

Hearing the news that I had been chosen as a 2023 recipient of the Tennessee Association of Museums (TAM) Conference Scholarship has not only been one of the biggest highlights of my year so far, but was also one of the most personally and professionally rewarding moments in my young career. For some context as to my professional background, I've spent the last 6 years in the private sector working as an auditor with a local mortgage company, 3 of those years I spent painstakingly working to transition out of mortgages and into the museum field. Following my graduation in 2020 with my Masters Degree in Museum Studies, I've split my time between interning with a variety of nonprofits, networking with local museum professionals, applying to 100's of positions, and interviewing for various roles. This cycle continued until I finally found my place within the Blount Mansion National Historic Landmark as their Director of Development and Public Relations.

After finally securing a full-time position at a historic house museum I was eager to do anything and everything that I could to ensure that I could do my job and do it well. Which brings us full-circle to my excitement to be selected to attend this year's TAM Conference. For the first time I found myself amongst a large group of like-minded individuals who, not only were excited to meet me and discuss my life and career, but were also excited to share their knowledge and experiences so that I, as a new museum professional, could thrive and succeed. There are no words to adequately describe the warmth and enrichment that I felt from the "TAM-fam", but I will attempt to do so as I recount a number of my favorite experiences from my time in Memphis.

My adventure began early as a colleague and I departed from Knoxville at 6:00am to embark on our 6 hour journey to Memphis. Together, we shared personal and professional stories, experienced our first Buccee's, and talked immensely about the love we share for our four-legged children. Upon arrival, we were greeted warmly by the TAM crew, given our welcome packages, and then led through a brief overview of what to expect over the next few days. From here, the conference started in earnest with a welcome luncheon and a stellar introductory message from the members of TAM and Jeff Kollath, CEO of the Stax Museum. While I could talk endlessly about my sentiments on each day's sessions, I will try to focus on only one for the sake of brevity.

Day One's Roundtables session was immensely helpful to me as a first time director. Here, all other directors and administrators joined together to discuss what current aspects of museum operations and management were the most pressing, how can we address these issues, as well as just had an open and honest discussion about our fears and hesitations surrounding museums in the current political climate. This session was immensely insightful and allowed for greater and more open discussion than in any typical lecture setting.

On Day Two, I was inundated by the passion and knowledge demonstrated by Dory Lerner, a museum educator for the National Civil Rights Museum. The ways in which they presented the educational activities and how they promote empathy and understanding to school aged children should be the gold standard for how today's museums engage and educate their visitors. There was an immeasurable amount of information that I was able to take with me and incorporate into our museum tours and lesson plans.

Lastly, the most pertinent and necessary talk was given on the last day of the conference as the entirety of TAM came together to discuss Museum Advocacy. As previously stated, today's current political climate has, and continues, to cause great stress and conflict amongst people across the state. Personally, myself and my colleagues have experienced numerous instances of museum visitors becoming belligerent and hostile towards volunteers and docents for having differing opinions on certain historical facts or narratives. This session was not just one of unity, but of hope and action to ensure that, not only

are our guests, staff, and volunteers protected, but that factual information is protected and supported in our institutions.

If I had one complaint of my experience at TAM, it would be the lack of information sessions provided that actually aligned with my current role. As someone over museum fundraising and marketing, no session was geared towards me. And as someone who came to TAM hoping to widen my breath of understanding in a completely different role than what I had previously conducted (that being in education and curation), I did feel a bit disappointed that nothing within my sphere was well represented. In the future, I would love to see more talks regarding good practices in donor management, social media and marketing, and how to successfully fundraise in the modern age. From the standpoint of a small, historic house museum, these roles are typically conducted by a single person. Finances are a critical aspect in any institution and, unfortunately, they fell by the wayside this year in my opinion.

All in all, however, I left TAM with a better sense of confidence in myself, a great deal of ideas and new knowledge to take back to my Executive Director for use in our museum, and a book of contacts that was much thicker than when I had first arrived. Most importantly, I left feeling fulfilled and well supported by my new TAM-fam., many of which made sure to remind me that they were simply a call or email away. I left knowing that I had met a wonderful support base of professionals across the state who would offer whatever they could to see that I succeed in my new position; which is all I could ever ask for.