

**Oregon Heritage Commission
Regional Roundup
Oregon City
Friday, April 9, 2010**

**Feedback from Lunchtime Presentation of the
2010 Oregon Heritage Vitality Report**

Of the attendees at the Regional Round, about 50% report being a volunteer representing an organization.

Changing Generations:

Attendees acknowledge the challenge of straddling the expectations of multiple generations.

There is a sense that a new “idea people” culture is replacing the “good old boy” network of old- this can be seen in programming such as the “History Pub” program (run by OHS, McMenamins, and the Holy Names Heritage Center). These programs are bringing in new people and a younger demographic.

Funding Issues:

Attendees report the challenges posed by an amorphous definition of heritage and culture

Looking outside the Heritage sector for ideas:

Attendees acknowledge the need for collaboration, new strategies (for example, coloring books for young people), and new partnerships (for example, with the local business community).

Resonance with 2010 Heritage Report Findings:

Attendees report feelings of initial frustration and surprise at learning of the Report findings.

Attendees report that the survey results and indicated trends resonate with their experiences (99%)

Issues:

There are four museums currently closed in Clackamas County.

Disparity of Experiences:

There are examples of both museum failures and successes in Oregon right now. The scale of what is happening varies.

For example, the Washington County Museum adopted a new strategic plan in 2009. It has a new home, vision, and mission. It is sharing joint operations with an art group. They have tripled memberships and visitations as well as partnered with a university to apply for grants. They have joined with local businesses to pool marketing efforts and

dollars. They have also worked with the Oregon Cultural Trust as well as their local cultural coalition.

Clackamas County, on the other hand, has four museums that are completely closed.

Mt. Hood Museum reports that their volunteers are key to their ongoing efforts. They have also lead community revitalization efforts. Their community is enthusiastic, value new experiences, are self-reliant and come up with new ideas, and have a positive attitude.

Reaching out to new audiences:

Attendees report that they sense there is an “awakening to heritage” happening; defining heritage and making it a priority in the lives of people is a priority of the attendees. They feel the need to diversify their understanding of the “public” and reaching out to families

What’s working:

- Living history programs
- Event partnerships
- Guest speakers
- Engagement with Schools
- Increased communication
- Media
- Events
- New staff with new ideas (Ex. Benton County Museum hosts museum sleepovers, traveling history trunks to schools)
- Broadening exhibits to include art exhibits, including a more interdisciplinary approach to exhibits

What’s not working:

- Museum closures
- Local government relations
- Lack of expertise of all volunteer boards

Table Reports from Facilitated Group Discussion

Topic: Issues of Relevance

Defining Relevance

- Having active collections activities keeps you relevant to new communities
- “History starts at home” reaching into homes to preserve heritage
- Having a place for new communities to connect (ex: the Basque)
- Intrinsic relevance lies in resources, while perceived resources is related to current cultures

- Washington County, for example, is the most diverse in Oregon. Their new strategic plan hopes to answer the question of how to engage their community, how to provide new educational resources, and a way to address new (for the organization) issues such as public policy issues- those looking to shape the future
- Arts community- being engaged and involved
- Reaching targeted audiences
- Deciding and acting upon relevance to state and gov't agencies; information flow that flows both down and up; inter-organizational communication
- Broad participation and support by the community
- Answering the question of relevance to Oregonians and why your organization is valuable, unique, and creates points of connection

Ways to Stay Relevant include:

- Being a place where people go to find out what's going on the world, the nation, the state, and their community
- Engaging with non-traditional partners (ex: partnering with Portland Center Stage in the staging of historical plays has helped a Portland based museum reach new audiences)
- Adopting leadership roles; defining priorities, defining success, employing time-management, being focused, and delivering.

Challenges to Issue of Relevancy:

- Mission vs. Survival- The ability to be mission driven versus just trying to survive is difficult. A reliance on volunteers, lack of organization depth, and being deadline driven versus being proactive are also challenges.
- Many organizations are in triage mode- while funding decreases, demand is increasing.
- A burden felt by tribes is the limited resources they have to answer demands and support the work to correct the historical record

Topic: Changing Demographics

Who is your "public":

- Niche organizations
- Farmers
- School kids
- Tourists
- Locals
- Public officials
- SHPO

Underrepresented:

- African Americans
- Native Americans
- Latinos

Overrepresented:

- Pioneers
- Settlement era history

How do you see demographics changing?

- Both ethnic and economic identities
- Cultural identity
- Directed giving vs. unrestricted funding
- Younger audiences with different expectations

Marketing/Outreach Strategies:

- Many organizations don't have marketing resources, know how to use them, and aren't sure how to engage the tourism question
- Outreach needs to be made to the media, politicians, and donors

Ideas for new strategies include:

- In Washington, 4th-12th graders are required to produce a family history
- Email trees
- Geocaching
- Websites
- Special events
- Cultural passports/passes
- Hands-on experiences

What's working:

- Cross promotion
- Varied tools (electronic media, visitor blogs)
- Public access TV
- Publications (AAA, OMA)
- Participatory activities
- Local gov't partnerships with resources
- Tours
- OEP lectures
- Outreach to colleges
- Art in history museums
- Monthly lectures
- School groups

What's not working:

- Funding
- Grant writing
- Doing history "the same old way"
- Locations

- Not serving audience/lack of public engagement
- Fluctuations in gas prices/tourism dollars
- Reduction in funding

Issues or changes to audience:

- Underfunding of public representatives
- Competition with media/technology
- History not being taught in schools
- Greater ethnic diversity
- Constituents are less dependent on local resources
- Constituents are less oriented to groups/organizations
- New immigrants groups
- New/changing political affiliations
- Saving recent history & technology
- Changes in leadership => reinvention vs. recharging

Inconsistencies in the Heritage Field:

Positive:

- Diversifying the delivery of news
- marketing

Negative:

- Stagnant practices
- Private to public
- Meeting educational needs of the public

Questions generated:

- What resonates with current generations
- What is “history?” and the need to address historiography in museums
- How to connect the past and the present
- Should heritage organizations make political waves
- Identity branding- adopting other terminology such as “conservation” instead of heritage/historic

Issue Discussions

Issue: What is historic preservation?

Challenges:

How can the commonly held view of heritage, “dust, dates, and dead people” be interesting?

Opportunities:

- New legislation to define what’s considered historic

- Partnering with green organizations

Strategies/Solutions:

OHC + SHPO+ OCT= advocate under shared banner/branding that can be adopted by heritage organizations in signage, programming, etc. Create one heritage brand in Oregon!

Issue: Technology

Challenges:

- What's available?
- How do we learn how to use it?
- Can we afford it?
- What about storage capacity/format stability
- Fear of failure
- How to meet/address these needs?

Opportunities:

- Youth as resource
- Corporate sponsorships
- Accessibility of digital assets
- Increased communication
- Accessibilty/capacity for oral histories
- State library open source software could be a model of potential state support

Ex: OSU digital library

Strategies/Solutions:

- More access
- Collaboration
- Technical assistance
- Listserv/bulletin board as a centralized place for Qs&As, training standards, best practices, compatibility issues
- Partnerships
- Webaccess/trainings

Issue: Capacity & Leadership Development

Challenges:

- Sustainability without government support
- Lack of champions
- Lack of volunteer time
- Board members do not always understand their roles
- Recruiting new board members
- Finding board members who are committed
- How to propogate best practice resources from the AASLH, TACS, AAM?

- How to adopt term rotations for board members, bring diverse expertise to the board?

Strategies/Solutions:

- Board and staff trainings
- Grant requirements include education of board members
- Events to build capacity (relating to popular culture and current events)
- Planning effectively
- Written plans to provide continuity
- Sell mission to board
- Local programs for unpaid workers
- Building audience and volunteers by interest

Issue: Partnerships and Collaboration

Obstacles include:

- Self-interest orientation
- Mission at odds with collaboration
- Underlying agendas
- Lack of volunteers
- Nontraditional partners create risks
- Lack of staff/staff time
- Matching volunteer needs to task/training
- Overcommitment
- Isolation
- Competition for resources
- Art groups lack of interest in partnering with heritage
- Ignorance
- Heritage is not seen as an asset

Strategies/Solutions:

- Chamber of Commerces
- Cross-sector sponsors
- Community resources
- Collaboration with organizations with similar missions
- Educate electoral candidates
- Sharing technologies
- Sharing resources
- Joint advocacy
- Share best practices
- Become involved with economic development initiatives
- Access to tourism funds
- Multi-organizational grant funding
- Youth volunteers

- Nontraditional partners
- Partner with higher Ed and K-12
- Visitor surveys
- Cross organization seminars
- Sharing spaces
- Inclusivity/open-mindedness
- Share expertise with corporations

Topic: Building Resources

First:

- Know what they are
- Assign monetary value to volunteer hours
- Have a “can do” attitude
- Recruit skilled volunteers (have a resource committee on the board)
- Find ways to give value to local businesses
- Get value/market rate for your services

Build Relationships:

- Intergenerational communication tools
- Be open-minded
- Adopt shorter term volunteer project to match new volunteer goals
- Exert a concerted board effort to tackle goals; have goal-oriented efforts

Building Resources:

- Consider tax districts
- Special lottery (ex: Have one for the state’s anniversary of statehood on 02/14)
- Public service orientation
- Collaborate with similar organizations to reduce competition
- Create political investment for public support of heritage
- Revamp tax structure/districts
- Internships for students/volunteers
- Create a clearing house of projects
- Oregon Cultural Trust- contribute and raise awareness as a funding source

Other techniques to help build resources:

- Be a face in the community
- Network!
- Create an inventory of potential partners
- Have a strong, professional, and work-oriented board and staff
- Be newsworthy- get out there
- Have the Oregon Heritage Commission assign economic and educational value to heritage- create a heritage vitality index

- Leverage OCT in marketing and fundraising
- Build membership
- Communicate the value you bring to your community
- Have online donation capabilities
- Broadcast your 501 c 3 status
- Always have a big idea!

NEXT STEPS

Attendees would like to see the following happen:

- Have a heritage listserv that can be used to communicate across the sector/allow folks to stay in touch (online heritage bulletin board)
- Take action given the information you just received, even small steps count
- Contact your local elected official about the importance of your organization and future policy making opportunities for heritage
- CAN public testimony
- Engage in dialogue with your community- heritage starts at home