



## **Engagement, Communication, and Storytelling**

### **Working Group Report Summary**

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Improving conservation practitioners' community engagement, communication, and storytelling skills across the field is critical for advocating for sufficient resources and building intentional, reparative relationships between collecting institutions and local and source communities.

The Held in Trust (HIT) Working Group on Engagement, Communication, and Storytelling identified its top-level goal as raising the conservation and preservation enterprise to a new, sustainable, impactful, and deeply resonant level with the U.S. citizenry for generations to come. The public, when inspired by conservation storytelling, becomes more engaged in preservation efforts in their communities. Additionally, more conservation projects are funded when philanthropic organizations, government agencies, and allied professionals are inspired by conservation storytelling, thus enabling a wider variety of cultural heritage to be preserved. This type of increase in preservation efforts should be promoted to give the profession more visibility and increase public appreciation for its efforts.

In identifying the following key considerations and goals, the Working Group conducted an environmental scan that evaluated the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, existing infrastructure, challenges, and threats related to storytelling and communication in the conservation and preservation field. The findings from that environmental scan can be found in the Working Group's [full report](#).

### **KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

Summarized below are the areas of key consideration the Working Group identified for the field around communications and community engagement for greater understanding of and advocacy for cultural heritage and its preservation.

#### **Engagement and audiences**

Engagement must come from a place of authenticity and transparency, centering communities, cultures, and people in preservation work. Yet, traditional norms of preservation and conservation may exclude culturally based ways of working. For the field to be impactful and resonant, we need a broad and inclusive way of engaging in a variety of settings and to understand that successful strategies range widely depending on the culture and community.

#### **Inclusive storytelling around artifacts and cultural heritage**

Artifacts and cultural heritage mean different things to different people and communities. Preservation professionals need to gain an understanding of the meanings and resonance of objects, artworks, archives, and sites from a multitude of perspectives and be as inclusive as possible in gathering those perspectives. This will help align preservation work and related communication strategies around the needs, goals, and interests of the communities and stakeholders the field and collecting institutions serve.

## **Communication strategies and processes**

The kinds of stories told, by whom, when, where, and how must be considered with careful intention and authenticity. Understanding the diversity and concerns of the audience(s) the cultural heritage conservation field would like to reach and engage through storytelling is essential to forming successful strategies.

## **STRATEGIC GOALS**

The HIT Engagement, Communication, and Storytelling Working Group has identified the following three strategic goals to empower preservation professionals, institutions, and communities to create strong partnerships built on trust, to work meaningfully with each other and the cultural “artifacts” embedded in communities, and to tell resonant stories about those objects and sites and their preservation.

Further detail on these goals and an outline of benchmarks over the short, medium, and long term can be found in the Working Group’s [full report](#).

### **GOAL #1: Foster equitable and meaningful community engagement**

The cultural heritage field should prioritize equitable and meaningful community engagement in their communication. This can be accomplished through partnerships with community organizations that have interests and strengths in engaging stakeholders in conversations around cultural heritage, civic engagement, and social justice initiatives. The cultural heritage field must also understand that connecting to multiple and varied audiences is essential and fundamental to this work. For these strategies to be effective, preservation professionals must be committed to active listening and learning from the community-focused engagements and reflect critically on these experiences.

### **GOAL #2: Build connections with communities around and in support of artifacts and cultural heritage**

Ongoing and meaningful relationships and partnerships are the foundation for community connections. The field needs to think carefully about the resources and staffing needed to sustain regular and meaningful connections with the individuals, communities, and organizations that are invested in cultural heritage preservation and conservation. The field will support efforts to connect preservation professionals and community stakeholders for inclusive storytelling around artifacts and cultural heritage with the acknowledgment of the different areas of expertise brought to the conversations.

### **GOAL #3: Develop resources and trainings based on successful storytelling strategies**

Many conservators and communities will be taking on communications around cultural heritage preservation amidst other responsibilities. It is critical that they have straightforward and accessible communications training, tools, and strategies to tell engaging stories in cultural- and community-centered ways (as opposed to colonized/er ways). The resource(s) developed can also identify venues and technology platforms ideal for storytelling.

## **IN SUMMARY**

When communities are empowered through intentional and reparative relationships, they can be more engaged in preservation efforts in their communities or with their cultural heritage. When funders, government agencies, and allied professionals are inspired by conservation storytelling, more work gets funded. Effective storytelling and engagement around preservation

efforts will increase visibility, advocate for policy change, and increase public appreciation, thus propagating a more sustainable conservation and preservation enterprise.

To learn further details around the findings and recommendations of the HIT Working Group on Engagement, Communication, and Storytelling, please access their [full report](#).

## **ENGAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION, AND STORYTELLING WORKING GROUP MEMBERS**

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