENCE DESIGN HANDBOOK

By Timothy J. McNeil

"Destined to become essential reading for anyone in the field!" —Merritt Price, former head of design, J. Paul Getty Museum

This full-color book uses real-world examples, museum and exhibition design studio profiles, historical and contemporary voices, and draws on the author's own creative practice and exhibition making experience, as well as contributions from his extensive network of international museum, attraction, and design professionals. The book contains over 250 photographs and drawings.

2023 • 292 pages  
978-1-5381-5798-5 • \$110.00 • Cloth  
978-1-5381-5799-2 • \$104.50 • eBook



**NEW!**

## DIMENSIONS OF CURATION

### Considering Competing Values for Intentional Exhibition Practices

By Ann Rowson Love and Pat Villeneuve

"A must-read publication for museum professionals and advocates, *Dimensions of Curation* offers a critical and dynamic approach to the assessment of curatorial practice. Villeneuve and Love demonstrate a unique understanding of the nuanced relationships that drive and govern cultural institutions. Rather than presenting a one-size-fits-all narrative, featured essays—from an impressively diverse range of practitioners, scholars, and emerging professionals—illustrate the variety of institutional and communal considerations shaping exhibition development in the twenty first century."

—Keidra Daniels Navaroli, McKnight Doctoral Fellow, University of Central Florida

August 2023 • 272 pages  
978-1-5381-6736-6 • \$55.00 • Paper  
978-1-5381-6735-9 • \$52.00 • eBook

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A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE  
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# Future of Museums Summit

Virtual • November 1-2, 2023

Our sector, and our world, is changing faster than ever, and it's never been more important to think about the future than in this volatile but hopeful time. Using the profound disruptions of the past several years, **museums can create a better, more equitable, and resilient future.**

Connect with museum professionals around the world this fall for the inaugural Future of Museums Summit, a virtual convening where you'll go beyond the theoretical framing of this year's *TrendsWatch* report and gain tactical strategies and takeaways to plan for a brighter future for you, your museum, and your community.

The **summit's themes** get at the heart of some of the profound changes our field is experiencing: worrying partisan divides, accelerated digital evolutions, changing workplace norms, and renewed efforts in repatriation and restitution.

To find more information and sign up for future updates, visit:  
[summit.aam-us.org](https://summit.aam-us.org)