



## Collections Advocacy Toolkit

### Articulating Key Messages

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### The Positioning Statement

Before you reach out to elected officials and potential supporters, sketch a “word image” or “word cloud,” which is a graphical representation of key words and phrases. With a clear view of your mission, state your purpose; how you are poised to carry it out; and the singular impacts that your activities have had and will have on your community and region. Summarizing your answers from the “Twenty Questions: A Self-Assessment Game” section of the toolkit may help you describe your goals and how your institution is uniquely positioned to bring them about with the support you seek.

Using the results of your word image, write a positioning statement. A positioning statement should project your future as a logical outcome of the nature and direction of your organization. Like two points defining a line, your mission statement and your positioning statement will establish your unique trajectory—distinguishing your organization from those with similar missions. The positioning statement should be short and simply stated. It should be action-oriented and strike an emotional chord.

To create key messages, build on the positioning statement by adding relevant details about your purpose and direction. A compelling narrative about your future engages the interests and aspirations of your potential supporters. The complete message makes clear how the contributions of supporters will help you achieve your goals.

Below are examples of narratives from various cultural organizations, small and large.

#### From the [Winters Heritage House Museum](#) in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania

“Winters Heritage House Museum seeks to preserve local history by: engaging community support to identify buildings of historical significance; developing educational experiences that recognize contributions of early cultural groups in the greater Elizabethtown, PA area; and acquiring artifacts, texts, and documents of historical value...Every year, Winters Heritage House strives to provide the community with educational, fun, and historically insightful programs. In turn, these programs, along with our supportive community, enable us to preserve and maintain these valuable Colonial through Victorian era properties...Winters Heritage House Museum is a community-driven organization with the interests of preserving our community’s history at our heart. We exist because the people of Elizabethtown cared enough to preserve these buildings and fill them with items that can best educate the public about our local history. We hope to continue, but are always in need of community support to do so.”

## From the [New York City Fire Museum](#)

“The mission of the New York City Fire Museum is to collect, preserve and present the history and cultural heritage of the fire service of New York and to provide fire prevention and safety education to the public, especially children...The Museum, in conjunction with the New York City Fire Department, operates a world-class fire safety education program designed to teach participants how to prevent fires within the home and how to protect themselves and escape should a fire occur...retired NYFD firefighters volunteer... to discuss and demonstrate the rigorous training needed to acquire the bravery and discipline required of New York City’s ‘Bravest.’”

## From the [National Park Service’s Network to Freedom Project](#)

“The mission of the National Parks service is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations...The National Park Service, through shared leadership with local, state, and federal entities, as well as interested individuals and organizations, will: promote programs and partnerships to commemorate, preserve sites and other resources associated with, and educate the public about the historical significance of the Underground Railroad...The National Park Service is implementing the National Networks to Freedom program to coordinate preservation and education efforts nationwide and integrate local historical places, museums, and interpretive programs associated with the Underground Railroad into a mosaic of community, regional, and national stories.”

## Talking Points and Supporting Statements

Prepare several talking points and select them as you need them to support your positioning statement and emphasize your trajectory. Mix and match your talking points. Use them in your annual reports, brochures, catalogs, grants, membership drives, and public presentations, as well as in letters to elected officials and funders. Keep the following ideas in mind when creating talking points.

### Consider Your Audience

Name your audience specifically. Think how differently you would introduce your museum and its collection care needs to Senator A or Sponsor Y, who consistently support cultural institutions with legislation and funds than to Senator B or Sponsor Z, who do not believe federal budgets should fund arts and humanities in general.

Each message you craft must tell others what they need to know about your goals and direction in a way that is meaningful and makes sense to them. Effective messages reflect the values of your organization and resonate with the interests of those individuals you want to influence.

### Expand Your Positioning Statement

Include details about the:

- Demand for your organization’s programs and collections
- Number and variety of individuals and groups you serve

- Size and distinguishing achievements of your staff
- Characteristics of the trustees, donors, and members who support you
- Strengths and accomplishments of your organization over time
- Overall contributions of your programs and collections to the region, state, and nation

## Make a Fact Sheet about Your Organization

List the following data:

- Size, location, and context of organization in regional economy
- Amount and sources of annual revenue
- Operating budget
- Hours worked and number of professional staff and volunteers

## Quantify Your Contribution to Education and Life-Long Learning

Identify the:

- Number and nature of your organization's events, exhibits, and programs
- School groups served
- Integration of your services with school curricula
- Types and scope of your collections, as well as the number of items exhibited or in storage
- Research value of the collections; the impact of such research on publications and public or expert knowledge; and the ways in which the contents of your collections drive the advancement of certain disciplines
- Number of life-long members or patrons
- At-risk or underserved populations that your institution and/or its partners serve

## Choose a Specific Focus

Choosing a specific focus will help you logically defend your point of view. If what you want is funding for collections care, messages should relate to the need for preserving collections for future generations. Have you completed a preservation needs assessment? What were the findings? What is impacting the health of your most significant collections? If you are unsure about the condition of your collection or need an evaluation, consult with the Preservation Services staff at the [Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts](#).

Items to discuss might include:

- External or internal environmental factors
- Failing building systems
- Age and fragility of collections
- Demand for access of fragile materials
- Storage

## Coordinate Messages and Actions with Other Museums

[A public opinion poll](#) taken by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in 2010 identified the top six guiding principles for preserving and sharing the state's heritage. Among these was the

expectation that museums would maintain the highest standards of stewardship and contribute to the state's position as a premier destination for heritage travelers. Individual organizations cannot meet these goals alone. Coalitions and collaborations are essential.

Discuss how you have joined forces to accomplish collective goals and objectives. Consider the costs and benefits of being part of a National Heritage Area such as [Silos and Smokestacks](#), a network that leverages partnerships to interpret the history of agriculture in Iowa. Are you part of any of the Pennsylvania Heritage networks such as the [PA Trails of History](#) or the [Lumber Heritage Region](#)? What benefits and difficulties come from participation in these networks?

### Stay Current with Research

Include relevant findings from your research in your messages. For instance, in September 2012, the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance completed research on the impact of the arts and cultural sector on southeastern Pennsylvania's economy. The [online report](#) provides an impact calculator and useful data about the number, size, and revenue potential of museums. Two months later, a joint committee of the Pennsylvania General Assembly published a report about museum funding in Pennsylvania. The [report](#) admits to the considerable amount of taxable revenue generated by cultural institutions as part of the tourist trade and to the disproportionate amount of public funding available to these institutions.

Review and refresh your points as time passes and circumstances change.

### Be Aware of Recommendations Made by Legislators

Leverage your legislators' interests and advocate when their proposals are advantageous to you. Track them at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/>. See the "Additional Resources" section for other links.