

Kykuit Findings and Recommendations on Creativity and Sustainability

In April 2007, the National Trust for Historic Preservation in partnership with the American Association for State and Local History, the American Architectural Foundation, and the American Association of Museums, invited 30 historic site professionals to a three-day conference to discuss issues related to the financial sustainability of historic sites. The purpose of this think-tank meeting, funded in part by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, was to initiate a national discussion and assessment of museum professional practices and funding sources that may be negatively impacting creativity and financial sustainability. As a result of the conference each of the partnering organizations will be publishing articles and hosting sessions at professional meetings to generate a more national conversation about these issues.

- Successful stewardship of the nation's historic sites requires financial sustainability.
- Sustainability begins with each historic site's engagement with its community and its willingness to change its structure, programs, and services in response to the changing needs of that community
- The long-accepted heritage tourism business model is not a sustainable business model for most historic sites.
- Serving the needs of the local community (not the tourist audience) is the most valuable and most sustainable goal for most historic sites.
- Attendance figures are not the most valid measure of the positive value and impact of the historic site experience or impact.
- Many professional standards and practices in the historic site field were borrowed from the museum community and, in practice, often deter creativity and sustainability at Historic sites.
- New standards of stewardship for historic sites should be modeled to reflect the distinct nature of these places.
- Responsible site stewardship achieves a sustainable balance between the needs of the buildings, landscapes, collections, and the visiting public.
- The buildings, landscapes, and collections are the means but not the ends of the work of historic sites.
- Innovation, experimentation, collaboration and a broad sharing of the resulting information are essential to achieving historic site sustainability on a broad scale.
- Undefined collecting coupled with professional standards and practices regarding deaccessioning are an impediment to change and sustainability.
- Program, challenge and matching grants can reduce long term sustainability by shifting focus away from operating and endowment needs and by encouraging the growth of non-mission related programs.

- Returning sites to private ownership with proper easements can be a positive means of assuring long term stewardship.

Recommendations

- The AASLH Task Force on Standards should seek to establish an appropriate stewardship balance for the needs of buildings, landscapes, collections and the public.
- The AASLH Ethics Committee should prepare a positive statement to guide the transitioning of historic sites and returning them to private stewardship.
- The National Trust and others should experiment with responsible situational standards for collections, buildings and landscapes at pilot sites that could serve as models for others and they should publish their findings as appropriate.
- Foundations and granting agencies should refocus their philanthropy away from short term program support to grants that assist sites in building their capacity to sustain themselves for the long term, including GOS and endowment.
- Foundations should be supported in their efforts to terminate repeated “drip support” to historic sites to focus their support on sites taking positive steps to achieve long term sustainability.
- Those who educate and develop the leadership of historic sites should amend their curricula to better equip students to deal successfully with rapidly changing realities.
- The major professional associations should encourage, promote, publicize and recognize experimental and successful models of change and sustainable practices.
- The profession must develop new measures, beyond attendance, that document the quality of visitor engagement at sites and the extent of community outreach beyond the bounds of historic sites.
- Historic sites must no longer think of the “velvet rope tour” as their “basic bread and butter” program and must generate more varied ways to utilize these remarkable resources to enrich people’s lives.
- The historic site community must reaffirm the importance of these places for our nations future and redefine our mission in terms of that future rather than the past.
- Selected sites should develop a pilot process to streamline deaccessioning.

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