

I doubt that any professional would question the value of attending industry conferences. For most of us, whether seasoned in our fields or emerging, conferences are like a burst of fresh air, refreshing and reinvigorating us while we grow our professional networks and interact with some of the strongest and most proven minds in our field. For young professionals like myself, the benefits of attending are multiplied several fold, for it is the young professionals who are still working to learn the ins and outs of their field and carve out their own niche within it. Because I believe this so ardently, I was excited and honored when I learned that TAM had selected me to receive a scholarship that would allow me to attend the 2016 annual meeting in Nashville.

I have been to a lot of conferences, both as a presenter and an attendee, but this was my first time attending the TAM conference. I have never been to a bad conference, though, so I knew when I registered that the time I spent at TAM would be well-spent, informative and inspiring. I went in with high expectations. And even my high expectations were absolutely blown away by the experiences the TAM conference offered. The networking opportunities, advice from established museum insiders, and introduction to professionals from a variety of different museums and career specialties were appreciated. But in my estimation, the exposure I received to new ideas from some of the most creative and articulate people in museums today were by far the most valuable part of the conference for my situation.

No organization exists in a vacuum. This is especially true of museums, which must grow and adapt to a variety of different social, economic, and political climates. My museum is itself undergoing a time of transition, and it requires constant effort to make informed choices and good decisions, but it is often difficult to think outside the box and come up with creative solutions for addressing the difficulties bound to accompany significant change. Museums are able to most effectively deal with their own ongoing evolution when allied with other museums, with whom they may exchange ideas and methodologies, compare notes on what works and what doesn't and work together to creatively leap old hurdles and the new ones with which the 21st century will assuredly present us. The TAM sessions were by far the richest and most densely-packed source of creative approaches and innovative ideas to issues old and new that I have ever encountered. For properly managing an evolving organization situated within a broader community that is itself usually in flux, ideas like the ones I found at TAM were invaluable. From the sessions on grant writing to interpretation to using social media effectively, I came away from TAM much more confident in my grasp of the nuances of several crucial areas.

Although the scholarship was helpful, especially for a young professional, I am quite sure that the cost of attendance is well worth it—next year, I will take the money for attending from my personal budget if I need to. That's how confident I am that the TAM experience should not be missed. Thank you to all the wonderful organizers and presenters who worked so many long hours as volunteers putting this year's conference together.

I hope that museums in Tennessee continue to work together with the mutual support and encouragement I saw evidenced at TAM. To any young professionals who may be contemplating attending the conference in 2017, I urge you to do so. The people are stellar, and the more experienced ones are more than willing to share their knowledge and offer advice to the next generation of museum professionals. The presentations are relevant to challenges you will face

every day in a working museum and cover topics related to many different museum specialties, from grant writing to interpretation.

To all my other colleagues in Tennessee museums: I look forward to serving alongside you as we work to pilot our organizations through the rest of 2016, and I hope that someday I can offer the next generation's young professionals as much inspiration and encouragement as you offered me in Nashville. I count it an honor to number myself among you.

And I'll see you in Pigeon Forge in 2017.