

From Dates to Doorways:

A Toolkit for Turning Anniversaries and Milestones
into Opportunities for Reflection, Connection,
Engagement and Growth



Message from the Oregon Heritage Commission

In 2024 the Oregon Heritage Commission conducted the *Oregon Heritage Vitality Study* to identify the primary issues impacting the health and vitality of the organizations that serve as caretakers of Oregon's heritage across the state. It's no surprise that among those issues are lack of volunteers leading to volunteer burnout, limited funding for operational and maintenance needs, under recognition of the value of heritage, and connecting to communities.

At the same time the study results and recommendations were released, conversations about the upcoming 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence were ramping up nationally. Initially, it felt a little harder for Western States to connect to this anniversary as the place-based context of the event looked very different across the nation. But ultimately, this is an opportunity for local heritage organizations to take advantage of that anniversary spotlight that is garnering a nationwide interest in history, to leverage it in ways that might address some of the issues highlighted in the *Oregon Heritage Vitality Study*.

It is the Commission's hope that heritage organizations start to proactively identify opportunities, including anniversaries and milestones, that can serve as moments to engage with the community, work towards organization sustainability, and gathering stories from community members that have yet to be told.

Work like this is what will help lead to healthy organizations that can continue to be caretakers of Oregon heritage and illustrate to communities the value of this work in contributing to building community connection, empathy, and community pride and appreciation.

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Welcome!

Welcome to the *From Dates to Doorways*—a toolkit built for the real life of heritage work: small staffs, volunteer-powered teams, too much to do, and stories that deserve more than an afterthought.

In 2026, much of our discussions revolve around the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This moment gives us a chance to pause and consider what it means to be an American two and half centuries after the idea began. Though there is focused effort on this year, recognizing a milestone such as anniversary isn't new to our work. Whether the 25th year of your site's opening, honoring volunteers who have donated more than 10,000 hours or noting the sesquicentennial of your state, we know milestones and anniversaries are powerful moments. They draw attention, invite memory, and create spaces to pause, to reflect both on who we've been/what we've done and where we are going. They can also serve as opportunities to help build organization capacity and sustainability.

The toolkit also supports HB2081 Heritage Commemorations, by providing support through resources, workbook questions and templates to inspire you: small museums, historical societies, libraries, archives, and other heritage organizations to use milestones not just as dates on a calendar, but as doorways—openings into deeper storytelling, stronger relationships and relevance, and more meaningful community connection. Along the way, it offers practical ways to turn reflection into action: engaging new audiences, strengthening collections & community memory making, expanding capacity, creating thoughtful programs, and communicating the value of your work through fundraising.

It also aligns with the Oregon Heritage Plan's statewide call to build the heritage community and focus on organizational sustainability —not as aspirational goals, but as doable next steps that fit your capacity and your community.

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A Quick Look at What's Inside

Welcome and introduction

The opening pages offer a welcome, key definitions (milestone vs. anniversary), and a short reflection on when the respectful response is not a celebration but rather a commemoration.

You'll also find a brief introduction to the toolkit's icons—cues which will acknowledge standards, resources and other tools to leverage your work further.

Part 1: Before you plan anything

This section is a pause button (the helpful kind). It begins by helping you name the moment you're standing in, then invites you to ground the work in what's real: who is connected, what relationships matter, and what your capacity can honestly hold.

Finally, it helps you choose your path into action—pointing you toward the workbook modules that match what you're trying to do.

Part 2: Workbook modules

This is the heart of the toolkit: three practical modules you can use in any order, depending on your goals.

- **Engagement (programming + relevancy):** ideas and prompts for special programming and community participation—designed to help a milestone become a doorway for new relationships, not just a one-day event.
- **Capacity Building (fundraising & volunteer raising):** guided questions that help you find the “why now,” shape a tangible ask, and align your fundraising tone with the history you're marking. It also provides opportunities for you to reflect on new ways to engage volunteers given current trends and the milestone itself.
- **Collections & Community Memory:** reflection prompts and pathways for using a milestone to look closely at what you hold, what's missing, and what might need new context—at a depth that can work for both staffed teams and all-volunteer groups.

Each module also includes advice and case examples to make the ideas feel concrete, not theoretical, learning from others who have done the work.

Part 3: Next steps (“Your turn”)

This short section is an invitation: to capture what you learned, name what you're carrying forward, and—if you'd like—share back with the Oregon Heritage Commission how the toolkit supported your work, so the field can keep learning together.

Part 4: Tools, Templates and Inspiration

Here you'll find ready-to-adapt materials (like volunteer role descriptions and partner invitation language), plus other practical supports that reduce the “where do I start?” problem. This section also includes resources from the case study examples highlighted throughout the workbook for inspiration.

Part 5: Beyond the Doorway — Resources for Going Further

A curated list of webinars, standards, and references (including Oregon Heritage tools) to help you go deeper when you have the time—or when you need a trusted next step.

Part 6: Acknowledgements and thank you.

Because this work is communal—and this toolkit is built from shared learning, case examples, and the generosity of people willing to reflect honestly on what worked and what didn't.

How ever you arrived here—because a big anniversary is coming, because a funder asked, because a community member raised a hard question, or because it simply feels like time—this toolkit is here to help you move with curiosity, humility, and care, and to turn a date on the calendar into something that lasts.

How to Use this Toolkit

The largest component of *From Dates to Doorways* is a series of guided reflections designed to help you slow down before acting and make intentional choices about what comes next. These questions are meant to inform—and strengthen—later decisions about the topics previously mentioned (engagement, capacity building and collections/community memory).

The answers to these questions do not live in this document... *they live with you and your board/governing body*—in your organization's history, in your collections, in your community relationships, and in the lived experiences connected to the milestone itself.

You may work through this toolkit on your own or with others. You may move slowly, skip sections that don't fit your needs, or return to earlier questions after conversations, research, or community engagement. All of that is part of the process, noting that though they are presented as individual models, one goal might feed another. So, for example, by examining your collections, you might invite and engage new audiences into what you preserve or through gaining new volunteers, you also find dedicated donors.

This toolkit is meant to be a companion, not a checklist.

Milestones vs. anniversaries: why it matters

To ensure we have a shared foundation as you explore this toolkit, let's begin with some definitions. So, what is a milestone anyway or an anniversary?

A *milestone* is defined as a meaningful point in time that marks a change, achievement or turning point in the life of an organization, place or community.

An *anniversary* on the other hand is a recurring yearly remembrance of a specific date—often marking when an event, founding or moment occurred.

An anniversary is calendar-based, often answering how long it has been since something has happened whereas a milestone is often about meaning.

From Dates to Doorways was created to support you in navigating those moments with care.

A Note on Celebration and Commemoration

Though anniversaries are often framed as celebrations—not all milestones feel celebratory to everyone.

Some moments invite pride and joy. Others carry complicated histories, unresolved harm, or deeply personal memories*. Still others sit somewhere in between and there might be even times when the best or most respectful decision is choosing not to formally mark a milestone at all.

In Oregon, the Oregon Heritage Plan and HB 2081 encourage the use of the word *commemoration* rather than celebration when recognizing statewide anniversaries. The shift reflects a growing understanding that these moments can open the door to learning and reflection—helping communities deepen their understanding of the past while also strengthening partnerships, participation, and the visibility of heritage across the state.

Toolkit icons

Throughout this toolkit, you'll see a small set of icons that signal different types of moments—times to pause and reflect, work through an idea on your own or with others, or access practical tools you can adapt for your organization. Think of them as small guides along the way, helping you move from reflection to action.



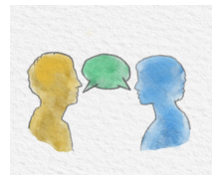
Pause & Reflect

A moment to slow down and consider the questions in front of you. These prompts invite thoughtful reflection before moving into planning or action.



Working solo (journal) or with others (conversation)

Indicates that a prompt or worksheet can be explored individually or through conversation with your board, staff, or volunteers.



Templates & Tools

Points to Part 4, full of ready-to-adapt materials—such as sample language, worksheets, or templates—that can help you get started more easily.



Guiding Principles

A compass highlights places where the guidance or suggestion connects to recognized professional standards by AASLH and NAI. Page 10 shares more about those standards and why they matter.

Washington State Parks: Example of Commemoration Language

In the early 2020s, Washington State Parks (WSP) began planning for a decade in which many parks would be “turning 100”. That milestone marked a century of state agency management—but not the age of the places themselves or people’s relationships to them. With the agency’s renewed focus on building and repairing relationships with Washington’s Tribes, WSP recognized that the language used to mark these moments needed to acknowledge complexity and honor multiple perspectives.

To meet the moment, a cross-agency committee (with staff from Communications, Tribal Relations, Interpretation, and Operations) formed to develop guidance for parks, beginning with recommended wording. The language below was shared with park staff and later informed public-facing messaging.

Why are we calling this a commemoration instead of a celebration or a party?

Commemoration calls upon us to remember or observe. Many of our parks have long and complicated histories that are important for us to remember. While we may want to have some fun with our 100-year events, some aspects of those histories may not be cause for celebration. As the current stewards of these lands, we want to pay respect to their storied histories while recognizing the complexities and people who made them what they are today.

That’s what makes them a commemoration: We are honoring the past, both the good and the bad.

When talking about this, use words and phrases like: Centennial commemoration (the official name of these events), centennial, commemoration, recognition or recognition event.

Avoid using words and phrases like: Birthday or birthday party, celebration.



An invitation

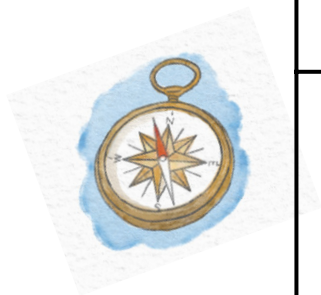


As you begin, we invite you to approach this work with curiosity, humility, and care. Milestones offer doorways to listen more closely—to the past, to the present, and to one another.

When reflection guides engagement, capacity building and collections, the results can be more grounded, more meaningful, and more deeply connected to the stories of the communities you serve.

*Guiding Principles

Several prompts in this toolkit connect to widely recognized professional standards in the heritage field, including guidance from the *National Association for Interpretation* (NAI) and the *American Association for State and Local History* (AASLH), which help organizations think carefully about meaning, stewardship, and how stories are shared with the public. Language in the toolkit which supports these standards/practices are noted with an asterisk (*). For a deeper dive, you can visit the organization's websites for more information.



Organization	Standard
NAI	Recognize that visitors bring their own cultural values and experiences to the site. (<i>Knowledge of the Visitor, Knowledge standard</i>)
	Navigate through what may be difficult controversial conversations (<i>Interpretive techniques, Skills/Abilities Standard</i>)

PART 1



Before You Plan Anything

Like most things, before you begin it helps to get your bearings. Part 1 is a guided pause—an opportunity to notice what this anniversary or milestone is bringing up, what stories and relationships live nearby, and what expectations (yours and others) may already be in the room.

Think of this portion as a way to widen the lens: to hold both excitement and complexity, to name who this moment matters to, and to be honest about what your organization can realistically take on.

SECTION 1

Naming the Moment You're Standing In

Spending some time as a board or staff identifying anniversaries and milestone dates that may be relevant to your organization can be a helpful starting point for future planning. Mapping these moments out in advance allows you to consider opportunities with your organization's capacity in mind, rather than reacting to them at the last minute. Here are a few categories of moments you might consider:

- Dates significant to the founding of the nation, state, or local community
- Dates associated with significant legislation at the national, state, or local level
- Local history or heritage festivals
- Cultural or seasonal festivals
- Anniversaries of local public works or landmarks
- Organizational milestones such as a founding date, the anniversary of acquiring a significant collection, or a historic building anniversary
- Anniversaries connected to important local businesses or institutions

Once you have identified some meaningful dates, try looking ahead to the next one or two milestone anniversaries.

For example:

XYZ Heritage Organization was founded on April 4, 1978

- 50th anniversary: April 4, 2028
- 75th anniversary: April 4, 2053

Taking the time to map out upcoming anniversaries several years into the future can help your governing body prioritize planning efforts and make thoughtful decisions about where to focus energy and resources. It can also help maintain continuity as staff and volunteers transition over time. With a few potential milestone dates in mind, the next step is to pause and consider which one of these moments might hold—for you, your organization, and the people connected to it.

On the following pages, you'll find a series of reflection questions to help guide that thinking. You can explore them with your board, governing body, or volunteer team (recommended), or work through them on your own and bring the insights back to a larger group.

Naming the Moment Worksheet

Working together as a group (board/governing body, committee, staff and volunteers, community working group, etc.), answer the questions below.



Group Worksheet

What milestone, anniversary, or moment has brought us together today?

This could be a founding date, a community anniversary, a building opening, a national moment like America250, or a turning point that feels important to name.

What do we each understand this moment to be about?

Where do our perspectives overlap—and where do they differ on this moment?

Who originally suggested we pay attention to this milestone? What needs, hopes, or concerns might be wrapped up in that suggestion?

Naming the Moment Worksheet

Does this milestone feel primarily: (check which apply)

☐

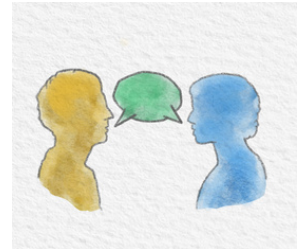
Local to our community?

☐

Connected to a larger regional or national story?

☐

Or both?



What do we already know about this moment as a group and what do we feel we are still learning?

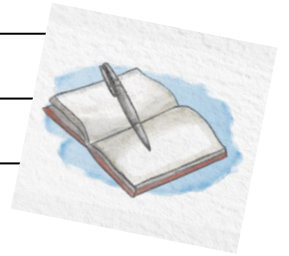
What questions do we need to sit with before deciding how to move forward together?

Naming the Moment Worksheet

Solo Worksheet

What milestone, anniversary, or moment are you feeling drawn to explore?

This could be a founding date, a community anniversary, a building opening, a national moment like America250, or a turning point that feels important to name.



What's bringing this moment to the surface right now? (check all that apply)
Do any of these feel relevant to your work?

☐

Timing

☐

Funding opportunities

☐

Curiosity

☐

Sense that it's "time" to look more closely

☐

Community Interest

☐

Other?

Does this milestone feel mostly local or is it connected to a larger regional or national story?

Naming the Moment Worksheet



Were you the one who first raised the idea, or did it come from someone else?

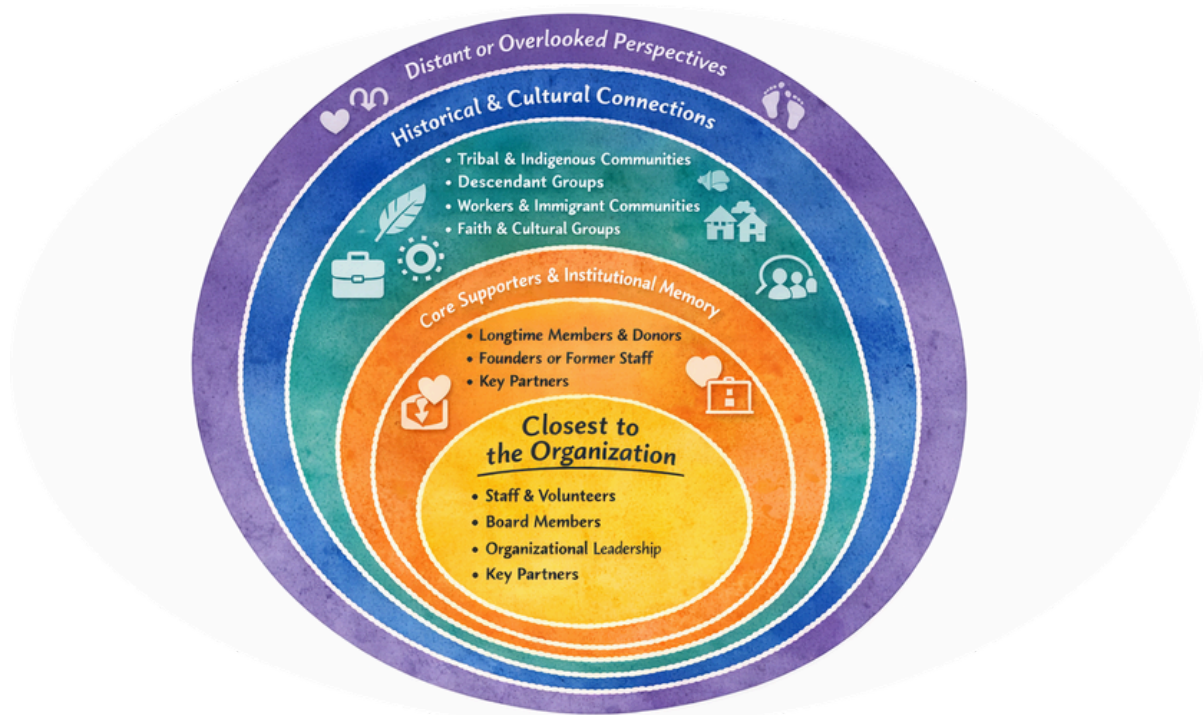
If so, how does this person's role in your organization contribute to your desire to recognize it?

What do you already know about this moment—and what do you feel you're still learning?

What other notes or thoughts do you have about this moment?

SECTION 2

Pausing to Consider What This Moment Means



Not every milestone feels the same to everyone. This section invites you to reflect on how this moment might be experienced differently across your community.

What this Moment Means

■ When you think about this milestone, what feelings or words come up first? (check all that apply)

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Celebration | ☐ Grief | ☐ Healing |
| ☐ Pride | ☐ Discomfort | ☐ Uncertainty |
| ☐ Curiosity | ☐ Reflection | ☐ Fill In _____ |

■ Who* might experience this moment differently than your organization does?

■ Are there perspectives that might be missing from the stories you've heard so far?

■ As an organization, what assumptions do we make about what this milestone "should" be? Where did those assumptions come from?

■ Are there parts of this history that include hardship, exclusion, displacement, or harm?_____ If so, how present—or absent—are those stories in your current engagement or collections? (Refer to Part 2 of the workbook)

■ Does marking this milestone automatically mean creating a celebratory event or feeling around it? What other forms of acknowledgment might also reflect or commemorate the full story?



SECTION 3

Grounding the Work in Community and Capacity*

This section helps you consider who should be part of the conversation and what is realistically possible for your organization right now.

Grounding the Work Worksheet

Who feels most closely connected to this milestone? (check all that apply)

☐ Longtime residents	☐ Descendents of milestone
☐ Elders	☐ Former employees
☐ Tribal partners	☐ Youth
☐ Volunteers	☐ Other (fill in blanks):
☐ Neighboring communities	☐
☐ Community partners	☐

Who isn't currently involved—but might want or need to be?

What might be getting in the way of their participation?

What kinds of relationships do you have with those communities or partners who carry these stories?

Grounding the Work Worksheet

What capacity do you honestly have at this moment?

☐ Staff time (if any)	☐ Partner support
☐ Volunteer energy/time	☐
☐ Budget	☐

What feels doable—and what feels like it might stretch your organization too far?

*Guiding Principles

An asterisk (*) highlights prompts that reflect professional standards from NAI and AASLH.

Organization	Standard
AASLH	The institution identifies current and potential audiences it serves, and makes appropriate decisions on how to serve them (<i>AUD1 Standard</i>)
NAI	Listen to and let the visitor demonstrate his/her knowledge of the resource during the interpretive experience. (<i>Social construction, Knowledge standard</i>)



Congratulations! You've done the thoughtful groundwork—named what matters, clarified the moment you're stepping into, and gathered the context that will guide you into what's next. Now let's walk through the doorway and move from orientation to action.

The modules that follow in Part 2 are designed to be flexible: start with the one that feels like the best fit for your goals, capacity, or what you're trying to solve right now. Then, when you have a moment, take a quick tour through the others—even a skim can spark an idea, reveal a helpful connection, or surface an opportunity you didn't know you had.



Workbook Modules

The modules that follow are designed like a set of doors—each one opening into a different way a milestone can move your organization forward. You don't need to walk through every door in the same order (or all at once). Start with the module that fits your most immediate need—where you have energy, urgency, or a clear opportunity—then circle back and at least peek into the others.

Inside, you'll find:

- **Engagement—Deepening Participation, Relevance and Relationships:** Ideas and prompts for special programming and community participation—designed to help a milestone become a doorway for new offerings and perhaps new relationships and stories to be shared.
- **Capacity Building: Strengthening Revenue, Volunteers & Relationships:** Guided questions to help you find the “why now,” shape a tangible ask, and align your fundraising tone with the history you're marking—plus space to rethink volunteer engagement in light of current trends and the milestone itself. It also provides opportunities for you to reflect on new ways to engage volunteers given current trends and the milestone itself.
- **Collections & Community Memory: Looking Closely at What you Hold and What Might be Missing:** Reflection prompts and pathways for using a milestone to look closely at what you hold, what's missing, and what may need new context.

MODULE 1

Engagement: Deepening Participation, Relevance & Relationships

Module Introduction

Milestones are more than a date on the calendar—they're a chance to open a doorway. This section is about engagement, special programming and community participation that help an anniversary become an opening for new offerings (and, when you're ready, new relationships and stories). Some sites will begin with a simple, obvious commemoration—a birthday bash, a paddle party, a special one-day program—and that's not "less than," it's often the on ramp that builds momentum and confidence. From there, the prompts in this section help you right-size your plans, clarify who you're inviting, and choose activities that feel welcoming, relevant, and doable. You'll also find tips, takeaways, and words of advice woven throughout, and if you want more sparks and models to borrow from, **Part 4** gathers resources and examples from interviews with heritage sites to inspire you to what's next.

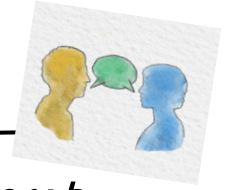
As previously, we invite you to explore this section with your board/governing body or planning committee (recommended) or alone. Select the questions that most meet your need and circumstances.

"Every 'circus' needs a ringleader; a central point of contact with the vision and ability to execute it."

Janice Crane, Executive Director- Cascade Locks Historical Museum, Cascade Locks, OR

Engagement Module Worksheet

Working together as a group (board/governing body, committee, staff and volunteers, community working group, etc.), answer the questions below.



Group Worksheet

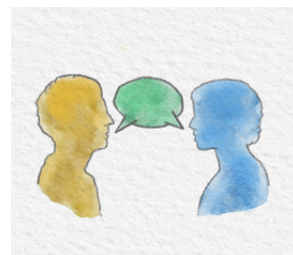
What's the most obvious or community-friendly way that comes to mind to mark this milestone

Are there things we are currently doing that we could use this milestone to leverage off?

If we did only one event, what would we want our visitors* to feel, learn, or remember as they leave? How does this connect to our mission*?

Engagement Module Worksheet

What partners could make the event easier or more fun (not more complex)*?



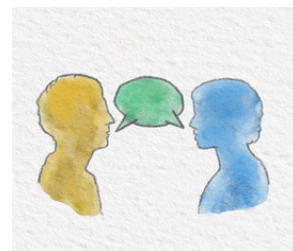
What relationships do we have on the board/governing body and in our networks to leverage right now?

Who would naturally show up to this kind of event—and who might feel left out*?

What would “success” look like at the right scale for us?

Engagement Module Worksheet

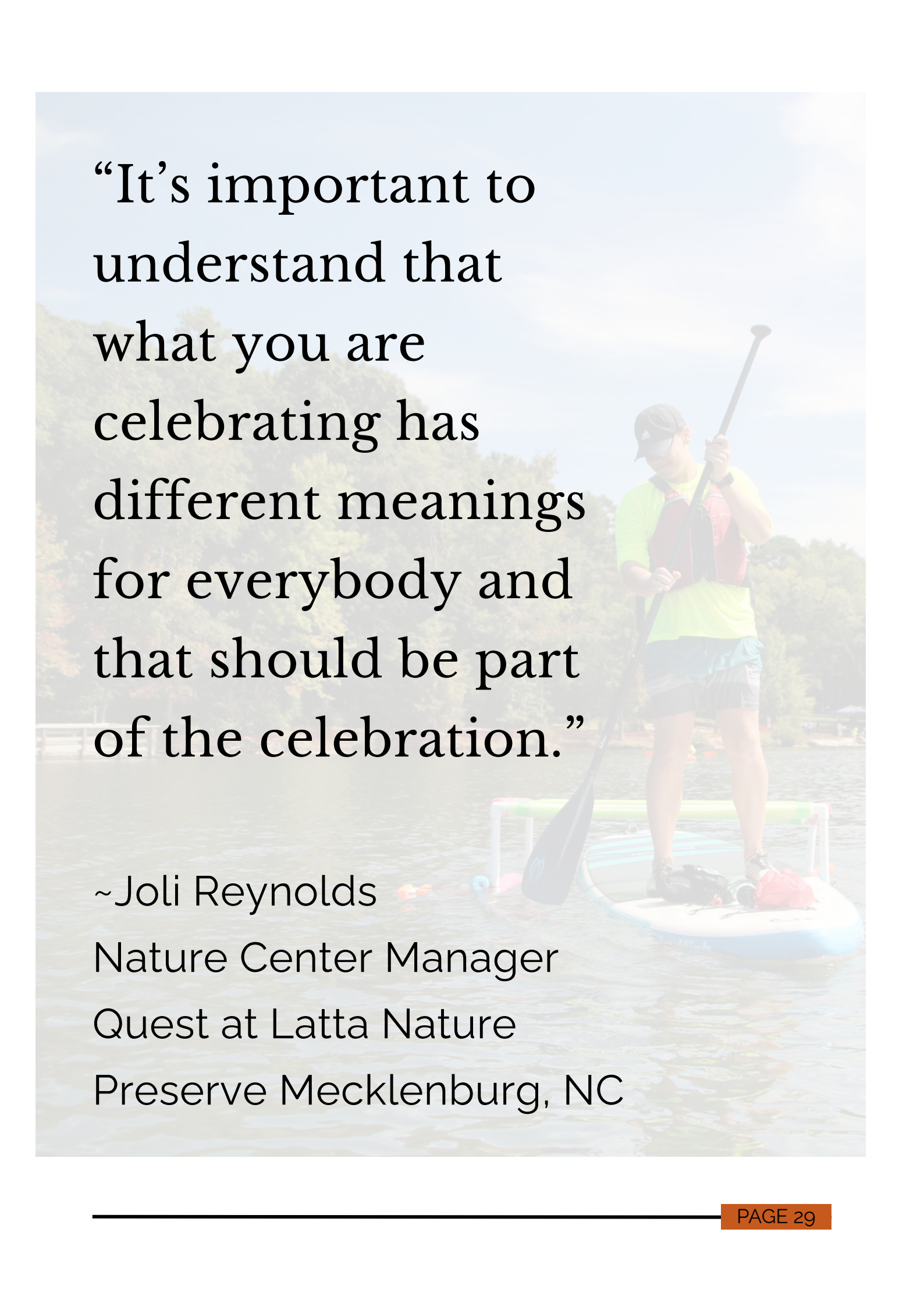
Are there parts of this anniversary story that are complicated for some people*? If yes, what tone feels responsible—celebration, commemoration, or a blend?



What is our organization's relationship with some of those communities?

How will we invite people back in after the event—without launching a whole new effort but will still help us in other areas of our organization that need support (fundraising, volunteer recruitment, etc.)?

If we take this on, what's one thing we're explicitly giving ourselves permission not to do this year?



“It’s important to understand that what you are celebrating has different meanings for everybody and that should be part of the celebration.”

~Joli Reynolds
Nature Center Manager
Quest at Latta Nature
Preserve Mecklenburg, NC

Engagement Module Worksheet

Solo Worksheet



What's

the easiest, most "of course I could do that" anniversary idea?
(List 3 options in 2 minutes; circle the one with the lowest lift/highest joy)

Is

there anything I'm *already doing* that we could use this milestone to amplify our existing work?

If

I did only one event, what would I want our visitors* to feel, learn, or remember as they leave? How does this connect to our mission*?

Who

is this event naturally for—and who might also come if the invitation felt welcoming?

Engagement Module Worksheet



Are there parts of this anniversary story that are complicated for some people*?

If yes, what's my role in building relationships with those groups?

What do I already have (space, partners, volunteers, props, money) that makes this doable?

What would "success" look like at that's appropriate for my capacity and work?

Engagement Module Worksheet



How will I engage visitors after the event—without launching a whole new program?

If I take this on, what's one thing I'm explicitly giving myself permission not to do this year?

Other notes and ideas:

Case Study: Puyallup Valley JACL Remembrance Gallery

Washington State Fairgrounds | Puyallup, Washington
Interview with Eileen Yamada Lamphere
(Puyallup Valley JACL)

What began as planning for the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066 became something far deeper: a long-term commitment to remembrance, relationship, and public learning at the Washington State Fairgrounds—on the site of the Puyallup Assembly Center, the largest temporary concentration camp for Japanese Americans during WW2 in Washington state. In her interview, Eileen Yamada Lamphere (President of the Puyallup Valley Japanese American Citizen League) described an early mindset shift that helped open the door to build bridges for the project: we have to remember that what happened here was as a military government action, not necessarily neighbor against neighbor, and acknowledging what happened there wasn't "a blight (on the community)," but a responsibility to tell the truth with care and respect.

In September 2017, an anniversary event was planned as a simple recognition moment—but then grew into an "all survivors event" with 1,500 families and survivors attending and a visual act of honoring that made the room stop and look. During the event, survivors were given stalks of bamboo (representing strength and resilience), and as names were read, they raised the plants upward so the audience could see—quietly, unmistakably—who was present.

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"I had 35 years of being an educator, but nothing gave me the experience for doing something like this. Wasn't because I wanted to, but because I needed to."

Eileen Yamada Lamphere

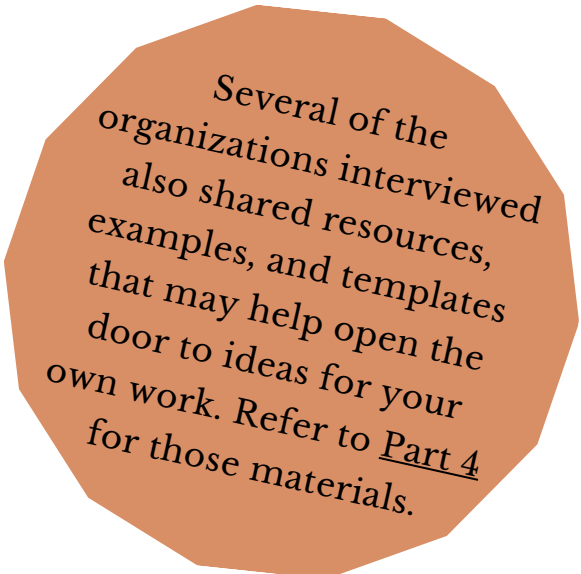
Case Study: Puyallup Valley JACL Remembrance Gallery

Washington State Fairgrounds | Puyallup, Washington
Interview with Eileen Yamada Lamphere
(Puyallup Valley JACL)

That same year, a pop-up exhibit sparked momentum beyond what the organizers expected: "People saw the value and importance of this exhibit." The milestone then became a doorway—first to visibility, then to community contribution, and eventually to a permanent space. The pop up was the banners of names, at that time over 7300. For the first time, many family members learned about their elders' time during the war.

By September 2022, that doorway had become the Remembrance Gallery—a place designed for reflection, immersion, and interaction. Visitors encounter a re-created barracks experience and an 40-foot sculptural monument honoring 7,500+ people through illuminated name markers and tactile panels where visitors can touch names or create rubbings. And the why behind the work is as important as the what. Lamphere put it simply, she was involved not necessarily "because I wanted to, but because I needed to" —not as a burden, but as a call to show up for community, for elders, and for the next generation. Eileen also felt a personal obligation to do this work and honor her parents and grandparents. The Gallery stands as a reminder that anniversaries can be more than a date on the calendar: they can be a way to build a lasting civic space that helps people leave empowered to make sure this doesn't happen again.

You can visit the Remembrance Gallery at the Washington State Fairgrounds and for a video tour, go to: <https://bwco.info/work/remembrance-gallery/>



Several of the organizations interviewed also shared resources, examples, and templates that may help open the door to ideas for your own work. Refer to Part 4 for those materials.

“It’s important to make it relevant across cross-sectional groups, and ask why does this matter? Will this be relevant in 50 yrs? 100 years?”

Gwen Trice

Founder & Executive Director

Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center,
Joseph OR

Case Study: Bridge of the Gods at 100: Two Community Pathways

Cascade Locks Main Street & Cascade Locks Historical Museum | Cascade Locks, OR

Interviews with: Lauryl Nagode (President of Main Street Cascade Locks) & Janice Crane (Executive Director, Cascade Locks Historical Museum)

This case study offers a unique approach to two different entities, honoring an anniversary with complementary approaches.

Cascade Locks is stepping into the Bridge of the Gods' centennial in 2026 with two parallel planning efforts, each grounded in a different way of serving the community and milestone: one with a more tourism- and Main Street-facing approach, and the other with an interpretation- and collections-facing mode. Together, they show how a single milestone can open more than one doorway—inviting both economic vitality and deeper local understanding, without requiring everyone to rally around the exact same format or way of doing things.

On the interpretive/collections side, the Cascade Locks Historical Museum and its partners are using the centennial to deepen public understanding of the bridge through research, story, and stewardship. Their early “pub talk” launch (titled Riveting History: 100 Years of the Bridge of the Gods) introduced their approach to honoring the milestone, complete with a digital exhibit and an exhibit which will be at the Capitol in Salem in September/October 2026, and then find its way “home” to become a permanent museum installation. The exhibition will have an emphasis on the laborers who built the bridge and were involved in the construction. Thereby treating the anniversary as a chance to strengthen the historical record, invite reflection, and leave behind interpretive assets that keep working long after the centennial year ends.

On the tourism/Main Street side, Main Street Cascade Locks is approaching the centennial as a community-wide invitation to bring people downtown, create low-barrier ways to participate, and generate momentum for local businesses—especially in a shoulder season. Their plan centers on an October 2026 “centennial month” experience with multiple entry points: a pop-up celebration visitor center, interactive/digital storytelling elements (including a digital “scrapbook/birthday card” concept), and a passport/rewards program designed to move visitors through local shops and events. The milestone was launched with a community night, including a raffle, multimedia presentation on the centennial project and troll hunt which took place several weeks prior.

The takeaway is simple: both approaches are tenable and valuable, prioritizing different outcomes—one building long-term interpretive capacity and collections-centered storytelling, the other expanding community participation and visitor-facing energy. In a small town, that “both/and” posture can be a strength: it allows the centennial to be celebrated in more than one voice, with more than one kind of welcome.



Check out Part 4 for resources and ideas!

From Their Doorstep to Yours: Engagement Advice from Anniversary Organizers

These tips and takeaways come straight from the voices behind the case studies—people who planned real anniversary moments in real-world conditions (limited time, limited staff, and big hopes). Though not all are specifically highlighted in the toolkit, the advice shared is worth resharing as it is both practical and permission-giving:

- ✓ **Right-size your calendar.** A shorter run of events is often stronger (and kinder to staff) than trying to stretch programming across an entire year.
- ✓ **Use the milestone to amplify what already works*.** Sometimes the best move is elevating current programs with an anniversary lens rather than inventing something new.
- ✓ **Start earlier than you think you need to.** Big attendance goals require long lead time; the larger the crowd you're aiming for, the more runway you'll want.
- ✓ **Borrow inspiration from "odd" places.** A concept from another context can become something deeply meaningful when adapted thoughtfully to your site.
- ✓ **Let partners help define what's workable.** For community engagement to be real (not performative), community and partners need to shape the "how," based on capacity, history, and what's being honored.
- ✓ **Match the program to the milestone's tone.** Let the history you're marking guide whether the moment calls for celebration, commemoration, or a blend*

From Their Doorstep to Yours: Engagement Advice from Anniversary Organizers

- ✓ **If you choose commemoration, plan with care*.** Be mindful of emotional burden and expectations—especially for those asked to participate or volunteer—so it doesn't feel like obligation disguised as “opportunity.”
- ✓ **Give yourself permission to make it fun.** Joy and play can be a powerful on-ramp to connection—and a legitimate way to mark a milestone.
- ✓ **Name a clear focus to keep people engaged.** A shared strategic vision helps volunteers and collaborators stay motivated and aligned.
- ✓ **Avoid the “kitchen sink” trap.** Goals + vision prevent your anniversary from becoming everything at once—and meaningful to no one.
- ✓ **Build the right planning* table.** Include not only current supporters, but also future partners you've wanted to engage—milestones create a natural reason to invite them in.
- ✓ **Don't plan in a vacuum—tap your DMO.** Your local/regional tourism partners (like Travel Oregon) can help amplify reach and sharpen messaging.
- ✓ **Make room to measure, even lightly.** Build in a little time to evaluate what worked—especially if you didn't start with crystal-clear goals. (Reminder: If possible, use the questions in this toolkit to help you think about why you are doing this work)



Guiding Principles: *Engagement Module*

Organization	Standard
AASLH	All aspects of the institution's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission. (<i>MVG Standard 2</i>)
	The institution identifies current and potential audiences it serves, and makes appropriate decisions on how to serve them (<i>AUD Standard 1</i>)
	The institution engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community. (<i>MGMT Standard 9</i>)
NAI	Manage program development and strategically coordinate implementation that demonstrates maximum utilization of resources. (<i>Interpretive Management, Skills/Abilities Standard</i>)
	Develop and maintain partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. (<i>Interpretive Management, Skills/Abilities Standard</i>)
	Recognize that visitors bring their own cultural values and experiences to the site. (<i>Knowledge of the Visitor, Knowledge standard</i>)

PLAN EARLY AND GET AS MANY KEY PLAYERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY ON BOARD AS SOON AS YOU CAN. IT'S NOT NECESSARILY GOING TO BE EASY, BUT YOU HAVE TO ENGAGE THEM RIGHT AWAY.

- LAURYL NAGODE, PRESIDENT, CASCADE LOCKS
MAIN STREET
CASCADE LOCKS OR

Conclusion Engagement Module

As you wrap up this engagement module, picture what a doorway does: it gives shape to an opening. It turns a wall into an invitation. It helps people know where to enter—and what they might find on the other side. The engagement ideas and prompts you've explored here are meant to do the same: create a clear, welcoming way into your milestone, whether that starts with a simple celebration or a more participatory experience that brings new voices into the story.

If your next question is, “How do we build the frame so this doorway holds?” step into Capacity Building (fundraising & volunteer raising)—to find the “why now,” shape a tangible ask, and rethink volunteer engagement in light of current trends and the milestone itself. If you're wondering, “What rooms are we opening, and what memories belong there?” move into Collections & Community Memory—to look closely at what you hold, what's missing, and what may need new context, at a depth that works for both collections-savvy teams and all-volunteer groups. Together, these modules help you turn an anniversary moment into a threshold for ongoing connection.

MODULE 2

Capacity Building: Strengthening Revenue, Volunteers & Relationships

Module Introduction

Capacity is what turns a milestone from a good idea into a lived experience—and this section is here to help you build it in ways that fit your story, your site, and your reality. Rather than treating fundraising and volunteers as separate “to-dos,” the pages ahead invite you to think of them as relationship work: how you ask, who you invite, and what you’re building together should match the history you’re marking. Within the questions below, you’ll find two complementary lenses and approaches—first, guided fundraising questions to help you clarify your “why now,” shape a tangible ask, and choose an approach that won’t exhaust your team, especially when the milestone carries complexity.

Then within those same headers, questions invite you to consider if the milestone is also an opportunity for volunteer engagement and recruiting—and when you’re ready to move from ideas to implementation, this module intentionally connects forward to the anniversary-specific volunteer job descriptions and templates in **Part 4**, so you can translate momentum into clear roles people can actually say “yes” to.

What makes this milestone a natural moment to ask for support?

Is there a project, need, or goal already underway that this anniversary could spotlight?

Are any of these circumstances currently happening at my site? If so, what are they?

Staff transitions, retirements, or leadership shifts that create a natural fundraising narrative?

A long-standing need (endowment, restoration, acquisitions, staffing) that feels more compelling when tied to this date?

An opportunity might we miss if we don't act this year?



If your goal is for the event to be a fundraiser, then think about attracting a broader audience and go light on the history. Make it fun, interactive, light on messaging (if any), seek out an out of the ordinary venue and a novel yet accessible program. If you want to attract your stalwart members, then go more in on a traditional format, with more time and focus on content on a deeper theme.

~ Greg Griffith, President of the Board of
Trustees Olympia Historical Society &
Bigelow House Museum

Opening the Right Doorway for Fundraising Worksheet

Decide Early: Is This a Fundraiser, a Community Celebration — or Both?

Start this work by thinking about the intent of your event since that choice will guide how you design it, frame the invitation, and measure success.

What is our primary goal for this event? (circle one)

Generating revenue

Growing membership or
volunteer support

Increasing visibility for
the organization

Creating space for community
reflection or healing

If **this is primarily a fundraiser:**

Is the value of the donation clear to supporters?

Is there a tangible outcome or impact donors can understand? What is it?

Does the event theme reinforce the reason we are asking for support and align with our mission*?

Opening the Right Doorway for Fundraising Worksheet

If this is primarily a community celebration:

How will we measure success beyond dollars raised?

Decide early section
continued

What kind of participation, connection, or visibility would feel meaningful*?

Align the Effort with Your Mission and Values

Fundraising and capacity-building during a milestone year should reflect not only what you hope to accomplish, but also how you hope to do it. As you shape your plans, consider how your approach supports the broader values of heritage work—expanding voices, increasing access, and demonstrating responsible stewardship.

The Oregon Heritage Commission encourages organizations to strengthen heritage work by:

- Engage more voices*
- Increasing access to Heritage
- Build heritage networks
- Develop healthy organizations

Does our fundraising language reflect the full history we are honoring?

Opening the Right Doorway for Fundraising Worksheet

Are we increasing access—or unintentionally pricing people out?

Align the effort
continued

Are we inviting new voices into leadership, planning, or volunteer roles?

Choose a Scale That Fits—and Consider Who Can Help

As you plan your milestone, consider both the scale of the effort and who might help share the lift.

What fundraising approaches have drained our energy or capacity in the past?

What feels achievable with our current staff and volunteer support?

Could partners contribute through “percentage nights,” special promotions, sponsorships, or in-kind support?

Case Study: A Doorway Year at Campbell House

Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture | Spokane, WA
Interview with: Ellen Postlewait, Curator of History & Campbell House



In Spokane at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, the Campbell House is more than a beautifully preserved home—it's a long-running relationship between a community and a place that has been cared for across generations. Built in 1898 for the Campbell family, the house became a museum in 1924 when it was donated to the local historical society, and it has spent more than a century welcoming school groups, tour-goers, and curious locals into a very tangible “portal” to the early 1900s. Over decades of restoration work—especially in the late 20th century—the team worked to return the house to a richly detailed 1910-era setting, with a strong emphasis on authenticity, education, and public access.

When the house's 125th anniversary arrived in 2023, it coincided with a key retirement and a cluster of “almost finished” restoration and collections goals: final wallpaper work, the chance to acquire original family objects from a descendant, and the completion of a long-awaited publication about the house. Rather than treating the anniversary as a single celebration, staff used it as a clear, concrete way to explain what stewardship really means—and why it matters. Anniversaries, as Curator Ellen Postlewait put it, help translate the value of preservation for people who don't think of themselves as “history people.” They're a simple, understandable invitation: help us care for something you can see and feel.

That clarity became the heart of their fundraising strategy. Instead of a vague appeal to “support the museum,” the Campbell House team emphasized specific, visible outcomes—restoring a chair, finishing a room, placing original objects back into the house—and then used the momentum to launch a bigger legacy goal: building an endowment to reestablish a dedicated curator position for the home. The site also focused their annual gala on the anniversary, highlighting the home as the event's beneficiary and published a catalog to commemorate the date. By 2025, the campaign had reached a major turning point—including a significant anonymous gift—strengthening the long-term plan to secure the position and ensuring that the Campbell House's next chapter would be supported not just by anniversary energy, but by lasting investment.



Though it can be hard, the specificity in fundraising is so useful. Saying things like “You're going to help the museum run” is not very exciting or effective. The more you can find specific things for the donors to fund, the easier it is to sell it. – Ellen Postlewait

Check out Part 4 for resources!

A Note on Volunteer Engagement

Across our sector, volunteer engagement is changing. Many organizations are paying closer attention to how volunteer experiences connect to donor relationships—because volunteers often become some of the most invested supporters over time, and systems are evolving to help nonprofits manage those connections more intentionally. At the same time, “one-size-fits-all” volunteer models are giving way to more flexible, bite-sized roles. The long-term “super volunteer” is increasingly rare, and many people are looking for episodic, skills-based, or short-term ways to contribute (which make milestones a perfect opportunity).



Take a closer look

Explore these links to learn more about the future of volunteer engagement:

[“What does the future of volunteering look like?”](#) (Johnson Center for Philanthropy)

[“The Future of Volunteer Management: Trends to Watch in 2025 and Beyond”](#) (Golden)

All of this points to a useful question for your milestone: What do people need to say yes? The questions in this section highlight volunteer trends and invite you to explore the deeper why—what motivates people to show up, stay involved, and feel proud of their contribution. From there, we’ve translated motivation into milestone-ready roles—including a bridge forward to the anniversary volunteer job descriptions in **Part 4**, where you can move from inspiration to clear, doable invitations.



From Supporters to Stewards Worksheet

Start with the People Who Already Care

Successful fundraising and volunteer recruitment often begin with the relationships you already have. Before reaching outward, take time to identify the people who already care about your organization and might welcome an invitation to support this milestone.

For Fundraising:

Who are our most loyal volunteers, members, or supporters*?

Have we asked our board/governing body to contribute within their means before going public with an appeal?

Are there founders, longtime champions, or early supporters who should be invited into this conversation first?

From Supporters to Stewards Worksheet

Start with the People Who Already Care *Continued:*

For Volunteers:

Who might care about this moment but has never considered volunteering before?

Could this anniversary serve as a welcoming, low-risk entry point for someone new to get involved*?

Make the Impact Tangible

People are more likely to give their time, money, or membership when they can clearly see the difference their participation will make. Instead of broad appeals, focus on specific outcomes that supporters can picture, contribute to, and celebrate together.

For Fundraising:

What could supporters physically see, touch, or experience because of their donation?

From Supporters to Stewards Worksheet

Make the Impact Tangible (Fundraising) *Continued:*

Can we break a larger need into smaller, visible pieces? (For example: \$50 restores wallpaper, \$100 funds an archival box.)

For Volunteers: Volunteers today are often motivated by meaning, visible progress, and recognition.

What progress would volunteers be able to see as the work unfolds?

What short-term project connected to the milestone would feel satisfying to complete?

From Supporters to Stewards Worksheet

Is There a “Participation-Based” Fundraising or volunteering option?

Could participation itself generate revenue?

Who there a small entry fee, permit, passport, or special item we could sell? (read the case study on Cascade Locks for inspiration)

What would make this feel fun rather than transactional?

Could participation also double as volunteer recruitment?

From Their Doorstep to Yours: Capacity Building Advice from Anniversary Organizers

These tips and takeaways come straight from the voices behind the case studies—people who planned real anniversary moments in real-world conditions (limited time, limited staff, and big hopes). Though not all are specifically highlighted in the toolkit, the advice shared is worth resharing as it is both practical and permission-giving:

- ✓ **Build on what's already in motion.** If a retirement, leadership transition, or milestone year is already creating attention, use it to spotlight (and fund) work you're already trying to complete—rather than inventing something brand new.
- ✓ **Start earlier than you think you need to.** “Your gift helps us do this” sounds better than “support the museum.” Tie donations to visible outcomes and share quick proof points of what previous gifts made possible.
- ✓ **Expand your partnership map.** Look beyond the usual suspects: What local businesses, parks, breweries, libraries, or gathering places already hold your community's attention—and could help amplify this milestone (and your fundraising) in a mutually beneficial way?
- ✓ **Choose the milestone that fits the story you can hold well*.** Sometimes a “side-step” anniversary is the wiser doorway. If the deeper history is complicated or contested, consider marking a different, values-aligned date (e.g., an organization founding) rather than forcing celebration where it doesn't fit.

From Their Doorstep to Yours: Capacity Building Advice from Anniversary Organizers

- ✓ **Use the milestone to deepen relationships**—not just raise dollars*. Ask: How could this moment strengthen trust, increase shared ownership, or make your organization more relevant to the people you serve?
- ✓ **Lean into a simple, memorable campaign hook.** A little wordplay can help people remember (and repeat) the ask: “Celebrate 25 Years. Invest in 25 More,” or “\$25K for 25 Years.” Keep it easy to explain and easy to share.
- ✓ **Invite founders and longtime champions early.** If founders (or “origin story” people) are still connected, learn what they care about now—and reflect that in the milestone plan. Alignment builds buy-in and reduces friction.
- ✓ **Watch for mission creep.** A milestone can open doors, but it shouldn’t pull you away from who you are. Use your mission* as the filter for what you say yes (and no) to.
- ✓ **Decide early: fundraiser, celebration, or both—with clear boundaries.** Many groups learn the hard way that an event can’t be everything at once. Name the primary purpose up front, then design the experience (pricing, messaging, partner asks) to match.



Guiding Principles: *Capacity Building* *Module*

Organization	Standard
AASLH	All aspects of the institution's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission. (<i>MVG Standard 2</i>)
	The institution engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community. (<i>MGMT Standard 9</i>)
	The institution identifies current and potential audiences it serves, and makes appropriate decisions on how to serve them (<i>AUD Standard 1</i>)
	The institution understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation. (<i>AUD Standard 3</i>)
NAI	Develop and maintain partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. (<i>Interpretive Management, Skills/Abilities Standard</i>)

Decide if you want it (your event) to be for your community/current supporters (who already value you) or if it's a fundraiser with a new audience, remember you can serve both audiences but have two separate events.

- Erin Whitesel-Jones, executive director of the Olympia Historical Society & Bigelow House Museum

Capacity Building Module

Conclusion

You've just done the core work of Capacity Building: clarifying why now, deciding early what kind of moment you're designing (fundraiser, celebration, or both), and shaping an ask people can grasp—one that's concrete, mission-aligned, and scaled to what your team can sustain. You also explored the people-power side of capacity: how volunteer engagement is changing, what motivates people to show up (meaning, belonging, recognition, flexibility), and how a milestone can be used to invite volunteers into roles that feel time-bound, purpose-driven, and genuinely appreciated. Along the way, you considered partnerships that widen the lift, and you began translating all of this into clearer pathways for supporters—donors and volunteers alike—to step in and stay connected beyond the anniversary.

If your next question is, "What rooms are we opening, and what memories belong there?" step into Collections & Community Memory: Looking Closely at What you Hold and What Might be Missing—to look closely at what you hold, what's missing, and what may need new context, at a depth that works for both collections-savvy teams and all-volunteer groups. If you're wondering, "How do we make this milestone matter to people beyond the date?" move into Engagement—Deepening Participation, Relevance and Relationships —for ideas and prompts that help a milestone become a doorway to participation, shared ownership, and new relationships (not just a one-day event). Together, these modules help you turn an anniversary moment into a threshold for ongoing connection.

MODULE 3

Collections & Community Memory:

Looking Closely at What you Hold and What Might be Missing

Module Introduction

Milestones invite more than programming or celebration. They also offer a rare moment to pause and look carefully at the stories an organization holds—and the ones it may not yet have the ability to tell. For museums, historical societies, and heritage sites, collections often feel familiar: objects in storage, photographs on the wall, or artifacts that have long helped anchor the stories a site shares with visitors. But when viewed through the lens of an anniversary or milestone, those same materials can raise new questions. What do these items reveal about the past—and about how and why they were collected in the first place? Which stories feel easy to tell because the materials are already there? Which stories remain harder to interpret because objects, voices, or context are missing?

At the same time, milestones can expand how we think about what it means to collect. For some organizations, the most meaningful additions may not be physical artifacts at all. Oral histories, artistic performances, community art, photographs, or digital storytelling projects can all become part of the historical record. These forms of collecting allow organizations to capture voices, experiences, and perspectives that may not have previously been preserved*—broadening who is represented in the story and how that story is shared. This moment can even be a time to expand what is on the historic register and further expand the locations where important stories take place.

This section of the toolkit offers reflection prompts and pathways to help you use a milestone to look closely at your collections and its representation of community memory. The questions that follow are designed to support thoughtful observation rather than technical evaluation. You may find yourself revisiting your collections with fresh curiosity, identifying stories that need additional context, or recognizing gaps that point toward new relationships or community conversations.

What Do We Have- and What Do We Notice?

■ When you think about this milestone, what objects or photos come to mind first?

■ What items do people most often ask about or comment on?

■ Are there things you see often but don't know much about?

What Stories Feel Easy—or Hard—to Tell?

■ Which stories connected to this milestone do we tell a lot?

■ Which stories do we struggle to explain or avoid?

■ Are there parts of the story that feel uncomfortable, incomplete, or complicated?



What Do We Know—and What Don't We Know?

■ Which items do we know the most about?

■ Which ones have labels or stories we trust—and which don't?

■ Are there items where we're unsure how they got here?

What Might Be Missing?

■ Are there people connected to this milestone we don't hear much about?

■ Are there voices we know existed but aren't represented here?

■ What's one small thing we could do during this milestone?

Looking for Patterns, Emphasis, and What's Missing

What themes or perspectives show up repeatedly in the collection related to this milestone?

What are the methods by which we have collected these stories?
(physical objects, photographs, documents, etc.)*

Are there voices, roles, or experiences that appear only indirectly—or not at all*?

Considering Context and Interpretation*

Do we know why these items were collected in the first place?

Are there cultural considerations or sensitivities connected to certain objects?

If we did nothing new, what stories would remain untold?

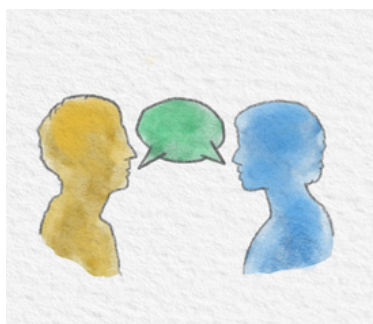
Don't feel compelled to do everything, tell every story, be comprehensive. Lean into the best representations of what you have and whatever they may be.

~ Cecily Marcus, Director, Collections
Minnesota Historical Society

Using a Milestone to Guide Collection Decisions

When thinking about your collections, the obvious first thing to consider is your organization's policy and a milestone or anniversary might serve as a good opportunity to revisit it.

Once you've reviewed your policy, choose one of two different worksheets (pages 65-72) to help you decide not just what is missing but also to guide you on what might be added to your collections/archives during this milestone.



“We started a year and half ago, it takes time to work with communities and to get to know people, and to know what they want to share (what’s their identify). **Community takes time to develop and doesn’t magically happen overnight.**”

~ Dr. Kim Kennedy-White, Associate Curator of Arts
& Leisure, HistoryCO

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

Solo Worksheet

How to use this worksheet:

Choose one object, story, or gap that came up while reflecting on your milestone and remember:

- There are **no right or wrong** answers.
- You do **not** need to complete every section.
- Noticing and writing things down **is progress**.

What am I considering? (An object, story, experience, or gap connected to this milestone)

Step 1: Does This Matter?



Why did this object or story stand out to me right now?

Does it help people better understand this moment or place in time?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

Not really

Would it feel like a missed opportunity if I did nothing with this?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

Not really

If this doesn't feel important right now, it's okay to stop here.

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

Step 2: Are We Ready to Hold This Responsibly?



Do I feel confident explaining this story honestly and carefully?

☐

Yes

☐

Somewhat

☐

Not yet

Are there sensitivities, emotions, or cultural considerations involved?

☐

Yes

☐

Not sure

☐

No

What questions would we want answered before moving forward?

Step 3: Where Does This Story Belong?

Does this story belong in our collection—or with the community?

Is the **object** important, or is the **story** more important?

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

Step 3: *continued*



Could listening, recording, or acknowledging be enough for now?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

No

Step 4: Choose A Path (for Now)

☐

Collect: We actively gather and care for this object or story.

☐

Reinterpret What We Already Have: We tell a fuller or more honest story using existing materials

☐

Acknowledge Without Collecting: We name the story or gap without taking ownership.

☐

Pause and Wait: We will think about this a bit more and revisit

Why does this path feel right now?

*Final
reflection*

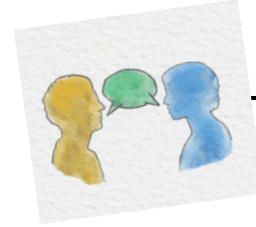
What did this conversation help me notice? What is one thing I want to remember in the future?

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

How to use this worksheet:

Choose one object, story, or gap that came up while reflecting on your milestone and remember:

- There are **no right or wrong** answers.
- You do **not** need to complete every section.
- This worksheet is meant to support thoughtful discussion, not force quick decisions.



Group Worksheet

What's (are we considering? (An object, story, community question, interpretive opportunity, or gap connected to this milestone.)

Step 1: Does This Fit Who We are?

Why is this coming up for us right now?

Does this connect to our mission, values, or purpose?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

Not really

Does it align with our stated values (equity, access, care, relevance, etc.)?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

Not really

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

Step 1: *continued*

Would not engaging with this story conflict with who we say we are?

☐

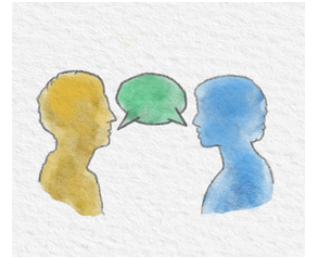
Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

No



Step 2: Who Could Be Affected?

Who might care about how this story is told—or not told?

Are there communities connected to this story that we have relationships with?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

Not sure

Is there potential harm, misunderstanding or broken trust?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

Not sure

What action seems the best for us as a board/organization (circle best option)"

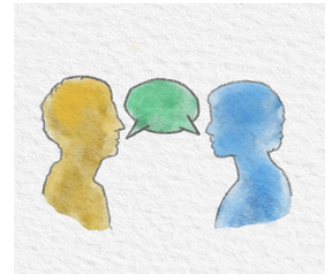
Proceed with Care

Proceed with consultation

Pause and learn more

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

Step 3: Can We Hold This Well? (Capacity and Sustainability Check)



Do we have the capacity to care for this responsibly?

Do we have the staff, volunteer time, space, or funding this would require?

☐

Yes

☐

Somewhat

☐

Not now

Is this a one-time milestone activity, or an ongoing commitment?

☐

One-time

☐

Both

☐

Ongoing

Would taking this on stretch us beyond what we can do well?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

Not really

If this requires new resources, are we prepared to support that?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

No

What's our takeaway?

☐

Capacity exists

☐

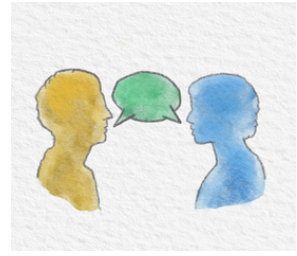
Capacity could be built

☐

Capacity not available

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

Step 4: Are We Ready? (Risk, Responsibility and Readiness)



Are there legal, ethical, cultural, or community considerations involved?

☐

Yes

☐

Not sure

☐

No

Are there reasons this story or object could be controversial, misunderstood or be a trigger for trauma?

☐

Yes

☐

Somewhat

☐

Not yet

Do we trust that the organization can hold this story responsibility at this time?

☐

Yes

☐

Maybe

☐

No

What questions would we want answered before moving forward?

Board or group takeaway?

☐

Low risk

☐

Manageable risk

☐

Risk suggests waiting

Collections Decision Making Worksheet

Step 5: Our Path Forward

Based on the discussion above, we support the following path:



- ☐ **Move Forward with Collection or Acquisition (we support it!)**
- ☐ **Support Reinterpretation:** We support telling a fuller or more honest story using what we already hold.
- ☐ **Acknowledge Without Collecting:** We support naming the story, gap, or issue without taking ownership of materials.
- ☐ **Pause and Revisit Later:** We support documenting the conversation and returning to it when the time is right.
- ☐ **Decline at This Time:** We believe not moving forward is the right decision for now.

What did this conversation help us notice? What do we want to remember for the next time a question like this comes forward?

Case Study: Portrait of Colorado at 150



History Colorado

Interview with: Dr. Kim Kennedy-White, Associate Curator of Arts & Leisure and project lead for Portrait of Colorado at 150

For History Colorado, the state's 150th anniversary—and the wider frame of America 250—has become less a prompt for a single celebratory event and more a doorway into statewide relationship-building.

Through Portrait of Colorado at 150, the organization set out to add 150 oral histories from underrepresented and marginalized voices, while intentionally looking beyond the Front Range to gather stories from all 64 counties and across eight regions in the state. Within a short time of launching, the project has widened, and collecting “story” has expanded from oral histories to also include community events, performances, art, and other forms of memory that communities themselves wanted to lift up.

What makes this example especially useful is its flexible, community-centered approach. Rather than assuming every story needs to come back to the institution, History Colorado has created options: communities can contribute to the state collection, keep materials in their own care, or use shared tools and support to document stories themselves. Along the way, the team has let go of some larger original ideas when funding changed and focused instead on the events, partnerships, and storytelling models they can do well.

The result is not just a one-year initiative, the anniversary has become a doorway not just for collecting, but for building relationships, increasing access, and creating resources that can support community memory long after 2026 has passed.



Check out Part 4 for resources!

From Their Doorstep to Yours: Collections and Community Memory Advice from Anniversary Organizers

These takeaways come from people who used milestone moments not just to look backward, but to ask better questions about what belongs in the record, who gets to shape it, and how collections work can feel more connected, more relevant, and more shared.

- ✓ **Start with what you already hold—then look at it differently.** A milestone can be a useful reason to revisit your collections, not to find the “best” or most iconic objects, but to ask what stories they tell, what questions they raise, and what new meaning they carry now.
- ✓ **Do not feel pressure to tell everything at once.** A milestone is not a command to be comprehensive. It can be enough to choose a few strong, meaningful stories and do them well. As one interviewee reflected, constraints of time, staffing, and capacity are real—and thoughtful choices are still good choices.
- ✓ **Know your connection to the milestone.** Before you collect, reinterpret, or launch a big project, get clear on why this moment matters to your organization.
- ✓ **Use the anniversary to widen the record, not just polish the familiar story.** Treat the milestone as a chance to add underrepresented voices, not simply retell a familiar story or rely on the easiest narratives to reach. Milestones can help make gaps more visible—and give you a reason to address them with intention.

From Their Doorstep to Yours: Collections and Community Memory Advice from Anniversary Organizers

- ✓ **Let community decide what belonging looks like*.**
Some communities may want to share stories with you; others may want to keep them in their own archives or platforms. Building in that choice respects community ownership and can build far more trust than assuming everything should come through your doors.
- ✓ **Make it easier for people to participate.** If you want new stories, lower the barrier to sharing them. Consider offering practical support—toolkits, office hours, equipment loans, and community connectors—so participation does not depend on people already knowing how to “do collections work.”
- ✓ **Go to where people already are.** Community memory work does not always begin in your museum, archive, or office. If the budget allows, show up at the events and places that matter to your community, and build from there.
- ✓ **Expect relationship-building to take longer than you think.** Trust, especially with communities that have good reason to be cautious, does not happen on an anniversary timeline.
- ✓ **Be flexible enough to follow what emerges*.** Sometimes the right collections doorway is an interview; sometimes it is a community event, a performance, a scanned photograph, or a story recorded elsewhere.

From Their Doorstep to Yours: Collections and Community Memory Advice from Anniversary Organizers

- ✓ **Think beyond the object to the people and relationships around it.*** One site's work grew from listening to elders, gathering stories directly, and understanding that the deeper value was not just in the artifacts collected but in the living memory connected to it. That is a helpful reminder that milestones can be opportunities to preserve context, voice, and experience—not only things.
- ✓ **Build with people who want to be of service.** Collections and community memory work often grows through relationships that are practical as well as personal: people with skills, equipment, local knowledge, or a willingness to help. Not every meaningful partner will come from the usual heritage circle.
- ✓ **Keep asking the long-view question.** Make the work relevant across groups, and ask whether what you are doing will still matter in 50 or 100 years. That is a powerful filter for deciding what to collect, what to reinterpret, and what stories are worth investing in now.



Guiding Principles: *Collections and Community Memory Module*

Organization	Standard
AASLH	The institution identifies current and potential audiences it serves, and makes appropriate decisions on how to serve them (AUD Standard 1)
	The institution understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation. (AUD Standard 3)
	The institution uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources (AUD6)
	The institution strategically plans for the use and development of its collections. (COLL4)
NAI	Recognize that visitors bring their own cultural values and experiences to the site. (Knowledge of the Visitor, Knowledge standard)
	Listen to and let the visitor demonstrate his/her knowledge of the resource during the interpretive experience. (Social construction, Knowledge standard)

Conclusion

Collections and Community Memory Module

Milestones can help organizations see collections not as static holdings, but as living doorways into memory, meaning, and relationship. Whether this section led you to look more closely at an object already in your care, notice a story that needs more context, or imagine new ways to gather community knowledge, the work begins with attention. You do not need to have every answer, every artifact, or every technical skill in place to begin. What matters is a willingness to pause, to ask better questions, and to recognize that collections work is also story work. This section also reminds us that what is absent can be as important as what is present. Sometimes a milestone reveals gaps in the historical record. Sometimes it reveals opportunities—to build trust, invite new voices, revisit long-held interpretations, or recognize that some stories may be better shared in partnership rather than owned by one institution alone. In that way, collections and community memory become not just about preservation, but about relevance, relationship, and responsibility.

If your next question is, “How do we invite people through this doorway and turn reflection into participation?” step into Engagement & Participation—to explore programming, special events, and community activities that can make a milestone feel welcoming, visible, and shared. If you are wondering, “How do we build the support to carry this work forward?” move into Capacity Building—Strengthening Revenue, Volunteers and Relationships to consider fundraising, volunteer engagement, partnerships, and the practical support that helps milestone ideas take root. Together, these sections can help you turn what you notice in your collections into a broader invitation for connection, action, and lasting community memory.

PART 3

Next steps/Your Turn

Share how you used this toolkit with a milestone or anniversary related event by contacting Katie Henry at Katie.Henry@opr.d.oregon.gov or 503-877-8834.

Learning about successes and lessons learned can help us improve the toolkit and share that information with the heritage preservation community. It can also help the Commission determine whether this resource is helpful to heritage organizations in moving forward the statewide goals of the Oregon Heritage Plan.

PART 4

Tools, Templates and Inspiration



Introduction

Planning a milestone doesn't have to start from a blank page. In this section, you'll find ready-to-adapt materials—such as volunteer role descriptions, partner invitation language, and sample promotional ideas—designed to help reduce the “where do we begin?” feeling that many organizations experience.

Many of these resources come directly from the organizations interviewed for this toolkit. They reflect real-world efforts—from small volunteer-run sites to larger institutions—that have used anniversaries and milestones as opportunities to engage their communities, strengthen partnerships, and tell meaningful stories.

To make these materials easier to use, the resources are organized around the same modules found in the workbook—Engagement, Capacity Building, and Collections & Community Memory—so you can quickly find examples that connect to the type of work you're exploring. Some items are simple templates you can adapt, while others are examples meant to spark ideas and show how different organizations approached similar moments. Think of this section as a toolkit within the toolkit: practical starting points you can modify, borrow from, or build upon as you move from reflection into action.

Tools to Support: Engagement—Deepening Participation, Relevance and Relationships module

Flyers and invitations:

- Mountain Island Lake Centennial, Mecklenberg County Park and Rec, NC
 - Paddle Party Poster
 - Birthday Bash Flyer
- Puyallup Valley JACL Remembrance Gallery: 75th anniversary invitation

Cascade Locks Main Street

- **Bridge of the Gods Downtown Centennial Files:** project overview, event overview card, rack card and sponsorship card
- **Escaped Troll Community Night:** program, sponsorship, promotional flyer, troll hunters handbook, pins and nametags

Websites:

Main Street Cascade Locks: <https://www.mainstreetcascadelocks.org>

Friends of the Cascade Locks Historical Museum: [Riveting History Pub Talk](#)

Maxville to Vanport musical composition: From Maxville to Vanport celebrates the history of two towns that reveal distinctive viewpoints of the state's under-represented Black history. Looking honestly at the prejudice these people faced, the album celebrates their resilience, courage, and important contributions to Oregon through jazz, R&B, and blues.

Minnesota Historical Society: 175th anniversary scavenger hunt

- [FAQ Website](#)
- [175th Google Map for Visitors](#)
- [Google Sheet-](#) Content for scavenger hunt

Puyallup Valley JACL Remembrance Gallery:

- [Video tour](#) of gallery

Tools to Support: Capacity Building: Strengthening Revenue, Volunteers & Relationships module

Donor Letters & Invitations:

- NW Museum of Arts and Culture
 - Donor Letters
 - Gala Save the Date and Evite

Table Tents:

- Job Carr Museum, Trivia Cards for 25th anniversary
- Cascade Locks Main Street- Escaped Troll Community Night Fundraiser

Volunteer Job Descriptions:

- Sample job descriptions for various milestone needs

Tools to Support: Collections & Community Memory: Looking Closely at What you Hold and What Might be Missing module

Minnesota Historical Society:

- Minnesota History Magazine: *An Invitation Presenting 25 Objects that Speak to 175 Years of MNHS History*

History Colorado 150

- [Project 150 Storytelling website](#)
- [Oral History Toolkit](#)

Beyond the Doorway — Resources for Going Further

Introduction

This section gathers a curated list of websites, professional standards, and reference materials—including Oregon Heritage tools—that can help you go deeper when you have the time, curiosity, or need for guidance.

While the ideas and prompts throughout this toolkit draw on many of these same fields of practice, the resources collected here go beyond what was used to create the workbook itself. They point to trusted organizations, frameworks, and learning opportunities that can support your work long after your milestone has passed.

Whether you are looking for professional standards, training opportunities, or additional inspiration, these resources offer a place to continue learning and strengthening your organization's work in interpretation, stewardship, and community engagement.

250th and Anniversary Resources

USA's 250th Toolkit for the 250th Anniversary of the United States & Pennsylvania: <https://pdesas.org/Page/Viewer/ViewPage/84/?SectionPageItemId=36855>

AASLH 250th Anniversary Handbook: <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/7978d4ce33.html#page/1>

Sharing the Value of Heritage, OR Heritage Commission Toolkit: <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/OH/pages/tools.aspx>

Indiana Historical Society 250th Planning Framework
<https://indianahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/U.S.-250-in-Indiana-Planning-Framework.pdf>

Indiana Historical Society 250th Planning toolkit
<https://indianahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/U.S.-250-in-Indiana-Plan-Framework-Toolkit-and-Resources-1.pdf>

Designations

Oregon Heritage Tradition and Oregon Heritage State Commemoration:
<https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/OH/Pages/Heritage-Designations.aspx>

[National Register of Historic Places](#)

Other Toolkits and Plans

2026 Oregon Heritage Plan, 2024 Oregon Historic Preservation Plan -
<https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/OH/pages/tools.aspx>

NPS Interpretive Toolkit: History and Hope:
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/climatechange/historyhope.htm>

AAHC Juneteenth Toolkit: <https://aahc.nc.gov/2025-nc-aahc-juneteenth-toolkit/open>

Grant resources

Oregon Heritage Grants <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/OH/Pages/Grants.aspx>

Oregon Cultural Trust Cultural Development Grants
<https://www.culturaltrust.org/get-involved/what-we-fund/>

Cultural Coalition Grants <https://www.culturaltrust.org/about-us/coalitions/>

Oregon Humanities Grants <https://www.oregonhumanities.org/programs/grants/>

The Roundhouse Foundation <https://roundhousefoundation.org/>

Oregon State Capitol Foundation Exhibit Funding Program
<https://oregoncapitolfoundation.org/project/exhibit-sponsorship/>

National Endowment for the Humanities Grants
<https://www.neh.gov/grants/listing>

Institute of Museum and Library Services Grants <https://www.imls.gov/find-funding/funding-opportunities>

Communications & Casemaking

Heritage Bulletin #2 (an Oregon Heritage publication) - [How to Spread the News](#)

Heritage Bulletin #28 (an Oregon Heritage publication) - [Recognizing Achievements](#)

[2024 Oregon Heritage Vitality Study Report \(2024\)](#)

The Oregon Heritage Commission released the 2024 Oregon Heritage Vitality Study Report identifying the top issues impacting the operational vitality of Oregon's heritage organizations and proposing six primary recommendations to comprehensively support the health of the heritage sector.

[Cost of Collections Care Report](#), Oregon Heritage Commission

[Sharing the Value of Heritage Toolkit](#), Oregon Heritage Commission

Volunteers

[Simple Tool To Re Energize](#)

[Recruiting and Training Volunteers](#), University of Kansas Community Toolbox

[Designing a Museum Volunteer Program](#), American Alliance of Museums

How to Manage Volunteers Resource List, [Connecting to Collections Webinar](#) (8/9/2023)

Fundraising

AASLH 101 Fundraising:

<https://download.aaslh.org/101+Ideas+for+New+Revenue-FINAL.pdf>

[Oregon Main Street Donor Guide](#) (Please note, while this was developed for Oregon Main Street organizations, there are resources within it that can apply to any type of nonprofit organization)

[Fundraising for Collections Care Webinar](#), Connecting to Collections

[Ten Fundraising To-Do's for Small Museums & Nonprofits](#), American Association for State and Local History

Beyond the Bake Sale: Fundraising for Local History Organizations, Texas Historical Commission Webinar, presented by Jamie Simek:

[Recording](#)

[Slides](#)

[Handouts](#)



Standards

AASLH Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (STEPS): <https://aaslh.org/professional-development/steps/>

NAI Interpretation Standards: https://nai-us.org/common/Uploaded%20files/Admin_Docs/Standards_2019.pdf

Engagement

[Made by Us](https://historymadebyus.org/) <https://historymadebyus.org/>

PART 6

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