



Education, Professional Development, and Leadership Working Group Working Group Report Summary

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The current state of education, professional development, and leadership within cultural heritage preservation influences every aspect of the field. Crucial priorities are insuring that the field is attracting, welcoming, and educating diverse candidates for careers; that all professionals have the training and tools they need to work in and advocate for cultural heritage in a changing world; and that community caretakers and allied professionals are both empowered to collaborate in cultural heritage preservation and will have a deep and long-lasting effect on the country and the world's remarkably diverse cultural heritage.

The audiences covered by this report encompass K-12 students through to early career professionals, and those in leadership roles and development. Given the diversity of needs these audiences encompass, the Education, Professional Development, and Leadership Working Group of the Held in Trust (HIT) initiative worked as three separate subcommittees with each focusing on one of these areas. Outlined below are the areas of key consideration identified by each of these subcommittees to achieve a vibrant and inclusive future for cultural heritage preservation.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

EDUCATION

Early education around cultural heritage preservation

Raising awareness of the importance of cultural heritage preservation early and consistently in young people's education is critical both for advocacy efforts and for establishing a diverse population of students interested in pursuing a career in the field. This can be achieved through a variety of partnerships and curricula that begin in primary school and continue through undergraduate programs, with a focus on equitable access.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are critical areas of development for education in cultural heritage preservation. Currently, the field primarily recognizes formal graduate programs as pathways into the field. With limited regional access and daunting prerequisites, graduate degree programs have a history of excluding many potential professionals from pursuing a career in cultural heritage preservation. In addition, degree programs have struggled to foster cultures of belonging as the majority have been slow to integrate training in intercultural competencies or a meaningful number of non-Western case studies. The field needs to expand its recognition of education and training pathways to include appropriate pre-graduate and non-degree offerings, including apprenticeships.

Coordination among conservation and allied professions

The cultural heritage sector in the U.S. lacks a uniting agency or infrastructure supporting field advancement, including mentoring, funding, cross-disciplinary and collaborative research, and international exchange. This has been recognized across all the Education, Professional Development, and Leadership Working Group members, who found that education within

museums, libraries, archives, built heritage, landscape, etc. thrives through interdisciplinarity and connections between allied professionals and communities.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Core competencies in preservation for continuing education and career development

The importance of rigorously implementing and recognizing core competencies should extend to professional development. A set of recognized professional training requirements and free or low-cost programs to meet them would promote professionalization across all areas of cultural heritage preservation. It is important to define core competencies along with skills and knowledge for specific deliverables independent of varying job titles. Such a mandate for ongoing training related to mandated core competencies would encourage greater investment in professional development from institutions and funders.

Access to professional development opportunities

Institutional context and professional roles impact a worker's ability to obtain funding or leave to pursue professional development opportunities. For example, conservators in private practice, hourly wage employees, and volunteer caretakers often lack access to paid research time or subsidized training programs. More individual professional development funding will increase training opportunities for cultural heritage preservation professionals, regardless of employer.

Collaboration across all professional levels and related disciplines

Preservation work is inherently interdisciplinary, yet professional silos often limit access to various continuing education opportunities. There is room for more interdisciplinary spaces where workers can train on issues related to conservation and preservation and learn from other disciplines. Such programs exist, for example programs at Ox-Bow in Michigan, where book conservators can meet with book artists, curators, and historians to explore overlapping themes of interest. More of these cross-disciplinary collaborations are needed to enrich cultural heritage preservation.

LEADERSHIP

Research and data collection

The cultural heritage sector largely lacks comprehensive data quantifying or qualifying the characteristics demonstrated by current acknowledged leaders and by those who demonstrate unacknowledged leadership. With a clear, thoughtful assessment of leadership in hand, actions can be taken to advance leadership for the field and for conservation professionals in their work.

Infrastructure

Museums, libraries, archives, and other collecting institutions, alongside those in architectural preservation, academia, small community cultural institutions, and other cultural heritage organizations all work independently to advance leadership with varying success. Greater collaboration would expand leadership networks and underscore the possibilities and necessities of working across silos.

Access, equitability, and perception in leadership development

There is an overall lack of access to and equitability in leadership development opportunities, alongside a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the leadership already being displayed by preservation professionals. Barriers to participation include a lack of paid or unpaid time off to participate, little or no financial support for the costs of training, and minimal internal supervisory support for leadership training within organizations and businesses. Lack of acknowledgement also means that those exhibiting leadership are not incentivized to achieve further.

STRATEGIC GOALS

All three subcommittees reported on the challenges of an interdisciplinary field with broadly distributed participants whose educational and practical preparation, professional development, and leadership definitions and opportunities differ significantly. Greater collaboration within and outside the field is necessary and desired. There is an overall concern that current education and professional pathways are exclusive, preventing the participation of all those interested in pursuing and succeeding in a career in cultural heritage preservation. Given the interconnected nature of education, professional development, and leadership, the subcommittee members identified the following three overall strategic goals to focus the field's efforts on ensuring that current and next generations of cultural heritage preservation professionals are welcomed and empowered. Further details and an outline of the short-, mid-, and long-term benchmarks can be found in the HIT Working Group's [full report](#).

GOAL #1: Establish core competencies and benchmarks.

A national organization or consortium of cultural heritage groups designed to represent the various constituencies who contribute to conservation and preservation is a crucial and missing component. AIC membership does not cover all professions within the broader cultural heritage preservation field. This new body would be responsible for setting the core competencies (not formal educational pathways) related to entering the profession and maintaining qualifications.

GOAL #2: Increase collaboration amongst preservation professionals and disciplines.

All workers in cultural heritage preservation and allied disciplines must harmonize their efforts to develop and implement best practices in the protection, treatment, and long-term care of the objects, collections, buildings, and sites that embody our historic and cultural memory. The cross-disciplinary nature of the field is one of its great strengths. It is also one of its greatest challenges, as the specific knowledge that is required by any individual working in one aspect of this pool may vary greatly from that required by others. By finding new ways to share skills and knowledge and activate community and teamwork, the field will be better positioned to address current and future challenges facing cultural heritage preservation.

Goal #3: Expand access to education, professional development, and leadership opportunities.

While more research is needed to gain a detailed picture of which groups, regions, and specialties lack sufficient access to education, professional development, and leadership, existing data confirms overall entrenched inequities that must be addressed for the growth and sustainability of the field.

IN SUMMARY

While the preservation of the nation's diverse cultural heritage requires a wide range of specialized skills, over time the recognized education and development pathways and even a widespread understanding of the identity of foundational skills have fallen behind and become limited. The cultural heritage conservation and preservation field is creative and progressive, which is a strong foundation for thinking of new and expanded pathways that can open the field to new perspectives, backgrounds, and skills. Education, professional development, and leadership affect nearly every other pillar of cultural heritage preservation, and thus, deserve the field and its supporters' investment and focus.

To learn further details around the findings and recommendations of the HIT Working Group on Education, Professional Development, and Leadership, please access their [full report](#).

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