



Issue 51, January 2016

New Year's Resolutions for the Museum

by Local History Services, Indiana Historical Society

The new year is upon us, and it's a great time to get our museums in order for the coming year. De-cluttering, cleaning and organizing can reduce stress and increase productivity among staff and volunteers, improve visitor experiences and protect our historic collections.

January tends to be a little quieter in museums, and if this is true for you, it is a good time to take stock and get everything shipshape before the year ramps up. With some popular New Year's resolutions in mind, here are a few tips for getting a museum in order.

Resolution #1: Lose Weight

Like our waistlines, our museums can sometimes take on unwanted surpluses.

- Organize files: Sort through and discard any unneeded records and paperwork. Peruse your membership and collections databases or spreadsheets and clean up any bad data.

- Clean out your supply closets: Look through your educational, decorative and office supply items. It's a good time to get rid of those broken crayons, old holiday wreaths, broken display stands and rusty folding chairs.
- Make a deaccession plan: If you have accessioned collections items that don't fit your mission, start thinking about how to begin a process to find them new homes. This is an extensive process, but its worth taking the time to think about.

Resolution #2: Get in Shape

Losing weight is definitely a good thing, but it's even better to get in shape!

In the office area(s):

- Review your museum policies and standards and make sure they are up-to-date and accessible with clear and concise notes. Go over them with staff and volunteers.
- Backup all your files (preferably in more than one location).
- Check that all staff areas are tidy and clean, and that there is a proper place for everything and everything is in its place.

In collections storage:

- Make a detailed inspection of your collection storage area, looking above and under shelving for any dust, spider webs, pests or other dangers.
- Check that all items are clean, properly labeled, and stored correctly.
- Evaluate your environmental controls for the proper moisture and temperature levels.

In public areas:

- Imagine yourself in the role of your visitor, and, starting with your exterior, do a complete walkthrough of your museum, looking for anything that is out of place, broken, untidy or unsafe.

- Make sure you are ADA compliant.
- Landscaping should be attractive and inviting, and signage should be in good working order.
- Exhibits should be appealing and labels up-to-date.
- All lights, HVAC and other systems should be checked and operational.
- Bathrooms and kitchens should be clean and functioning.

Resolution #3: Quit Bad Habits and Maintain Good Habits

Part of staying in good shape is getting rid of some of those bad habits, and replacing them with good!

- Don't collect anything and everything: Make sure your collections policy is current, and that you have good procedures in place for accessioning items. Only accept things that truly fit your organization's mission and that you can properly care for.
- Is there anything that could run more smoothly: Consider procedures for volunteer management, collections management and storage, and general museum maintenance.
- Have a disaster plan: If you don't have one, now's the time to get one started.
- Get your leadership involved: Your board should have priorities for your museum, and they should be communicated to everyone involved.
- Keep track of ways to improve your operations.

Resolution #4: Meet New People and Keep in Touch with Friends

Making and keeping friends is always a good policy for museums!

- Invite people to help: Advertise that you are doing a spring cleaning and invite volunteers to help. Delegate responsibilities and have a party!
- Plan for how you will attract new members and visitors this year: Think about new programs and volunteer opportunities, and consider community outreach

events and exhibits.

Resolution #5: Manage Your Time and Money

Work smarter, not harder!

- Create a centralized information center: Include lists, schedules and priorities.
- Save money: Think about ways to cut costs for the museum, and encourage all staff and volunteers to think about money-saving ideas as well.

Resolution #6: Reduce Stress

Rome wasn't built in a day!

- Remember to do only what you can do: Take everything one step at a time.
- Tidy up: Getting things organized will mean less stress, both now and in the future.
- Go team-building: Take a day off to connect with staff. Do something fun outside the museum.

Resolution #7: Reinvent Yourself

- Embrace change and think about tomorrow!
- Strategize: Think about starting a new strategic plan, or, if you already have one, re-examine it.
- Have a vision: Don't stop dreaming about the future. What stories will you tell? What is your vision? Write it all down and keep at it!

Use this list to think about organizing your museum this spring, or add your own resolutions. Happy New Year!

The Local History Services Department also holds a large selection of books and articles on museum-related subjects in the Lending Resource Center. Indiana organizations and individuals who are involved in history can borrow items at no charge. Here is a sampling of the resources:

- *The Small Museum Toolkit*
- *A Deaccession Reader*

- *Registration Methods for the Small Museum*
- *Things Great and Small: Collection Management*
- *Policies*
- *Preventive Conservation for Historic House Museums*
- *The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding,*
- *Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members*
- *Exhibit Makeovers: A Do-It-Yourself Workbook for*
- *Small Museums*
- *Boomer Volunteer Engagement: Collaborate Today,*
- *Thrive Tomorrow*



This publication from the Indiana Historical Society is a service of the Hoosier Heritage Alliance. This project is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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Collections Advisor is provided for the benefit of local historical societies and museums throughout Indiana. It is emailed to a subscriber list maintained by the [Local History Services](#) department of the Indiana Historical Society, 450 W. Ohio St., Indianapolis, IN 46202, (317) 232-1882.