

Collective Wisdom: An Exploration of Library, Archives and Museum Cultures

Executive Summary

The 2016 Collective Wisdom: Library, Archives and Museum Conference Exchange program brought together 18 librarians, archivists and museum professionals to form a cohort charged with exploring cross-sector practices and culture with an eye toward increasing interdisciplinary collaboration and continuing education and professional development.



A project of the Coalition to Advance Learning in Archives, Libraries and Museums

The full white paper with appendices is available online at:

<http://www.coalitiontoadvancelearning.org/projects/collective-wisdom-white-paper/>

Suggested citation:

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Published on behalf of the Coalition to Advance Learning in Archives, Libraries and Museums by OCLC.

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, grant # RE-00-13-0092-13.

Executive Summary

Collective Wisdom: An Exploration of Library, Archives and Museum Cultures

The 2016 Collective Wisdom: Library, Archives and Museum (LAM) Conference Exchange program brought together 18 librarians, archivists and museum professionals to form a cohort charged with exploring cross-sector practices and culture with an eye toward increasing interdisciplinary collaborations and continuing education. This white paper presents reflections and provides recommendations based on the cohort experience. Cohort members represented a range of library, archives and museum institutions, academic programs and professional organizations from across the US and the Territory of American Samoa.

The cohort's experience spanned March through December of 2016. Cohort members attended the annual meetings of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), American Library Association (ALA) and the Society of American Archivists (SAA); participated in virtual meetings and discussions over the nine-month program; and gathered for a culminating working retreat in Seattle.

Attending the annual meetings of the major professional organization for each LAM sector allowed cohort members to reflect on the similarities and differences in professional cultures; assess opportunities for cross-sector collaborations; network with allied information and cultural heritage professionals; and reflect on challenges, opportunities and best practices across the LAM sectors.

Although the conference exchange was originally envisioned as a catalyst for collaborative learning and cross-sector continuing education/professional development (CE/PD), it quickly became apparent that the challenges and opportunities across professions surpassed this initial scope. In their reflections, cohort members noted both structural barriers to and multiple opportunities for collaboration, particularly in the arena of professional development and continuing education, but not exclusively so. Salient insights that emerged through the cohort's reflections after attending these conferences include:

- Many information professionals attending each annual meeting genuinely desire to work across sectors, particularly in the area of CE/PD.
- Concerns that cut across all three professions include preservation and conservation; diversity, equity and inclusion; employment and workplace practices; sustainability (financial and environmental); and the need to become better advocates for ourselves as individuals, institutions, sectors and collectively across these sectors in order to secure needed resources and articulate our public value.
- Other common concerns include the development of new technologies and a need for shared standards and best practices. The pressing need to develop and maintain new digital competencies and shared best practices opens up new possibilities for CE/PD across sectors.
- Structural barriers to cross-sector CE/PD and collaboration include the cost of attending national conferences across vast geographic distances, increased specialization within the sectors (silos within silos), as well as the current focus of funding agencies, graduate schools and CE/PD providers on programs targeted to a particular professional field, thereby reinforcing LAM silos and limiting collaboration and experimentation across the sectors.
- AAM, ALA and SAA leadership seem to exhibit varying degrees of support for cross-sector engagement, which

has impacted the reach and effectiveness of the joint Committee on Archives, Libraries, and Museums (CALM), the only long-standing group charged with addressing areas of mutual interest across these organizations.

- Structural differences between AAM, ALA and SAA include fundamentally different approaches to CE/PD, credentialing and accreditation, which present additional challenges to collaboration among these important organizations.
- It may be more fruitful to develop smaller interest groups across sectors and at a more local level (e.g., the state, the county, an urban area) where cross-engagement is already happening or requires an easier set up to bridge traditional divides between sectors.
- Graduate programs in library and information science and museum studies can enable cross-sector collaboration by ensuring that cross-collaboration is required and/or encouraged in their course offerings, assignments and internship programs.
- Opportunities exist to leverage the strengths and successes of other professional organizations such as American Association for State and Local History (AASLH); American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC); Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums (ATALM); and the National Council on Public History (NCPH), all of which are already bringing together LAM sectors to offer training and other collaborative opportunities.

Arguably, LAM organizations are inherently cross-sector, with shared affinities and needs, yet practitioners tend to retreat to their own affinity groups for answers to professional quandaries. In other words, while we face many of the same challenges, we are all too often isolated in our professional practices. A shared need for coordinated advocacy with stakeholders and resource allocators at the national, local and institutional level emerged as a high strategic priority across sectors.

It is important to note once more that the observations made in this white paper are experience-based reflections by cohort members who participated in the 2016 Collective Wisdom: LAM Conference Exchange rather than the results of an exhaustive research process or literature review. The aim of this white paper is to capture cohort members' observations on the general state of libraries, archives and museums; reflect on potential challenges and opportunities for LAM collaboration and shared learning; and to share general lessons learned and outcomes of the cohort experience. In a very short time, the Collective Wisdom cohort not only met, but exceeded, original expectations and provided proof of concept of the value of bringing together professionals with a diverse range of expertise and an interest in cross-sector engagement from each of the LAM sectors. Above all else, the full narrative of this experience is intended as the start of a dynamic conversation rather than a definitive overview of issues or a comprehensive set of recommendations.