

Building a Sustainable Statewide Preservation Program for Washington State

**A task force of the Washington Connecting to Collections Conference
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What Others Have Done:

The task force began its work by investigating what several other states have been doing in statewide preservation. Documentation about some of the efforts in eight other states was reviewed.

Those states were:

- Massachusetts
- New York
- Delaware
- Ohio
- Iowa
- California
- New Mexico
- North Carolina

From that list, four states (North Carolina, Iowa, New Mexico, & California) were selected for more in depth review. Preservation leaders in those states were interviewed by telephone. Notes from those conversations are available.

General Findings From Other States:

Some states have been successful in getting regular funding for preservation from a state agency or their state legislature. However, such funding is hard to achieve and continuing funding can be threatened.

A key factor in successful statewide preservation efforts is having a core of dedicated people. Without this core statewide efforts do not have sustainability.

Dedicated people might mean paid staff members. It can also mean one or two key volunteers or an active volunteer board or committee. Successful board run organizations have had individual members taking responsibility for accomplishing specific tasks.

Most states, even many of those with a state funded operation, rely on one or two key individuals to keep preservation efforts alive and moving forward. Most states reported having concerns about sustaining preservation activities if/when the dedicated individual leaves the stage. Statewide efforts in New Mexico and North Carolina, for instance, both had significant setbacks when staff moved on.

Independent non-governmental organizations with dues paying members can be successful in statewide efforts. These independent organizations still need institutions to allow their key volunteers to use their official positions as a base from which to do their extra activities. Iowa is an example of where this institutional support has facilitated a successful program and New Mexico is an example of where lack of such support has hampered efforts.

Because of the dues income, these organizations have a base level of funding to sustain some continuing activities. It was reported that payment of dues also increases institutional buy-in to the organization's activities. The basic funding has been useful in getting preservation grants from other agencies.

Many states have found that workshops on preservation topics are a very popular with members of the cultural heritage community. Disaster preparedness and response seem to be the single most popular workshop topic. Disasters is a topic that applies to all types of cultural heritage institutions. The creation of disaster response groups are also a valuable activity.

WESTPAS (Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service) is a resource available to institutions in Washington. It was recommended that we keep in mind what it is doing as we are planning.

All states are making an effort to include a broad range of cultural heritage institutions in their preservation efforts. Some have a long track record in this and some are just starting. To be successful in this effort, it is important to be sure that any organization created is not seen as too library centric.

Suggestions for Washington State:

Based on the investigations of what other states are doing and on our own discussions, the task force recommends the following to develop a sustainable statewide preservation effort in Washington State.

Seek Dedicated Funding:

- Lobby the Washington State Library to include preservation as an LSTA funding priority.
- Lobby the Washington State Legislature to allocate new funding for statewide cultural heritage preservation.
- But realistically, substantial funds are not likely to be made available in the near future, particularly in light of the current budget situation.
- The lobbying activity, however, is not without value, even if not immediately successful. Ten years, or more, is not an unusually long time to get funding for a new program. The continuing lobbying effort, if well handled, will build support in the long run.

Go Independent:

- Preservation efforts can't wait for state funding.
- Consider creating an independent non-profit dues based membership organization to build and sustain a statewide effort.
- Have a voluntary dues structure such as that used by Iowa or North Carolina.
- Have the entry level fee low enough to encourage small organizations to join.
- Have enough higher level categories that the better funded institutions can pay more (if they want to).

Workshops/Disaster Prep:

- The first activities after organization could be workshops (coordinated with WESTPAS) with early efforts focused on disaster preparation.
- Disaster preparation is very applicable to all types of cultural heritage institutions.
- It is likely that every institution will have some "disaster" event, probably small, like a water leak. It could, however, also be major like a fire, roof collapse, or an earthquake (all things that have happened to Washington State cultural heritage organizations in the recent past).

- Preparing local institutions for disasters is probably the single most important thing that we could do.
- Another useful activity might be to compile list of appropriate supplies and suppliers (local and national).
- Investigate having pre-negotiated blanket agreements with commercial firms in case of disasters (cold storage, disaster response firms, etc.)
- Consider developing disaster response groups as a longer term goal.

Involve Others:

- Investigate connections and/or cooperation with institutions in Oregon and Idaho. In some areas of the state it may make sense for institutions to look across the state border for partners to cooperate with. Our statewide organization should allow for, if not encourage, these connections.
- The group should also engage in outreach activities promoting the importance of preservation awareness and support. This is to build support in both the individuals on the front lines in organizations and with the managers and boards who set budget allocations. Connect with as many organizations as possible, including:
 - Historical societies
 - Library groups
 - Museums
 - Archives
 - Indian tribes
 - Public agencies
 - Professional membership groups