



Field Investment, Infrastructure, and Sector Health

Working Group Report Summary

Co-chairs: Alison Gilchrest, Debra Hess Norris, Annabelle Camp

As the United States approaches its semiquincentennial in 2026, the field of cultural heritage preservation is at an inflection point. All nine areas of study of the Held in Trust (HIT) initiative identify a need for greater financial investment in the field. We must frame a vision for a national support infrastructure for the next 50 years that attracts new and existing donors and investors and demonstrates why and how the preservation of cultural memory and tangible heritage is a critical component in addressing numerous critical, contemporary issues ranging from climate crisis to social, gender, and racial injustice.

The field of cultural heritage conservation has grown reliant on a limited group of funders whose near-term priorities are shifting rapidly and whose long-term investment in the field is not guaranteed. The Field Investment, Infrastructure, and Sector Health Working Group is dedicated to understanding the ways in which the profession can develop multi-faceted, strategic efforts to broaden the funding base to include multigenerational individuals, entrepreneurial companies, and family foundations. Simultaneously, we must consider how significant reliance on philanthropy and government funding has excluded particular stakeholders and how we can engage wider audiences—a step necessary to long-term sustainability.

As the field seeks financial *sustainability*, expanded *visibility* is essential. The conservation field in the U.S. can be highly collaborative, strategic, creative, and action-oriented when appropriately incentivized. Practitioners are passionate; their excitement is engaging and contagious. In periods of emergency or crisis, conservators rise to the occasion and show, rather than tell, why the expertise to save and preserve cultural heritage is critical. But culture is not a project nor is it episodic: it endures. The field's work must spark action-oriented programs and practices that will excite and appeal to donors, resource allocators, and cultural amplifiers while strengthening opportunities for engagement and growth across the conservation and preservation landscape. Long-term sustainability also requires better integration and engagement with a significant but often overlooked segment of its workforce, individual cultural heritage preservation practitioners.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Summarized below are the areas of key consideration the Held in Trust (HIT) Working Group on Field Investment, Infrastructure, and Sector Health identified when considering the field's long-term sustainability.

Strengthening public awareness and connections to new philanthropic opportunities

Philanthropic practices among the major foundations that have been stalwart supporters of conservation practices in the U.S. are rapidly shifting to include previously marginalized communities and voices, coincident with a profound reckoning within the conservation profession about what and whose culture is preserved and why. As the cultural heritage preservation field works to secure sustainable, external funding, it must demonstrate its relevance to and impact on society. Members of the profession must clearly communicate why and how the preservation of

cultural memory and heritage is important for society; our material and documentary past are critical components of addressing broad societal issues, such as climate change; public health, cultural understanding, and social, gender, and racial injustice. Corporate, federal, foundation, and private investors will support initiatives and actions that address these intersectional issues. Multi-tiered influencer, communication, and marketing strategies will raise the visibility, trust level, and urgency of conservation in the public conscience.

Financial sustainability, influence, and capacity of individual cultural heritage preservation practitioners

Cultural heritage preservation professionals who work full- or part-time in private practice are the largest percentage of the preservation workforce. A thriving profession must include engagement with and cultivation of the vast amount of expertise and opportunity in the private sector. Calling on opportunities for professional growth, training models, and innovative business and funding models are all facets that can increase the accessibility and impact of this sector for more individuals. A range of opportunities related to the sharing economy and digital infrastructure could nourish community, simplify and lower costs and barriers of entry, and facilitate more equitable project distribution and completion. These possibilities are ripe for research, development, and support.

Collections Sustainability

The policies and practices in museums, libraries, archives, and other collecting institutions affect the persistence and development of the conservation profession. This Working Group questions assumptions about the role of conservation expertise in institutional leadership, decision-making, and policy-setting regarding collection-based activity such as pace and scale of collection growth, (de-)accessioning, risk assessment, provenance research, authentication, couriering, community engagement, and professional training.

STRATEGIC GOALS

An overarching goal regarding field sustainability is to establish cultural heritage preservation as a human right deserving of resources, attention, and credibility in the private and public sectors. As we work toward common goals to elevate an entire field of practice, many of these recommendations will require shifts in our shared ideology and the pursuit of innovative paths to economic sustainability. This is our opportunity to think outside of the box and influence the norms of those who hold power in the cultural sector as we reflect on the field's past and envision a more sustainable future.

The HIT Field Investment, Infrastructure, and Sector Health Working Group identified the following goals to better leverage the numerous opportunities present for the field's long-term sustainability. Further detail on these goals and an outline of benchmarks over the short, medium, and long term can be found in the Working Group's [full report](#).

GOAL #1: Capitalize a professional, national communication and fundraising strategy

As we require financial sustainability through larger and more diversified funding streams, expanded visibility is essential. Over a period of several years, the goal should be to raise the public consciousness about preservation and conservation of cultural heritage and to promote shared human values, storytelling, and diverse perspectives across broader audiences (see also HIT report "Engagement, Communication, and Storytelling" and "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility"). To accomplish this, the field requires a strategic, coordinated media strategy that addresses local, regional, and national publics. The field must also make a solid case, with financial data, to communicate its intrinsic value and economic impact, as well as the cost of not

investing in conservation. In parallel, this work will improve case-making, drive engagement, and ultimately funding through positive associations and meaningful content.

GOAL #2: Increase professional data collection

There is a clear need for the field to engage lobbying professionals and to commission data-driven research to align with other major service organizations such as Americans for the Arts and the American Library Association. We must, for example, gather, share, and promote data that will allow us to better understand our profession's demographic, experiential, and financial profiles. Such systemic data collection will also allow us to create demographic and economic benchmarks. Without timely, high-impact data and a strategy to mechanize it effectively, the field loses agency in the national conversation about heritage, its value and preservation. The Foundation for Advancement in Conservation (FAIC) has an opportunity to embrace an even greater national leadership role to strengthen the impact and influence of the cultural heritage preservation profession through strong public/private partnerships and greater investment and visibility. Fostering greater connections with an established national think tank should be investigated.

GOAL #3: Innovative business practice

While a high percentage of conservation professions are private practitioners, this component of the conservation workforce has not been fully recognized for or maximized in its contributions. A stronger and more secure future for the profession must include strategic consideration and development of the private conservation sector and its innovation-driven perspectives. It is a talented and engaged workforce highly networked with allied professions and the public, unencumbered by the pace of procedures and embedded hierarchies of institutional practice. We need to leverage the complimentary and innovation-driven perspectives that the private sector offers to further the profession at large. Target support for conservation business owners (entry level, mid-career, and established) should focus on facilitating running a profitable business, while also participating fully in other professional endeavors even if that requires subsidy and public-private partnerships. An effort can be made to establish mechanisms to make it easier to match cultural heritage in need of conservation with appropriate practitioners and funding. In addition, any field-wide marketing campaign or public programming initiative needs to be inclusive of private conservators and their work.

IN SUMMARY

As we examine opportunities for the future, our work must spark creative, action-oriented programs and practices that will excite and appeal to donors, resource allocators, and cultural amplifiers while strengthening opportunities for engagement, growth, and reflection across the conservation and preservation landscape.

To learn further details around the findings and recommendations of the HIT Working Group on Field Investment, Infrastructure, and Sector Health, please access their [full report](#).

FIELD INVESTMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND SECTOR HEALTH WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Danielle Amato-Milligan, Amato-Milligan & Associates

Annabelle Camp, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation*

Abigail Choudbury, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Lisa Duncan, Lisa Duncan, Art Conservator, LLC

Michelle Facini, National Gallery of Art

Alison Gilchrest, Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, Yale University*

Leticia Gomez Franco, Balboa Art Conservation Center

Julie Heath, The Speak Easy †

Derek Jones, Atelier

Claire Knowlton, Nonprofit Finance Fund †

Rosa Lowinger, RLA Conservation

Katie Luber, Minneapolis Institute of Art

Michele Marincola, Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University †

Debra Hess Norris, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation*

Loretta Parham, Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center, Inc.

Sarah Reidell, University of Pennsylvania Libraries

Caitlin Richeson, American Museum of Natural History

Sari Uricheck, Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance

Fred Wallace, Newfields †

Norman Weiss, Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

**Working Group co-chairs*

†Contributing consultants