



Better Together

Collaboration for Continuing Education and Professional Development across Archives, Libraries and Museums

Introduction

The Coalition to Advance Learning in Archives, Libraries and Museums (“the Coalition”) formed as a cross-sector group of representatives from organizations and key individuals committed to continuing education and professional development (CE/PD). With impetus and funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, supplemental funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and project management from OCLC, the [Coalition launched in March 2014](#) to identify key challenges and to develop approaches for cross-sector collaboration on CE/PD.

This document summarizes the joint strategy formulated by the Coalition to clarify our goals and objectives and provide a foundation for organizations to take action together to strengthen CE/PD across the archives, libraries and museums (LAM) professions. Ultimately, we intend to expand the community of cross-sector collaborative practice and inspire other organizations to share their intentions, resources, and solutions.

Real Challenges and Opportunities

In a world where knowledge is power, our nation depends on an informed citizenry. At a time when information technologies and practices are changing at an extraordinary rate, the staff of LAM institutions serve as essential guides for researchers, scholars, professionals, students, and people of all ages, backgrounds, experience, and disciplines. Just when our cultural institutions are facing intense pressure to stay up to date with the needs of users, they are under increasing financial pressure. With insufficient resources to conduct business as usual, we need bold new approaches in order to rise to meet new challenges.

Collaborative investment in CE/PD has impacts at multiple levels of our communities:

- *Staff*, gaining skill development, job satisfaction and enriched perspectives from other sectors.
- *Organizations*, leading to staff retention, greater community impact, and a stronger reputation.
- *Our professions*, cultivating future leaders, change agents, and problem solvers.
- *The communities we serve*, providing easier access to resources, more current and comprehensive collections in multiple formats, more compelling exhibits, better use of technology, and countless other tangible outcomes.

A Coalition Response

The Coalition aligns around a common vision: *to work in deliberate coordination across boundaries to advance sustainable continuing education and professional development (CE/PD) programs that will transform the cultural heritage professions and strengthen a nation of learners.*

As champions of a collaborative approach to learning, we are driven by these imperatives:

- *We need to break down discipline-based silos.* Our communities expect easy, barrier-free access to information and experiences, without regard to institutional or professional divisions. If we think of users and user communities holistically, we can prepare our workforce to integrate programs and services to truly meet user needs.
- *Each discipline brings unique strengths and answers to common challenges.* While we can learn much from one another, there is even greater potential in what we can create together. By leveraging both our similarities and our differences, we will generate creative and effective solutions we could not reach by acting in isolation.
- *It is in our collective economic interest.* We can accomplish more through collaboration and sharing resources than we can when acting independently. By collaborating on shared solutions to mutual challenges, we can focus time and attention in our areas of specialization. Combining forces allows for the creation of larger, more transparent markets for CE/PD offerings, expanding the market for providers, and allowing both providers and consumers to do more with limited resources.

Goals and Strategies

The Coalition has defined four key goals to advance our work. Objectives are articulated under each goal. Under each objective, actions and resources are identified as achieved by the Coalition, in progress, and under consideration.

Four key goals:

1. BUILD COMMUNITY AND CAPACITY
2. ADVOCATE FOR ONGOING INVESTMENT IN CE/PD
3. INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF CURRENT OFFERINGS AND EMERGING NEEDS
4. TAKE ACTION TOGETHER

GOAL 1: BUILD COMMUNITY AND CAPACITY

The Coalition has forged new interagency and cross-sector relationships that expands our collective knowledge and resources and moves us toward shared CE/PD goals. We intend to establish an open community of practice to support LAM organizations to come together to learn, identify shared interests, and collaborate. We envision a growing network of organizations, contributing and gaining knowledge, information, and ideas that will advance and sustain learning.

Objectives

A) Support ongoing communication, information sharing, and coordination. A commitment to share information, coordinate, and actively collaborate requires vehicles for communication.

- Coalition actions to date
 - Created a Coalition website as a platform for an online community of practice, and other tools to enable information sharing, communication and coordination.
 - Website: <http://coalitiontoadvancelearning.org/>

- Twitter: @LAMcoalition
- Assembled a [CE/PD calendar](#) to surface learning opportunities for Coalition organizations, our members, and the broader community.
- Published a [folio summary](#) of the Coalition's strategy goals.

B) Build effective personal networks across sectors. Collaboration begins with and depends on trusted relationships among individuals. Cultivating strong relationships among individuals across sectors is foundational to working together well as organizations.

- Coalition actions to date
 - Established the structure and membership of the original Coalition.
 - Convened Coalition members at in-person and virtual meetings to build relationships and trust across the whole community.
 - Explored areas of [commonality and difference](#), strengthening members' understandings of the three sectors and personal connections.
 - Recruited others in our organizations to get involved in projects.
- Coalition actions in progress
 - Plan cross-sector cultural exchanges via participation at existing major conferences of each sector
 - Investigate the feasibility of a cross-sector residency program, which could provide internships for emerging or mid-career professionals to experience in depth the work and practice of a different sector.
 - Recruit more broadly to join the Coalition's open community.

C) Share expertise across sectors to increase the level of excellence achieved in all continuing education and professional development. Anyone in a broad community of practice can take small steps to connect expertise across sectors improving the delivery of effective and efficient CE/PD.

- Coalition actions to date
 - Shared strengths and interests across member organizations and sectors.
- Coalition actions in progress
 - Seek and broadcast opportunities to send staff of Coalition organizations to training from other sectors.

GOAL 2: ADVOCATE FOR ONGOING INVESTMENT IN CE/PD

It is crucial to champion the importance of continuing education and professional development. The Coalition's goal is to ensure that CE/PD is viewed by decision makers as a vital component of a successful organization, and to raise awareness of the value of learning from other sectors. There is a strong case to be made for the benefits achieved when organizations work together to coordinate both broad-based and targeted outreach. We are doing this via the Coalition's website, social media, and conference outreach channels.

Objectives

A) Establish the case and make the case broadly, loudly, and repeatedly. Develop consistent and compelling messages that promote the linkage between quality CE/PD, the ability of our staffs to do their jobs effectively, and our health and prosperity as a nation. Emphasize the importance to peers, leaders, and policy makers at all levels.

- Coalition actions to date
 - Drafted messages that describes the community benefits tied to investments in CE/PD.
 - Delivered presentations at sector conferences to explain Coalition strategy and activities
- Coalition actions in progress
 - Provided suggestions for tailoring key messages to specific audiences.
 - Collect examples of cross-sector collaborations implemented by Coalition members, including lessons learned from both successes and failures.

B) Cultivate the support of influential partners. Targeted engagements with influential policy makers, grantors, and others involves relationship development and the thoughtful, tailored cultivation of support through repeated engagements.

- Coalition actions to date
 - Created a Communications Guide to facilitate internal communication.
 - Produced a white paper [*Spanning Our Field Boundaries*](#), which identifies "collaborative starting points," or growth areas that are ripe for collaboration.

GOAL 3: INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF CURRENT OFFERINGS AND EMERGING NEEDS

Although CE/PD is clearly valued across LAMs, little common data is currently collected or circulated about offerings, methodologies, and the needs of professionals/practitioners either within or across any of these institutional sectors. This has created gaps in knowledge and documentation, where potential areas of overlap or collaborative opportunities in CE/PD investments and offerings remain simply unknown. Assessing the state of the field and surfacing needs and gaps are critical steps toward effective cross-sector collaboration. What is learned from this goal will inform much of the collaboration and coordination involved in taking action together.

Objectives

A) Illuminate current and emerging needs. CE/PD providers and consumers will benefit greatly if shared training needs can be identified across sectors, with the objective of increasing the efficiency and speed by which emergent needs are met.

- Coalition actions to date
 - Coalition members proposed and were awarded an IMLS grant, [Mapping the Landscapes](#), to conduct an extensive CE/PD needs assessment across sectors. Since March 2015, the project has:
 - Assembled an advisory group of 38 member organizations representing LAMs from within and external to the Coalition,
 - Defined a conceptual model, which organizes professional competencies and attitudes into a broad set of categories that spans the three sectors.
 - Produced the white paper [Spanning Our Field Boundaries](#), which identifies “collaborative starting points,” or growth areas that are ripe for collaboration.

- Coalition actions in progress
 - The continued efforts of the *Mapping the Landscapes* project team will:
 - Develop a survey instrument to document CE/PD needs in and across each sector
 - Build a master source of data, openly usable throughout the field.
 - Assess viability of cross-sector collaborations on particular topics by examining what challenges are shared across LAMs and establish common competencies that might address them.
 - Design sustainability scenarios for ongoing volunteer-based data collection by the Coalition, using the general frameworks and data models produced in this project.

- Coalition actions under consideration
 - While the *Mapping the Landscapes* project will assess the needs of individuals, there is an opportunity for Coalition organizations to propose future grant-funded projects to assess the needs of organizations and of sectors. These needs assessment projects could focus on organizational and sector leaders, and provide data analysis and a sustainability scenario.

B) Raise awareness of current offerings and available resources. Investigating the array of current CE/PD offerings in the LAM sectors will surface opportunities for meeting the collective needs of the field through increased awareness of existing offerings or areas suited to the creation of new learning opportunities. With a clear view of the CE/PD supply, providers will be positioned to make informed choices to reduce redundancy and increase efficiency of learning offerings.

- Coalition actions under consideration:
 - Conduct a supply analysis, reviewing which organizations and groups are providing CE/PD opportunities, and summarizing each organization’s educational goals.
 - Document what curriculum and evaluation methodologies are available to LAM professionals.
 - Establish a sustainable platform for sharing up-to-date CE/PD offerings with community members.

GOAL 4: TAKE ACTION TOGETHER

In the midst of building relationships and conducting research, the Coalition is testing whether collaboration on CE/PD development can yield effective learning experiences for participants across LAM organizations. Prototyping how multiple organizations representing their respective sectors can work together may reveal new approaches that benefit learners and have sufficient return on investment for CE/PD providers.

Objectives

A) Coordinate CE/PD to augment organizational strengths and reduce costly duplication. Use the market information and the collective understanding of member organizations’ strengths to identify where and how we can best provide CE/PD for our workforces.

- Coalition actions under consideration
 - Compare inventories of current offerings and the providers’ programmatic goals and needs to call attention to potential market gaps.
 - Identify areas of overlap and redundancy in current offerings, encouraging providers to focus on areas of strength and address underserved market niches.
 - Identify opportunities for a coordinated and collaborative response to producing CE/PD for cross-sector audiences.

B) Collaborate on the efficient production and delivery of effective CE/PD. The information gathered in Goal 3 can be used to create strategic responses to ever-evolving market conditions, establishing the foundation for informed coordination. While efficient use of resources is critical, it is important to acknowledge that some duplication of effort may be valuable by providing consumers with alternative choices.

- Coalition Actions to date
 - Produced a Project Management 101 webinar series: [Key Elements of a Project Plan](#) and [Evaluating your Project Plan](#)

- Working collaboratively, the project team repurposed existing content for webinar format, planned and produced the webinars, identified hosts and presenters, marketed to multiple sector audiences, and conducted pre- and post-evaluations.
- Built upon content on accessibility and inclusion developed by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and expanded AAM's 3-part webinar series ([Stories of Inclusion](#)) to include audiences from across LAMs.

"[Cross-sector training make it] easier to realize that the problems we are experiencing are not necessarily specific to our jobs or industries, and it is wise to seek advice and practical solutions from outside our own walls and take lessons from experts - even experts in the corporate world."

Participant, Project Management training, February 2015

- Coalition actions under consideration
 - Identify a core set of CE/PD topics that are topics of interest and usefulness across sectors. Potential topics include:
 - Effective online training, disaster preparedness, advocacy, digital collections, workforce development, early learning, member engagement, and open government.
 - Explore further opportunities for collaborative production around these topics, leveraging content and strengths of member organizations.
 - Devise plans to design, produce and deliver more cross-sector learning opportunities.

C) Leverage best practices and practical tools that enable cross-sector collaboration. Cross-sector collaboration can pose practical challenges, including legal and organizational obstacles to working together and difficulties in translating, adapting, or promoting CE/PD developed for one sector for use in another.

- Coalition actions to date
 - Summarized [factors of success and lessons learned](#) from the Project Management 101 pilot project.
 - Conducted a business analysis and value chain mapping to better understand and describe the CE/PD delivery marketplace across the three sectors.

SUSTAIN THE MOMENTUM

The Coalition will continue its collaborative CE/PD work, seeking to establish concrete objectives, measures and milestones based on the strategy defined in this document. It will also investigate options for sustaining such activities over time.

The vision to work collaboratively across archives, libraries and museums to strengthen and advance CE/PD is not limited to the current membership of the Coalition. Imagine a broad collective of organizations from the LAM sectors, inspired by real challenges and opportunities and guided by the vision, goals, and actions identified and explored by the Coalition.

Organizations may choose to enact the philosophy and practices advocated in this document in the development of continuing CE/PD for their own workforce. Possible actions may stem from the Coalition goals.

1. Build community and capacity
 - Expand personal and professional relationships through development of cross-sector relationships at the individual and organizational level.
 - Plan multi-organization or cross-sector conferences or meetings.
2. Advocate for ongoing investment in CE/PD
 - Promote the benefits of collaborative, cross-sector approaches to stakeholders.
 - Collect stories and data on the effectiveness and benefits of CE/PD in your own institution.
3. Increase the visibility of current offerings and emerging needs
 - Share information, tools, and resources about current CE/PD offerings and needs.
 - Contribute to ongoing Coalition communication channels (website and Twitter).
 - Seek opportunities to share expertise beyond the traditional sectors of stakeholder organizations.
 - Gather and share the use of frameworks, models, and agreements to support cross sector collaboration.
4. Take action together
 - Maximize collaboration in grant proposals, pursuing grant opportunities from funders who support cross-sector collaboration and focusing grant proposals on needs that are prioritized across multiple sectors.
 - Partner within, across, and among sectors to develop CE/PD that meets the needs of multiple audiences.

Working together offers solutions to the challenges facing archives, library and museum organizations in a time of rapid change and threatened budgets. Beyond the practical advantages of increasing efficiency and reducing redundancy, collaboration across sectors can add vitality to the knowledge landscape. A diverse environment fosters the pollination of ideas; thought partnership flourishes when different experiences meld. When staff are better prepared to meet information and technology challenges, our communities benefit. We can all be better together.

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