

# INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

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## "NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US."

By Karen DePauw, manager, IHS Local History Services

"Nothing about us, without us." This rallying cry has a long past, part of which is firmly rooted in the disability rights movement, and has become synonymous with the idea that having a place at the table is an important part of having your story heard. After the events of the last few years, many collecting organizations are taking steps to create collecting initiatives in order to broaden their collections and ensure they are truly reflective and inclusive of their communities, past and present. It is important to take steps to include those whose histories you wish to preserve in the collections process of your institution. One of the easiest ways to do this is through inclusion on the board and/or collections committees.



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[Understanding and  
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(Lara-Edythe)

[Man with a Guide Dog.](#) (Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

Many organizations know the struggles of recruiting new board members, but a great place to start is by inviting people from various parts of your community to have a seat on your collections committee. The commitment is often less intense than being on the board. Additionally, having a variety of voices represented on your collections committee is imperative to creating a more inclusive collection (if you don't have a collections committee and want to learn more about them, check out this previous [Collections Advisor](#)).



[Young Black Republicans at the Columbia Club.](#) (Indiana Historical Society, P0569)

A collections committee representing the diverse voices of your community is a step towards making sure the collection of the organization represents all people. It is also a great way to include more people in the collecting process, in general, particularly when the museum has a small, or nonexistent, collections staff. Since collections committees are integral parts of both accessioning and deaccessioning items into the collection, they have a prime opportunity to push the organization to consider where its collection resources are going. A diverse committee should help question whether *another* item that represents the same part of the community should really be added to the collection or if resources would be better spent collecting items of underrepresented groups in the community. This is not to say that organizations should stop collecting in certain areas, but it is to say that all organizations need various voices on their committees in order to think about things from various perspectives, and this is no less important on a collections committee as it is on the board.

Coleman)

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Connecting to Collections Care webinar.

[Does Your Board Reflect Your Story and Your Audience?](#)

**August 25 -**  
Texas Historical Commission webinar.

[Webinars Recorded -](#)  
Indiana Historical Society.



[Maria Luisa Cavassa Mesias and Children](#). (Maria L. Tishner, Indiana Historical Society)

The first step in diversifying the collection is to create relationships with members of underrepresented areas of your community. Asking them to sit on the collections committee and then really listening to their questions and opinions is a great way to start welcoming the entire community into the organization. It is also a wonderful way to make the connections that might lead to the donors who will ultimately help diversify the collection. The collections committee is just one tool in an organization's toolbox that can help create an institution that represents their entire community. Remember, these new community relationships should become an integral part of transforming the organization into one that is truly inclusive.

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