



VIRGINIA
ASSOCIATION
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Presenting Sponsor

**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF
HISTORY & CULTURE**

2026 Annual Conference Williamsburg

March 14-17

Engage

Develop

Give Back



Jamestown Settlement



Colonial Williamsburg



**American Revolution
Museum at Yorktown**



The Capitol at Colonial Williamsburg

Schedule at a Glance

All activities are held at [The Lodge at Colonial Williamsburg](#) unless noted*

Key: \$ Fee Required - onsite registrations for Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday events are available until sold out

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2026

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Tour: <i>We the People: The World in Our Commonwealth</i> Location: Virginia Museum of History & Culture \$	1:00 pm - 5:00 pm	Workshop: Revolutionize Your Leadership Style Location: Jamestown Settlement \$
1:00 pm - 5:00 pm	Workshop: How to Write So People Will Read Location: Jamestown Settlement \$	5:00 pm - 7:00 pm	Opening Reception at the Muscarelle Museum of Art Location: William & Mary
1:00 pm - 5:00 pm	Workshop: You Want to talk with Kids about What? Location: Jamestown Settlement \$	7:00 pm - 8:30 pm	Tidewater/Eastern Shore Regional Meet-up Location: Precarious Beer Project

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2026

9:00 am - 5:30 pm	Registration Open	1:00 pm - 2:15 pm	Concurrent Sessions 1
10:30 am - 5:00 pm	VMFA Art Mobile	2:30 pm - 3:30 pm	Student Poster Presentations
11:00 am - 12:15 pm	Opening Session: The Historian and The Historianish	3:00 pm - 4:15 pm	Concurrent Sessions 2
12:15 pm - 12:45 pm	First Time Attendee Meet-Up	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Reception
12:00 pm - 6:00 pm	Silent Auction/Exhibit Hall Open	6:30 pm - 8:30 pm	Evening at the Art Museums at Colonial Williamsburg \$
1:15 pm - 5:00 pm	CEO/Directors Forum \$		

MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2026

8:00 am - 5:30 pm	Registration Open	11:00 am - 12:15 pm	Concurrent Sessions 3
8:00 am - 9:00 am	Light Breakfast	12:30 pm - 2:00 pm	Awards Luncheon \$
9:00 am - 10:00 am	Keynote Presentation: Transforming the Future	2:30 pm - 3:45 pm	Concurrent Sessions 4
9:00 am - 6:00 pm	Exhibit Hall/Silent Auction Open	4:00 pm - 5:00 pm	Roundtable Discussion: Career Conundrums
10:00 am - 10:30 am	Annual Meeting	4:30 pm - 6:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Reception
10:30 am - 11:00 am	Coffee Break	6:30 pm - 8:30 pm	Evening Event: Evening at the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown \$
10:30 am - 1:00 pm	VMFA Art Mobile		

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026

8:00 am - 9:00 am	Light Breakfast	11:00 am - 12:15 pm	Concurrent Sessions 5
8:30 am - 10:30 am	Registration Open	1:00 pm - 3:00 pm	VAM Field Trip - Historic Jamestowne \$
8:30 am - 12:00 pm	Silent Auction Pick Up	1:00 pm - 3:00 pm	John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library - Open House
9:00 am - 10:30 am	Town Hall: Practicing Pluralism		

Conference Tracks

Follow the conference tracks to create a customized agenda for your conference experience and help focus your time on topics that matter most to you.

Collections/Exhibitions

Education/Outreach

External Affairs

Internal Affairs

Career/Personal Development

Types of Conference Sessions

Roundtable (75 minutes): Roundtables are typically half presentation about a topic, half discussion and feedback with the panelists and attendees.

Case Study (75 minutes): Facilitated conversation with panelists on a particular topic, often including discussion questions with participants.

Expert-Led Discussion (75 minutes): Facilitated discussion with an expert or panel on a particular subject.

Panel Presentation (75 minutes): Two or more presenters, sometimes with a moderator, on the discussion of a project or case related to the theme.

Workshop (3-4 hours): A half-day workshop is a more intensive and skills-based deep dive into a topic. It includes concrete, practical tools and lessons for a smaller group of attendees.

Conference Program

Saturday, March 14

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm Curated Tour at the Virginia Museum of History & Culture On-Site \$

Join the VMHC for a pre-conference behind-the-scenes tour of "We the People: The World in Our Commonwealth", opening soon to the public. Explore how VMHC staff-built relationships with immigrant and cultural communities that shaped the exhibit's design, programs, and publication, then tour the galleries and join a discussion on community collaboration in exhibit development.

Location: VMHC, 428 N Arthur Ashe Blvd, Richmond, VA 23220 (off-site)

Type of Session: Tour

Track: Collections and Exhibitions

Speaker(s): Julie Kemper, Exhibits Curator, VMHC

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm Workshop: How to Write So People Will Read \$

Museum professionals often write for curators or academics, not visitors. Yet most visitors read labels for only 7–10 seconds. This workshop helps participants refocus on audience needs—crafting concise, engaging text through empathy, strategic thinking, and rigorous editing. Hands-on exercises and group review will sharpen skills for writing labels that truly connect.

Location: Jamestown Settlement, 2110 Jamestown Rd, Williamsburg, VA 23185 (off-site)

Type of Session: Workshop

Track: Collections and Exhibitions

Speaker(s): Lara Maupin, Museum Strategist and Project Manager, Independent Museum Professional

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm Workshop: You Want to Talk with Kids About What? \$

The Surratt House Museum created a trauma-informed, community-driven program to teach elementary students about slavery through the eyes of 10-year-old Nathan Sims, an enslaved boy. This workshop shares strategies for interpreting slavery sensitively, supporting emotional learning, and using evaluation and testing to develop inclusive, effective educational programs.

Location: Jamestown Settlement, 2110 Jamestown Rd, Williamsburg, VA 23185 (off-site)

Type of Session: Workshop

Track: Education

Speaker(s): Kristin Gallas, Principal, MUSE Consulting

1:00 pm - 5:00 pm Workshop: Revolutionize Your Leadership Style \$

This session helps participants define and develop their unique leadership style—essential for trust, morale, and belonging. Through expert guidance and small-group discussions with experienced museum leaders, attendees will reflect, share, and begin shaping authentic, effective approaches to leadership.

Location: Jamestown Settlement, 2110 Jamestown Rd, Williamsburg, VA 23185 (off-site)

Type of Session: Workshop

Track: Internal Affairs

Speaker(s): Scott Stroh, CEO and President, Museum of the Shenandoah Valley

Evening Events

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm Opening Reception at the Muscarelle Museum of Art

Explore the newly expanded **Muscarelle Museum of Art at William & Mary!** View the special exhibition **Abstract Expressionists: The Women**, take behind-the-scenes tours of the expansion, contribute to the Great American Birthday Quilt project, and enjoy beverages and hors d'oeuvres while connecting with fellow attendees.

Location: 611 Jamestown Road, Williamsburg VA 23185

Shuttles: Transportation from the Lodge to the Muscarelle Museum of Art will be provided on a continuous loop. On-Site Parking is also available.

7:00 pm – 8:30 pm Tidewater & Eastern Shore Regional Meet-up

Join VAM Staff and Members for networking and socializing at **Precarious Beer Project**. Food is available for purchase from Electric Circus Taco and Ol' Dominion Burger. Bonus - There is an ARCADE!

Location: 110 S. Henry Street, Williamsburg VA 23185

Parking: Paid parking is available in nearby lots and is within walking distance of the Lodge at Colonial Williamsburg



Save time and money if parking in any Colonial Williamsburg or City of Williamsburg lot by downloading the [Passport App!](#)

Sunday, March 15

9:00 am - 5:30 pm: Registration Open

Location: Colony Foyer

10:30 am – 5:00 pm VMFA Art MOBILE

Location: Lodge Parking Lot

11:00 am - 12:15 pm Opening Session

Presentation: The Historian and The Historianish
Will introduce the “Historianish,” a new paradigm in popular historymaking.

Speaker: M.J. Rymza-Pawlowska

Today, many people undertake historian-like work—creating online archives, challenging institutional interpretations, and modeling research on social media. The presentation will outline this trend and its implications for the historical profession.

M.J. Rymza-Pawlowska is an interdisciplinary cultural historian and associate professor of history and public history at American University. She is the author of *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s* and numerous scholarly articles. Her recent roles include New America Us@250 Fellow, Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Luxembourg’s Centre for Contemporary and Digital History, and Smithsonian Research Associate.

She serves on the Board of Humanities DC, the editorial board of *Washington History*, and as series editor for the NPS/NCPH American Revolution 250th Scholars’ Forums. Her work has been featured in major outlets, and she appeared in Netflix’s *D.B. Cooper, Where Are You?*

Her current projects include *Your Nation’s Capital* and *The Historian and the Historian-ish*.

Location: Colony Room

12:15 pm - 12:45 pm: First Time Attendee Meet-up

Join VAM staff, Council members, and fellow first-time attendees for an engaging introduction to the conference. We’ll walk through this year’s theme, highlight key sessions and events, and share tips on navigating the program, connecting with colleagues, and getting the most out of your time at VAM. This is a great opportunity to meet new people, ask questions, and start your conference experience with confidence.

Location: Colony Room

12:00 pm - 6:00 pm: Silent Auction and Exhibit Hall Open

Location: Virginia EF

1:15 pm - 5:00 pm: CEO & Directors Forum \$ Building Strong Ground in Times of Transformation Facilitated by Andrea Jones

Engage in two thoughtfully designed activities that help you lead with clarity and cultivate meaningful peer support. You’ll explore the core values that truly guide your leadership decisions—especially when faced with difficult choices—using a proven framework from social psychology to identify what matters most and how those values can anchor you and your organization through change.

Exclusive to Museum Directors and CEOs.

Light Refreshments and hors d’oeuvres will be served.

Location: Alleghany ABC

1:00 pm - 2:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 1

Reimagining Diversity Fellowships

Many museums have introduced diversity fellowship programs to broaden representation within the field—but how effective are these initiatives in practice? In this session, two emerging museum professionals share candid reflections from their experiences as diversity fellows across the U.S., offering insight into what works, what falls short, and how institutions can better support fellows. Attendees will gain practical guidance for building more equitable, impactful fellowship programs that truly foster an inclusive museum future.

Location: Virginia B

Type of Session: Panel Presentation

Track: Internal Affairs, Career or Professional Development

Speakers: Nyree Dowdy (Chrysler Museum of Art) and Angie Lopez (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology)

Revolutionary Cooperation: Bringing a City Together for Hampton VA250

Recent shifts in the socio-political landscape have heightened the need for museums and cultural institutions to build strong, cooperative relationships with stakeholders and local communities. In this session, members of the Hampton VA250 Committee will share the collaborative strategies that made their city-wide commemoration possible, followed by an interactive exercise where attendees design their own event using these approaches. Open to all experience levels, this session offers practical tools for strengthening institutional partnerships and creating successful public programming.

Location: Tidewater AB

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: Education & Outreach, Internal Affairs

Speakers: Dr. Amanda Green (Hampton Public Libraries), Beth Austin (Hampton History Museum), Victoria Ritchson (Hampton Public Libraries), and Mary Fugere (Hampton Convention & Visitor Bureau/Hampton Marketing & Outreach).

Involving the Youth Community in Our Museums

Let’s discuss connecting with our teen community. The panel will converse with the audience about including teen communities to successfully create museum programs and gallery exhibitions. Involving teens in programs or designing museum spaces leads to greater success in reaching younger audiences and in building a “museum habit.” It also gives teens professional experience and skills. Applicable to everyone from volunteer coordinators to community outreach to curators to museum educators. Includes discussion of VMFA’s Museum Leaders in Training program, Rocktown History’s youth exhibition: *Resilience Amid Resistance*, and JYF’s Jr Interpreter/Gallery Guide program.

Location: Virginia C

Type of Session: Expert - Led Discussion

Track: Education & Outreach

Speakers: Beau Dickenson (Rockingham County Public Schools), Caitlin Wurdeman (VMFA - Museum Leaders in Training), LeeAnn Shelhorse (Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation), Jay Templin (Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation)

Sunday, March 15

1:00 pm - 2:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 1

Revolutionary Relics: Unearthing the Stories in Richmond's Confederate Monument Cornerstones

In recent years, Richmond has transformed its public landscape, from the 2020 removal of the Jefferson Davis statue to the unearthing of the 134-year-old Lee Monument cornerstone box, and the new Shockoe Project master plan. This session brings together three perspectives on these shifts: Kate Ridgway, Archaeological Conservator at DHR, will discuss conserving the Lee cornerstone artifacts; Christina Vida, curator at the Valentine, will share how the Davis statue is displayed and reinterpreted; and historian Ana Edwards will highlight efforts to reclaim and commemorate Shockoe Bottom's history. Presenters will offer lessons on conservation, interpretation, and community collaboration.

Location: Piedmont BC

Type of Session: Panel

Track: Education & Outreach, External Affairs, Collections and Exhibitions

Speakers: Christina Vida (The Valentine), Katherine Ridgway (Virginia Department of Historic Resources) and Ana Edwards (Sacred Ground Reclamation Project)

Community Connections

What if a museum is housed in a 158-year-old church? Or what if it has already welcomed visitors for more than 40 years? Join us to discover the intentional and creative methods used by the Sixth Mt. Zion Baptist Church Museum in downtown Richmond and the Meadow Farm Museum in Henrico County. Though their approaches differ, both share the same mission: to connect meaningfully with their communities, increase awareness, and draw in new audiences—including more tourists! Come learn how these museums are reimagining engagement, revitalizing interest, and inspiring visitors to see familiar spaces in new ways.

Location: Virginia A

Type of Session: Panel

Track: Education & Outreach

Speakers: Julian Charity (Meadow Farm) and Benjamin Ross (Sixth Mount Zion Church)

The Art of the Pivot: Lending and Borrowing in a New Era

Lending and borrowing are a cornerstone of museum operations. Join three museum registrars for an open conversation about how they've had to adapt to lending and borrowing in the wake of the pandemic.

Each speaker represents a different type of institution: Devon Dargan, an art museum; Laura Fogarty, a university art museum; Courtney Morfeld, a history and art museum. They will present their experiences on cost-saving measures related to courier trips and shipping and provide tips and tricks to simplify and demystify the process. To conclude, they will lead a guided discussion with a Q&A session.

Location: Tidewater CD

Type of Session: Panel

Track: Collections

Speakers: Laura Fogarty (Muscarelle Museum of Art), Courtney Morfeld (Colonial Williamsburg) and Devon Dargan (Chrysler Museum of Art)

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm: Student Poster Presentations

Join the audience as undergraduate, graduate students, and emerging professionals present their latest museum-based projects. VAM's poster competition is an interactive way to connect recent students with experienced museum professionals. Students will be available for conversations during Sunday's Exhibit Hall reception.

Location: Virginia EF

3:00 pm - 4:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 2

Curated Chaos: A Collection Storage Move

What happens when you need to move 25,000 objects in two months? At the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, careful planning—and a little chaos—turned a massive relocation project into both a visible storage exhibition and an unexpected public engagement opportunity. In this session, the collections and exhibitions team shares how they transformed galleries into storage, gardeners into art-handlers, and logistical challenges into creative solutions, offering practical strategies (and a few good stories) for anyone facing a storage shuffle.

Location: Tidewater AB

Type of Session: Panel Presentation

Track: Collections

Speakers: Lauren Fleming (MSV), Carla Leen (MSV), Nick Powers (MSV). **Moderator:** Nancy Huth (MSV)

Many Hands, Light Work: Leveraging Community Partnerships to Expand Impact

This session explores how small museums can expand their impact without expanding their budget by building meaningful, sustainable partnerships with schools, nonprofits, businesses, and community groups. Through real-world examples and creative, ready-to-use strategies, attendees will learn how collaboration can strengthen programming, broaden audiences, and boost community relevance. Whether you're launching new initiatives or refining existing efforts, this session offers practical tools for doing more with the resources you already have.

Location: Virginia C

Type of Session: Panel Presentation

Track: Education

Speakers: Lynsey Allie (Botetourt County Historical Society) and Garrett Channell (Salem Museum & Historical Society)

Getting Behind the Camera: Creating Videos with the Office of Historic Alexandria

Interested in creating short-form video content for your museum but not sure where to start? Join Historic Alexandria as they share how they produce engaging videos across multiple platforms with limited time, staff, and budget. Attendees will leave with practical tips, lessons learned, and straightforward strategies to kick-start filming and expand their institution's digital reach.

Location: Virginia B

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: Education

Speakers: Simon Valez (Historic Alexandria) and Melissa Thiringer (Historic Alexandria).

Moderator: Liz Williams (Historic Alexandria)

Sunday, March 15

3:00 pm - 4:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 2

Burnout, Boundaries, and Belonging: People-Centered Practices for Small Museum Teams

Burnout is real—and in museums without dedicated HR support, it can feel especially difficult to address. This session explores practical, people-first strategies that institutions of any size can use to build healthier boundaries, foster belonging, and support staff well-being. Through real-world examples and crowd-sourced solutions, attendees will gain actionable tools to make museum work more sustainable and human-centered—no HR department required.

Location: Virginia A

Type of Session: Expert - Led Discussion

Track: Internal Affairs

Speakers: Coy Mozingo (Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation)

Technological Self Sufficiency for Small Museums

Join Lucy Burns Museum Coordinator Jay Loy for a hands-on discussion about integrating DIY electronics into small museums. This session will demystify consumer DIY tech, showing how it can enhance exhibitions and support collections management, with real examples from projects implemented at the Lucy Burns Museum. Attendees will also receive a build guide for an open-source, cloud-based environmental monitor and leave inspired to experiment with technology in their own institutions—soldering iron optional!

Location: Tidewater CD

Type of Session: Expert - Led Discussion

Track: Internal Affairs

Speakers: Jay Loy (Lucy Burns Museum)

Creating “Ancestral Spaces” at Tudor Place

This session will focus on Ancestral Spaces, a community-centered project that reimagined a historic house museum by centering the lives, labor, and legacies of people historically marginalized within the site's narrative. This session explores how institutions can move beyond traditional, singular interpretations by engaging descendant communities, uplifting Indigenous perspectives, and collaborating with stakeholders to tell more complete and truthful histories. Attendees will gain insight into the processes, challenges, and transformative impact of reframing interpretation to acknowledge layered histories of place, memory, and resilience.

Location: Piedmont BC

Type of Session: Expert - Led Discussion

Track: Internal Affairs

Speakers: Rob DeHart (Tudor Place)

4:30 pm - 6:00pm: Exhibit Hall Reception

Location: Virginia EF

Drinks and Light Hors d'oeuvres

2 Drink Tickets will be provided to each attendee

Evening Events

6:30 pm – 8:30 pm: An Evening at the Art Museums at Colonial Williamsburg \$

Enjoy an evening at Colonial Williamsburg with a preview of the new Campbell Archaeology Center, featuring hands-on labs and exhibits on Williamsburg's history. Then, explore the Art Museums' galleries and Colonial Williamsburg: The First 100 Years exhibition while enjoying beverages and hors d'oeuvres.

Location: 301 S Nassau Street, Williamsburg VA 23185

Parking: Free Parking is available at the Art Museums at Colonial Williamsburg Lot

Shuttle Service: Transportation will be provided from the Lodge to the Art Museum on a Continuous loop.

Monday, March 16

8:00 am - 5:30pm: Registration Open

Location: Colony Foyer

8:00 am - 9:00 am: Light Breakfast

Location: Colony Room

9:00 am - 10:00 am: Keynote Presentation

Transforming the Future with Elizabeth Merritt

America is entering a period of rapid, transformative change. AI is expected to transmute the nature of labor, for good or for ill. Communities are scrambling to respond to escalating environmental challenges, from extreme heat to rising sea level. New forms of digital currency are disrupting traditional financial structures and amplifying inequities of wealth. Unprecedented shifts in government policy may change the very nature of the nonprofit sector. But the future has yet to be written and we, as individuals, organizations, communities, and a nation, have the power to influence the next chapter of America's history. How can museums activate their power to shape a better future for our communities, and our country?

Location: Colony Room

Speaker: Elizabeth Merritt, Vice President, Strategic Foresight and Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums at the American Alliance of Museums (AAM)

12:00 pm - 6:00 pm: Silent Auction and Exhibit Hall Open

Location: Virginia EF

10:00 am - 10:30 am: Annual Meeting

In 2025, the Virginia Association of Museums (VAM) advanced its mission through meaningful professional development, statewide advocacy, and expanded member support. Workshops, webinars, and networking events addressed key issues such as collections care, visitor engagement, and DEAL, while advocacy initiatives strengthened recognition of museums' value across Virginia and D.C.

Membership involvement increased through new partnerships and enhanced support for students and emerging professionals. The year culminated in a successful Annual Meeting that brought colleagues together to learn, collaborate, and celebrate their work.

As we look ahead, VAM remains dedicated to empowering museums of all sizes. This year's Annual Meeting will include the election of officers and new Council members, the introduction of the Living Network, a financial and budgetary review of FY26, and a presentation of the new membership levels.

Location: Colony ABCD

10:30 am - 11:00 am: Coffee Break

Location: Colony Room

10:30 am – 1:00 pm: VMFA Art MOBILE

Location: Lodge Parking Lot

11:00 am - 12:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 3

Leading from the Middle

This interactive session explores practical strategies and resources that help emerging and mid-level professionals build leadership skills and create meaningful impact from the middle of their organizations. Presenters will share their own experiences while guiding attendees in developing a collective list of essential leadership competencies and actionable approaches for gaining those skills. Participants will leave with clear pathways for leadership development—both within their institutions and through external community opportunities.

Location: Tidewater CD

Type of Session: Panel

Track: Internal Affairs

Speakers: Dorette Sobolewski (Frontier Culture Museum), Felicia Abrams (Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation), Kim Robinson (NPS), and Gary Sandling (History in Practice).

Be The Voice Your Museum Needs: Advocacy for Funding and Support

Unlock the power of your voice in this lively, beginner-friendly session on museum advocacy. Attendees will learn practical strategies for securing local and state support—from funding to legislative awareness—regardless of their prior experience. Designed for directors, staff, and volunteers alike, this session will leave participants confident, empowered, and ready to effectively champion their museum's needs.

Location: Tidewater AB

Type of Session: Panel

Track: External Affairs

Speakers: Nathan Stalvey (Clarke County Historical Association), Gretchen Bulova (Office of Historic Alexandria).

Transforming Exhibit Spaces through Community Collaboration

This panel examines how museum educators, community experts, and local student groups collaborate from concept to completion to create an exhibit space that promotes educational development through play, interaction, and accessibility. Panelists will offer suggestions on how to identify and recruit community members interested in collaborating on the evolution of a museum's physical space. Attendees will gain insight into building educational, visitor-centered spaces through truly integrated teamwork.

Location: Virginia B

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: Collections/Education

Speakers: Lindsay Jones (Virginia Discovery Museum), Ashley Falwell (AIA - American Institute of Architects), and Janine Dozier (Virginia Discovery Museum)

Monday, March 16

11:00 am - 12:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 3

Reframing a Revolutionary: Small Shifts, Big Impact in Interpreting Patrick Henry's Scotchtown

At Scotchtown—long dedicated to the legacy of Patrick Henry—we are undertaking a quiet but significant transformation in how this iconic figure is interpreted. Through updated research, new interpretive tools, and reframed narratives, the site is encouraging more nuanced conversations and challenging long-held assumptions. This session will demonstrate how even small and mid-scale interpretive shifts can meaningfully reshape visitor engagement and deepen connections to the past.

Location: Virginia A

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: Education

Speakers: Samantha Dorsey (Heirloom Consulting), Elyse Werling (Preservation Virginia), Dawn Burnett (Preservation Virginia), Patrick Laird (Preservation Virginia)

Doodles, Discovery, and Dialogue: How Visitor Response Spaces Shape the Guest Experience

From dueling Post-it notes to quiet moments of reflection to memes and doodles, visitor response walls can spark a surprising range of reactions and insights. This session showcases the Valentine's diverse response formats—public and private, playful and serious—and explores the opportunities and challenges they create for frontline Visitor Services staff. Attendees will leave with practical, low-cost ideas for designing response spaces that enrich visitor engagement and deepen the overall museum experience.

Location: Piedmont BC

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: Education

Speakers: Sophia McCrimmon (The Valentine), Maya Flores (The Valentine), Cece D'Arville (The Valentine)

Invite, Intrigue & Instigate: Engaging Our Youngest Museum Guests

Little visitors may be small, but their curiosity is mighty! How intentional are you about engaging your youngest museum guests and the caregivers who accompany them? Discover how CMoR has created playful "Stops" throughout the museum—simple, flexible moments that encourage caregivers to engage young visitors using existing exhibit elements, along with thoughtfully designed additions created just for early learners. Come explore easy, creative ways to make your museum welcoming and engaging from the very start.

Location: Virginia C

Type of Session: Expert-Led Discussion

Track: Education

Speakers: Krista Dawson (Children's Museum of Richmond)

12:30 pm - 2:00 pm: Awards Luncheon \$

Join us as we present the Museum Educator Award, Innovation Award, Ann Brownson Award and our Virginia's Top-Ten Endangered Artifacts Award.

Location: Colony Room

Separate Ticket Required

2:30 pm - 3:45pm: Concurrent Sessions 4

Welcoming by Design: Rethinking Visitor Experiences Through Accessibility

As cultural tourism expands and Virginia prepares for VA250, museums must be ready to serve a wider, more diverse audience—including visitors with disabilities, older adults, and those with temporary or situational access needs. Featuring award-winning work from Virginia Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), this session explores how museums can create "travel-ready accessibility" through inclusive trip-planning resources, clear information, staff training, and accessible physical and digital spaces. Attendees will gain practical tools for strengthening accessibility across the entire visitor journey—before, during, and after a visit—ensuring all guests feel welcomed, informed, and empowered to explore.

Location: Virginia B

Type of Session: Panel Presentation

Track: External Affairs

Speakers: Cassie Ivey (Visit Charlottesville), Toni Bastian (Visit Richmond), Jennifer Case (Visit Williamsburg), Jennifer Christie (Visit Loudoun)

Moderator: TBD

Revolutionary Data: Measuring the Social Impact of your Museum in the Community

How can museums meaningfully measure the ways they impact and transform their communities? This session introduces the American Alliance of Museums' Social Impact Toolkit and features insights from two institutions participating in AAM's Museum Social Impact in Practice Cohort. Attendees will learn practical methods for gathering social impact data and using it to tell their institution's story, strengthen advocacy efforts, and demonstrate real value to stakeholders.

Location: Virginia A

Type of Session: Expert-Led Discussion

Track: External Affairs

Speakers: Callie Hawkins (President Lincoln's Cottage), Cameron Walpole (President Lincoln's Cottage), Megan Lantz (American Alliance of Museums), Michele Longo (Historic Alexandria)

Moderator: Liz Williams (Historic Alexandria)

Monday, March 16

2:30 pm - 3:45pm: Concurrent Sessions 4

From Storage to Storytelling: Activating Collections Behind the Scenes

Most museum objects spend their lives off display, yet they hold powerful potential for education, engagement, and community connection. This session highlights how collections management software, student collaboration, and creative programming can activate these hidden collections, featuring insights from CatalogIt's Co-Founder, the Fredericksburg Area Museum's Curator of Collections, and a Historic Preservation student. Attendees will gain practical strategies for expanding access, involving students, and integrating community voices using resources they already have.

Location: Tidewater AB

Type of Session: Panel

Track: Collections

Speakers: Kylie Thomson (Fredericksburg Area Museum), Dan Rael (CatalogIt), Makayla Bowman (Student, University of Mary Washington)

Beyond March: Integrating Women's Stories at Historic Sites

Women's History Month brings a surge of interest in women's stories, yet programs centered on women's history often face limited ticket sales and primarily female audiences. This panel explores creative approaches to uncovering and integrating women's narratives into historic house museums and cultural sites year-round, highlighting women as cultural keepers and using themes such as grief, family, and preservation to connect across audiences. Attendees will learn practical strategies for weaving women's stories into everyday interpretation to engage broader, more inclusive communities.

Location: Tidewater CD

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: Education

Speakers: Ashley Hollinshead (Monticello), Amanda Roper (Independent Museum Professional), Elizabeth Reese (Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House)

Project Management Essentials for the Small Museum

Trying to stretch limited time and budget further? This session introduces key project management principles that can streamline museum workflows and improve outcomes for exhibitions, events, collections initiatives, and any project with a defined timeline. Attendees will learn how project management supports on-time, on-budget work through clear communication, risk assessment, and structured planning—an essential leadership skill for museum professionals at any level.

Location: Virginia C

Type of Session: Expert- Led Discussion

Track: Internal Affairs

Speakers: Laura Maupin (Independent Museum Professional)

2:30 pm - 3:45pm: Concurrent Sessions 4

From Dirt to Display: The Critical Partnership between Museums, Archaeology, and Historic Preservation Professionals

This session highlights how local government history professionals—archaeologists, architectural historians, and museum staff—collaborate to create dynamic, engaging programming. Panelists will explore the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary projects and demonstrate how strategic partnerships can transform community engagement into preservation action. Attendees will leave with practical resources and strategies for applying these collaborative approaches within their own historic sites and museums.

Location: Piedmont BC

Type of Session: Panel Discussion

Track: Education

Speakers: Emma Dietrich (Prince William County), Lauren Maloy (Prince William County), and Eric Griffiths (Prince William County)

4:00 pm - 5:00pm: Round Table Discussion

Mid-Career Conundrums

Navigating careers in museums can be both challenging for new and seasoned professionals. This collaborative hour offers attendees the opportunity to join their colleagues in moderated, small group discussions that encourage peer-to-peer problem solving in a range of topics from work-life balance, navigating internal politics, to deciding when it is time to move on, among other challenges will be addressed. Do you have a career conundrum? We look forward to chatting with you and helping steer your course in the industry.

Location: Tidewater AB

Type of Session: Roundtable Discussion

Track: Internal Affairs

Speakers: Matthew S. Davis (Washington and Lee University), Robin Wilson von Seldeneck (The Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library), Dorette Sobolewski (Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia)

4:30 pm - 6:00pm: Exhibit Hall Reception

Location: Virginia EF

Drinks and Light Hors d'oeuvres

2 Drink Tickets will be provided to each attendee

Evening Event

6:30 pm – 8:30 pm: An Evening at the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown \$

Join the final 2026 VAM Conference evening at the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown! Explore galleries and the VA250 exhibit, enjoy beverages and hors d'oeuvres, meet historic interpreters, experience an artillery firing, and take part in hands-on activities for a memorable, immersive experience.

Location: 200 Water Street, Yorktown, VA 23690

Shuttle Service: A shuttle will be provided from the Lodge to the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown.

Parking: On-Site Free Parking is available - Please note that the museum is approximately 30 minutes from Williamsburg.

Tuesday, March 17

8:30 am - 12:00 pm: Silent Auction Pick-Up

Location: Registration 2

8:30 am - 10:30 am: Registration Open

Location: Colony Foyer

8:00 am - 9:00 am: Light Breakfast

Location: Colony Room

9:00 am - 10:30 am Town Hall:

Practicing Pluralism Facilitated by Sarah Jencks

Museums across disciplines aspire to be civic spaces—places for learning, reflection, and conversation across lines of difference. In today's climate of social, cultural, and political polarization, fulfilling that role requires deliberate effort. This Town Hall explores how museums can actively practice pluralism: the ongoing work of acknowledging, respecting, and engaging multiple perspectives within institutions, with visitors, and in partnership with communities.

Practicing pluralism isn't about consensus; it's about creating conditions where diverse voices can coexist, be heard, and be understood. It includes setting clear expectations that support disagreement while upholding empathy, respect, and curiosity. This approach echoes deeply American traditions of debate and dialogue, reminiscent of the spirited exchanges that shaped the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Attendees are invited to consider pluralism not only as a value but as a practical framework for public engagement. Participants will hear from peers across disciplines about how their organizations foster pluralism through interpretation, programming, staffing, and community relationships—and how they navigate the tensions that come with dialogue in divided times.

Location: Colony Room

11:00 am - 12:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 5

Low Cost/High Impact: Accessible Revolutions in an Academic Museum

This panel presents case studies from the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University showcasing low-cost, high-impact transformations in an academic museum. Panelists will discuss initiatives including a digital guide on Bloomberg Connects to expand accessibility, revitalization of the museum's advisory board to foster campus and community engagement, and the conversion of an unused storage room into an interactive learning space. Attendees will gain practical strategies for enhancing accessibility, participation, and visitor experiences with limited resources.

Location: Tidewater AB

Type of Session: Panel

Track: Education

Speakers: Jess Ambler (Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Hollins University) and Laura Ilawan (Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Hollins University)

Are you Ready? What it Takes to Launch a Revolutionary Fundraising Campaign

Whether your museum is preparing for a major fundraising campaign or considering one in the future, this session provides practical guidance for success. Consultants from The Curtis Group and a panel of museum leaders will discuss assessing organizational readiness, building donor relationships, and navigating the campaign planning process. Attendees will leave with real-world insights, proven strategies, and clear steps to help their boards and staff confidently launch and manage impactful fundraising campaigns.

Location: Piedmont BC

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: External Affairs

Speakers: Ginny Badgett (The Curtis Group), Lauren Greene (The Curtis Group), Danielle Ripperton (Children's Museum of Richmond), Scott M. Stroh III (Museum of the Shenandoah Valley), and Cynthia Whitbred-Spanoulis (Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center).

Tuesday, March 17

11:00 am - 12:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 5

Everyday People, Extraordinary Partnerships: Transforming Museum Volunteerism Through Community Co-Curation

Ready to transform community engagement? Join Elizabeth Blackney (Cook Foundation/Fine Arts Museum of Gloucester) and Deborah Billups (Descendant Community Leader/Woodville Rosenwald Foundation Board) as they share how preserving Freedom B. Goode's photographic legacy sparked extraordinary partnerships through authentic co-curation with Descendant Communities. Learn their proven three-phase model that increased attendance, empowered volunteers as decision-makers, and offers actionable strategies for meaningful, inclusive community collaboration in museums.

Location: Virginia A

Type of Session: Education

Track: Case Study

Speakers: Elizabeth Blackney (Cook Foundation and The Fine Arts Museum of Gloucester), Deborah Billups (Woodville Rosenwald School Foundation) and Dr. David Brown (Fairfield Foundation)

Inclusion Revolution: Creating Accessible Museum Programs

As the number of Virginians living with disabilities continues to grow, museums must adapt to ensure they remain welcoming spaces for all visitors. This session explores the challenges of creating inclusive programming and highlights strategies panelists have used to overcome barriers at their sites. Attendees will gain practical insights for designing accessible, engaging museum experiences that serve diverse communities effectively.

Location: Virginia B

Type of Session: Panel

Track: Education

Speakers: Sam Scalph (Museum of the Shenandoah Valley), Katrina King-Singh (Taubman Museum of Art), Maggie Creech (Virginia Museum of History & Culture), and Karen Getty (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts).

11:00 am - 12:15pm: Concurrent Sessions 5

Strategies for Safety and Security at Your Museum

This panel discussion will explore and provide opportunities for attendees to discuss strategies currently being employed at George Washington's Mount Vernon and the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley for the purpose of supporting the safety and security of staff, guests, collections, and property. This discussion will include insight on both the strategic approach and the practical application of routine safety and security practices and those supporting special events and programs.

Location: Virginia C

Type of Session: Expert-Led Discussion

Track: External Affairs

Speakers: Matt Ware (Museum of the Shenandoah Valley) and Harry Lashley (George Washington's Mount Vernon).

"Foundations Matter: Improving Practices for Sustainable Museum Leadership"

Local museums do vital work, often with limited staff, funding, and capacity. In this practical session, Amanda Roper, Amanda Keller, and Samantha Dorsey share strategies for managing key museum operations, including fundraising, HR, finance, communications, and board relations. Designed for professionals at small to midsize institutions, the session combines panel insights with guided discussion, providing actionable tools to strengthen operations and enhance community impact.

Location: Tidewater CD

Type of Session: Case Study

Track: Internal Affairs

Speakers: Amanda Roper (Independent Museum Professional), Samantha Dorsey (Heirloom Consulting), and Amanda Keller (Wilton House Museum)

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm POST CONFERENCE TOURS/ACTIVITIES

VAM Field Trip - Historic Jamestowne \$

Join Jamestown Rediscovery and Preservation Virginia on Tuesday, March 17, 1-3pm. Enjoy a 1pm lecture by Mark Summers on presenting contentious history, a 2pm tour of current excavations with Sean Romo, and time to explore the Archaearium Museum, home to thousands of 17th-century artifacts uncovered over 31 years of Jamestown Rediscovery.

Location: 1365 Colonial Parkway, Williamsburg, VA 23815

Parking: Free on-site parking is available.

John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library - Open House

Join us for a behind-the-scenes look at Colonial Williamsburg's Rockefeller Library and its unique collections. Explore the library's resources on revolutionary history; rare 18th century books and manuscripts; as well as photographs, media, and archival materials that tell CWF's 100-year-old story!

Location: 313 First Street, Williamsburg, VA 23185

Parking: Free on-site parking is available.