

Museums in Presidential Libraries



A First Report
on Policies,
Practices and
Performance
December 2004



Introduction

A dozen individuals from across the country came to Princeton in April 2004 to discuss the performance of presidential libraries regarding their museums and public and educational programs and to consider the policies and practices influencing them. These diverse experts shared a concern that these programs of broad public impact have not received sufficient analysis, evaluation and reporting within or beyond the presidential library system. Invited to Princeton by its Center for Arts and Cultural Policy, the meeting participants agreed that it was well past time for an independent discussion of these matters followed by a brief first report accessible to the presidential libraries, their supporters, and the public.

The Princeton group discussed three broad areas: strategic planning in individual libraries and for the system; the quality and character of museum programs, especially permanent and temporary exhibits and educational programs for teachers and students; and resources for such programs, especially the implications of National Archives policy to depend so heavily on private support organizations for these programs affecting the public.





Participants

The following individuals, reflecting a wide range of relevant experience and expertise, participated in the discussions at Princeton:

Willard “Sandy” Boyd. Professor of Law, University of Iowa. Formerly President of the University of Iowa, President of the Field Museum in Chicago, and Chairman of the Truman Library Institute.

Edwin Bridges. For more than twenty years, director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, which administers the State museum.

Lynn Scott “Scottie” Cochrane. Director of Libraries, Denison University. Author of a Public Administration Ph.D. dissertation on the presidential library system. Book in progress on presidential libraries.

Bruce Craig. Historian and author. Executive Director, National Coalition for History, Washington DC.

Terry Davis. Executive Director, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville.

Larry Hackman. Recently retired Director, Truman Presidential Library and Museum and President, Truman Library Institute. Formerly Director of Oral History and of Special Programs for Kennedy Library and New York State Archivist and Assistant Commissioner of Education.

Benjamin Hufbauer. Assistant Professor in Art History, University of Louisville. Ph.D. dissertation on the way America memorializes its presidents. Completing a book for University of Kansas Press, *Presidential Temples: The Transformation of Presidential Commemoration since 1900*.

Stanley Katz. Professor of History, Princeton, and Director of the Center for Arts and

Cultural Policy, Woodrow Wilson School. Formerly Director of the American Council of Learned Societies and President of the Organization of American Historians.

Daniel Linke. University Archivist and Curator of Public Policy Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

Harold Skramstad. Museum consultant. Formerly Director of the Chicago Historical Society and President Emeritus, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

George Vogt. Director, Hagley Museum and Library. Formerly Director of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and President, American Association for State and Local History.

Robert Warner. Formerly Archivist of the United States and Dean of the Library and Information School, University of Michigan. Member, Board of Directors, Gerald R. Ford Library Foundation.

Sharon Fawcett, Deputy Director of the Office of Presidential Libraries at the National Archives, and **Cynthia Koch,** Director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, participated in portions of the Princeton discussions.



Background and Issues Discussed

Prior to their arrival in Princeton, participants had read a twenty-page background paper drafted by Larry Hackman. The paper explored seven issues within the three broad areas of concern noted above.

On planning, direction and oversight, the paper considered: (a) priorities and plans for



presidential libraries and, (b) direction, oversight and evaluation from the National Archives and its Office of Presidential Libraries.

On programs for the public, the background paper discussed: (a) permanent exhibition programs, (b) temporary exhibition programs, and (c) programs for students and teachers.

On partnerships and resources, the paper examined: (a) the lack of information to, from and about the non-profit partner/support organizations of presidential libraries and (b) ongoing library relationships with and support from these non-profit partners.

To provoke discussion, the background paper offered 29 potential recommendations on the issues listed above.



Findings and Recommendations

Based on their reading of the background paper, introductory comments by the conference coordinators, and discussions together at Princeton, participants reached two broad conclusions:

First, that the “museum functions” of the presidential libraries, especially exhibits, and educational and public programs, can become much greater resources to the public than they are now through modest actions to strengthen planning, program development, and the use of resources. The National Archives and the individual libraries should pursue these actions.

Second, that there is considerable risk to the present and future health of these presidential museums in current National Archives policy that requires the libraries to rely so heavily on support from non-profit partners for most or all funding for core museum functions serving

the general public. Too little is known about the priorities, resources, and influence of these key organizations. This needs the attention of the Congress and the National Archives and more open and formal discussion within the presidential library system.

The conferees recommend, more particularly, that early attention be given to six important actions:

1. Partners and stakeholders. More meaningful and open discussion is needed among key stakeholders on policies and resources, especially regarding the nonprofit/library partnerships. This could begin with a professionally facilitated conference to consider key issues, but discussions should continue on a regular basis and should provide for independent perspectives as well.

2. Best practices. In view of the National Archives lack of guidelines for most museum functions, an active “best practices” program by the Office of Presidential Libraries should consistently promulgate examples that can help the individual libraries further strengthen their museum programs. This approach should also be used to help increase the effectiveness of the relationships between the libraries and their non-profit partners.

3. Strategic planning. The National Archives needs to assist and reward strategic planning as a central and continuing activity for each of the presidential libraries. Though this should not be a rigid top-down approach, each library at least should be able to make available in writing its mission, its vision for the future, the critical issues it faces in realizing this, and its main strategies to address these issues in the next period. A useful early stage in strategic planning, for example, could be to use the Museum Assessment Program of the American Association of Museums. This would help the libraries see this part of their business through the eyes of experienced independent museum professionals using a



proven assessment tool. Joint strategic planning between the libraries and their non-profit partners should be encouraged.

4. Collaboration. There is high potential positive impact through increased collaboration among the libraries, especially but not only in the form of traveling exhibits. Collaborative exhibits would have the advantages of improving the quality of public exhibitions at all the libraries, enhancing the value of particular exhibitions at each library and providing baseline experience in collaborative activity. Leadership is needed from the National Archives to promote, facilitate, and to provide support or other incentives for such collaborations. Greater collaboration within individual libraries among specialists in museums, archives and education is also desirable to better serve the public.

5. Resources and incentives. How might additional revenue, both public and private, be secured to support key ongoing and new museum programs, including collaborative programs such as exhibits and education? Options for such new funding that should be considered include a new Presidential Libraries Foundation, acting on behalf of all the libraries and their partners; a dedicated portion of presidential libraries annual earned revenue contributions to the existing National Archives Trust Fund; Congressional appropriations to a special fund to support museum activities, especially to provide incentive for collaborative projects; or all of these in combination.

6. Advisors and experts for the National Archives. The presidential library system should participate more actively in professional associations and make greater use of the museum expertise of others. First should be creation of an advisory board of professionals in museums, education and public programming for the Office of Presidential Libraries. Such a group of

nationally-recognized experts could be a source of ideas, assessment and guidance and also help the National Archives develop and defend sound policies and resist pressures that run against its fundamental vision for the presidential library system. The individual libraries could benefit from creating their own advisory boards of experts in interpretation, exhibits and education. The Office of Presidential Libraries itself should have museum and education professionals on its own staff.



Beyond Princeton

The Princeton participants hope that their initial conclusions, as well as the more detailed discussion and recommendations in the background paper for the Princeton meeting, will be considered actively by all concerned about the future of presidential libraries. This begins with the National Archives and the individual presidential libraries and their non-profit support groups. But the report seeks also to promote increased attention to these issues by professional associations and policy centers, the media, and the Congress.

More rigorous assessment and more vigorous discussion are needed on the three broader issues considered at the Princeton meeting. Research and analysis are also needed on a variety of other matters including, for example, leadership in the presidential libraries, and the growing importance of electronic access to presidential library programs by scholars, teachers, students and the public around the world. Developments in this last area will further alter the operations and may even call into question the basic rationale for future presidential libraries. The Center for Arts and Cultural Policy at Princeton, and attendees at the April 2004 working meeting, would be pleased to participate in further analysis and discussion.



This summary report and the more detailed background paper are available in PDF versions via the Center's web page at www.princeton.edu/~artspol/ and will be brought to the attention of the presidential library system, appropriate professional associations and policy centers, and key individuals. Several Princeton participants are engaged in writing books and articles relating to these matters and several professional meeting sessions already have been scheduled on these same issues.

To comment on this report or for further information contact :

**Dr. Stanley Katz, Director
Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies
Princeton University
Robertson Hall, Woodrow Wilson School
Princeton, New Jersey 08544-1013
Telephone: 609/258-5180
Fax: 609/258-1235
e-mail: artspol@princeton.edu
www.princeton.edu/~artspol/**

