



## *Assessing Black Museums*

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President

The National Leadership grant awarded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in April 2015, will allow the Association of African American Museums (AAAM) to further develop its board, assess the field of Black museum work, and set a clear strategic direction for the future. AAAM's assessment of the field of Black museums and museum professionals has widened its scope to collect data representing a fuller profile of Black museum work. Included in the 2015 assessment project will not only be museums, but individuals from a wide range of professions and occupations that impact the work of museums including collectors, consultants, artists, architects, fund developers, etc. Also, data will be collected from member organizations that do not identify themselves through their missions as Black museums, but do have programs or initiatives that address the Black cultural experience. Data gathered through this project will provide invaluable information about the status of African American museums and museum professionals. Information sheets can be found on the AAAM website, or by contacting the project consultant at [AAAM.needs@ppdresearch.com](mailto:AAAM.needs@ppdresearch.com).

In addition to this assessment project, a strategic planning initiative will help the AAAM board further clarify its future goals and objectives, resulting in the establishment of an executive director position. These initiatives have been long-time goals of AAAM under my tenure as president. The next five years are a pivotal time for the board to set the direction of the organization, especially with AAAM's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary fast approaching in 2018.



Another goal and objective of AAAM is to develop its membership in the Western part of the country. Most African American museums are located east of the Mississippi River, but there are significant long-standing museums located in the west. The 2016 conference will convene in Riverside, CA, and AAAM will look to recruit western members and museums, and strengthen its existing membership with a physical and programmatic presence. The Riverside host committee, under the chairmanship of Lovella Singer, director of the Dora Nelson African American Museum, is busy working on the arrangements surrounding the conference. AAAM member institutions, the California African American Museum (Los Angeles), the Northwest African American Museum (Seattle), and the Museum of the African Diaspora (San Francisco), are all anxious for AAAM to be on the West Coast. The Call for Proposals will be distributed soon for those interested in presenting a panel, workshop, roundtable, or poster session on the theme, “Looking West.”

The 2015 annual conference in Memphis, TN was one of the largest gatherings of AAAM in recent years. Over 300 people registered for the conference and enjoyed the delights of Memphis’ museum and gallery scene as well as the incomparable Beale Street. The National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM), and other museums including the Staxx Museum, and the Withers Gallery opened their doors, hearts, and talents to the multitude of AAAM. Keynote speaker, Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries of the Ohio State University, brought the theme of the conference and the work of museums together highlighting the civil rights struggle and the need to continue to educate about the importance of freedom in America. AAAM gave a warm thank you to outgoing board members: Wayne Coleman, Dr. Schroeder Cherry, Dr. Deborah L. Mack,



Beverly Robertson, Dr. Alvia Wardlaw and Ellen Zisholtz. Beverly Robertson, retired president & CEO of the NCRM, received the Dr. John E. Fleming Award, while Dr. Deborah L. Mack was the recipient of the Museum Service Award. Dr. Robert E. Lockett was the recipient of the Pace Setter Award. Congratulations again to all of our awardees for 2015!