



President's Message: The Case for Attending AAAM's Conference

By AAAM President Brian J. Carter

The 2017 American Association of Museums Conference is fast approaching, and its board of directors is thrilled to be partnering with the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture in welcoming our members to Washington D.C. this summer. I am acutely aware that expenses associated with attending a conference are not insignificant for our members, regardless of their institution's size or budget. Still, I firmly believe that the benefits of conference participation, to each attendee, their institution, and the larger field, justify the expense.

If you're going to have to make the case for conference attendance to your director, supervisor or to your Board, you'll find some helpful tips below you can use to articulate the professional benefits and institutional capacity building attending the AAAM Conference provides:

The AAAM Annual Conference advances your professional skill sets:

- Learn from leaders in the field;
- Network with peers and leaders from all areas of museums;
- Share ideas and visions during interactive programming and off-site events;
- Explore new and innovative solutions at the general sessions with intriguing, inspirational speakers and topics;
- Exchange ideas with speakers and fellow participants;

Some strategies for speaking to your supervisor about the attendance benefits:

- Write down three issues your institution is facing right now;
- List how you personally work to address these issues; (Hint: Think how your work is specifically aligned with your institution's vision or mission.)



- Review the Conference Schedule and highlight sessions you'd like to attend related to your personal contributions and/or organizational strategy;
- Draft a brief statement on why attending these sessions will help your institution with its vision/mission.

Sample Case Statement Language:

• The AAAM conference offers a number of educational sessions directly applicable to my work, and will allow me to network with museum experts and colleagues from around the country. Many of the presentations are tailored to my specific (insert your primary function here i.e. education, exhibit design, collection management, curatorial, marketing, development, etc.) functions, and would provide me with information on how to improve my (insert benefits/lessons here, for example: reduce costs, expand educational programming, grant writing skills, develop collections, harness technology, etc.) skills. I am seeking support for the registration fee, travel, and meal expenses for the conference. Attached, please find a breakdown of costs for my attendance at AAAM 2017.

• In reviewing the AAAM Annual Conference program, I have identified these (list them) informative sessions that will help me improve our (insert primary function) processes. Museum colleagues who have faced similar challenges, as well as industry experts, will facilitate these presentations. I chose each of these presentations because they are directly related to situations the (your department name) department faces. Attending these sessions will be enable me to gather organizationally beneficial information at a reduced research time and related costs than (your organization's name) typically would incur during development phases. Furthermore, I will be able to share what I've learned with our colleagues here at (your organization's name). If you would like, I could also create a mini-presentation to share everything I will have learned at AAAM 2016. (Insert another option here if it would better suit your function within your institution)

Preparing for the Meeting:

Once you get approval, prepare properly for the conference to demonstrate you received the benefits that you promised to the person paying your way:



- Make a list of people you'd like to meet at the conference and why you want to meet them. Include presenters and other "luminaries." They are more accessible than you might think, especially if you make plans with them in advance;
- Take advantage of built-in networking opportunities during the conference, including the speed-mentorship session;
- One week prior to the meeting, make a personal agenda for yourself. Include the people you're meeting, and sessions you'll be attending;
- Stick to your schedule as much as possible during the meeting. Take notes. But leave some time on your calendar in case you encounter new people with whom you'd like to spend some time;

After the Meeting:

- Immediately following the conference draft a concise summary of what happened and how you will use the information and contacts to further your organization. Write this one- or two-page summary quickly, while the information is fresh. Use your notes to help you;
- Submit the summary to the person who sponsored your attendance and thank him or her. This summary should make your next conference request even easier. Once your superiors understand you mean business when you attend a conference, they'll be more likely to quickly approve your participation;
- If what you learned might be useful to your colleagues and peers, consider rewriting portions of your summary as a blog or Twitter post. Offer to prepare and deliver a short presentation and Q&A to your colleagues to share what you learned. These mini-sessions ensure that others in your department will get the benefits of your attendance;
- Complete the annual conference survey. This helps AAAM plan future conferences that maximize the experience for attendees.