

Founding and Creating a Community-Based Museum

Where would we be without history?

We would not have a clue about our ancestors, their environments or how they developed settlements, food gathering, arts and crafts.

Our sources of history are primarily books and museums. Museums show and tell cultural and natural history through static exhibits of archives and artifacts, with the goal of passing along our heritage.

There is an alternate way of preserving history: direct experience. This is the way we all learned to walk, talk, ride a bike and drive a car; it's a good way to learn history too. You pick up the oars and row a traditional boat, pick up the tools and build a traditional boat. Variations might be cultivating heritage vegetables and fruit, shearing a sheep, dyeing the wool, spinning the wheel. You are preserving history by participating in hands-on programs using heritage skills.

Direct experience uses the analytic and the creative parts of your brain at the same time. The results are pride of accomplishments, a long-term memory of your heritage and sometimes even life-changing.

The following documents deal with some of the issues in founding and sustaining a hands-on museum that I have encountered since 1968. With vision, determination and the help of a community of thousands of friends, The Center for Wooden Boats came into existence. I hope to help you put together a similar organization for your community.

Dick Wagner, Founder
The Center for Wooden Boats

The Center for Wooden Boats Youth Programs

Our public schools are a mess. A large percentage of high school students are dropping out.

The Center for Wooden Boats (CWB) is a laboratory of learning for all ages and abilities, but our special focus is disadvantaged youth. For 30 years we have provided programs for homeless teenagers and high school dropouts that give them the self-confidence to match up to well-balanced youth with greater advantages. More than 50 communities worldwide have asked us how they can replicate CWB's program. There is a rising interest in our method of teaching.

Our method is very hands-on. The program teaches math and science as practical tools and uses the students' analytic and creative minds to solve complex problems. These tools have been used to build and sail prams, skiffs, dories, Aleut umiaqs and a carved native canoe.

In addition to practical skills, our students learn all kinds of other useful life skills. They come to us distrustful of each other and CWB. After a short time learning to build and sail boats, they become bonded to their team, the program and their instructors. I often have seen them do more than we asked, coming early, staying late, composing poetry, writing songs, adding the words "hydrodynamics" and "aerodynamics" to their vocabularies, going back to finish high school and even going on from high school to college.

They have not broken any records nor won any medals. Their reward is peace of mind. They have achieved more than they dreamed and more than anyone believed they could.

Teaching With Small Boats

Leadership comes from several years of maritime experiences and a vision. Leaders also must have passion, patience and persistence to begin an experiment that will make a difference.

Don't wait to raise money before your project begins. You always will be \$\$ short. Minimize what is needed. A tent with a generator and phone will be fine until you can build a shop and office building. Encourage pay-what-you-can donations. Have festivals with family activities. Recruit and count on dedicated volunteers. Encourage youth to become interns; they will be the next leaders.

Write about, photograph and video all the activities and events. Have a newsletter. Reach out to all ages and abilities. Partner with social service agencies, schools, relevant industries and other museums. Have monthly talks, quarterly staff and volunteer parties and seasonal-themed exhibits.

Have programs that anyone can participate in. You are teaching through direct experience. Programs can range from knot-tying and splices to making toolboxes to building traditional boats. The students will be bonded to your organization because of their successful hands-on experiences. They will be your supporters for the rest of their lives.

Board of Directors General Training Agenda

Below are topics to be addressed. The Directors need to question, discuss and absorb.

Mission

Short and snappy

Vision

The wider horizon

Goals

Implementing the vision

Feasibility

Who cares?

Business Plan

The Bible

Non-Profit Status

A Federal benediction

Governance Guidelines

Who runs the joint?

By-Laws

Lawyers' delight

Budget

Economics as art

Workshops/Boatbuilding Classes

Fitting out the facilities

Creating a program catalogue

Evaluations

Did we give what we promised?

Operations

The roles of staff

Public Awareness

How to make them all salute the flag

Partnerships

Get out of the box

Fundraising

The fairy tales and the truth

Financials for Non-Profits

Staff: Hire those who are passionate about your organization, who are reliable and energetic and who have the skills to bring in support for the organization. Give salary increases every year. Always pay on time; the Director waits if there is a shortage of funds at payday.

Volunteers: The Holy Ghosts of your organization. For each volunteer, find a job or jobs they like. They should have social skills to increase the organization's earnings and donations. Give them parties every quarter. Feature their contributions in your newsletters. Keep track of their time contributed and offer recognition or a reward (logo hat, free boat time, etc.) when their time exceeds certain levels.

Director: Must be recognized as a leader and have vision, passion, persistence and patience. Must keep in touch with the Staff and Board of Trustees. Focus on bringing in youth, families and people of all abilities. Present financial record to Board every month with details of income, expenses, balance of deposits and comparison with budget. A line of credit should be only a short-time lifesaver. The assets of buildings, books, tools and equipment such as boats should be accounted for. Endowments for special programs should be sought and made.

Budget: Should be drafted by the Director, based on the prior year and the educated estimates of income for the upcoming year. Staff can contribute to planning if they have worked more than three years. Income from memberships, donations by individuals, corporations and foundations and earnings from events, workshops, facility rentals and merchandise sales should cover the expenses of salary, utilities, insurance and other repetitive repair and renew expenses. Director should use a Chart of Accounts to keep day-to-day record of income and expense.