

ISSUE SIX

THE CHANGING POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS AND GENERATIONAL EXPECTATIONS, INCLUDING DEVELOPING NEW LEADERSHIP



Volunteer Management Training

Keeping organizations “viable and relevant” is challenging heritage leaders. With changing population demographics and expectations, organizations wanting to shift with them have moving targets that may stretch beyond their current capacities and resources. New leadership may be needed.

Fifty-four percent of the historic preservation respondents, 24 percent of certified local governments, and 39 percent of museum respondents to the Heritage Assessment Survey agreed that keeping themselves “viable and relevant” was a major challenge. Many said they needed new leadership and supporters to be viable.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Oregon’s demographics are changing. According to the 2000 census, more than half of Oregon’s population had moved to the state from elsewhere. By 2008, the number of Hispanic Oregonians had risen to 11 percent of the population and is predicted to grow. Nationally, the country’s population is one-third minority, but only nine percent of core museum visitors are minorities. Statistics for Oregon museums have not been collected, but they are likely to be similar.

REACHING THE NEW OREGONIANS

The consequences of changing demographics are many. Some people move here knowing little about the state. “There is a role for history institutions to play in helping people plug in and understand how their stories fit into the continuing story of in-migration of Oregon,” says Oregon Historical Society director George Vogt.

In contrast, some people migrate to this state because of their understanding of Oregon’s heritage and culture. In communities such as Astoria, Jacksonville and Bend, retired newcomers have become active supporters and volunteers for heritage, arts and cultural organizations.

“For most adults over the age of 30, ‘narrative’ is a passive experience.....

For Americans under 30, there’s an emerging structural shift in which consumers increasingly drive narrative.”

- from “Museums and Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures,” an initiative of the American Association of Museums

These people bring time, skills and enthusiasm that can be harnessed to strengthen the expression and preservation of Oregon's heritage.

Involving newcomers begins by reaching out to them. In an era when technology drives both the structure and content of information, traditional organizations must reach out to younger audiences in more creative ways.

“There is an increasing segment of the younger population that doesn't see how they connect with heritage stories at all,” says David Porter, the former executive director of the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Oregon City. “Making that connection between individual history and heritage while using contemporary communication and social technologies is critical to capturing the imagination and interest of Oregon's future leaders and patrons of the heritage community.”

CREATING NEW LEADERSHIP

Assessment Survey participants cited “developing new organization leadership and management” as one of their top five concerns for the next decade.

“Despite our efforts to recruit new and younger members we haven't solved the problem,” says Gary Fugate, curator of the Rinehart Stone House Museum in Vale. “What tends to happen is that fewer and fewer aging members keep the organization going.”

Regional roundup participants said diversity training at regional and organizational levels would support the transition to newer and younger Oregonians.

Survey respondents repeatedly noted the need for statewide leadership and advocacy. Potential candidates to fill this role include the Oregon Heritage Commission, the State Historic Preservation Office, elected officials, and formal or informal networks that support the work of heritage and attest to the value it brings to communities.

BOOM TIMES AHEAD?

As the Baby Boomers age, their sheer numbers tell a story of future change in U.S. society. Today, 1 in 8 Americans are older than 65. In 2034, the ratio will jump to 1 in 5. — from *Museums and Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures*, an initiative of the American Association of Museum



Marshfield Cemetery, Coos Bay