DRAFT OREGON HERITAGE PLAN

This Draft Oregon Heritage Plan includes content for public review purposes. The Plan will be placed into layout and graphic elements will be added to make it visually appealing following public comment.

OREGON HERITAGE
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KEARNS & WEST

DRAFT Oregon Heritage Plan

2026-2033

Introduction

Plan Purpose and Context

The 2026-2033 Oregon Heritage Plan is a call to action for heritage efforts across the state to unite around common goals. The Oregon Heritage Commission (Oregon Heritage) invites individuals and organizations to discuss the goals and strategies in this plan, consider how they align with organization missions and priorities, and join Oregon Heritage in this work. Together, individual steps will add up to important outcomes for the state resulting in more stories told, more people served, and more sustainable heritage organizations. Oregon Heritage and other statewide agencies and service organizations provide grants, incentives, technical assistance, and recognition programs to support this work.

Call out box: What does the Oregon Heritage Plan do?

- Identifies opportunities to strengthen partnerships and networks.
- Aligns Oregon Heritage initiatives and technical assistance with the work of heritage organizations.
- Establishes focus areas, goals, and strategies organizations can use to align efforts with their missions.
- Supports heritage organizations in securing support from partners, stakeholders, grant makers, and decision makers.

How to Use This Plan

This plan is a tool for the heritage community and the public to move our work forward by pursuing shared goals. Here are some ways to use the plan:

- **Learn and engage.** Explore the resources Oregon Heritage has to offer and how to get involved in heritage activities.
- **Build relationships.** Connect with your community and other organizations carrying out heritage work and brainstorm new opportunities to work together.
- **Guide strategic planning.** Use goals and strategies in the plan to inform your priorities and vision for the future.
- **Identify innovative approaches.** Consider more equitable and inclusive ways of doing work with individuals, partners, and communities outlined in the plan.

- **Advocate for heritage.** Share the plan with decision makers to support policies that advance heritage efforts.
- **Secure funding**. Show how your work aligns with statewide goals to strengthen applications for grants and other funding opportunities.
- **Share your work.** Remind decision makers and the public how your work is connected to statewide goals and why it is important.

Oregon Heritage, state agencies and service organizations, and heritage organizations have key roles to play in this work. They may work independently, in partnership, or across networks to achieve these goals. Examples of how different groups may work together are illustrated for each goal below.

[Venn Diagram like infographic showing roles and how groups work independently and together]

What we Heard – 2025 Engagement

[Infographic of key engagement activities: 12 discussion groups with over 170 participants, 428 survey responses]

Oregon Heritage conducted engagement with the public, heritage organizations, and other key parties to inform the Plan from August to November 2025. Engagement activities included a public survey, discussion groups, and a questionnaire for heritage groups. Individuals and organizations across the state provided input on Plan goals and shared the value of heritage.

Survey respondents shared that engaging with heritage resources helps them understand the context of the world today, build connections with communities, strengthen cultural identity, and learn from the past to support the future.

Discussion group participants were asked to reflect on past plan goals, including barriers they faced and how they made progress. Participants emphasized the importance of finding partnership opportunities, being collaborative, and building relationships with communities.

[Quote box]: "Heritage resources are important to me because they help us remember where a community came from and how it started. They preserve culture so it isn't lost over time, provide lessons from the past that can guide a better future, and support the local community by keeping its history and traditions alive." – Survey Participant

How to Navigate This plan

[Infographic showing how the plan is organized with definitions for focus areas, goals, strategies, and resources]

- **Focus areas** are foundational elements of the plan that guided its development and will serve as a lens for carrying out the goals and strategies.
- **Goals** identify long-term desired outcomes for heritage efforts across the state.
- **Strategies** lay out a path forward for Oregon Heritage, state agencies and service organizations, and heritage organizations to achieve the goals.

*The strategies identified in this plan are a starting point. You can use any of the focus areas, goals, and strategies in the way that works best for you. If you are looking for additional ways to implement the plan, consider reaching out to Oregon Heritage, joining a network of organizations, or attending the annual Heritage Conference to brainstorm and identify new ways to collaborate!

Focus Areas

[Infographic showing all focus areas with symbols across the top and descriptions below]

- **Tribal engagement and relationship building:** Center the values and priorities of Indigenous people and Tribes in the relationship building process.
- **Healthy and thriving communities:** Leverage heritage resources to connect to the places and people around us, deepen our understanding of the past, and improve well-being.
- **Collaboration and partnerships:** Foster relationships with individuals and community organizations to share expertise, resources, and stories.
- **Ethical practices and accountability:** Work to apply established standards and center ethical practices informed by working with colleagues, individuals, and communities to carry out heritage work.
- **Future thinking:** Align decisions and actions to support the long-term sustainability and vitality of the heritage sector.

Goals

Goal 1: Engage more voices

Engage excluded and marginalized voices to expand the narrative of history told and preserved in Oregon.

Goal introduction

History is not a single narrative. Traditional historical sources often exclude or mischaracterize communities, and the narratives that have been shared are not inclusive of the breadth of the human experience in Oregon. Engaging multiple viewpoints helps develop a more accurate and nuanced depiction of history. To better understand Oregon's heritage and historical events, excluded and marginalized experiences need to be documented, preserved, and shared. Authentic partnerships, built through trust and relationships, provide a pathway for communities to tell their stories. Building relationships should move at the speed of trust, which can take time, and requires respecting a community's decision to tell their story when and how they choose.

[Quote box]: "Heritage resources matter because they tell the story of our collective past—both the parts we're proud of and the parts we need to learn from. They help us build understanding and empathy across generations and cultures. While it's important to preserve these resources, it's equally important to ensure they reflect the full diversity of our communities." – Survey Participant

Strategies

- Increase understanding of who currently and historically make up the communities you serve.
- Build relationships with culturally specific organizations and community members to develop heritage activities.
- Create space and opportunity for communities to tell their own stories.
- Evaluate organizational content to identify gaps and harmful content and determine how to improve the representation of excluded and marginalized stories.
- Develop and share educational tools to support engagement and storytelling efforts.
- Support community-led heritage activities.

Call out box: Strategies in Action - Engaging Tribal Nations
[Photo]
[icon connecting to "Evaluate organizational content to identify gaps and harmful content and determine how to improve the representation of excluded and marginalized stories" *and elements to indicate roles]*
The **nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon** and **Oregon State University (OSU)** worked together to build a university facility to facilitate the repatriation and return of Tribal Ancestors and cultural items currently under the university's stewardship. When transferring Ancestors and cultural items from the previous building to the new facility, OSU

worked in tandem with seven Tribes and Indigenous students to develop a transfer plan. OSU coordinated the university aspects of transfer, such as turning off smoke alarms in the old building and closing the street in front of the building. Students from the kaku-ixt mana ina haws navigated the public away from the building, and seven of the nine Tribes were able to pray, sing, give offerings to the Ancestors and talk to them as they were being moved by Tribal members themselves.

Call out box: Resources

- [**U.S. Census Bureau Data**](): Data profiles to better understand who makes up your community.
- [**Ford Family Foundation Oregon by the Numbers**](): Oregon county data profiles to better understand who makes up your community.
- [**Addressing harmful Content in Collections**](): Information to help understand the scope of harm that can occur to visitors, staff, and volunteers when engaging with institutional records and collections and how to address harmful content.
- [**K–12 Oregon Social Science: New Perspectives**](): Curriculum developed by the Oregon Historical Society that align exhibits with Oregon Social Science Standards.

Goal 2: Increase access to heritage

Increase access to heritage resources for the communities you serve.

Goal introduction

Goal 1 focuses on engaging voices and developing relationships. These relationships will help heritage organizations have a better understanding of barriers that exist in accessing heritage resources, a key element of Goal 2. Barriers could include cost, technology, translation, or physical access. To increase participation in and access to heritage resources, accommodations should be offered to support the needs of all Oregonians.

Call out box: Strategies in Action - Language and Sensory Access
[Photo]
[icon connecting to "identify barriers to accessing heritage resources and determine how to improve access" and elements to indicate roles]
After the **Columbia River Maritime Museum** recognized an increase in Clatsop County's Spanish-speaking population, they applied to and received a 2022 grant from **Oregon Heritage** to develop an audio tour that translated exhibit information from English to Spanish. The Columbia River Maritime Museum also made accessibility efforts for visitors with anxiety or autism by providing comfort carts and Sensory Sunday's, where the museum environment features no or low audio.

Strategies

- Create and promote materials, programming, and exhibits representative of the community.
- Identify barriers to accessing heritage resources and determine how to improve access.
- Create tools to help heritage organizations identify and address access barriers.
- Increase the availability of digital content.
- Provide accommodations for the communities you serve, including ADA access and offering spaces for community use.
- Increase the availability of translated materials and exhibits.

Call out box: Resources

- **Museums for All:** Museums can register to be part of the Museums for All program.
- **Oregon Heritage access blog**: Ongoing effort to compile information and guidance on increasing accessibility.
- **State Library of Oregon – Digital Collections**: As a service of Northwest Digital Heritage, the State Library can host and make available online digital files of heritage organizations collections for free.
- **Museum access**. Many local libraries offer cultural passes for local heritage organizations.

Goal 3: Build heritage networks

Work together at all levels to advocate for sustainable funding and to increase awareness of the value of heritage.

Goal introduction

In addition to social and cultural benefits, heritage resources generate and promote economic activity. Heritage work is made possible by government grants and funds, private foundations, public donations, and more. Securing stable funding helps organizations and agencies plan, improve, and deliver heritage resources to Oregonians. An active heritage network supports sector stabilization by strategically communicating the value of heritage to funders and decision makers.

[Quote box]: "As a sector, we need to be more organized. We need to know each other better, be able to communicate easily, and take action." – Discussion Group Participant

Strategies

- Expand and diversify the heritage sector network to support coordination and leverage resources.
- Strengthen relationships with other sectors to expand funding sources.
- Provide state funding for heritage activities at the state, regional, and local level.
- Engage with elected officials to increase understanding of the value of heritage.
- Develop strategic messaging and communications strategies to share the value of heritage with the public.
- Develop materials to promote the value of heritage.
- Identify new channels and methods to share information with the public.

Call out box: Strategies in Action - Main Streets Make an Impact
[photo]
[icon connecting to "develop strategic messaging and communications strategies to share the value of heritage with the public" and elements to indicate roles]
Oregon Main Street, an **Oregon Heritage** program, provides a framework to help communities revitalize their downtowns through historic preservation, economic vitality, public improvements, and community events. Oregon Main Street has developed a variety of communications tools to highlight the importance of this program including videos and reports sharing successes by **participating communities.** These communications tools help decision makers at the state level and local level understand the positive impacts and value this work has in Oregon's communities. From 2011 and 2021, Oregon Main Street and Jon Stover & Associates found that the Oregon Main Street network helped generate $266 million in additional sales revenue in Oregon and 2,400 jobs.

Call out box: Resources

- **Oregon Heritage Grants:** Eight grant programs that assist people and organizations with projects related to historic building preservation, collection preservation, heritage tourism, education, outreach, economic vitality, historic cemetery preservation, and more.
- **Oregon Heritage Conference:** Three days of workshops, sessions, tours, and conversations that provide tools, support, and networking for those doing heritage preservation.
- **Oregon Main Street Conference**: Three days of keynotes, interactive workshops, and networking focused on downtown historic preservation and economic development.

- **Sharing the Value of Heritage Toolkit:** Ongoing effort to compile data, resources, and guidance to help heritage groups recognize and communicate the value of their work.
- **Oregon Cultural Trust:** Funding from the Cultural Tax Credit goes towards five Statewide Partners, 45 County and Tribal Coalitions, and qualified cultural nonprofits through competitive Cultural Development grants.
- **The Cultural Advocacy Coalition of Oregon (CACO):** Advocates for public investment in arts, culture, heritage, and humanities. CACO administers the Cultural Resources Economic Funds (CREF) program that supports nonprofit cultural organizations' capital construction projects.
- **Oregon Historical Society Reciprocal Membership:** Membership model that includes access to museum exhibitions, regional attractions, and print and digital resources.
- **Travel Oregon**: Travel Oregon is a state agency that can help promote local, regional, and state heritage tourism and value.

Grants included as resources were available at the time of publication.

Goal 4: Develop healthy organizations

Apply practices and standards in sustainable, scalable, and ethical ways to increase organizational health.

Goal introduction

Practices and standards used in heritage work are continually evolving to account for new technologies and alternative ways of doing things. As practices and standards change, it is important to make sure they are applied in ways that are ethically responsible, sustainable over time, and scalable for different organizations. At the same time, funding constraints, declining volunteer rates, and limited resources to train and onboard staff can make it difficult for organizations to adapt and implement these changes. Finding ways to address these challenges in incremental ways will help build healthy heritage organizations with clear missions, inclusive practices, engaged employees and volunteers, and valuable services.

Strategies

- Develop and support existing networks to facilitate skill sharing, education, training, and more.
- Make best practices and standards accessible and relatable to organizations of varied sizes and capacities.

- Develop and implement systems that prioritize volunteer and staff retention.
- Develop a centralized hub of information or other creative and scalable solutions that streamline access to resources.
- Conduct ongoing financial planning and forecasting to identify financial risks, manage cash flow, and anticipate future needs.
- Assess organizational capacity and staffing needs to align resources and support succession planning.

Call out box: MentorCorps in Action

[Photo]

[icon connecting to "Develop and support existing networks to facilitate skill sharing, education, training, and more" and elements to indicate roles]

MentorCorps, a free program of **Oregon Heritage**, is a statewide network of volunteers available to provide one-on-one mentorship to heritage organizations across the state. A mentor supported **Rock Creek Cemetery** in identifying organizational priorities, such as repairing heritage resources, and funding. Rock Creek Cemetery then applied for and was awarded two grants: an Oregon Heritage Historic Cemeteries Grant to repair cemetery markers and an Oregon Heritage Preserving Oregon Grant to repair windows on a National Register of Historic Places listed church.

Call out box: Resources

- **Oregon Heritage MentorCorps:** Statewide network of volunteers that provide support, project planning assistance, and resources to those doing heritage work.
- **Oregon Heritage Technical Resources:** Bulletins, position papers, subject matter resources, disaster preparedness guidance, and more are available on the Oregon Heritage website.
- **Nonprofit Association of Oregon (NAO)**: NAO serves the needs of the nonprofit sector through advocacy, convening, capacity building, and training.
- **Oregon Cultural Trust Organizations and Professional Development Grants**: The Organizational & Professional Development Grant Program is part of Oregon Cultural Trust's and provides capacity building opportunities.*
- **Roundhouse Foundation Technical Assistance Grants**: This grant program is designed to increase access to professional development and technical assistance opportunities to improve or enhance skills, talents, and capacity.*
- **Oregon Museums Association:** Nonprofit organization that provides resources and services to over 250 museums, cultural institutions and professionals in Oregon.
- **American Associate for State and Local History:** National membership association providing leadership and resources to organizations and individuals in the history sector.

Reflections and What's Next

We want to honor the work heritage organizations, state agencies, and other partners have done over the past five years. From 2020 to 2025, the heritage community navigated challenges and celebrated success. We aimed to include more voices in our work, increase access to and promote the value of heritage, and pursue best practices. We navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and found new ways to engage and communicate with the communities we serve. We adapted to shifting funding sources and volunteer rates. We learned how important it is to pause, reflect, and be more inclusive in our work. Examples of how heritage organizations achieved 2020-2025 plan goals are highlighted below.

Goal 1: Include more voices

The Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project promotes research and education on Oregon's early Chinese residents. Recent work includes conducting archaeological investigations around Black Rock Tunnel to better understand how Chinese migrants lived and worked at the site.

Goal 2: Increase access to heritage

The City of Willamina worked with the University of Oregon Digital Newspaper Program to digitize and make accessible online the Willamina Times (1909-1972). They also established a research desk at the museum for patrons to view the collection.

Goal 3: Promote value of heritage

When the Friends of the Cascades Locks Historical Museum published "Images of America: Cascade Locks and Canal", they had no idea it would help solve a 70-year-old mystery about a missing family. The Executive Director of the Museum shared this unique story through an op-ed in The Oregonian to highlight the importance of local museums and the resources they provide.

Goal 4: Pursue best practices

The Roundhouse Foundation developed a technical assistance grant for heritage organizations based on the recommendations that came out of the 2024 Oregon Heritage Vitality Study. The grants are designed to increase capacity for nonprofit partners and could go towards conferences and trainings, consultant support, and more.

Evaluation

Oregon Heritage's approach to evaluation is always evolving. Evaluating success is challenging because the data we have access to is only a snapshot of heritage preservation work in Oregon. We want to be transparent in our approach to evaluation and keep building on our goals to engage more voices, increase access to heritage, build networks, and develop healthy organizations. To efficiently and effectively evaluate our success, we will use data that is currently available to Oregon Heritage and any data outside of Oregon Heritage that can be collected through partnerships and story submissions.

Oregon Heritage Grant Data: Oregon Heritage has eight grant programs. Those applying for a grant select a Plan goal their project help moves forward. This data can help identify trends over the next seven years and inform any updates to the next plan.

Oregon Heritage Program Networks: MentorCorps, Oregon Main Street participants, Heritage All-Star Communities, and Certified Local Governments reports to Oregon Heritage can identify goal successes and challenges. This information will help develop resources and content for conferences, summits, and workshops.

Oregon Heritage Designations and Awards: Heritage nominations to the National Register Program of Historic Places, Heritage Excellence Awards, and Excellence on Main Awards can help identify if goals are reflected in selections or if there are gaps that need to be addressed.

Success Stories: State agencies and service organizations and heritage organizations, we need your help! Tell us how you have accomplished plan goals by sharing your stories with Oregon Heritage at any time over the next seven years. This anecdotal information allows Oregon Heritage to hear successes and challenges in achieving Plan goals. With permission, successes will be shared through Oregon Heritage communication channels to highlight different examples, models, and ways goals are being moved forward.