

# **STAND FOR YOUR MISSION**

**THE POWER OF BOARD ADVOCACY:  
A DISCUSSION GUIDE  
FOR MUSEUM TRUSTEES**

**[WWW.STANDFORYOURMISSION.ORG](http://WWW.STANDFORYOURMISSION.ORG)**



## DEAR MUSEUM TRUSTEE,

Whether it's saving species from extinction, preserving cultural heritage, or addressing issues of diversity and equity, each of us has been called to serve because we believe deeply in the power of museums. To our core, we know the intrinsic value of museums.

All too often, however, our missions are compromised by limited resources or, worse, misguided notions about museums being amenities—"nice but not necessary"—and therefore unworthy of public support.

We need to do better.

We need to help our communities and decision-makers understand the importance of museums. The unique ways in which we educate, inspire, and engage the minds of our visitors. The irreplaceable role that museums play in our communities.

We have an opportunity to change the conversation. But it requires each of us as leaders to stand up for our missions and play a more vocal role in advocating for our missions. The American Alliance of Museums, in partnership with BoardSource and their Stand for Your Mission campaign, have worked together to outline advocacy action steps for museum leaders. An easy first step is to share this with your fellow board members and start the dialogue.

We urge you to join our clarion call for trustee engagement, and we thank you for your service to museums.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Laura L. Lott".

Laura L. Lott  
President & CEO  
American Alliance of Museums

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anne Wallestad".

Anne Wallestad  
President & CEO  
BoardSource

# WE DO THIS WORK BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IN SOMETHING.

Each of us has made a personal commitment to serve. We do it because it calls upon the best part of ourselves. We feel we must try, and we know that we can make a difference.

**DECISIONS ARE HAPPENING AROUND US THAT AFFECT OUR ABILITY TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSIONS.**

Our respective missions will never be fulfilled if we are relegated to accepting the decisions that are made without us.

Our missions demand that we have an impact on those decisions before they are made. And to fix the ones that get in the way of our success.

Our missions will be fully realized when our community leaders hear our voices, understand our arguments, and see our causes as worthy of their best efforts.

**BOARD MEMBERS ARE THE CITIZEN LEADERS FROM WHOM DECISION-MAKERS NEED TO HEAR.**

The most useful—and under-utilized—asset our museums have to advance our missions are the business leaders, community volunteers, philanthropists, and opinion leaders who are so passionate about what our missions seek to achieve that they have already put their time, resources, and reputations on the line.

Our board members. Us.

Strong board leadership is not just about checks and balances; it is about creating the circumstances that will allow our missions to be achieved.





## CASE STUDY: THE MASSILLON MUSEUM MASSILLON, OHIO

**THE VISION** Since 1933, the Massillon Museum (formerly the Baldwin Museum) was envisioned as a place that would bring “immeasurable joy” to the city of Massillon, Ohio and the region. It has certainly lived up to that promise, keenly attuned to the needs of its community and constantly striving to reach deeply into the community.

In 1996, the museum moved to a new location, and the board—recognizing the museum’s potential for growth—secured a right of first refusal on one of the adjacent properties. As an anchor tenant in Massillon’s downtown, the museum was credited for much of the city’s revitalization.

After consulting with board, staff, guests, and community leaders over a period of several years, the decision was made to enlarge the footprint of the museum in order to meet the expanding needs of the Massillon community.

The museum envisioned an expansion and renovation to add approximately 15,500 square feet of space to the existing 29,000-square-foot museum. The plan involved a new partnership with the Massillon Tiger Football Booster Club and the Paul E. Brown Museum.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** The Massillon Museum’s mission is to collect, preserve, and exhibit art and artifacts to enrich the Massillon community through education and experience. The museum’s strategic plan is threefold: to be the cultural center of the community, a key destination of cultural enrichment, and a respected member of the museum community.

The museum has a diverse permanent collection of over 100,000 art and history artifacts, most of local and regional significance. The museum provides free admission to all visitors, and nearly 25,000 visitors are welcomed each year with an additional 8,000 children and adults served annually through outreach programs.

With its stated goal of being the cultural center of the community, the museum hosts annual juried shows of Stark County artists, sponsors Brown Bag Lunch lectures, classes and workshops, and The Artful Living Program, which immerses 1,000 preschool children weekly in the visual arts, literature, music, drama, and dance.





“Board members are advocates in a number of ways, from attending legislative breakfasts and attending state and regional conferences to soliciting memberships and going door-to-door during our levy campaign,” said Alexandra Nicholis Coon, the Massillon Museum’s executive director, pictured with Congressman Bob Gibbs. “They are truly a working board, and an amazing group of leaders.”

**THE STRATEGY** Public officials—including Congressional representatives, state senators, and the Massillon mayor—are frequent visitors to the Museum, and the board plays an active role in hosting these visits.

The museum works closely with the mayor’s office to organize special events and educational programs, and the City of Massillon maintains the museum’s landscaping.

Board members keep their elected officials informed and in tune to the fact that the Massillon Museum is the downtown community’s keystone.

In fulfillment of its mission to the people of Massillon, the museum hosts an annual thank you to the community in the form of an Island Party, which attracted 2,540 visitors in 2015, including several public officials.

The museum has been accredited by the American Alliance of Museums since 1972. The museum has secured numerous government grants—with board members playing a key role—including a renovation of its collections storage facility to include state-of-the-art environmental controls and museum cabinetry, funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the State of Ohio’s Cultural Facilities Commission.

**THE RESULT** While it is a locally-based and supported museum, its reach goes far beyond the city of Massillon. The Massillon Museum has gained a reputation for excellence within the professional realm on a number of fronts:

- Since 1988, Massillon voters have approved an operating levy for the museum—the only one of its kind in the state of Ohio—which provides approximately 60% of annual operating funds. Membership has increased steadily since 2010.
- The Museum has been the recipient of an ArtsinStark operating grant since 2008. Also, the Ohio Arts Council has regularly supported the museum with funding for operations and programming. In addition, for nine consecutive years, the National Endowment for the Arts has awarded the Big Read grant to the Museum.
- Most recently, the State of Ohio’s capital budget included a \$1.5 million allocation for the Massillon Museum’s expansion project. Board members played a key role in facilitating the state’s endorsement of the organization’s expansion effort.
- The board and staff are empowered to engage in advocacy at the local, state, and national levels; the executive director chairs the advocacy committee for the Ohio Museums Association; and the museum has been represented each year at Museums Advocacy Day in Washington, DC.

# STARTING A CONVERSATION IN YOUR BOARDROOM.

Every nonprofit has its own unique history, culture, and mission, and, therefore, its own view regarding advocacy. But, no matter where you are on the continuum—from doing no advocacy to doing a lot—the path toward greater impact through advocacy begins with an honest conversation in the boardroom—a conversation about your museum’s mission, goals, and, most importantly, its vision for the future.

The following guide is designed to help you as a trustee start that conversation. While some organizations may be able to move ahead quickly because they have already grappled with the more fundamental questions presented here, others may want to spend more time on those questions before moving on. Regardless of where your organization starts, we encourage you to use this guide as a tool for facilitating ongoing board dialogue on your organization’s legal right to advocate and for helping you cultivate a culture of standing for your mission in all possible ways.

## STEP 1: A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Your organization was founded to meet a specific need or purpose and, as a part of that, is likely to have a vision of what the world would look like if that mission was achieved. Ask your board to answer the following questions:

- Is the board in agreement about our museum’s vision for the future?
- How would the world be different if our mission was fully achieved?
- Are our current strategies the fastest or most direct path to achieving our vision? If not, what would be?

## STEP 2: A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR WORK

All organizations are impacted by the larger environment and ecosystem in which they operate. Understanding what that ecosystem looks like for your museum, and where you are situated within it, is a critical step for your board. Ask your board the following questions:

- How is our museum working to address societal realities or challenges that face our community and its citizens?
- How is the work of our museum impacted by broader issues and challenges impacting our community?
- Are our strategies actively addressing those issues? If not, what would change if they did?



## STEP 3: IDENTIFICATION OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Changes in your community, funding sources, and policy environment affect—either positively or negatively—your museum’s ability to achieve its mission. Identifying and understanding the opportunities and threats affecting your museum is a key step in building an advocacy strategy and in ensuring that your board is well-positioned to help implement that strategy. Ask your board the following questions:

- What are some of the external factors that have positively or negatively impacted our work in the past? How well did we—as a board—anticipate them before they happened? Did we try to stop or soften the bad ones, or rally to support the good ones?
- Are there policy changes that would dramatically improve (or threaten) our ability to fulfill our mission and vision? If we could advance our mission more effectively by changing one law, public policy, or public attitude, what would that change be?
- Do we have candid conversations about the reliability of funding that we earn through government contracts or grants?
- Are we—as an organization—actively engaged in conversations with decision-makers about the policies or decisions that affect our work? If not, why not?

## STEP 4: BOARD ENGAGEMENT IN MAKING IT HAPPEN

Every board member brings a potent combination of passion and influence to their board service that—if leveraged—can powerfully accelerate your organization’s advocacy strategy. Understanding your board’s networks and spheres of influence can help you map the ways each board member can help. Ask your board the following questions:

- Do we regularly discuss the implications of public policies and funding to our mission?
- Do we have a public policy strategy for our museum, and—if so—is the board well-informed about how best to support it?
- Do we have board leaders who can speak to and connect with a broad cross-section of community needs and constituencies in support of our work?
- Have we provided training or guidance to board members about how to engage effectively in advocacy efforts that enables them to represent our mission and work with confidence?

## STEP 5: MAKING ADVOCACY A PART OF YOUR BOARD'S CULTURE

A true cultural change happens when advocacy becomes fully integrated into the way that your board thinks, makes decisions, and measures its own success. Ask your board the following questions:

- Do we have goals for our advocacy work that enable us to assess how well we are doing across all the links and connections that are vital to our success?
- Is a degree of advocacy a part of every board member’s job description?
- Is our board recruitment strategy aligned with our public policy strategy, and the connections or influence that will ensure our success?
- Are we—as an organization—actively participating in coalitions and organizations that are helping to advance our advocacy strategy?

# ACTIONS FOR MUSEUM LEADERS

## IF YOU'RE A MUSEUM DIRECTOR...

- 1. Just starting out:** Engage your board in a conversation about what public policy is and how decisions made by people outside your organization influence your mission, making it easier or harder to accomplish.
- 2. Building:** Educate your board members about key policy issues that positively or negatively influence your organization's work (or could), and tap them to help open doors and make the case to external decision-makers and opinion leaders.
- 3. Accelerating:** Identify gaps in your organization's advocacy network and engage the board in recruiting new board members to help bridge them.
- 4. Connecting:** Join groups that monitor policy matters that might support or threaten your museum's mission. Stay up to date on state and federal policy issues affecting museums ([aam-us.org/advocacy](http://aam-us.org/advocacy)) and nonprofits ([councilofnonprofits.org](http://councilofnonprofits.org)), and then engage when appropriate.

## IF YOU'RE A MUSEUM TRUSTEE...

- 1. Just starting out:** Talk with your board chair or CEO about how your board can get more engaged in advocating for your museum's mission.
- 2. Building:** Participate in a training session about how to become a stronger advocate for your work.
- 3. Accelerating:** Institutionalize your board's role in advocating for your mission by incorporating it into your board job description and expectations.
- 4. Connecting:** Join groups that monitor policy matters that might support or threaten your nonprofit's mission. Stay up to date on state and federal policy issues affecting museums ([aam-us.org/advocacy](http://aam-us.org/advocacy)) and nonprofits ([councilofnonprofits.org/policy](http://councilofnonprofits.org/policy)), and then engage when appropriate.
- 5. Leading:** Represent your museum at a national advocacy event such as Museums Advocacy Day in Washington, DC.



## IF YOU'RE A FUNDER...

- 1. Just starting out:** Engage in an internal conversation about what public policy is and how decisions by policymakers and others make it easier or harder for your grantees to accomplish their missions. Many foundations are inadvertently discouraging nonprofits from engaging in vital advocacy efforts by using unnecessarily restrictive or ominous language in grant agreements. Review your proposal guidelines and grant agreements to make sure you aren't artificially restricting your grantees' constitutional rights to speak up to advance their missions. For guidance, visit the Alliance For Justice website ([afj.org](http://afj.org)).
- 2. Building:** Consider providing more general operating support grants that provide the flexibility to rally resources quickly to engage in advocacy campaigns as needed.
- 3. Accelerating:** Engage grantees in conversations about how they are using advocacy as a tool for greater impact. The Alliance for Justice has suggestions on how to begin that conversation with your grantees ([afj.org](http://afj.org)).
- 4. Connecting:** Stay up to date on policy issues affecting museums ([aam-us.org/advocacy](http://aam-us.org/advocacy)) and nonprofits ([councilofnonprofits.org](http://councilofnonprofits.org)) and engage when appropriate. The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers created a list of questions to think through prior to reaching out to a policymaker ([givingforum.org](http://givingforum.org)).

# THE STAND FOR YOUR MISSION CAMPAIGN

STAND FOR YOUR MISSION calls on all nonprofit decision-makers to stand for the organizations they believe in by actively representing their missions and values, and creating public will for important policy changes.

A collaborative effort initiated by the Alliance for Justice, BoardSource, the Campion Foundation, the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, the Knight Foundation, and the National Council of Nonprofits, the Campaign seeks to unleash the full potential of nonprofits to advance their missions by engaging board leaders more directly in the advocacy work of their organizations.



This Discussion Guide for Museum Trustees was created by the American Alliance of Museums in collaboration with BoardSource and the Stand for Your Mission Campaign.







# GET ENGAGED

The most important action you can take is to start a conversation in your boardroom about how advocacy can accelerate the impact of your mission, with this resource as your guide.

You can also:

**SHARE YOUR STORY** about how board engagement in advocacy strengthened your museum's impact at [standforyourmission.org](http://standforyourmission.org) or via Twitter with #S4YM.

**JOIN US** in Washington, DC for Museums Advocacy Day in February.

**SUPPORT THE CAUSE OF MUSEUMS** through the Speak Up For Museums fund ([aam-us.org/donate](http://aam-us.org/donate)).

Access more museum advocacy resources and tools to support your board's engagement at:  
**[AAM-US.ORG/ADVOCACY](http://AAM-US.ORG/ADVOCACY)**



**American  
Alliance of  
Museums**

**OUR VISION: A WORLD INFORMED AND  
ENRICHED BY THRIVING MUSEUMS**

**[AAM-US.ORG/ADVOCACY](https://aam-us.org/advocacy)**



*Your Mission. Your Voice.*