



Seven Best Practices for Museums

By AAAM Member Jada Wright-Greene

Passion creates opportunities. I've seen it in my own journey. I love African American museums, and today, I publish a magazine, "Heritage Salon," about African American museums across the country. I completed my initial museum studies work at Michigan State University in 2004 and in August of 2015, I graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a dual master's degree in Nonprofit Management & Museum Studies. So, for every African American museum director reading this, please know that I am an ardent supporter of your institution.

But I've asked myself, 'now that I have all of this information, how can I help?' What can I do to help these institutions I love so much? What are some best practices that I can share? Well, I have **seven best practices for museums** that I've picked up in the past 17 years doing nonprofit management, fundraising, community engagement and outreach. I'd encourage all museums, cultural institutions and nonprofits to review this list and make sure what you are doing aligns with these critical practices.

1. Financial Sustainability – Does your institution have a budget? Do you have a fundraising or development staff person? This may seem to be a given but many institutions do not have a budget or a fundraising staffer. If you cannot afford an employee to solicit funds, contact your local college business school or nonprofit program. There's likely a student wanting an independent study/internship that will assist them in their graduation requirements.

2. Strong Leadership & Governance – Does your board support your cause financially? Do they understand their governing and fiduciary roles? Does each board member know at least eight people able to donate? Do you have board members who love the cause but continually fail to contribute yet remain on the board for personal gain? People invested in your institution's survival will make certain you succeed. A strong board aware of what is needed to govern is the key to your success.



3. Excellence in collections, preservation and exhibitions – Do you know how to handle a document or papers from 1965? Is your exhibition space climate controlled? Do you know how to write an exhibition label? Do you have a collection database or inventory? If not, your local university may have a museum studies or historical preservation program you could use as a resource.

4. Follow – Up – Are you promptly returning emails, phone calls, and letters? You may have hundreds of things to do but the person reaching out to you could become a supporter and an advocate. By not returning their call, you could be creating a detractor who could do a lot of damage with their words. Follow -up! Call them back! Opportunities lurk in your voicemail, email and snail-mail.

5. Community Involvement & Engagement – Do you have groups, churches, and clubs in your community that visit regularly? Do you have a partnership with the local school system or community centers? Your community must feel as though your museum or nonprofit is as much their home as it is yours. Develop these relationships and I promise that they will make sure you will not have to close your doors.

6. Stay true to your mission! Hold relentlessly to your purpose. Don't create a program for the sake of a grant that is unrelated to your mission. Stay on the path. The money will come.

7. Long-Term Strategic Planning – I may lose some of you with this one, but having a long-term strategic plan helps you know where you are going. If you don't have a plan how do you know what to do next? A strategic plan gives you a roadmap for what is next and what goals you are attempting to reach.

That's my list. If you have any thoughts or questions, feel free to reach out to me at:

jada@heritagesalon.org. I'd love to hear from you. Good luck!

Jada Wright-Greene is a Dallas based writer, author, museum professional and Founder & President of Heritage Salon. Her personal goal is to see African American museums, cultural institutions and historic sites/homes be exposed to rise and thrive.