

October 15, 2020 Muse-ings

Intro:

This month's Muse-ing comes from Kelli Kling, Director of the Wood County Historical Society in Bowling Green, OH. Kelli is currently hiring a Development Coordinator (see job posting below) and she gives some advice about how to position yourself for fundraising-related positions.

Piece by Kelli Kling:

To be successful, museums and other non-profit humanities-based organizations need to cultivate an overlapping variety of skills within their organizations. While content knowledge can be valuable, there is a greater skill set needed in a viable employee. At the Wood County Museum, we believe part of our success comes from our staff's broader experience and training, where a background in history and museum studies is only part of the equation.

What makes for an attractive candidate is a proven track record of taking action and getting results. For our current Development Coordinator position, knowledge of our local history is favorable, but because this is our only staff member focused on fundraising, the strongest candidates will have at least one year of successful experience leading a development campaign and demonstrating the importance of building relationships.

Development involves both corporations and individuals, and each must be approached uniquely and will support the organization differently. One traditional example of this experience involves conducting an annual campaign that is comprised of multiple components - letters to an identified target audience (museum membership perhaps), a social media campaign for non-member followers, a timeline, a budget of anticipated donations, and a follow-up plan for giving thanks and setting goals for the next annual campaign. Another example of individual support can come in the form of developing a planned giving program that encourages support through retirement or estate funds.

But building a successful corporate relationship is more than a one-time ask of local merchants for a gift card – it includes executing a creative vision to find new corporate partners, understanding their marketing or community needs, then securing a reoccurring partnership for multiple years. For this reason, experience in community outreach and engagement can also be helpful in applying for development positions, especially at institutions where there is more than one staff person managing such work.

Still, even at the Wood County Museum, which is like thousands of small-to-mid-size museums that operate with a limited budget and limited resources, a well-rounded candidate is all that more desirable. A good candidate should have an appreciation for the organization's mission and find inspiration there to creatively generate the funding and support needed to uphold that mission. Here is where having a content background can be helpful in separating you from other candidates.

The best way to get specific development experience, like any museum experience, is to volunteer, intern, or work part-time for at least one year. Being involved for a span of time longer than just a summer internship will ensure that you get experience in the full process of planning, execution, evaluation, and the opportunity to enjoy success or reinvent a plan that did not go as expected.

When seeking an interview, the cover letter should be concise (one page) but amplify key areas of the resume that are relevant to the job description – especially how your combination of experience might set you apart and help the institution in unique, broad, and impactful ways. Give brief examples of past experiences and outcomes that meet the requirements of the job description. If granted an interview, be prepared to expand on those experiences, but also research the organization and prepare examples of how

to apply those skills within the organization's structure. An interview, whether in person or virtual, should be conducted with the same enthusiasm.

If you want to work for a museum or cultural non-profit, take the time to immerse yourself in the environment and experience the complexity first-hand. This will help build skills, industry leads, and an overall support for these important institutions.