TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

Let's Meet Halfway: Authentic Community Engagement for Local Museums

Welcome!

The webinar will begin at 2:00 p.m. CT.

While you wait:

1. Download PDFs of the slides and handout under the "Handouts" tab of your control bar.

2. Confirm that your speakers are turned on and your audio is working by doing a sound check in the "Audio" tab of the control bar. Having problems? Exit and restart the webinar or switch to "phone call" for a phone number and access code to hear the audio through your telephone.

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Museum Services

The Museum Services Program provides support, resources, and training to museums in Texas.

- Consultations
- Webinars and workshops
- Resources

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Museum Services

www.thc.texas.gov/museum-services

On our webpage:

- Webinars
- Workshops
- Grants and Fundraising
- Helpful Resources
- Connect and Learn

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Upcoming Free Museum Services Webinar

www.thc.texas.gov/museumwebinars

- Tending the Field for a Strong Harvest: Board Development for Nonprofits
  - Thursday, January 21, 10:00 a.m. CT

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Upcoming Free Webinars from Other Orgs

www.thc.texas.gov/museumconnections

- *NEA Grants: The Programs, The Process, and How to Pitch*, January 12, 2:00 p.m. CT, Americans for the Arts
- *Social Media and Volunteer Engagement*, January 13, 1:00 p.m. CT, VolunteerMatch
- *Restructuring with Equity in Mind: Insights on How Museums Can Build Back from the Pandemic*, January 14, 2:00 p.m. CT, Cultural Competence Learning Institute
- *Augmenting Engagement*, January 14, 2:00 p.m. CT, American Association for State and Local History
- *Virtual Field Trips*, January 14, 2:00 p.m. CT, NAEA Museum Education Division
- *Virtual Field Trips*, January 18, 11:00 a.m. CT, NAEA Museum Education Division
- *One by One*, January 19, 11:00 a.m. CT, Association of Art Museum Curators Foundation
- *New Year, New Story: Rewriting Your Grant Proposal for 2021*, January 19, 11:00 a.m. CT, Foundant
- *Care of Baskets*, January 19, 12:00 p.m. CT, Connecting to Collections Care
- *Top Fundraising Trends to Capitalize on in 2021*, January 20, 1:00 p.m. CT, Candid
- *Writing Accurate and Useful Volunteer Position Descriptions*, January 20, 1:00 p.m. CT, VolunteerMatch

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Valerie Wade

Let's Meet Halfway: Authentic Community Engagement for Local Museums

Valerie Wade
Lynnfield Historical Consulting, LLC
Wednesday, January 13, 2021

Overview

As culture workers and public historians, community engagement is important for us, but it can be intimidating, especially for historical societies and smaller museums.

Today, we'll discuss *authentic* community engagement and its role in museum work, particularly in light of our current social climate. How can we build connections and maintain true partnerships between our institutions and communities we serve?

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Agenda

1. Introduction
   - What Is Community Engagement?
   - What This Is and What This Isn't
2. Identifying Challenges
   - Thought Exercise: Public Memory in Kennewick, Washington
3. The Important Questions
4. Three Requirements for Authentic Community Engagement
5. Remembering Our Purpose
6. Q & A

Heritage House, Irving, Texas

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What Is Community Engagement?

- Community engagement seeks to better engage the community to achieve long-term and sustainable outcomes, processes, relationships, discourse, decision-making, or implementation.
- To be successful, it must encompass strategies and processes that are sensitive to the community-context in which it occurs.

https://aese.psu.edu/research/centers/cecd/engagement-toolbox/engagement/what-is-community-engagement

Authentic = Bona Fide

It is one thing to collaborate with another group in your town for a specific project or themed initiative.
It is quite another to truly evaluate your position in the community and seek to connect with other groups in mutually beneficial ways.

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What This Is And What This Isn't

This webinar is intended to foster a discussion about community engagement, and to provide a basic outline for developing an authentic community engagement plan for historical societies and smaller museums.

It is NOT a primer for resolving intergenerational conflicts.

There is no magical, quick solution for strengthening the relationships between our institutions and our communities. There will be smooth years and rough years.

Nevertheless, this work is important. Public history matters!

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What Are Some Challenges to Authentic Community Engagement?

One of the biggest challenges for authentic community engagement is grappling with the idea that different communities can have vastly different experiences of a single place or event. **What we take for granted as "truth" may not be true at all for everyone in our town or county.** When we create programs or exhibits, we have to take care to ensure the narratives we use actually honor the histories of our whole communities, not just dominant groups.

Historical societies and small museums typically don’t have the staff size to dedicate a team to community engagement. These tasks are shared between paid staff and volunteers who may be serving on a temporary basis.

Thought Exercise: Public Memory in Kennewick, Washington

Port Angeles Evening News
Monday, May 20, 1963

At Kennewick

Negro demonstration viewed with silence

KENNEWICK (AP)—The organizer of a demonstration against racial discrimination here says it "served our purpose" and Mayor Lawrence Scott says it proved that "Kennewick is no Birmingham."

The two voiced their reactions after an estimated 80 Negro and white persons paraded through town as a crowd of several hundred persons watched mostly in silence Saturday.

Jack Tanner, Tacoma, Pacific Northwest president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said:

SERVED PURPOSE

"I feel this has served our purpose of demonstrating freedom of speech, sympathy with the struggles being carried on in the South, commemorating the May 17, 1954, Supreme Court decision on integration of schools, and protesting against the all-white City of Kennewick."

The mayor said:

"I wish to compliment those who participated They were very courteous, orderly, and their personal conduct was excellent.

"I also wish to compliment the spectators, the vast majority of whom conducted themselves in a commendable manner. Kennewick is no Birmingham. I feel that the nonviolent attitude on the part of both marchers and onlookers attested to this fact."

Tanner organized the demonstration after calling Kennewick, where some Negroes work but none live "the Birmingham of Washington." He contended the city excludes Negroes. City officials denied there was any such policy.

Tanner led the demonstration. Other demonstrators included Mrs. Malcolm Higgins, wife of the executive secretary of the State Board Against Discrimination. She said she was "doing this on her own."

Demonstrators carried placards with legends such as "Why is Kennewick All White?" and "South has no Monopoly on Bigotry."

An NAACP spokesman said about half the demonstrators were from the Tir-City area and others were from Portland, Seattle, Tacoma and Yakima.

Port Angeles Evening News
Tuesday, July 9, 1963

Charge Kennewick as "sundown town"

By JOE RIGERT

OLYMPIA (AP) — A state civil rights board indicated Tuesday Kennewick has virtually barred its gates to Negroes and gained a reputation as a "sundown town" where Negroes must leave after dark.

The indictment came in a hard-hitting report by the five-member State Board against Discrimination. It was based on a 10-day investigation last May of alleged segregation practices in the Eastern Washington city of 14,244 population.

UNDISPUTED FINDINGS

The board said undisputed findings showed there was not a single Negro living in Kennewick while 1,200 of them were bottled up in what it called "a district racial ghetto" in nearby East Pasco.

No Negroes were found enrolled in the Kennewick public schools nor employed in the school district, city, Benton County, state or federal offices in Kennewick, the board said.

About six Negroes were said to be working for private firms in the city.

The board said it was told policemen had been advised two years ago to stop Negroes at night and ask them what they were doing in Kennewick.

SECRET SESSION

The city councilman who related this information was later criticized at a secret meeting of the council, the board said.

The board also said an official of the Kennewick Housing Authority refused to testify after telling an investigator I'm not going to get mixed up in any damned nigger problem."

Based on its findings, the board offered 15 recommendations for action by public officials and the real estate industry to assure equal opportunity in employment, housing and public facilities.

The investigation was requested by Gov. Rosellini after a Negro leader contended Kennewick was the "Birmingham of Washington."

The charges of discrimination were made by Jack Tanner of Tacoma, northwest president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. They were denied by city officials.

In commenting on the report, Rosellini noted civil rights steps already taken by his office and urged Kennewick officials—who also asked for the investigation—to take "appropriate action."

The anti-discrimination board recommended the city establish a human relations commission to administer a civil rights ordinance covering jobs, housing and public services.

RACE RELATIONS

The board also called for creation of a Tri-Cities advisory council to study race relations, an affirmative policy statement by the real estate industry and fair hiring practices by the city.

It said city police should be advised against reflecting bias or prejudice on minority groups or speaking in a derogatory manner toward them.

Two children

Pasco-Kennewick Bridge

The Important Questions

Institutional Assessment

- What are my staffing and budget capabilities?
- Why am I pursuing this project?
- Why is community engagement important to this project? How will it contribute to my results?

Audience Assessment

- Where can I find my audience? (High school alumni societies, churches, interest groups, etc.)
- What can they do best on their own?
- What is their relationship to my institution, this project, or this topic?

Community Engagement Continuum

Increasing Level of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust, and Communication Flow

Outreach	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Shared Leadership
Some Community Involvement *Communication flows from one to the other, to inform* Provides community with information. Entities coexist. Outcomes: Optimally, establishes communication channels and channels for outreach.	*More Community Involvement* *Communication flows to the community and then back, answer seeking* Gets information or feedback from the community. Entities share information. Outcomes: Develops connections.	*Better Community Involvement* *Communication flows both ways, participatory form of communication* Involves more participation with community on issues. Entities cooperate with each other. Outcomes: Visibility of partnership established with increased cooperation.	*Community Involvement* *Communication flow is bidirectional* Forms partnerships with community on each aspect of project from development to solution. Entities form bidirectional communication channels. Outcomes: Partnership building, trust building.	*Strong Bidirectional Relationship* Final decision making is at community level. Entities have formed strong partnership structures. Outcomes: Broader health outcomes affecting broader community. Strong bidirectional trust built.

Reference: Modified by the authors from the International Association for Public Participation.

Three Requirements for Authentic Community Engagement

Requirement #1

- Both sides must release grudges and be willing to be uncomfortable.

Requirement #2

- Historical societies and museums must offer something up front.

Requirement #3

- Get things in writing and collaborate on a memorandum of understanding.

O'Henry House, Austin, Texas

Requirement #1

Both sides must release grudges and be willing to be uncomfortable.

McFadden-Ward House, Beaumont, Texas

Paternalism

- We know how to tell this story or manage this project better than you do.

Rigid Tradition

- We've always done it this way, so it is the only way to do it.

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Requirement #2

Historical societies and museums must offer something up front.

Complementary Space Rental

Promotion of Programs

Tips on Preserving Group Archives

Goodman-LeGrand House, Tyler, Texas

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Requirement #3

Get things in writing and collaborate on a memorandum of understanding.

Yates House, Houston, Texas

Documenting your project accomplishes several goals:

- Fosters trust between partners
- Encourages communication from start to finish
- Provides a record for future reference

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Remembering Our Purpose

For many of us, the political and public health challenges of past year have forced us to reckon with our various missions. How can we maintain a sense of community during a pandemic? How do we advocate for the study of history when bombarded with questions about the practical relevancy of our field?

I hope that by seeking opportunities to bring joy, to educate, and to connect with our neighbors, we find a renewed sense of purpose.

I would love to hear from you about ways you engage with your community in the future!

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Q & A // Discussion

Let's Stay in Touch!

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