

ISSUE FIVE

SHORTAGE OF PEOPLE WITH THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF PRESERVATION, FUND RAISING, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

Volunteers and staff need training in many topics: preservation, technology, fund raising, and leadership. Location, organizational size, financial instability, lack of leadership, and the lack of interest in training have left many Oregon heritage organizations without the necessary tools to solve problems.

PRESERVATION

Disasters come in many forms, from fires to storms to insect infestations. The 2006 Heritage Health Index Report, a national project of Heritage Preservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, found that 92 percent of historical societies, 70 percent of archives, and 78 percent of museums did not have an emergency response plan with staff trained to carry it out. Eighty percent of institutions did not have paid staff dedicated to collections care and 71 percent needed additional training and expertise for collections staff.

The majority of city and county landmarks commissions lack formal training in preservation. Planners who coordinate their efforts get little or no training because budgets are tight and preservation is only one of many issues they must be knowledgeable about.

TRAINING ISSUES

Technical training issues include preservation, fundraising, leadership and board development, and embracing technological change.

Fifteen years after many businesses began using websites, county historical societies in Oregon have web presence. A December 2009 survey of 50 county historical society and museums revealed that 22 percent did not have websites and a third of those that did had not registered their own domain name.

Heritage Assessment Survey respondents frequently cited “keeping current with changing technology and other technical changes” as



Cottage Grove



Claypool Cemetery, Linn County

“... there are fewer people from around the state taking advantage of things like the Oregon Museums Association as a resource to help build professionalism and so on. And we haven’t quite figured out a way to get resources more effectively in those people’s hands,”

- David Porter, former director of the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Oregon City.

major issues. Many said state government ought to increase technical and other professional training opportunities, including technical advice about building rehabilitation codes and techniques, digital transfer, archaeological permitting, collections care, and gravemarker repair.

MAKING ORGANIZATIONS SUCCESSFUL

The Nonprofit Fundraising Trends report showed that in 2009 those organizations doing well were not necessarily those with the biggest budgets or the ones with the best fundraising in 2008.

Instead, hallmarks of these successful organizations included:

- Funds from many sources and with a variety of ways to give.
- Proactive planning by leadership prepared to address changes in the coming year.
- More effort in donor outreach and cultivating relationships.
- Investment in development.

Janet Gallimore, the director of the Idaho State Historical Society, and Bob Blackburn, the director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, both say that the biggest challenges facing them during the next few years includes transforming tradition-bound organizations into ones with an entrepreneurial culture.

“We work really hard to make sure everyone gets some educational programming for their job here; we put it into the budget every year. Unfortunately, that’s the first thing that gets cut. This staff isn’t going to grow unless I throw them out and they get to see what other organizations are doing. Connecting with like-kind organizations is critical to not just our success but our existence,” says Janeanne Upp, president of The High Desert Museum in Bend.

GETTING TRAINING DELIVERED

Staff and volunteers can obtain training in many ways, often in quarterly or annual meetings. The Association of Oregon Archaeologists, the Northwest Archivists, the Oregon Library Association, and the Oregon Museums Association offer trainings. The State Historic Preservation Office and the Oregon Heritage Commission have also provided training through workshops and conferences, as well as with technical assistance programs in northeast and southern Oregon.

While the mechanisms for training are growing, many organizations are not taking advantage of them. Online training is an option for some; inadequate Internet availability in some regions precludes participation. Travel costs challenge some. Informal training in some regions is thwarted because there are no trained professionals there who can train others.

In 2010, the Oregon Museums Association, the Oregon Library Association, the Northwest Archivists, the Oregon Heritage Commission, and others began using a grant from the federal Institute for Museum and Library Services to create a possible model for coordinating preservation training.

HELP WANTED

Seventy-two percent of the Heritage Solutions Survey respondents said providing technical assistance would be the most effective way to develop boards and businesses with the skills and knowledge to address issues of preservation, fund raising, leadership and technology.



Rogue Valley Genealogical Society