



Partnerships and Transformation for Leaders at Museums and Historic Sites

March 25-26, 2026, Conference Center, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) created a new Museum Support & Statewide Services Division as of October 1, 2025. According to Commissioner Garrett Donnelly (Midland, Texas), its purpose is “to explore new ways to better assist museums across Texas focusing on building stronger connections between our state historic sites and museums—large and small—for the benefit of the public.”

The Division’s mission is to inspire, support, and connect the people who do Texas history by providing them with innovative resources and strategic partnerships that advance museum excellence, foster public engagement, and strengthen community-centered stewardship.

Partnerships leverage shared resources and varied perspectives, creating a win-win scenario where the THC and your museum, historic site, or cultural organization benefits more than any could alone. The best partnerships combine different but complementary skills and assets.

You are invited to help plan next steps to expand THC’s reach and collaboration.

- Inez Wolins, Division Director, Museum Support & Statewide Services
- Ellen Cone Busch, Museum Services Director
- Beth Foulds, Museum Services Coordinator
- Emily Hermans, Chief Educator
- Danielle Christian, Preservation Programs Education Coordinator



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“Where Texas Became Texas”

Located on 293 acres of lush park land, Washington-on-the-Brazos gives visitors unique insights into the lives and times of the 59 delegates who met there on March 2, 1836, to make a formal declaration of independence from Mexico. From 1836 to 1846, the Republic of Texas existed as a separate and unique nation. On the grounds is the Star of the Republic Museum; recreated Town Site; and Barrington Living History Farm. The site’s Visitor Center features interactive exhibits and houses the spacious Museum Store. Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site is the core of the Republic of Texas Complex, which also includes Fanthorp Inn, a preserved 19th century stagecoach inn located nearby in Anderson, Texas. The Complex REOPENED in November 2025 after an epic restoration to create an enhanced visitor experience.

Day 1

Optional: If you arrive early, please take full advantage of the morning and independently explore the Republic of Texas Complex. The workshop includes time to see the site, but this sprawling historic site merits an extended visit.

- Washington-on-the-Brazos, including the Townsite, Visitor Center, and Star of the Republic Museum (opens 9:30 am)
- Barrington Living History Farm (opens 10 am)
- Fanthorp Inn (opens 10 am)

1:00 **Welcome**
– *Joseph Bell, THC Executive Director*

1:15 **Program Overview**
– *Inez Wolins*

1:30 **Participant Introductions**
– *Emily Hermans*

Introduce yourself and meet others you’ll be sharing the experience with. Let us know about you and your institution, as well as what early job you had before you were a leader that gave you a lesson, big or small, that you use today. Alternately, you might share what your current job’s theme song might be as we get to know one another.

2:15

Museum Services: Past Achievements and Future Vision

– *Ellen Cone Busch & Emily Hermans*

Brief history of the Texas Historical Commission’s Museum Services Program and Historic Sites Division.

Reflections for discussion: What have we done well? What could we be doing? How can Museum Services and THC Historic Sites better collaborate? How can THC better support the broader community of “history doers?”

3:00

Break

3:10

Reimagining an Institution: Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site Case Study

- *Jonathan Failor, Executive Director, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site*

Consider strategies that might apply to your own institution after hearing about how the site transformed its visitor experience through mission-driven decision-making.

4:00

Discussion:

What strategies might apply to your own institution? How do you decide which strategies work for you? Have partnerships played a role?

4:20

Visit the new Star of the Republic Museum exhibition

5:30

Wine Reception at the Washington-on-the-Brazos Visitor Center

6:00

Dinner (*catered on site*)

Program: Senator Lois Kolkhorst speaks on Leadership



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Day 2

8:30

Morning Welcome

- *Beth Foulds*

“Two Truths and a Dream” - share two truths about our institutions and an ambition for the future.

9:00

Texas History Collaborative or Partnership (*working title*)

- *Ellen Cone Busch*

Hear where we are in the development of this new program concept, then ask questions and provide general feedback, and challenge our thinking. What are we missing? What could better meet your needs and lift your ambitions? What could work and how can we aim higher?

9:45

Transformations & Partnerships

- *Inez Wolins*

Museum leaders share recent transformations at their institutions, their process, their partners, and how they define success.

- *David Shields, Director, National Museum of Pacific War*
- *Amy Rogers, Executive Director, San Jacinto Battleground and Monument Museum*
- *Dr. Monica Perales, Associate Vice Provost, Institute of Texan Cultures*

10:30

Defining Success

- *Inez Wolins*

Share how your institution defines success and join in a conversation after pre-selected leaders present examples of how they have defined success in their institutions (particularly partnerships) using both quantitative and qualitative metrics. Consider what success could look like for the Texas History Collaborative or Partnership (*working title*) in 2036 keeping in mind the win-win goal of good partnerships and expanding your/our reach.

- 11:15** *Break*
- 11:30** **Tales from Two Museums: Institutional Effectiveness, Challenges, and Potential**
- Bonnie Campbell, retired director of the Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, founding executive director of the Bob Bullock State History Museum, and first curator of the Texas Capitol
- 12:00** **Working Lunch** *(catered on-site)*
Brainstorming selection criteria & possible tiered program benefits.
- 1:00** **Adjourn** to spend personal time at Washington-on-the Brazos State Historic Site and depart on your own