

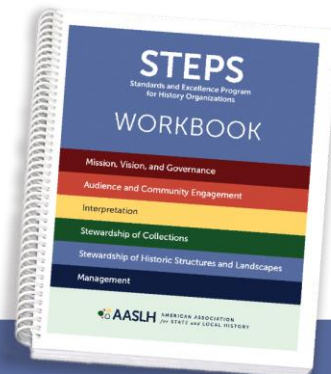
STEPS

Standards and Excellence Program
for History Organizations

A Program of AASLH

What is STEPS? Why Do We Need it?

June 27, 2024



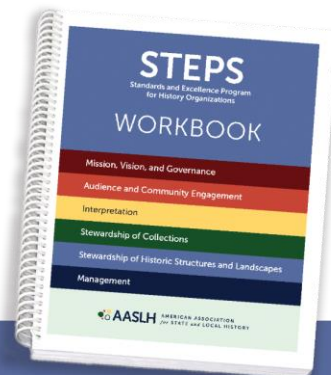
Rebecca Mendez

(she/her/hers)

Professional Development
Manager

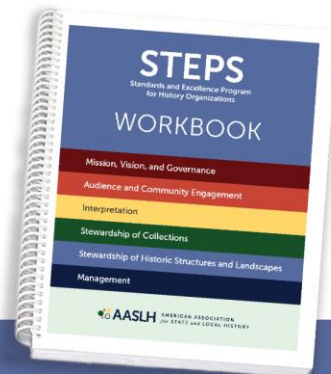
American Association for State
and Local History

Mendez@aaslh.org



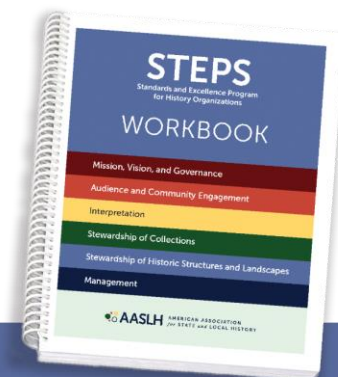
Presentation Outline

- Introduction to the Standards and Excellence Program of History Organizations (STEPS)
- Enrollment and Benefits
- STEPS Workbook
- STEPS Online Community
- Examples of How Other Organizations are Using STEPS
- Q&A



To do list:

- 1) very, very important stuff
- 2) very important stuff
- 3) other important items
- 4) don't forget to eat
- 5) sleep would be good



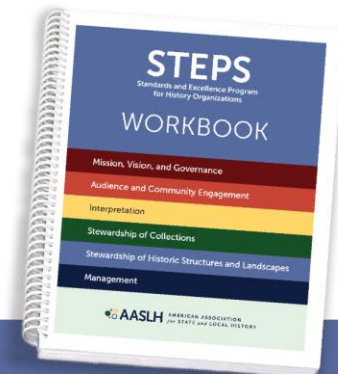
What is STEPS?

- Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations
- Self-study program to help museums, historic houses, and sites assess their policies and practices
- Primarily for small to mid-size organizations, but open to all
- Flexible way to work towards making improvements and meeting national standards
- No application or deadlines



“With the basic, good and better levels, STEPS became a valuable experience for us and helped us set goals for the future.”

Flavia Cigliano, Nichols House Museum, Boston



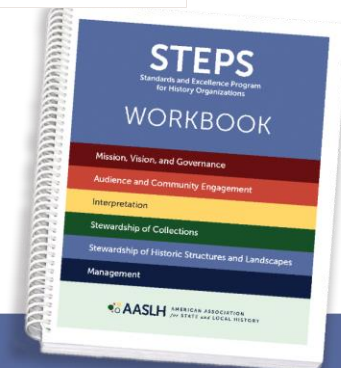
STEPS Enrollment

- One-time fee of \$195*
- Easy-to-use workbook
- Earn Bronze, Silver and Gold certificates**
- STEPS Community offering workbook section PDFs, sample forms, policies, job descriptions and more



*Non-members must join at the institutional level; rates are based on budget

**Must maintain active institutional membership to receive certificates



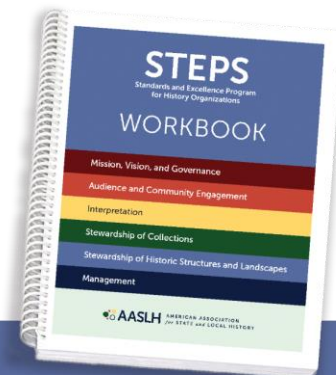
Benefits

- National recognition for certificates earned
- The certificates work well as leverage when you are requesting funds or applying for grants.
- Discounts on AASLH webinars
- Practical tools to assess and improve your organizations functions as a staff.



"It was wonderful to see our hard work pay off when we earned our first gold certificate. STEPS showed us we're on the right track and more importantly, it made our board understand there's a reason why we have to pay attention to these things."

Charlene Orr, Historic Mesquite, Mesquite, TX



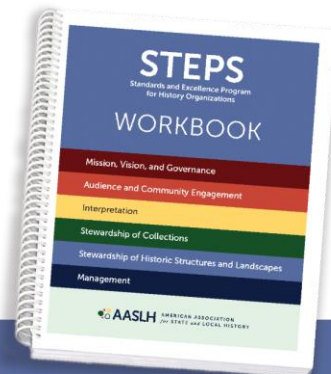
Meaningful Progress, Not a Lot of Money

- Board orientation manual
- Job descriptions for board officers and paid/unpaid staff
- Code of ethics
- Space rental policy
- Emergency preparedness plan
- Maintenance plan
- Collections management policy



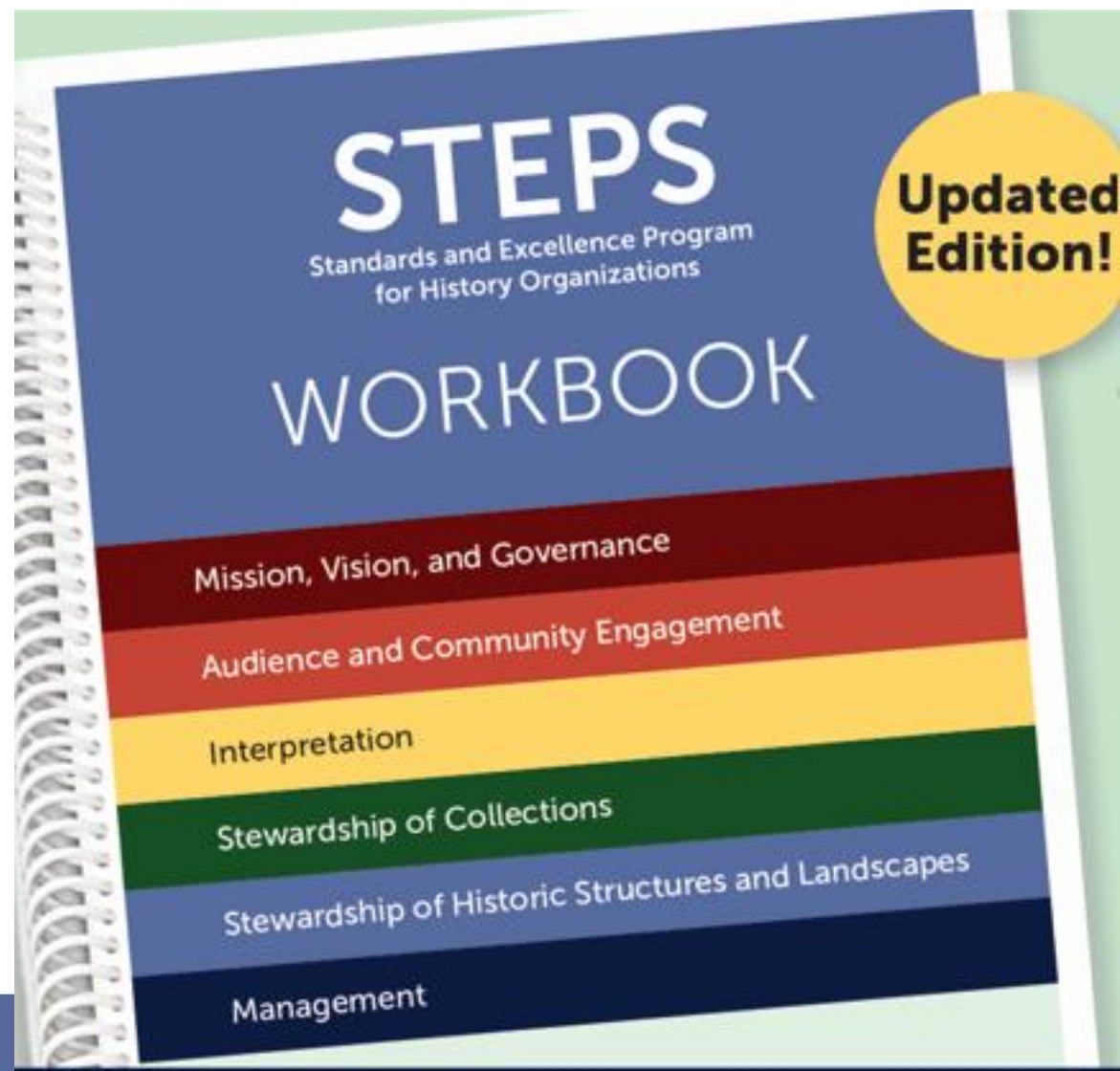
“The workbook provided an excellent resource for evaluating our entire program. Its methodical approach promotes improvement at a pace that a small staff with limited resources can follow.”

Bill Latady, Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum Tower, Minnesota

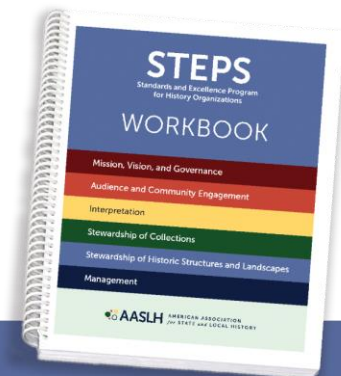


Workbook: Updated Edition

- New content about inclusion, equity, accessibility, digital collections, financial management, fundraising, and more
- The workbook also now uses a learning taxonomy of action verbs that helps your organization understand what is being recommended



Standard	Assessment Question	Performance Indicators
<p>MVG Standard 2: The institution is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.</p>	<p>E. <i>Is the governing authority committed to transparency in financial matters and other areas?</i></p>	<p>Basic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The governing authority recognizes the importance of being honest when soliciting monetary or other donations and truthful and clear with donors about how their gift will be or was used. <input type="checkbox"/> If required to file an IRS Form 990, the institution makes its three most recent ones, along with its annual financial report, available to stakeholders and the public. <input type="checkbox"/> The governing authority records financial management and other decisions in meeting minutes and makes those minutes available to stakeholders and the public. <hr/> <p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution publicly identifies members of its governing authority by publishing an up-to-date list of names in its newsletter, on its web presence, and in other communications. <input type="checkbox"/> The institution publishes an annual list of donors in its newsletter or other communications. <hr/> <p>Better</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution shares its annual independent financial review or audit with stakeholders and the public.



Glossary

Glossary

STEPS

STEPS

Stewardship of Collections COL

Glossary

Standard	Assessment Question	Performance Indicators
COL Standard 3: The Institution's culture, policies, and procedures are inclusive and equitable.	B. <i>Does the institution understand that collections often look the way they do because of bias?</i>	<p>Basic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution recognizes that museum collections are shaped by conscious and unconscious biases. <input type="checkbox"/> The governing authority, staff (paid and unpaid), and volunteers can describe, in general, examples of conscious and unconscious bias in the institution's collections. <hr/> <p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution adds specific strategies to its Collections Development Plan to help reveal biases in its collections. <hr/> <p>Better</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution shares its Collections Development Plan with the communities it serves and engages those communities in helping it begin the assessment. <input type="checkbox"/> The institution engages the communities it serves in correcting biases found during the assessment process.

This glossary was compiled using definitions from a number of reliable sources including the American Alliance of Museums, American Institute for Conservation, MASS Action, Museum SOS from the American Museum of Natural History, National Association for Interpretation's Definitions Project, National Park Service, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, Society of American Archivists, and the Washington Conservation Guild.

Abandoned Property: Property to which the owner has relinquished all rights. When property is abandoned, the owner gives up the reasonable expectation of privacy concerning it. The person finding the abandoned property is entitled to keep it. Many jurisdictions have statutes that modify the common law's treatment of lost or abandoned property, and institutions should become familiar with the state laws that may impact the understanding of what constitutes abandoned property.

Accessibility: In its publication, "Facing Change: Insights from AAM's Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Working Group," the American Alliance of Museums defines accessibility as giving equitable (i.e., fair and just) access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader meanings of compliance and refers to how organizations make space for the characteristics that each person brings.

Accession: (1) An object, group of objects, or archival collection physically and legally transferred to an institution's permanent collection as a unit at a single time from one source; an acquisition. (2) To take legal and physical custody of an addition to an institution's collection, including establishing documentation for it. (3) To document the transfer of records or materials in a register, database, or other log of the repository's holdings.

Accreditation: In the museum field, accreditation refers to the program coordinated by the American Alliance of Museums that recognizes museums that have successfully met its Accreditation program criteria and have thus been awarded accredited status.

Acquisition: (1) An item acquired by an institution. (2) The method by which an institution acquires an item such as donation, bequest, purchase, transfer from another institution, exchange with another institution, or archaeological find.

Advisory Committee: A group of people with specific skills, knowledge, and interests that meet with the staff of an institution to make recommendations about programs and offerings.

American Institute for Conservation: Membership association for current and aspiring conservators and allied professionals who preserve cultural heritage. The association maintains a database of conservators qualified to provide advice or treatment for museum collections.

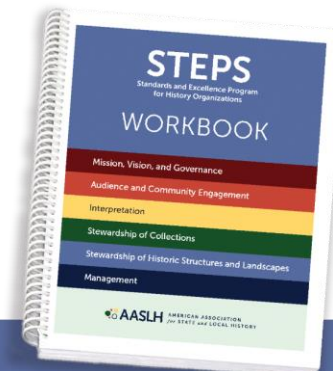
Annual Giving: Repeating gift programs seeking funds on an annual or recurring basis from the same constituency; income is generally used for operating budget support.

Appraisal: Evaluating an item's financial and/or historical value.

focusing upon ongoing maintenance and repair of historic structures.

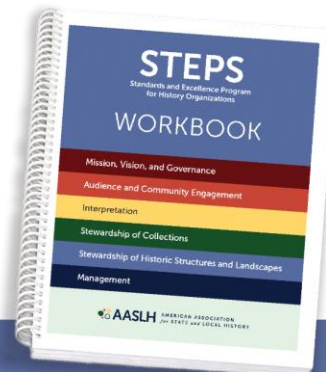
Unconscious Bias: Stereotypes, attitudes, or categorizations that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness and that often have an effect on their decision-making and behavior.

Universal Design: The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for



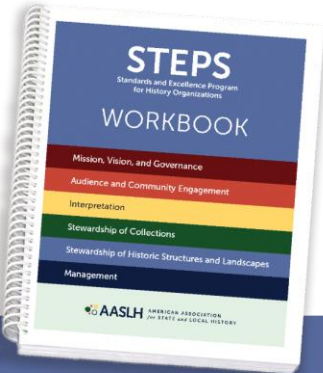
Vertical Method

STEPS		Stewardship of Historic Structures and Landscapes HSL
Standard	Assessment Question	Performance Indicators
<p>HSL Standard 11: Guided by its mission, the institution provides public access to and interpretation of its historic structures and landscapes while ensuring their preservation.</p>	<p>B. <i>Are historic structures and landscapes that are open to the public physically accessible to all audiences?</i></p>	<p>Basic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution recognizes its role as a place of public accommodation according to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and its obligation to remove barriers; if barriers have not been removed, they have been evaluated and a plan is in place for removal. <input type="checkbox"/> The governing authority, staff (paid and unpaid), and volunteers recognize that while ADA allows “threaten or destroy” exceptions for historic structures, the goal is always to allow all people equal access (e.g., photographs or virtual tour of a space inaccessible to wheelchair users). <hr/> <p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution commits to offering opportunities for all audiences by providing services and provisions to enhance accessibility as a standard of operation. <hr/> <p>Better</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The institution collaborates with community members who have relevant life experience to



Horizontal Method

STEPS		
Stewardship of Historic Structures and Landscapes HSL		
Standard	Assessment Question	Performance Indicators
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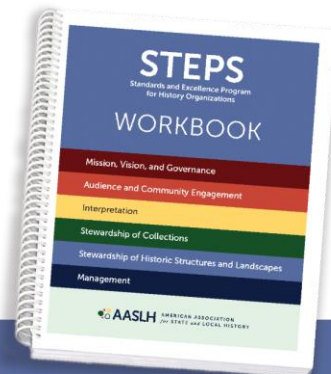
Addressed Topics

Mission, Vision, and Governance

- Bylaws and Other Enabling Documents
- Committees
- Compliance with Laws, Codes, and Regulations
- Environmental Sustainability
- Ethics and Public Trust
- Financial Management, Accountability, and Transparency
- Fundraising
- Governing Authority
- Inclusion and Equity
- Mission, Vision, and Values
- Personnel Hiring, Compensation, and Performance Evaluation
- Planning
- Support Groups
- Technology
- Volunteers

Management

- Compliance with Laws, Codes, and Regulations
- Emergency and Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Plan
- Environmental Sustainability
- Ethics and Public Trust
- Facility Care, Maintenance, and Space Allotment
- Financial Management, Accountability, and Transparency
- Fundraising
- Inclusion, Equity, and Accessibility
- Institutional Archives and Records Management
- Mission, Vision, and Values
- Personnel Hiring, Compensation, and Evaluation
- Planning
- Risk Management, Safety, Security, and Insurance
- Technology
- Visitor Amenities
- Volunteers



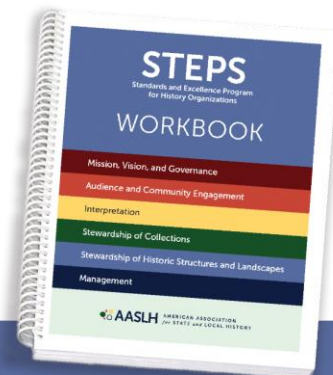
Addressed Topics

Interpretation

- Accessibility
- Accountability and Public Trust
- Environmental Sustainability
- Inclusion and Equity
- Interpretation Content and Delivery
- Interpretive Planning
- Research
- Shared Authority
- Support for Staff and Volunteers
- Technology

Audience and Community Engagement

- Accessibility
- Accountability and Transparency
- Environmental Sustainability
- Marketing and Public Relations
- Physical and Intellectual Access
- Technology
- Visitor Experience
- Visitor Services
- Visitor Studies



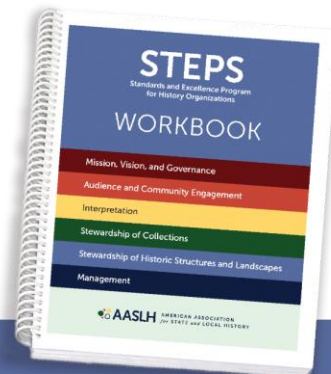
Addressed Topics

Stewardship of Collections

- Accountability and Transparency
- Collections and Mission
- Collections Care and Preservation
- Collections Management
- Compliance with Laws and Regulations
- Conservation Planning
- Deaccessioning and Disposal
- Digital Collections
- Emergencies and Disasters
- Environmental Sustainability
- Ethics and Public Trust
- Financial Resources for Collections
- Incoming and Outgoing Loans
- Inclusive and Equitable Collections Practices
- Institutional Archives
- Research
- Safety and Security
- Staffing
- Storage
- Technology


Stewardship of Historic Structures

- Accountability and transparency
- Care of collections housed in historic structures
- Care, preservation, and maintenance
- Compliance with laws and regulations
- Emergencies and disasters
- Environmental sustainability
- Ethics and public trust
- Inclusion and equity
- Interpretation
- Mission
- Planning
- Public access
- Research and documentation
- Safety and security
- Staffing
- Technology



STEPS Community

← → ↻ 🔍 🗄️ ☆ 🌐 Incognito



The Official Community of the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations

WELCOME TO THE STEPS COMMUNITY! STEPS WORKBOOK STEPS PARTICIPANTS STEPS COMMONS CERTIFICATES (40) MVG RESOURCES AUD RESOURCES

INT RESOURCES COLL RESOURCES HSL RESOURCES MGMT RESOURCES SAMPLE PLANS, POLICIES, AND FORMS STEPS GROUPS DISCOUNT CODES AASLH STEPS STAFF

RESOURCE CENTER DASHBOARD


Welcome to the STEPS Community!

The STEPS Community is currently being updated with new materials and pdf downloads of the new workbook. We will send a notice out to all STEPS Community members when these updates are complete.

In the meantime, don't forget to invite fellow staff, board members, and volunteers from your organization to join the STEPS Community! They will be able to register with the community using their **Staff Profile** or **Academic Faculty/Student Profile**. Click on the handouts below for more information on creating Staff Profiles or Academic Faculty/Student Profiles.

We ask that you not share the STEPS Community link with anyone outside your organization because it is a benefit only for those enrolled in STEPS.

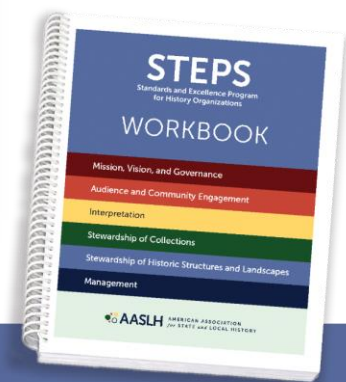
Thank you for your patience and participation!

 [Creating Staff Profiles](#)

✓ **You are registered!**
Logged in as Alex Collins.

[Profile](#)

[Logout?](#)



STEPS

Standards and Excellence Program
for History Organizations

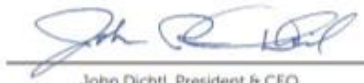
A self-study program for history organizations that encourages
awareness and achievement of national standards.

CONGRATULATIONS TO

Belfast Historical Society & Museum

This Gold Certificate Acknowledges Completion
of Better Performance Indicators for

Stewardship of Historic Structures and Landscapes

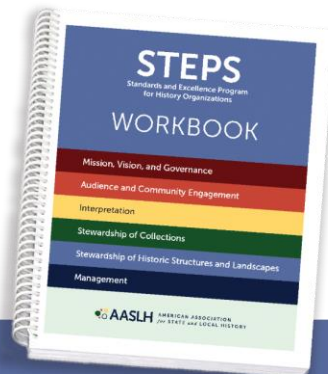


John Dichtl, President & CEO

_____ Date

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION *for* STATE *and* LOCAL HISTORY

6 sections x 3 certificate levels =
18 possible progress certificates



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Welcome!

Cherie Cook ▾

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RESOURCE CENTER HOME

MY DASHBOARD

UPCOMING EVENTS

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Check this page regularly for the most current event schedule.

WEBINARS

Live Webinars are online discussions, typically lasting 75 to 90 minutes including a Q&A session. Register for webinar events and associated resources, like slide decks, worksheets, and recommended resources.



Live Webinar: AASLH Conversations: Guidelines and Procedures for Reop...

MAY 20, 2020 | 3 - 4 PM EST | AASLH Conversations: Guidelines and Procedures for Reopening Your Historic Site is an AASLH e



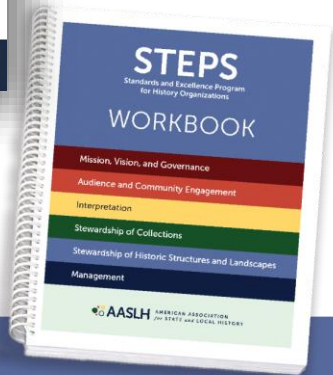
Live Webinar: AASLH Conversations: Deaccessioning in a Recession? Why ...

MAY 21, 2020 | 3 - 4 PM EST | AASLH Conversations: Deaccessioning in a Recession? Why and Why Not is an AASLH ...



Live Webinar: Member Orientation (June 2020)

JUN. 10, 2020 (NEW DATE!) | 3 - 4 PM EST | Member Orientation is an AASLH informational event presented by Rey Rege...

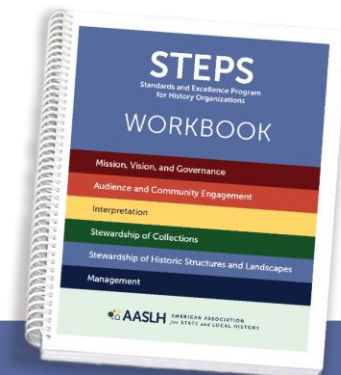


Teamwork with STEPS Groups



“Find small museums in your area that are interested in working on STEPS too. Go through the sections together. It’s great camaraderie! You don’t feel so alone, and tackling problems and projects together is very rewarding.”

Tori Mason, Grassmere Historic Farm, Nashville



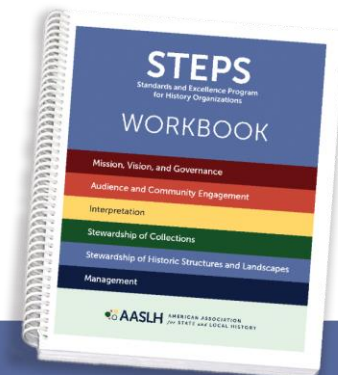
Is My Organization in a Rut?



“STEPS helped us be more forward thinking rather than getting stuck in day-to-day challenges. We have come together as a team to work for the good of the museum.

Our credibility in the community has increased as people understand we are committed to this assessment process.”

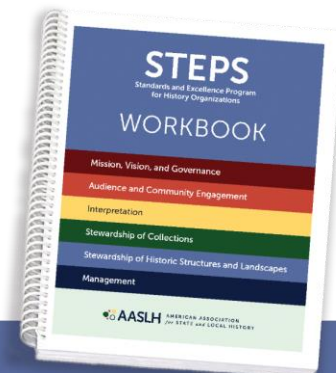
Pioneer Museum, Fredericksburg, Texas



Is My Organization Open to Hard Discussions?



Are we open to discussing topics and issues that some people may find uncomfortable because those discussions may involve changing or ending long-held traditions and practices? If we don't think everyone is open to those discussions, what is our plan?

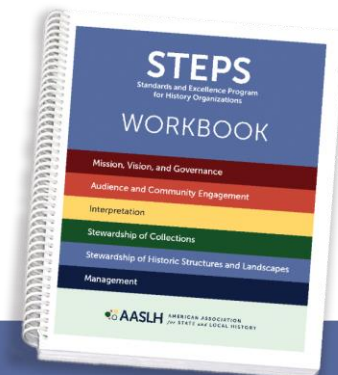


Helping Organizations Improve Long-Term Sustainability

- Communication within our board of directors has improved because STEPS gives us a common language to achieve clear goals.
- Alignment with STEPS has given BHS grant opportunities to improve management of our collections.



Black Heritage Society of Washington State, Seattle

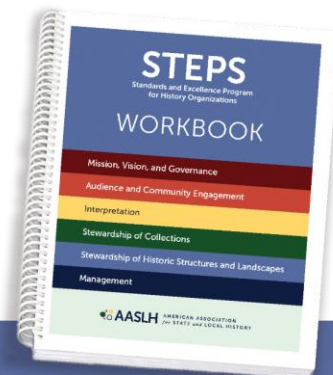


Are we willing to take a close look at our policies and practices?

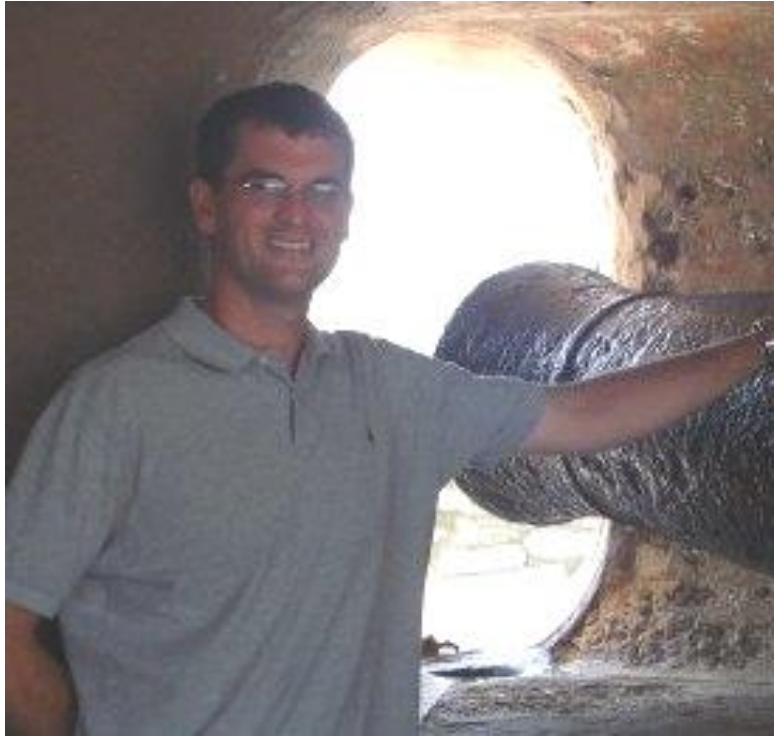
- Our board of directors has a better understanding of how museums work.
- Our strategic plan is less vague.
- STEPS helps us when we're developing new policies like a disaster plan.



New London Public Museum, New London, Wisconsin

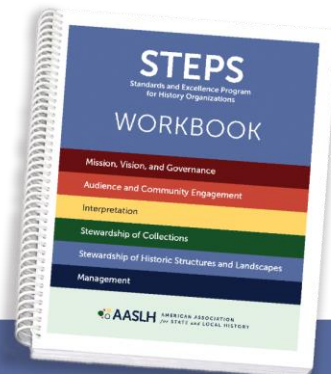


Building Credibility and Generating New Opportunities



“We can demonstrate to county officials that we are following national standards. STEPS is also helping us train maintenance staff and others who are not familiar with recommended practices.”

Rob Orrison, Brentsville
Courthouse Historic Centre,
Virginia

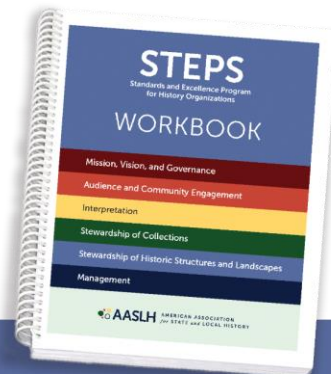


Essex Historical Society's Accomplishments

- Rewrote our mission statement
- Created our organization's first ever strategic plan
- Addressed thorny issues like deferred maintenance and land-use in a structured, systematic way



Essex, Connecticut



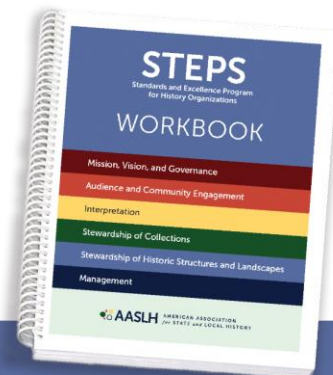
Essex Historical Society's Accomplishments

- Addressed space allocation issues. For example, we had an empty first floor and another unused area but we were renting offsite storage. STEPS provided the foundation for in-depth and sometimes awkward discussions about the need to deaccession some collection items and move others back to our site from offsite storage.



“STEPS gave our organization the opportunity to think creatively and permission to experiment.

These topics, let alone actions, would have been UNHEARD of before STEPS.”

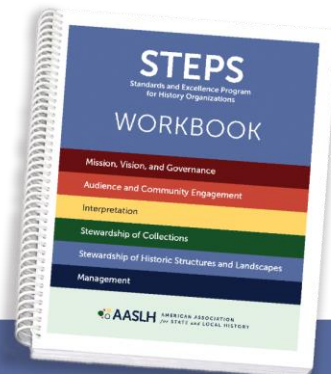


Identify What's Important



“Do it! You will likely be able to check off more boxes than you first think is possible. The STEPS workbook is wonderful at helping you identify what is important and what you need to focus on.”

Tori Mason, Grassmere Historic Farm, Nashville

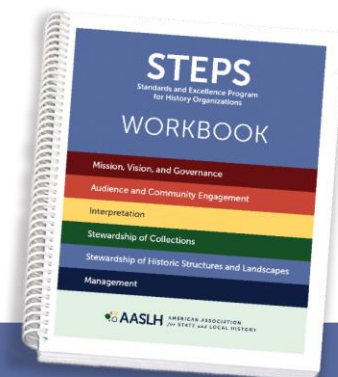


Thank You!

Enroll by **August 26, 2024** and save **\$25!**

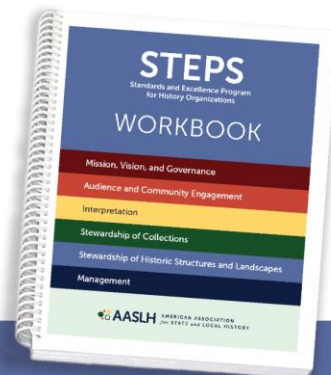
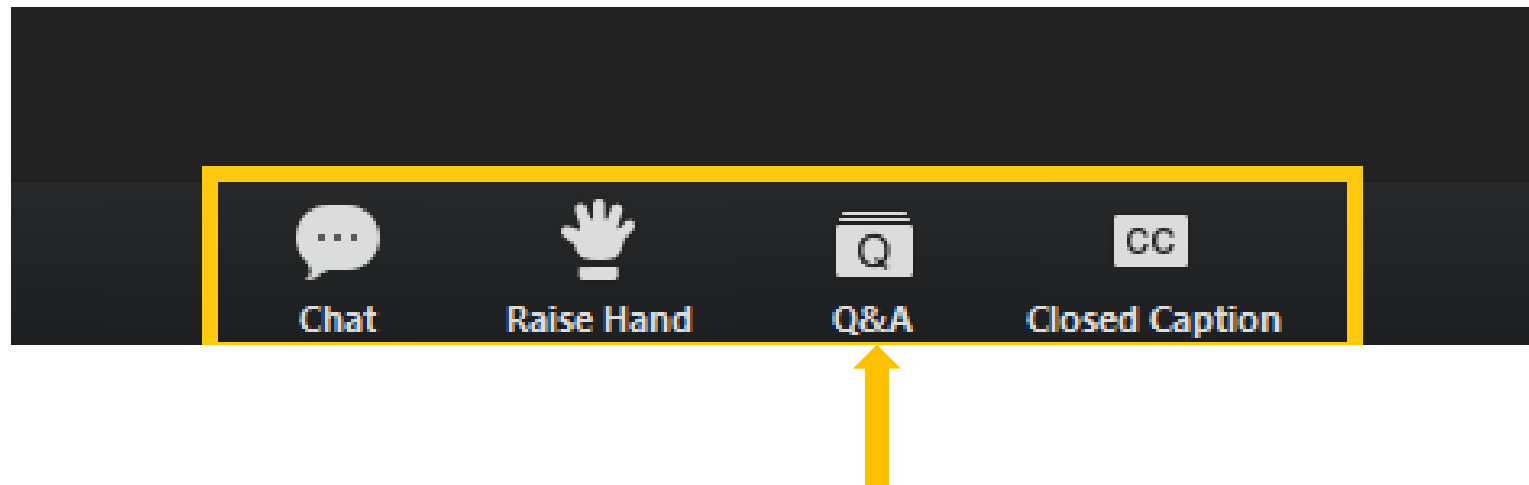
Use promo code **NEWSTEPS24** at checkout

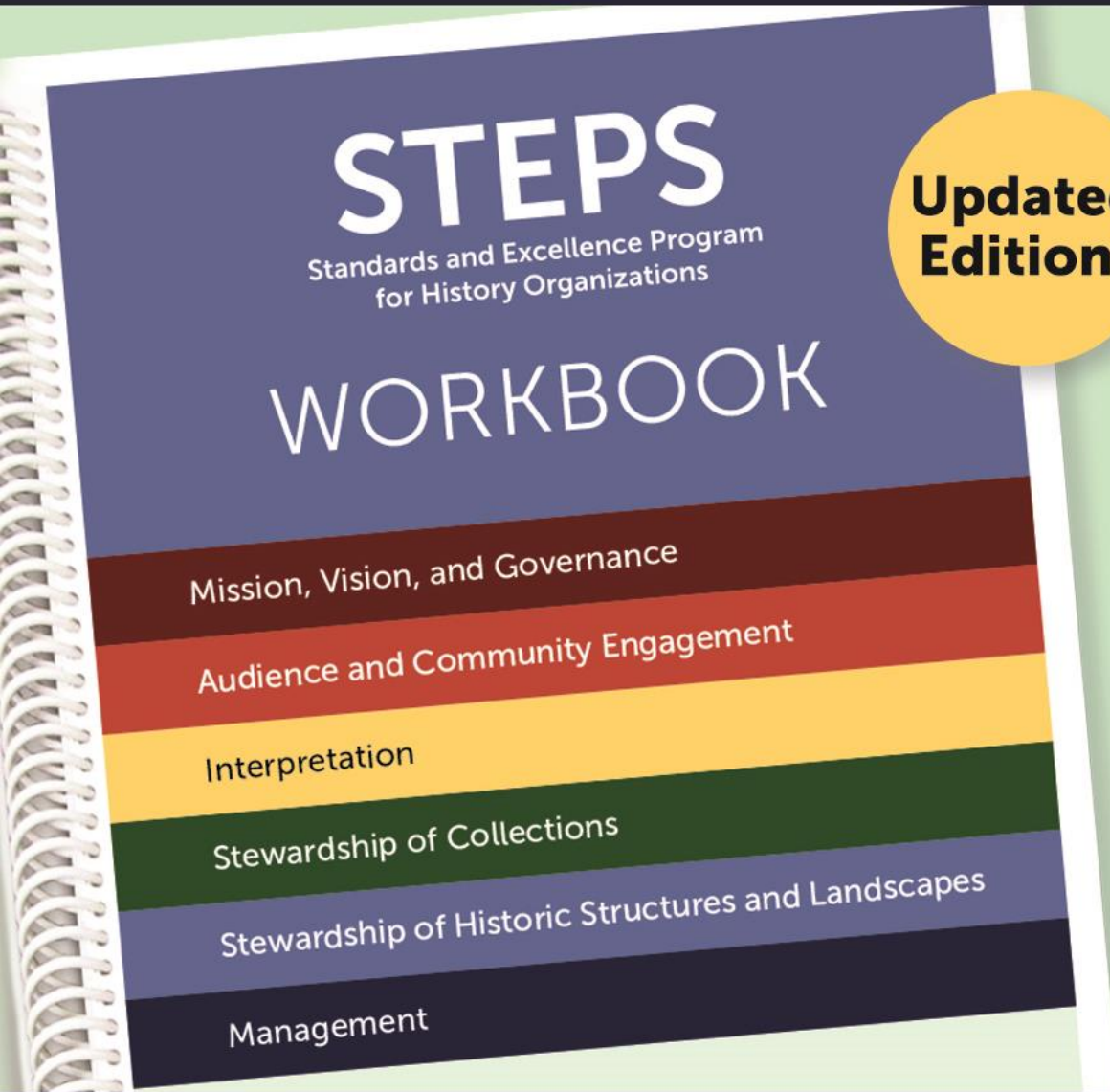
<https://learn.aaslh.org/products/steps-enrollment>



Q&A

Please use the Q&A to post questions for panelists. All questions will be collected from there.





Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations

With STEPS your organization benefits from:

- Better informed board members
- Structured process for identifying priorities
- Justification for funding requests
- More meaningful planning
- Increased credibility

Visit aaslh.org/steps today!

Thank You!

Professional Development Team
American Association for State
and Local History

learn@aaalh.org

Rebecca Mendez, Professional
Development Manager

Mendez@aaalh.org

