Call for Working Group Discussants
NCPH Annual Meeting
April 21-24, 2027
St. Louis, Missouri

What are NCPH Working Groups?

Working groups, involving up to six 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. They aim to create an end product(s), such as a report, article, website, or exhibition.

2027 Working Groups

For 2027, five working groups are seeking discussants:

1. Building a Critical Memory: A German American Project
2. Creating a Peer-Review Clearinghouse for Public Historians
3. From Greener Annual Meetings to Sustainable Regional Gatherings
4. Hold the Line? Where is it? Oral History, Public History, and the IRB
5. Where We Stand, What We Hold: Mapping Care and Refusal in Black Public History Landscapes

To apply to join one of these working groups, 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 **November 18, 2026.** 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

Group facilitators will ask discussants to contribute a 500-1,000-word case statement. The case statement will describe a discussant's particular experience, define the issues this experience raises, and suggest strategies and/or goals for resolution. Case statements will be circulated among participants and posted to the NCPH website. Discussants are expected to read and provide written comments 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 or may choose to open case statements for wider public input. Discussants are expected to meet in person next April at the National Council on Public History's annual meeting in St. Louis.

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 working group discussants are expected to register and pay for the annual meeting within six weeks of acceptance.

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

About the 2027 Working Groups

Building a Critical Memory: A German American Project

Facilitators: Andreas Etges, University of Munich (LMU)
Irmgard Zündorf, Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam (ZZF)

This working group will bring together public historians mostly from Germany and the United States who work in museums, memorial sites, civil rights organizations, and academia. It will continue the work started by the German American Critical Memory Project, which in 2025 brought together 25 practitioners from each country who spent one week each in different German and US sites to learn about the respective memory cultures, historic and current challenges, failures and best practices. We now seek to build on this work.

A major goal of the Critical Memory Project was to start a transatlantic conversation, learn from each other, create a network, and to think about joint projects. With everyone busy with their own local projects, this has been challenging, so we now look to reconvene and refocus our collaborations. The working group will continue work begun in 2025 and which has continued in smaller ways with a panel at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago in January 2026, a small speaking tour of Nicole Moore (Atlanta) and Charles Woods (Birmingham) to Germany in July 2026, a working group in Lisbon in September 2026, Zoom talks to university students, an online publication with a critical international look at America 259 for the Southern Poverty Law Center, and in other ways.

This working group will plan for possible joint publications, presentations, and other transnational projects related to this work. While the main focus so far has been on the United States and Germany, we are open to broadening and internationalizing the Critical Memory Project, not the least because the challenges are similar in many countries around the world.

Creating a Peer-Review Clearinghouse for Public Historians

Facilitators: Kathleen Conti, Florida State University
Clarissa Ceglio, University of Connecticut
Elizabeth Fraterrigo, Loyola University Chicago

Regardless of institutional setting, public historians have a need for peer review. This working group is developing blueprints for a sustainable clearinghouse to facilitate peer review for publicly engaged scholarship. Such assessments may range from those that provide critical feedback during a formative phase of work to evaluation and documentation of a completed project or body of work. Building on discussions begun on NCPH's Public History Educators' Listserv and continued at the 2024 and 2025 conferences, this group will bring together participants from within and outside academia to create a system for securing and providing the peer review so essential to public history practice and career advancement.

Building on past work, the 2027 iteration of the working group will continue to document the ways in which peer review occurs in public history practice with a view to creating a resource for those needing

to educate non-public history colleagues and review committees about public history. We will also continue to investigate ways to create a structure/system to facilitate open and blind peer review at formative and summative project stages across institutional settings.

The members of the working group will submit position statements to the group before the conference, and we will meet via Zoom in the weeks leading to the conference so that we will be able to most effectively use this in-person time together. This working group will use a range of whole group, small group, pair and share, and individual brainstorming and development sessions ensure active learning and help reduce conference fatigue. The group will develop a list of public history awards and a resource document outlining existing forms of public history peer review. We will also continue exploring existing models and investigate new avenues to create a database of qualified reviewers and a system for facilitating peer review through NCPH, with a view to establishing a task force to pilot a system in the near future.

From Greener Annual Meetings to Sustainable Regional Gatherings

Facilitators: Carolyn Crawford, University of North Alabama
Kathy Garrett-Cox, Maymont Foundation

The NCPH Committee on Environmental Sustainability (CoES) Report and Recommendations for Green Meetings Planning (2022) identified air travel as the single largest environmental impact of professional conferences. While fully digital meetings dramatically reduce emissions, they cannot replace the value of face-to-face interaction. The CoES therefore advocates for balance: preserving opportunities for in-person connection while reducing the environmental impacts of professional gatherings.

At a time when public historians face increasing environmental, political, and institutional challenges, sustaining professional networks and spaces for collaboration has become more important than ever. Regional gatherings create opportunities for learning, mentorship, and community-building while reducing costs, travel burdens, and carbon emissions. They also broaden access for colleagues who may not be able to attend a national conference each year.

This working group will bring together participants interested in developing a regional mini-conference on public history and environmental sustainability for fall or winter 2028. Through collaborative planning, participants will identify goals, partnerships, logistics, programming priorities, and strategies for long-term success while exploring how regional gatherings can strengthen the public history community during a period of significant change. Our goal is to develop a replicable model for low-carbon professional engagement that supports both environmental responsibility and the long-term vitality of the field.

We welcome participants interested in environmental sustainability, conference and event planning, and strengthening regional professional networks. We are especially interested in bringing together colleagues engaged in similar work through allied organizations. Working group facilitator Kathy Garrett-Cox currently serves as co-chair of the AASLH Climate and Sustainability Committee, and this working group anticipates expanding on relationships between NCPH and AASLH at our joint 2026 conference.

Hold the Line? Where is it? Oral History, Public History, and the IRB

Oral history sits at the center of public history, yet public historians often have little say over how it is reviewed and regulated. Since 2019, oral history has generally fallen outside the scope of IRB review under the federal Common Rule. Recent guidance from the Oral History Association (OHA) has revived

the question of whether oral history projects should go through IRB review. In practice, many educators now face unclear expectations. Do class assignments count as "research"? What happens when a student project grows into a thesis or dissertation? Does a community archive project need review? Do visitor studies? What if interviews were already collected without review?

This working group starts from a concern that these questions are being settled for public historians rather than by them. Our methods often involve long-term, collaborative, publicly oriented work in which narrators want to be named and heard. IRB frameworks were built around different disciplines, risks, and assumptions about privacy and anonymity. Since the 2019 revision to the Common Rule, IRB review has rarely been necessary for oral history. As such, many of us were never trained to prepare an IRB submission. And because we weren't trained, we haven't trained our students, so a generation of emerging practitioners is now unfamiliar with the rules that may apply to their work.

At a moment when professional responsibility is contested, this group asks whether public historians can articulate and defend our own ethical standards for working with people, and how we should engage the institutions and organizations that regulate that work. Through pre-meeting discussion and two hours of focused work in St. Louis, we will take stock of current practice and have the following goals in mind:

Goals of this working group include:

- Clarify the landscape. Review what the Common Rule, institutional IRBs, and OHA guidance actually require and recommend, and where the language is ambiguous (e.g., what counts as "research," how oral history differs from an interview, and when class projects, visitor studies, and archival collecting are covered).
- Share experiences and strategies. Collect real cases from members: IRB successes and failures, workarounds, and the consequences of non-review.
- Address training gaps. Identify what practitioners, faculty, and students need to learn about IRBs and the Common Rule, and how to teach it without letting compliance take over a course.
- Plan for engagement. Outline ways to work with IRBs (serving on committees, advocating for oral history-specific review) and with OHA, including a possible NCPH liaison.
- Produce a usable end product. Leave with a draft of one or more of the following, to be refined with NCPH leadership, such as a "guerrilla guide" to working with IRBs, for public historians; a position statement or policy language on ethical review in public history; and/or a plan for a survey of NCPH members, so future conversations are grounded in data.

Where We Stand, What We Hold: Mapping Care and Refusal in Black Public History Landscapes

Facilitators: Jordan Brewington, African American History & Engagement Project
Arianne Edmonds, African American History & Engagement Project
Lauren O'Brien, African American History & Engagement Project

This working group brings together Black public historians, interpreters, and cultural workers employed at state parks, historic sites, museums, and outdoor interpretive landscapes to critically examine the emotional and material realities of doing public history within institutions that have historically erased, sanitized, and commodified Black histories. In a historical moment marked by political repression, attacks on public memory, and growing restrictions on how histories of race and power can be interpreted, the group asks: What does professional responsibility look like for Black memory workers

working within institutions that are often at odds with the communities and histories they seek to represent? How do we navigate institutional constraints while remaining responsible to ancestral directives, community histories, and known and unknown stories of place? What forms of care, refusal, and collective practice are needed to sustain this work?

Guided by the insights of Black geographical thought, participants will engage in facilitated story circles, counter-mapping exercises, embodied landscape walks, sound mapping, and collaborative note-taking and analysis of physical and emotional landscapes. Together, we will map not only the visible landscapes of trails, waterways, monuments, plantation grounds, and historic sites, but also the internal geographies carried within our bodies—fatigue, grief, joy, obligation, belonging, isolation, and refusal. Through these activities, participants will trace how power, exclusion, surveillance, care, memory, and resistance operate across the sites where we work and interpret.

While public history increasingly emphasizes shared authority, community engagement, and inclusive interpretation, far less attention has been paid to the emotional labor, vulnerability, and ethical tensions experienced by Black practitioners tasked with carrying out this work within predominantly white institutions. Rather than ask how practitioners can survive hostile political climates, this working group explores how we might cultivate collective strategies for care, accountability, adaptation, and resistance. In doing so, participants will rethink whether traditional disciplinary principles remain adequate to this moment and explore alternative approaches rooted in relational practice, shared authority, and the active disruption of historical erasure.

We seek discussants who identify as Black public historians, interpreters, cultural workers, educators, curators, archivists, community historians, artists, and preservation practitioners working within or alongside public institutions. We especially welcome those working in parks, historic sites, museums, cultural landscapes, and place-based interpretation who are interested in exploring the intersections of race, labor, public memory, community accountability, and institutional change.

The working group will convene through three virtual gatherings: Where We Work: Mapping Institutional Landscapes; What We Carry: Emotional and Internal Geographies; and Where We Stand: Counter-Mapping with the Collective.

The group will culminate in a collaboratively produced digital project, the “(Black) Collective Memory Field (Feel) Guide.” Reimagining the state park field guide as a countermap, this project will gather suppressed, erased, and under interpreted histories held within public landscapes. Inspired by participatory mapping projects such as Queering the Map, the guide will hold participants' entries that mark silenced site histories, brief oral and reflective fragments on interpretive labor, and collective notes on what we wish we could interpret within our institutions.