



Call for Working Group Discussants
2018 NCPH Annual Meeting
Las Vegas, Nevada
April 18-21, 2018

Working groups, involving facilitators and up to twelve discussants, allow conferees to explore in depth a subject of shared concern before and during the annual meeting. In these seminar-like conversations, participants have a chance to discuss questions raised by specific programs, problems, or initiatives in their own public history practice with peers grappling with similar issues. Working groups articulate a purpose they are working toward or a problem they are actively trying to solve and aim to create an end product(s), such as a report, article, website, or exhibition. For 2018, eight working groups are assembling, four of which are still seeking discussants:

1. ~~Insider/Outsider: Racial Bias and Positionality in Interpretation~~
2. ~~Disrupting Institutional Power: Imagining a Regional Model for Public History Education~~
3. **La Frontera: Public History on the Borderlands**
4. **Negotiating Power Lines: Economic Justice and the Ethics of Public History**
5. **Agriculture and Public History**
6. ~~Crossing the Line: Facilitating Digital Access to Primary Sources~~
7. **Millennials as Change-Makers: The Power Lines between Generations in Public History Institutions**
8. ~~The Public History of Labor~~

To join a working group, please [fill out the form](#) describing the issues you wish to raise with your peers, together with a one-page resume, CV, or biographical statement, by ~~October 15~~ **October 23**. We welcome submissions from individuals across a range of professions and career stages. Please see the specific working group descriptions below. Individuals who are selected will be listed as working group discussants in the conference *Program* and will participate in the working group session at the annual meeting.

Expectations: This winter the group facilitators will ask participants to contribute a 500-1,000 word case statement for discussion. The case statement will describe a participant's particular experience, define the issues it raises, and suggest strategies and/or goals for resolution. Case statements will be circulated among participants by email and posted to the NCPH website. Discussants are expected to read and comment briefly by email on one another's case statements well before the conference date. Some working groups may also have additional shared background reading materials identified by their facilitators.

To apply: Please fill out the [discussant application form](#), making sure to select which working group you are applying to join. (You may apply to participate in a working group whether or not you have submitted another presentation or session proposal. You may apply for only one working group.) All presenters, attendees, and other participants are expected to register for the annual meeting.

Apply at <http://ncph.org/conference/working-group-discussant-application/>

3. La Frontera: Public History on the Borderlands

Facilitators: Ligia Arguilez, The University of Texas at El Paso
Blanca Garcia-Barron, University of Texas at El Paso
Angelina Martinez, The University of Texas at El Paso
RaeAnn Swanson, The University of Texas at El Paso

The US-Mexico border has existed as a contested space since its inception as a line in the sand. The power lines existing in the border regions of California to Texas construct a persistent narrative that divides vibrant communities, fractures identities, and creates racial/social inequities. This persistent narrative filtered through government agencies, legislature, and media cast these border regions and communities as places of disorder and violence. Consequently, this constructed image heightens the fear of those living away from the border, and negatively impacts border residents.

Despite the vast literature that contests these images and narratives, the US-Mexico border region still exists in the shadows of the collective imagination fueled by misinformation.

This working group seeks to explore the role of the public historian, students of public history, and field professionals within the current political climate of misinformation that impacts our work and our relationships with border communities. Specifically, we want to address what our responsibilities as public historians, professionals, and students living and working on the border are towards combating false narratives. We will also explore our responsibility to the diverse communities we serve on the border and how to privilege their voices in order to project a just and true narrative that reflects community struggle and identity unique to the border region. Ultimately, the goal of this working group is to collaborate with different border region public history practitioners and create 3-4 posts on the *History@Work* blog that outlines our responsibilities as a collective.

Thematically, this conversation is critical, but it is also imperative to seek action and collaboration within the field. As a political issue the border region is consistently debated and contested, therefore it needs a unique set of best practices and resources. We hope to begin this conversation by examining critical questions in our practice with other public historians, professionals, and students.

4. Negotiating Power Lines: Economic Justice and the Ethics of Public History

Facilitators: Rachel Boyle, Newberry Library
Theodore Karamanski, Loyola University
Dan Ott, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire
Stella Ress, University of Southern Indiana

Building on robust conversations started at NCPH 2017, this working group will navigate beyond “radical” public history – a nebulous phrase with competing definitions – to focus on the ethical foundation of public history: economic justice and questions of access, practice, and training. We will consider the loaded proposition of who – communities, students, practitioners, professors, institutions – can access and practice relevant public history and on what terms, and who cannot. Embedded in these fraught questions, the dynamic reality of public history as a discursive technology of power will rise to the surface, scuttling all hopes of simple answers.

Our goals for exploring the ethical terrain of theory, training, and practice in public history today are two-fold: first, to publish the results of what will hopefully be a meaningful conversation that includes competing perspectives, case studies, thought pieces, useful applications, practical advice, and lofty

ideas presented by and among facilitators, discussants, and those who join us; and secondly, to engender a conversation about enacting economic models of public history work that can resist the realities of the current system dependent upon and limited by the gig economy, grant cycles, and the neoliberalization of higher education.

The working group will speak to the following questions:

- As practitioners, how can we realize economically just models of public history in which we can make a living and practice shared authority for the economic and social benefit of community stakeholders?
- What previous understandings and models offer more viable avenues for making public history socially relevant and economically sustainable in the 21st century?
- As community partners, how do we artfully and ethically share authority in a way that reconciles history and heritage in a responsible way? Should we?
- As educators, how do we grapple with the implications of public history's embrace by mainstream academia, particularly with reference to education, practice, and philosophy, as well as economic, racial, and gender access? How do we equip students to navigate the not-so-radical economic realities of both academic and non-academic public history? How can we prepare students to succeed in myriad political and cultural climates and understand the ethical dynamics of history as instrument of power that they are wielding?

Arranged around the central ethical question of the field, this working group hopes to solicit the involvement of public historians from across the professional and political spectrum – including practitioners with non-profits and government entities, professors and consultants. The working group itself will engage in rigorous conversation about these questions before the conference, which facilitators will structure into meaningful categories for a stimulating and lively public conversation at NCPH 2018. That forum will further be used as a launching point for organizing an edited publication. Nearly 30 years after NCPH published the outcomes of a roundtable on the ethics of public history, this working group brings together public historians eager to frame urgent contemporary conversations about the practical ethics of public history within the broader project of acknowledging and affecting social and economic power structures in the 21st century.

5. Agriculture and Public History

Facilitators: Debra Reid, The Henry Ford
David Vail, University of Nebraska-Kearney

Agriculture once defined routines for most of the world's population - farmers. The rhythms of the seasons and the needs of livestock and crops dictated work performed by women, men, and children on farms. Cultural distinction resulted, and cultural clashes erupted over land, trade access, and power. Environments changed; ecosystems collapsed. What role does public history play in the interpretation of this all-encompassing topic?

Engaging the public in this history requires reading in agricultural and local history, and thinking creatively about the content. Working group members believe that their work will increase agricultural literacy – a humanist's prerogative – and that it warrants the effort.

Several recent publications can provide a starting point for more precise strategies. Debra A. Reid's book, *Interpreting Agriculture at Museums and Historic Sites* (2017), emphasizes steps to take to put a humanist spin on the STEM subject, while Michelle Moon's book, *Interpreting Food at Historic Sites and*

Museums (2016) does the same for foodways programming. Several venues provide opportunities for public engagement. Guests can interact with domesticated animals at historic sites, open-air museums, and living history farms. Visitors can talk to people using tools to plow, disc, plant, harrow, and harvest crops. Community supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers' markets allow customers to engage with farmers and agricultural processors. Restaurants, breweries, and wineries gain cachet by emphasizing locally sourced supplies. Michelle Moon and Cathy Stanton addressed this potential for increasing interpretation in a 2014 NCPH workshop (Engaging with Change: Local Food, Farming, and Public History), an article in *The Public Historian* 36:3 (August 2014) and in their co-written book, *Public History and the Food Movement* (2017).

This working group takes up where these other efforts have left off. It will unpack the terms "agriculture" and "farming." Participants will explore regional distinctions, crop and livestock cultures, and how humanities (history, art, theater, philosophy, literature) and social sciences (politics, culture, economics, cultural geography) can inform interpretation of agriculture. The group work will offer a framework for museums, historical societies and historic sites (including living history farms) to develop collection and interpretive plans that address agriculture and farming in their own locations. Subjects of interest include how gender and race affected power and authority on the farm, how place affected crop and stock management and human relationships over time, how rural-urban dichotomies began and thrived, and how agriculture differed between the city and the country.

The working group's written reports will become the basis for article submission(s) to *The Public Historian* and *Agriculture History* (the journal of the Agricultural History Society) and a book proposal for the "Interpreting History" series for Rowman & Littlefield pitched as a follow-up to *Interpreting Food*, *Interpreting Agriculture*, and *Interpreting Environment* (in progress). These numerous products can contribute to public interpretation of agriculture and farming.

7. Millennials as Change-Makers: The Power Lines between Generations in Public History Institutions

Facilitators: Kimberly Campbell, Historic Macon
Alyssa Constad, General Federation of Women's Clubs
Katherine Crosby, University of South Carolina

This working group will be facilitated by a group of millennials in national and local institutions focused on archives, preservation, and museums. It aims to engage collaborators with a variety of ages and experiences to reflect on the ways in which millennials entering the workforce have the power to shape institutions and to think about the ways in which they have succeeded or failed to create change within their institutions. Millennials have been taught to encourage inclusiveness, to push boundaries, and engage in tough questions that have been considered "off-limits" in the past, such as the historical effects of racism and climate change.

The questions the group aims to answer include:

- Are the advocacy contributions of millennials in public history institutions different than those of more established professionals? If so, how?
- Understanding that generational statements are stereotypes, how do these stereotypes affect institutional power and the ability to update interpretations and formats?
- How should millennials attempt to change older interpretative formats, so that the change is productive and excites superiors and stakeholders?

This working group aims to produce a series of at least six blog posts to address the questions above that will be contributed to by a discussant who identifies as a “millennial” as well as a discussant who identifies as a member of a different generation. This blog posts will be written with *History@Work* in mind as a format, and all posts will seek to offer concrete strategies for creating change in public history institutions.