



2026 Conference Schedule

MONDAY

12:00 to 3:30 pm

- Registration Table Open
- Silent Auction Open

1:00 to 3:30 pm

- Resource Hall Open

1:00 to 2:30 pm

- Sessions
 - ***New Museum in a Changing World: Breaking Ground at the Patterson House and Gardens***
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
 - **Presenters:** Lauren Canty, Candi Claggett, and Lindsay Hollister
 - **Description:** The Patterson House and Gardens, located on Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum in St. Leonard, Maryland, is part of an environment that is experiencing great change. The re-opening of the historic house and landscape after six years of renovations has put it in a unique position to address shifts in demographics, technology, land use, and climate in Southern Maryland. The JPPM Curator, Patterson Educator, and Horticulturist worked with JPPM staff and volunteers to create a mission-driven museum space that seeks to break barriers in what is expected in collections, interpretation, and horticulture to serve the needs of visitors in a changing world.
 - ***You Are Not Alone: Building and Sustaining a Regional Disaster Response and Recovery Team with the East Broad Top Archives and Special Collections***
 - **Location:** Pullo Room
 - **Presenters:** Julie Fether and Scarlett Wirt
 - **Description:** Would you know what to do if a natural disaster hit your small museum? Or do you know what to do, but worry that limited

resources make it impossible to prepare? This session will provide a case study and workshop on how the East Broad Top Archives and Special Collections partnered with other local museums along the railroad's historic route to create a regional disaster response team.

2:30 to 4:00 pm

- **Sessions**

- ***Preventing (Climate) Collections Catastrophes and Other Chaos***
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
 - **Presenters:** Kayla Doyle, Hannah Gaston, Katherine Quigley, and Michaela Zoquier
 - **Description:** Liberty Hall Museum & Arboretum faced a fair number of collection catastrophes in 2025: a kid on a field trip kicking a hole in a wall, an AC unit flooding a rare book room, and a visitor deciding to sit in (and subsequently break) a nineteenth-century chair with presidential provenance. As a museum that only recently began prioritizing collections safety by hiring its first full-time Curators of Collections and Archives, Liberty Hall's workshop facilitators will share how the museum has prioritized mitigating future chaos and how collections, education, and other departments can collaborate to protect objects while also making them usable resources for the public. Participants will then be invited to share their own catastrophes (or near-misses) with other attendees before reconvening as a whole group to share and learn together to create actionable and practical plans for developing a safer climate for all their collections (both historic and touch objects) while preventing catastrophes and chaos with limited resources and a small-museum budget.
- ***Maryland Affinity Meeting***
 - **Location:** Stewart Company Room
- ***Independent Museum Professionals Meet-Up***
 - **Location:** North/South Meeting Room

4:00 to 6:00 pm

- **Opening Night Reception**

- **Location:** York County History Center, 121 N Pershing Ave, York, PA, 17401
- **Description:** Kick off the 42nd Small Museum Association Conference with an opening reception at the new York County History Center, where more

than 90,000 artifacts bring 300 years of history to life as you mingle with fellow attendees and explore the stories of York County.

6:00 to 9:00 pm

- **Eat & Engage**

- **Description:** Meet up with new friends or reunite with old ones at one of downtown York's many restaurants, including the Davidson Lobby Bar and Restaurant at the conference hotel.

9:00 to 10:30 pm

- **Trivia**

- **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
- **Description:** Get ready to test your knowledge at a returning conference favorite! All are welcome to attend - no need to come with a team!



2026 Conference Schedule

TUESDAY

8:00 am to 3:30 pm

- **Registration Table Open**
- **Resource Hall Open**
- **Silent Auction Open**

8:30 to 10:15 am

- **Breakfast**
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom

9:00 to 10:00 am

- **Plenary**
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
 - **Plenary Speaker:** Ashley Witherspoon
 - **Description:** Museum professionals dedicate themselves to preserving culture and creating meaningful experiences, yet the demands of this work often come with hidden costs. Burnout, financial stress, and the emotional labor of caring for communities can weigh heavily on individuals and organizations alike. These challenges are compounded when traditional metrics like budgets, visitor counts, and job titles fail to fully reflect the depth and significance of what museum workers contribute. When museum professionals and the organizations we work for are not willing or able to truly honor our impact, our wellness and resilience can suffer. This talk will explore why conventional metrics often fall short as measurements of value, and how reframing impact through cultural, community, personal, and relational lenses can help professionals better honor the intangible yet profound effects of our work. Recognizing these dimensions not only validates the efforts of museum professionals but also strengthens resilience and well-being across the field. Participants will leave with practical strategies and affirmations to help them see their contributions as invaluable—not just in numbers, but in meaning. Together, we will celebrate the power of

museums to transform lives and communities, and equip attendees with tools to advocate for themselves and their work.

10:15 to 11:15 am

● Sessions

- ***Creating an ICE Interaction Policy for Your Institution***
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
 - **Presenter:** Megan Mann
 - **Description:** Would you or your volunteers know how to respond if ICE came to your museum? This presentation, specifically created with small museums in mind, offers a practical framework for developing and implementing a policy for interacting with ICE agents, even with limited in-house legal or HR capacity. Using publicly available legal resources, and emphasizing low-cost, realistic steps, we'll discuss how to identify a valid warrant, review your rights when dealing with ICE agents, and consider the decision points involved in tailoring a provided sample policy to your institution. You'll walk away with resources for training your colleagues and a roadmap to draft a policy by your next board meeting.
- ***Practical Fundraising Tips for Small Museums***
 - **Location:** Pullo Room
 - **Presenter:** Nora Venezky
 - **Description:** Raising funds for a small museum can be challenging, but with the right approach, even limited resources can make a big impact. This session will provide you with practical tips and tricks to simplify fundraising, introduce free or low-cost tools to enhance your efforts, and offer actionable ideas on where to get started. Whether you're new to fundraising or looking to refine your strategy, you'll leave with valuable insights to help secure financial support and sustain your museum's mission.
- ***Climate and Changing Approaches to Museum Programming***
 - **Location:** North/South Meeting Room
 - **Presenters:** Elizabeth Scott Shatto and Scott N. Shatto
 - **Description:** This session will be a lively exchange, sharing experiences and climate-driven adaptations for the sake of long-term sustainability. How are you staying true to mission, generating resources to deliver your services, while shifting away from dependence on large, outdoor, public events? We'll explore ways to activate museum grounds, consider storytelling through the lens of weather history, and community engagement via citizen science.
- ***"We the People..." How One Exhibition Changed an Entire Museum***
 - **Location:** Stewart Company Room

- **Presenter:** Kristen Matulewicz
- **Description:** This presentation discusses cultural climate change by case studying the exhibition “We the People....” It grapples with issues of how changing politics and societal response effects museum and heritage sites and ultimately transforms an exhibition’s meaning. By allowing the community’s frustration with prescribed alienation and othering to find its voice in what was once a rather ordinary celebration, Rockwood has had to reconcile with its interpretive past. “We the People...” was the first major interpretive project post Rockwood’s first ever strategic plan and this shows redesign in response to voiced community needs inspired Rockwood’s staff to rethinking how the institution prioritizes its strategic plan to better meet the needs of the community in a way that matters.

11:15 to 11:30 am

- **Coffee Break**

- ***Sponsored by Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service | Smithsonian Affiliations***
- **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom

11:30 am to 12:30 pm

- **Sessions**

- ***When Is It Too Much?***
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
 - **Presenters:** Caitlin Playle and Molly Voth
 - **Description:** How do you keep going when the very environment you depend on for most of your experiential programming threatens those very programs? The Antique Boat Museum faces challenges mostly from wind and water and will share some of the weather and climate change events they have dealt with and the solutions and adaptations used. We’ll have time at the end for others to share their experiences as well.
- ***Climate Change Contributes to the Establishment of a Museum***
 - **Location:** Pullo Room
 - **Presenters:** Robert Wills and David Tobias
 - **Description:** Winter sailing on ice in craft able to carry cargo evolved into craft designed and built solely for speed – these becoming the fastest vehicles on earth in the 1800’s. The aging members of the Hudson River Ice Yacht Club, established in 1885, still try to practice this sport today in restored vintage craft, but warming temperatures

have meant less ice and fewer opportunities to sail. To save these threatened craft, and communicate the lessons of wind-powered technology, we formed the Hudson River Ice Yacht Preservation Trust with the goal of establishing a working museum to not only display these artifacts, but to have them ready to sail when conditions arise.

- ***Hide and Seekers: Unlocking the Geocaching Audience***
 - **Location:** North/South Meeting Room
 - **Presenters:** Emily Huebner and Mark Neuberger
 - **Description:** Geocaching is a real-world treasure hunt that attracts an enthusiastic, multigenerational, diverse audience. As museums and historic sites seek new ways to sustainably attract visitation and unpredictable weather makes large events more difficult, geocaching is an opportunity to attract hundreds of visitors seeking nontraditional museum experiences over an extended period of time. This session will discuss everything you need to know to get started with geocaching at your site, using the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area's recent GeoTour launch as a case study.
- ***Interpreting the Civil War in a Small Town: Developing Truthful Programming in a Politically Charged Time***
 - **Location:** Stewart Company Room
 - **Presenters:** Byron Smith and Rick Kriebel
 - **Description:** The session will address the challenges of designing educational programs that interpret the complexities of the American Civil War on a local level in a balanced and objective way. Special attention will be given to the way the current politically charged cultural environment is causing some to demand historical narratives that harmonize with their modern political ideology and cherished beliefs about the past. Principles of program design and content will be addressed, and practical advice will be offered that is based on the actual experiences of staff at the Newtown History Center, a museum located in a hotly contested region of Northern Virginia during the Civil War.

12:30 to 1:45 pm

- **Lunch**

- **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
- **Description:** Celebrate SMA annual award winners and recognize conference scholarship recipients.

2:00 pm to 3:00 pm

- **Sessions**

- ***Letting Go: The Art and Science of Eliminating Programs and Practices That No Longer Work***
 - **Location:** Pullo Room
 - **Presenters:** Mike Adams, Kim Staub, and Michael Madeja
 - **Description:** Every museum has them: educational programs, special events, tours, exhibits, and other initiatives that no longer relate to mission, fail to bring in significant revenue, and are more taxing on staff and resources than their impacts and returns can justify. This session presents tools for diagnosing these problematic programs; approaches for finding ways to make them work better for your museum; methods to get internal and external stakeholders on board for “letting go;” and communication strategies to make the process as painless as possible. The session features case studies on the ways experienced museum professionals have adjusted, drastically modified, and eliminated problem programs and practices at multiple institutions with time for Q&A to help attendees navigate their own institutional obstacles to change.
- ***When the Lighthouse Fell Into the Sea: Sea Level Rise and Historic Sites***
 - **Location:** Stewart Company Room
 - **Presenter:** Mark Wilson
 - **Description:** This session will explore how the Zwaanendael Museum utilizes the destruction of the Cape Henlopen Lighthouse to coastal erosion in 1926 to demonstrate the negative effects of sea level rise and raise awareness. The session will discuss the creation of museum’s hands-on learning program, its operation, audiences engaged and reactions from the public and local educators.

2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

- **Sessions**

- ***Collaboration with Colleagues: Museum Educators in Dialogue***
 - **Location:** North/South Meeting Room
 - **Presenters:** Rebecca Shulman and Elise Petersen-Deitrick
 - **Description:** As communities across the country endure rapidly shifting political and financial climates, museum educators are facing new challenges. In this roundtable discussion led by experienced museum educators Rebecca Shulman and Elise Petersen-Deitrick, join colleagues in a conversation about how we can effectively respond to these challenges, prevent burnout, and maintain integrity and fulfillment in our work. The aim of this roundtable will be to carve out

a space of community and collegiality among SMA educators at all levels of experience.

4:00 pm to 6:00 pm

- **Tuesday Night Reception**

- **Location:** Keystone Kidspace, 10 Hamilton Ave, York, PA, 17401
- **Description:** Wrap up the day with hands-on fun at Keystone Kidspace, a vibrant children's museum designed to spark imagination and play. Explore interactive exhibits, connect with colleagues, and enjoy a relaxed evening of discovery and conversation.

6:00 to 9:00 pm

- **Eat & Engage**

- **Description:** Meet up with new friends or reunite with old ones at one of downtown York's many restaurants, including the Davidson Lobby Bar and Restaurant at the conference hotel.

8:00 pm

- **Silent Auction Closes**



2026 Conference Schedule

WEDNESDAY

8:00 am to 12:00 pm

- **Registration Table Open**
- **Resource Hall Open**

8:30 to 10:15 am

- **Breakfast**
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom

9:00 to 10:00 am

- **Keynote**
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
 - **Keynote Speaker:** Chenoa Baker
 - **Description:** As we stand at the intersection of environmental collapse and political volatility, small museums and arts organizations have a unique and urgent role to play. This keynote explores how neighborhood-based cultural institutions can act as catalysts for care and resistance, providing resource distribution, triage, and culture shifting in communities disproportionately affected by climate change and systemic neglect. Drawing on the frameworks of The Care Manifesto and Nuala Morse's "Towards a Careful Museology," this talk proposes a model of the museum not just as a container of objects, but as a container of care—responsive to the social, emotional, and environmental needs of its people.

Two case studies will be featured as models of museums fighting back: First, Pao Arts Center in Boston's Chinatown, where rising heat, environmental injustice, and community displacement intersect. As a cultural institution embedded in a social service agency, Pao leads creative, place-based responses to climate and community stress—hosting programs for elders during extreme weather, creating public art projects that advocate for safer streets, and embedding artists in long-term community planning efforts. Second, the Woodmere Art Museum in Philadelphia is taking legal action

after the Trump administration abruptly pulled federal funding for a capital project that would have supported cultural equity and local job creation. By suing to challenge this disinvestment, Woodmere is defending its future and the broader public role of museums in a healthy democracy.

Together, these examples demonstrate that small museums are not passive or peripheral, but powerful, community-rooted institutions using care, creativity, and legal action to resist disinvestment, displacement, and disconnection. This keynote invites attendees to imagine how their institutions can serve as places of refuge, resilience, and transformation.

10:15 to 11:15 am

● Sessions

- ***Shifting Volunteer Expectations: Adapting to a Changing Social Climate***
 - **Location:** Wellspan Ballroom
 - **Presenters:** Dr. Jennifer Rogers and LaShell Martinez
 - **Description:** Small museums face shifting volunteer and board dynamics, with fewer long-term commitments and growing accessibility needs. This session explores emerging trends, from short-term and flexible roles to inclusive systems that support youth and volunteers with disabilities. Through discussion and a practical toolkit, participants will gain strategies to adapt expectations and strengthen engagement in today's evolving landscape.
- ***Straddling the Line***
 - **Location:** Stewart Company Ballroom
 - **Presenters:** Marc R. Baum & Monica Kinner
 - **Description:** How to be a serious museum and a cheeky roadside attraction, both at the same time. Real-life marketing ideas, promotional considerations, and collection strategies to fill the needs of a stop along the road, as well as a chartered historical foundation.

11:30 am to 12:30 pm

● Sessions

- ***Stronger Together: How Museums and DMOs Can Create Authentic Visitor Experiences***
 - **Location:** North/South Meeting Room
 - **Presenters:** Heidi Schlag and Jake Wynn
 - **Description:** Today's travelers seek authentic, place-based experiences rooted in local heritage and culture. This session explores how museums—often overlooked in tourism planning—can collaborate with Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to boost

visibility, attract visitors, and deepen community connections. Join heritage tourism consultant Heidi Schlag and Visit Frederick's Jake Wynn to discover practical strategies for leveraging DMO resources like marketing, PR, and itinerary development to position your museum as a must-visit destination.

- ***FireWise in the Northwoods: Resiliency and Preparedness***

- **Location:** Stewart Company Room
- **Presenter:** Jess Edberg
- **Description:** Preparing for natural disasters has taken on more urgency in the past five years due to an increase in severe weather events including drought, which increases wildfire danger. The Dorothy Molter Museum has cultivated partnerships with local, state and federal agencies and organizations to develop a forest management and fuels-reduction property plan as well as emergency response plans. This session will share how creating space for a college forestry/natural resource program resulted in assistance in maintaining and implementing disaster prevention, climate change preparation, education programming and a new revenue generator at the Museum.