2020 Washington State Heritage Census

To learn more about heritage outreach visit www.washingtonhistory.org/heritage-resources/

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In 2020 the Washington state historical society (WSHS) surveyed heritage organizations to better understand who they are and what they need to thrive.

In its enabling legislation, the WSHS is charged with supporting heritage organizations' efforts across the state. (RCW 27.34) This support typically takes the form of consultations, technical services, professional development training, and the Heritage Capital Projects grant. The WSHS launched a statewide survey in 2020 to better understand who makes up Washington's heritage sector and how the Society can have the greatest positive impact on heritage organizations across the state. This document contains a snapshot of the results of this survey.

NOTE ON COVID - When the WSHS began this project, we could not have anticipated how our state's heritage community's needs would be amplified by a global public health and economic crisis. We decided to go forward with the survey and asked organizations to respond to questions seeking quantitative data based on 2019 figures.
The heritage census survey was developed by Heritage Outreach staff at the Washington State Historical Society, in consultation with colleagues across the heritage sector.

The survey consisted of 47 questions broken into sections covering operations, exhibitions and programs, collections, marketing and communications, and fundraising.

The survey was conducted between January and November, 2020.

178 organizations participated in the census survey. This map indicates the geographic distribution of participating organizations across the state.
This set of questions was designed to gather basic information about how responding heritage organizations operate. Most organizations represented in this data set self-identify as local history museums and historical societies, the majority with little or no professional paid staff. This fact speaks to a common theme across the survey results of the unique needs of volunteer-run organizations.

Which one of the following best describes your organization?

*Other includes: Library, State Park System, Arts and Heritage Alliance, Fiber Art museum, Pop Culture Museum, Arts and Event Center, Nonprofits housed in historic sites.
What is your annual operating budget?

- $0-$999
- $1,000-$4,999
- $5,000-$9,999
- $10,000-$49,000
- $50,000-$99,000
- $100,000-$499,999
- $500,000-$999,999
- $1,000,000+

What is the cost of full-priced adult admission?

- $0
- $1-9, 29.5%
- $10-19, 5.7%
- $20+, 4%

How many days per week is your site open to the public?

- Not open to the public
- Less than 2 days
- 2-4 days
- 5 days
- Over 5 days

How many people visited in 2019?

- 0
- 1-999
- 1,000-2,499
- 2,500-9,999
- 10,000-49,000
- 50,000+
How many full-time paid staff do you have?

How many part-time paid staff do you have?

How many board members do you currently have?

How many active volunteers did you have as of December 31, 2019 (not including board members)?
Which core documents has your organization established?

Mission Statement
Strategic Plan
Collections Policy
Collections Management Plan
Interpretive Plan
Code of Ethics
Emergency Plan
Volunteer Manual
Communications/Marketing Plan
DEI Statement
Other*

*Other includes: bylaws, business plan, conflict of interest statement, employee handbook, vision statement, rental use contract, code of conduct, fundraising policy.

Are you a member of a regional heritage association?

Yes 49.1%
No 37.7%
I don't know. 13.1%

These include:
- Association of King County Heritage Organizations
- Heritage League of Pierce County
- Heritage Association of Lower Columbia
- Upper Columbia Association of Museums
- Grays Harbor Museums
- South Sound Heritage Association
- League of Snohomish County Heritage Organizations
- Whidbey History Collective
- Cascade Association of Museums and History
EXHIBITS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The data from this set of questions indicates that heritage organizations engage audiences in various ways, from school programs to exhibitions and private docent-led tours. Lack of funding, lack of space, and lack of volunteers and staff with expertise are the largest factors limiting the ability of responding organizations to deliver new exhibits and programs.

What types of public programs do you offer?

- Permanent exhibits
- Temporary exhibits
- Public tours
- School tours
- Off-site school programs
- Open houses
- Special events
- Workshops
- Public lectures
- 21+ evening events
- Other
Do you regularly consult with local tribal nations when developing exhibits and programs?

- Yes: 45%
- No: 49.1%
- I don't know: 5.8%

Do you routinely conduct formal or informal visitor evaluations?

- Yes: 52%
- No: 48%

What are the three most pressing challenges your organization faces in developing exhibits and public programs?

- Lack of funding
- Marketing/PR
- Space limitations
- Lack of staff/volunteers with expertise
- Lack of staff/volunteers with capacity
- Facility issues
- Lack of audience/visitors
- Inability to identify current audience
- Limited access to collections
- Other*

*The most common additional challenge noted was the advanced age of many volunteers.
COLLECTIONS

As stewards of vital local history collections, the ability of organizations to maintain professional standards of collections management and care is of primary importance. Data suggests that organizations would benefit from support in digitizing collections, and recruiting and training staff and volunteers, to assist with updating and maintaining collections management databases.

Does your organization have a designated area(s) for collections storage?

![Pie chart showing 91.1% Yes and 8.9% No]

Do the buildings that house your collections have sufficient temperature and relative humidity controls?

![Bar chart showing 60% Yes, 40% No, 20% Some areas do, and 0% I don't know]
What do you feel are the three greatest challenges currently facing your organization's collection?

- Lack of staff/volunteers with capacity
- Lack of staff/volunteers with collections care experience
- Running out of storage space for collections
- Lack of dedicated collections storage space
- Digitization of collections
- Insufficient environmental controls
- Difficulty utilizing the collection for exhibits and programs
- Lack of supplies (i.e. archival boxes, shelving, etc.)
- Theft and vandalism
- Pests
- Unable to provide public access to the collection
- No plan for protecting the collections in an emergency
- Other
MARKETING

This set of questions relates to how heritage organizations market themselves to the communities they serve. With a deep understanding of their audience, organizations can better connect with community partners, stakeholders, and potential new visitors, donors, and volunteers. Marketing to new audiences will be a vital tool as heritage organizations work to recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

How are you currently promoting your organization? (Select all that apply.)

- Social media
- Electronic newsletter
- Print newsletter
- Press releases
- Local newspaper, radio or TV
- Cross promotion with other orgs.
- Printed materials (posters, flyers, etc.)
- Other (please specify)

How many followers does your organization currently have on Facebook?

- We do not use Facebook
- 1-199
- 200-499
- 500-999
- 1000-2999
- 3000-4999
- 5000+
Are your current marketing efforts attracting the desired number of people and audience type?

- Yes: 21.6%
- No: 56.7%
- I don't know: 21.6%

If you are not attracting the desired audiences, what is holding back your marketing and/or public relations efforts?

- Lack of staff/volunteers
- Lack of money
- Lack of knowledge
- All of the above
- Other (please specify)
FUNDRAISING

How does your organization raise money? (Select all that apply.)

- Admission fees
- Membership program
- Individual Donations
- Private grants from foundations and/or corporations
- Public grants from government entities
- Corporate sponsorships
- Public Support (designated directly from city, county or state budgets)
- Fundraising event/benefit
- Fundraising is handled by our affiliated 501c3 non-profit
- Other*

*Other includes: private rentals, gift shop revenue, investment income, vacation rental of a historic structure, GoFundMe.

Few things have a greater impact on an organization's ability to fulfill its mission than financial health and sustainability. Heritage organizations responding to the survey raise money and earn revenue in various ways. For most, individual donations and membership programs are central to their fundraising efforts. This data also suggests there is room to grow the reach of the Heritage Capital Projects program and that new grant programs could help put organizations on a stronger financial footing.
How many members does your organization currently have?

- No Membership Program: 0
- 1-49
- 50-99
- 100-499: 25
- 500-999
- 1000-1999
- 2000+

Does your organization have an endowment fund?

- Yes: 36.8%
- No: 60.2%
- I don't know: 2.9%
If your organization has an endowment, approximately how large is it?

- $1,000-4,999
- $5,000-9,999
- $10,000-49,000
- $50,000-99,999
- $100,000-499,999
- $500,000-999,999
- $1,000,000+

Has your organization ever applied for a Heritage Capital Projects grant?

- Yes 35.1%
- No 49.7%
- I don't know. 15.2%
Fundraising and volunteer recruitment emerge as the two areas of greatest need amongst heritage organizations responding to the survey, followed by marketing support and board development. Likely, these specific needs have only been compounded during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. As older volunteers hesitate to return to public venues and donors limit or redirect giving, we expect the needs in these areas to grow. We also anticipate the need for coordinated marketing around the reopening of museums in the coming months.

Rank your organization's areas of greatest need:
What can the WSHS's Heritage Outreach Program do to help your organization tackle its most pressing needs?

- Grant Programs
- Hands-on Technical Trainings
- Print and/or Online Technical Guides
- Professional Development Webinars
- Recognition of Achievement in the Field
- On-site Visits and Consultations
- Network Building Opportunities
- Templates for Developing Core Documents
- Support in Completing the AASLH StEPS Program
- Scholarships to Attend Trainings/Conferences
- Other*  

*Other includes: shared collections storage space, fiscal sponsorship, covid recovery support, training on remote volunteering, membership development, traveling exhibits.