



“The Middle: Where did we come from? Where are we going?”

CALL FOR PAPERS – 2017 Annual Meeting
National Council on Public History
Indianapolis, Indiana, April 19-22, 2017

In a society fascinated by extremes, the middle is often undervalued, overlooked, and unstudied. Public historians, however, tend to engage in work that addresses the interests and concerns of the wide-ranging public, not just the select. For public historians, the middle can be a delightful but challenging place. The concerns of the masses, not just the elite; the swirling firmament of the center of a story, not only the clearness of the beginning or end; the quotidian, not the extraordinary; is always ripe with ambiguity and importance. But who controls and speaks for the middle? How one parses the middle, and who gets to tell the story, is challenging and difficult. The 2017 NCPH conference in Indianapolis, itself located near the median center of the US, is the ideal location for the diverse public history field to wrestle with the concerns of the middle in interpreting the past.



Car on Bridge, Department of Agriculture, Forest Service,
National Archives and Records Administration

Questions to consider:

- Are we in a time of transformation? What are we in the middle of?
 - What is worth saving? The first? The rare? The average?
 - Does shared authority work? Does it value the views of all?
 - Are the marginalized, in fact the majority?
 - Why do people value history?
 - What is the role of the state? From totalitarianism to democracies, who controls public history?
 - Is the history of the middle of the United States different from the history of the edges of the nation?
 - Does digital history create opportunities for more inclusive history?
 - From the culture wars to hate speech, should the rhetoric of the middle be promoted?
 - What do business, science, medicine, and politics learn from history? Do they learn from history?
 - In an effort to preserve and tell the story of the disenfranchised, have historians given too little attention to the average?
 - Will the interests of many squelch the history of the few?
- Who funds history? How does this influence how history is practiced?
 - Have North American definitions and practices in public history become the "middle" ground? How does public history differ around the world?
 - How does public history chart a course between history and the public?
 - How do public history's origins shape its future?
 - How do public history practitioners reach out to the audience "in the middle?"

The NCPH urges participants to dispense with the reading of papers, and encourages a wide variety of forms of conversation and session format options. Please avoid panels of talking heads and overreliance on PowerPoint presentations. Sessions should not simply be a “show and tell” but should demonstrate advice and methodology, and include exchanges between presenters and audience beyond a ten-minute Q&A at the end. Session format options (90 minutes) can include, but are not limited to:

- **Experiential:** Participants simulate, role-play, or play games to convey key principles and learning objectives.
- **PechaKucha:** Facilitators quickly move the session through a variety of short tips/images/ideas designed to leave participants with inspiration and ideas. Typically, a PechaKucha is a multiple-presenter

activity where each presenter shows 20 slides in 20-second increments. Allow time for debriefing.

- **Point/Counterpoint:** A moderated discussion that offers opposing points of view in a debate format.
- **Roundtable:** Presentations in roundtables are typically limited to 30 minutes of presentation, followed by 60 minutes of discussion and feedback. Roundtable presenters should bring targeted questions to pose to others at the table in order to learn from and with those attending. Roundtables are an ideal format for networking and in-depth discussion on a particular topic.
- **Structured Conversation:** Sparked by a shared interest or need, these facilitated participant-driven discussions are designed to encourage audience dialogue. Start with a provocative or problem statement and see where the conversation goes.
- **Traditional:** Three-person, chair, and commentator panels.

Other non-session format options can include:

- **Working Groups (2 hours):** Involving facilitators and up to twelve discussants, working groups 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, a problem they are actively trying to solve, and aim to create an end product(s), such as a report, article, website, or exhibition. Proposals should include only facilitators. An open call for discussants will be issued fall 2016. More information about working groups can be found at <http://bit.ly/1Hmyu49>
- **Workshops (half-or full-day):** Workshops provide hands-on and participatory experiences that impart practical information or skills, and typically require participants to pay a fee.



While individuals are not prohibited from presenting in consecutive years at the meeting, session proposals that include new voices will receive preference. Additionally, participants may be members of only one session, but may also be discussants in Working Groups or introduce sessions.

See the NCPH website at www.ncph.org for details about submitting your proposal and be sure to peruse past NCPH programs for ideas about new session/event formats.

How to submit your proposal:

Optional Early Topic Proposal deadline: This is for people who are interested in presenting on a certain topic, but are looking for ideas to more fully develop their proposal or are looking for collaborators/co-panelists. Fill out the topic-only proposal form online by **June 1, 2016**. Topics received by that date will be distributed to NCPH members via email and posted to the Public History Commons for feedback and offers of collaboration. Respondents will contact the original submitter directly with their ideas or offers, and the submitter may choose to select additional participants, refine the proposal, and complete a full proposal form online by the July deadline.

Final Proposal Deadline: Submit your fully formed session, working group, individual paper, or workshop proposal online by **July 15, 2016**.