

MUSEUM ADMINISTRATION

2.0

HUGH H. GENOWAYS
AND LYNNE M. IRELAND

Revised by Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB,
United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Genoways, Hugh H., author. | Ireland, Lynne M., 1953- author. | Catlin-Legutko, Cinnamon, editor.

Title: Museum administration 2.0 / by Hugh H. Genoways and Lynne M. Ireland; revised by Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko.

Other titles: Museum administration.

Description: Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield [2016] | Series: American Association for State and Local History

Identifiers: LCCN 2016015151 | ISBN 9781442255500 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781442255517 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781442255524 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Museums—Management. | Museums—United States—Management.

Classification: LCC AM121 .G465 2016 | DDC 069/.068—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016015151>

∞™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

MUSEUM ADMINISTRATION 2.0

American Association for State and Local History

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*This second edition is dedicated to my husband, Larry, and my son, Jacob,
who are always supportive when I take on new projects and opportunities.
And patient ... very, very patient.*

—Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

"A leader is best
When people barely know he exists,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will say:
We did it ourselves."

—Lao-Tzu, sixth century B.C. Taoist poet

"The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and the self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."

—Theodore Roosevelt, twenty-sixth
president of the United States, 1901–1909

"Details are not my thing. You wouldn't expect the captain of a ship to go down and fix the boiler, would you?"

—Jesse "The Body" Ventura, governor of Minnesota, 2001

Although these quotes give excellent insight into the leadership that administrators must provide to their organizations, they do not describe the complexity that administrators in museums will encounter. Indeed, museum administrators will find themselves in a position, unless they work

for a few of the largest museums in the country, where they need to fulfill many roles because there may be no one else to do the job. They may well need to go and “fix the boiler” or else expect to be cold. And after fixing the boiler, they may well need to scrub the toilet prior to reading a budget report, calming a stressed-out volunteer, and giving a personal tour to a potential donor. We hope this book will give students and those taking on new administrative duties some of the knowledge they will need to meet these challenges.

This book is the outgrowth of our teaching a course in museum administration and management in the Museum Studies Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln each year since 1991. It has been prepared partly as a textbook for use in similar courses, but we also believe it will be useful to individual readers who are interested in increasing their knowledge of museum administration as they grow in their professional careers.

Throughout this book material has been set aside in special boxes to enhance the understanding of the subject being covered. Many boxes highlight practical knowledge gleaned from relevant sources. Additionally, three types of boxes contain materials that give the reader special insight into or opportunity for applying the concepts discussed in the text. Case Reviews are brief summaries of real situations that have occurred in museum-related organizations that pertain to particular topics under consideration. These offer insight into how real-life scenarios develop and evolve, devolve, and are eventually resolved.

Case Studies are fictitious situations presented for the reader to analyze and resolve. Readers looking for the “correct” answers to the case studies will be disappointed. We use case studies as the basis of class discussions and we tell our students the “correct” answers are those that they can concisely state and defend. Many issues with which museum administrators must deal, and the appropriate response to them, will depend upon the circumstances under which they arise. No answer will work in every situation. We want our readers to learn to think analytically, to develop their basic administrative philosophy, and to be able to state the issues and their proposed courses of action succinctly.

Exercises, as their title implies, will provide readers an opportunity to practice preparing documents, statements, and policies they will need in administrative positions.

The unifying theme and activity throughout this book and our course is a project to plan a new museum (see pages 339–340) and to prepare all of the documents and policies the institution would need to operate. The first edition is arranged in the general order in which we would expect

the documents to be prepared, beginning with a mission statement and bylaws and ending with a code of professional conduct. The final three chapters (13–15) discuss legal and philosophical issues that all museum administrators need to consider.

The semester-long planning project in our course is always done in small groups of four to seven people. It is so organized because we believe that the ability to function in small groups or teams is critical to successful work in the museum environment. Observing the functioning of these groups has been fascinating. All have successfully completed the assigned task, but in many cases the experience has been very uncomfortable. Our educational system does not promote and recognize team or group achievement; rather notice and “glory” go to the individual whose performance is exemplary. This is not a good background for museum work. Today’s museum staffers must be willing to submerge their desire for personal recognition in the effort to attain recognition and success for the institution. We urge anyone using this book as a text to emphasize the team approach in every aspect of coursework and professional work. Students need the experience; and all of us have more to learn about effective work in groups.

Hugh H. Genoways
Lynne M. Ireland
December 2, 2002

PREFACE

When asked why she chose to be in museum administration, the newly retired Ellen Rosenthal (former president and CEO of Conner Prairie) said it was “because I had the idea that I could pull together everything I learned and experienced from twenty-five years working in museum and business realms. I believed I could create a successful museum, both in terms of mission and financial sustainability. I could only do that if I was in charge. And, by golly, it worked!”¹ Throughout this second edition of *Museum Administration*, you will see how being able to assemble the museum’s “moving parts” and relying on experience and your peers will make you a capable administrator. As a result, your museum will be strengthened by solid administrative practice and policy.

The first edition of this book was the outgrowth of Hugh and Lynne’s teaching of a course in museum administration in the now-closed Museum Studies Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the 1990s and early 2000s. The book was prepared partly as a textbook for use in similar courses, but it is also useful to individual readers who are interested in increasing their knowledge of museum administration as they grow in their professional careers.

Throughout this book material has been set aside in special boxes to enhance the understanding of the subject being covered. Many boxes highlight practical knowledge gleaned from relevant sources. Additionally, three types of boxes contain materials that give the reader special insight into or opportunity for applying the concepts discussed in the text. Case Reviews are brief summaries of real situations that have occurred in museum-related

organizations that pertain to particular topics under consideration. These offer insight into how real-life scenarios develop and evolve, devolve, and are eventually resolved.

Case Studies are fictitious situations presented for the reader to analyze and resolve, but some are not far removed from real museum circumstances. Readers looking for the “correct” answers to the case studies will be disappointed. Case studies are great for class discussions as well as staff meetings; the “correct” answers are those that you can concisely state and defend. Many issues with which museum administrators must deal, and the appropriate response to them, will depend upon the circumstances under which they arise. No answer will work in every situation. Readers are to learn to think analytically, develop their basic administrative philosophy, and be able to state the issues and their proposed courses of action succinctly. And when needed, do more research, read more books and articles, and learn from you peers.

Exercises, as their title implies, will provide readers an opportunity to practice preparing documents, statements, and policies they will need in administrative positions. Each chapter concludes with Guiding Questions, good for both classroom and break room discussions. For professors, the Appendix includes the framework for a semester-long classroom exercise you may consider using with your classes.

To add texture and currency to this edition and to verify current trends in the field, I conducted over forty interviews with colleagues working in museums as employees and consultants, or as museum association affiliates. I am grateful for their talent and the time they gave to answer my questions. They are Katie Anderson, Tanya Andrews, Dina Bailey, Eloise Batic, Bob Beatty, Jenny Benjamin, Niki Ciccotelli Stewart, Anita Durel, Steve Elliot, Janet Gallimore, Jim Gardner, Brenda Granger, Andrea Grover, Jackie Hoff, David Janssen, Trevor Jones, Sean Kelley, Janice Klein, Wade Lawrence, Amy Lent, Allyn Lord, Wyona Lynch-McWhite, Kate Marks, Tonya Matthews, Nicolette Meister, Hassan Najjar, Trina Nelson Thomas, Carl Nold, Sarah Pharaon, Alex Rasic, Faith Revell, Nathan Richie, Cynthia Robinson, Ellen Rosenthal, Jill Rudnitski, Deborah Schwartz, Lauren Silberman, Janet Stoffer, Scott Stroh, Robert Trio, Janet Vaughan, Tobi Voigt, Phyllis Wahahrockhah-Tasi, and Larry Yerdon.

A special thank you goes to Hugh and Lynne whose original work I revised and updated for a new generation of administrators. The organization of their book and the advice contained within are evident in this edition. They’ve also made contributions to this edition, which I have credited when appropriate. And also thank you to Charles Harmon with Rowman and Littlefield and to, again, Bob Beatty with the American Association for State and Local History who have helped me make tough decisions for this second edition.

With this revision, my intent is to provide updates and enhancements that broaden the presentation and make it current. The chapters are organized with a “first things first” mentality combined with the priority of work that top-level museum administrators will encounter. For example, the COO of a large museum will likely spend more time working with finances and legal issues before she would be knee deep in collections care. That’s not to say that no one is working in collections care or that collections aren’t at the core of museum work, but it’s more likely that a registrar, collections manager, or curator will have the lead on those improvements and issues and will work it up the administrative channels when needed.

The book uses director, executive director, president/CEO, and CEO interchangeably. All of those titles are possible names for museum leaders. Administration is certainly not limited to those title holders. Hopefully, whether you work in the collections division or facilities management division and you have administrative duties, this book will be relevant. I’ve also taken great pains to make sure small museums are represented alongside larger museum examples, and that that ideas and solutions offered may be scaled to any size of board, staff, volunteer base, and community.

A great debt of thanks goes to the numerous museum and nonprofit professionals and friends who have inspired me to do my best work and helped me “see the way” many a time. My late mentor, Margaret “Peggy” Hoffman, is at the top of every gratitude list I write. She is soon followed by a list of other great people who have pushed me to be the best human and museum professional possible: Sandy Alter, Tanya Andrews, Bob Beatty, Jamie Bissonette Lewey, Sal Cilella, Ted Donosky, Anita and John Durel, Tim Grove, Kitty Haffner, Kim Harty, Cathy Fields, Chris Fogg, Nancy Johnson, Cheryl Keim, Stacy Klingler, Fran Levine, Tony Loudermilk, Kate Marks, Rebecca Martin, Tonya Matthews, Evelyn Murphy, Trina Nelson Thomas, Bonnie Newsom, Carl Nold, Dennis O’Toole, Dale Petrie, Darren Ranco, Alex Rasic, Susan Reed, Nathan Richie, Laura Roberts, Donna Sack, Dean Smoll, Gail Stephens, Scott Stroh, Kristen Watson, Sandy Wilcox, and the incredible team at the Abbe Museum. I’m so lucky to know you.

Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko
Mount Desert Island, Maine
March 12, 2016

NOTE

1. Rosenthal, interview.

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MUSEUMS AND ADMINISTRATION

Imagine the graduate student or even the high school student, dreaming of the day she becomes an administrator. While administration is not your typical career goal, it is easy to imagine a student dreaming of leadership and increasing responsibility as she moves up in seniority at the museum of her dreams. As careers develop, administrative duties will always become a growing realm of responsibility. And the smaller the museum, the more likely administration and a list of other duties (education! collections care! facilities management! cleaning bathrooms!) will land on the work plate.

Anyone seeking a professional position within a museum must expect that a certain amount of time will be devoted to administrative duties. Even the smallest project will involve a plan of work, the assignment of someone to do it, and a budget to pay for it. The manager of that project will be expected to see the work done, done well, on time, and within the confines of the allotted budget. The office manager procuring and maintaining supplies for use by the staff; the staff artist determining the need for, purchasing, and monitoring use of materials for museum exhibitions; the registrar negotiating a loan; the educator scheduling volunteer docents—may be functioning as administrators.

So this book is not just for museum directors or department heads, but for all members of the museum staff who have administrative duties. (And that's just about everyone.) Although originally conceived as a textbook for graduate students in museum studies, this book will help museum staff members just entering the profession or moving ahead in their careers.

Yes, that is correct! If “moving ahead” or “moving up” is the museum career plan, it’s the expectation that administrative duties increase and the amount of time devoted to these responsibilities will increase as well. Anyone entering the museum profession (or for that matter any profession) should expect a career filled with ever-increasing administrative and management duties. It is important to study and to improve administrative skills, as well as museum knowledge, throughout a museum career. Many people reach a plateau in their professional development beyond which they are not able to succeed; most often this involves some failure in administrative responsibilities because the person has not adequately developed the skills the position requires.

Rochelle Steiner, currently professor of Critical Studies at the University of Southern California Roski School of Art and Design, has deliberately pursued an administrative career path. “After many years as a curator, including roles that included management of junior staff, budgets, contracts, and commissioning, I took the role of chief curator and then the directorship of a small not-for-profit and then the dean of an art school. I found that as much as I love working with artists, I also excel with administration—and actually enjoy it as critical to the support of artists.”¹ Janet Gallimore, executive director of the Idaho State Historical Society, even gushes a bit when asked why she chose museum administration: “I love administration. It is gratifying to consider how all of the unique elements of a museum—from collections stewardship, to audience development, to strategy can be brought to bear synergistically to deliver results and value to the public.”

Although written centuries before museums developed as the institutions we know today, Chaucer’s observation is apt: “The life so short, the craft so long to learn.” Hopefully this book will serve as a starting point for a long life of learning about how to make museums work.

WHAT IS ADMINISTRATION?

“Administration” comes from the Latin *administrationem*, “aid, help, cooperation, direction, management.” “Manage” has as its root the word, *manus*, or hand. It seems fitting to us that administration and management are fundamentally “hands-on” words, because making things happen is what administration and management are all about. To administer is “to help, assist; manage, control, guide, superintend; rule, direct,”² and it is this responsibility and authority that makes administration satisfying,

worthwhile, and even fun. Museum administrators make choices, developing and executing plans so that museum collections can be preserved and so that museum visitors can have compelling experiences with the artifacts and specimens from those collections. A far cry from the mere paper-pushing that gives administration a bad name.

That's not to say that putting things in writing isn't important. In fact, the preparation of plans and documents is a major component of the museum administrators' purview. Creation of a mission statement and a strategic plan are the most vital; these two documents define the museum's niche in both the not-for-profit and museum worlds and determine how these roles will be filled. Other guiding documents and policies that must be written (or reviewed and revised if already in existence) and then implemented include:

- Bylaws

- Articles of incorporation

- IRS 501(c)3 or similar status

- Code of professional conduct

- Organizational chart

- Budget and accounting

- Policies related to collections management, personnel, facilities, and public

- Interpretive plans

- Development, marketing, and public relations plans

Administration of an organization requires skill in conflict management, interpersonal relations, budget management and monitoring, and staff supervision and evaluation. Managers must also set legal and ethical standards and maintain involvement in the museum profession. Certainly all of these issues are very important, but budget management and staff development should be at the top of the list. Financially sound museums are the only ones that have the opportunity to fulfill their stated missions. Financial stability is no accident, but the result of active budget management. Effective staff development assures the maximum utility of the museum's most important asset, the time, and skills of its staff. The most innovative and exceptional mission statements and strategic plans come to naught if the financial and human resources are not managed well.

What the etymology of administration does not address are the critical elements of leadership and vision, but these are qualities museum administrators, particularly directors, are expected to embody. These are difficult