

2025 Douglas County Heritage Partnership Needs Assessment Conducted by Coneflower Consulting

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Executive Summary of Findings

Coneflower Consulting is a woman-owned, limited-liability company, based in Lawrence, Kansas. Coneflower was hired by Douglas County to conduct a needs assessment for the Douglas County Heritage Partnership (DCHP), a loose coalition of seven area heritage organizations including: Clinton Lake Historical Society, Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council (HCC), Douglas County Historical Society, Eudora Historical Society, Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA), Lecompton Historical Society, and Santa Fe Trail Historical Society. Over the course of six months in 2025, Coneflower conducted:

- Heritage Sector Research
- 6 hour-long Focus Groups with Key Stakeholders
- 17 30-minute Phone Interviews with Key Stakeholders
- Public Survey (110 responses)
- Stakeholder Survey (16 responses)

The needs assessment found the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges the DCHP partnership.

Strengths

- **Deep Community Commitment:** Each organization is powered by passionate individuals and long-serving volunteers, often centered around one or two key leaders.
- **An Abundance of Local Stories:** All groups steward unique, significant stories — from the Bleeding Kansas era to Indigenous and immigrant narratives.
- **Successful Local Engagement:** Organizations have strong connections with area organizations, including schools, libraries, and city governments.
- **Emerging Collaborations:** Several groups are already working together informally or through past grants (e.g., ARPA, Freedom's Frontier).

Weaknesses

- **Volunteer Burnout and Leadership Gaps:** Most organizations rely heavily on one leader, a small board, and lots of volunteers; there are concerns about sustainability and succession.
- **Aging Audiences:** Difficulty attracting new and younger members; younger generations are often unaware or uninterested.
- **Limited Capacity and Funding:** Many organizations have small or no paid staff and experience constant funding and staffing gaps.
- **Uneven Visibility:** Many residents are unaware of local heritage groups unless directly involved; lack of shared public presence or centralized promotion.
- **Tensions between DCHP Organizations:** Historical mistrust and concerns over Lawrence/DCHS dominance; unequal funding and power dynamics persist.

Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Planning:** Strategic planning could be streamlined and made affordable by collaboration on timelines, templates, and annual plan update meetings.

- **Shared Digital Resources:** A partnership website, including a landing page, shared events calendar, and digital resource hub, could be hosted by a neutral party and maintained collaboratively.
- **Shared Marketing & IT Support:** Partners could cooperate on shared ad buys, shared graphic design, social media, or IT contractors, and shared marketing templates, while creating marketing campaigns and messaging to promote the partnership.
- **Collaborative Programming/Events:** There is excitement around co-sponsored speakers, multi-site exhibits and field trips, and coordinated, cross-organizational transportation.
- **Shared Volunteer Base & Shared Fundraising:** Partners could share resources for volunteer organization and celebration as well as fundraising templates and trainings.

Challenges

1. **Fear of Losing Autonomy:** Smaller organizations are cautious about centralized control or being “taken over.”
2. **Unequal Capacity:** Worry that some organizations will do more work or get less benefit from shared projects.
3. **Baggage from Past Efforts:** Several organizations mentioned prior collaborations that caused frustration or felt inequitable.
4. **Limited Time and Energy:** Staff and volunteers are already stretched thin, so collaboration must be simple and supportive—not another burden.

Overarching Recommendations

1. **Start with Low-Lift Strategic Planning Process:** Create a mini-strategic plan for the DCHP, setting a mission, vision, and values for the partnership and outlining one year of 1-2 partnership goals, strategies, and objectives. Goals could be in any of the following areas:
 - Collective Fundraising
 - Shared Contractors
 - Shared Digital Resources
 - Shared Volunteer Base
 - Collaborative Programming
 - Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
2. **Formalize the DCHP partnership:** With mini-strategic plan in hand, develop a written memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clearly lays out what DCHP membership entails—both in terms of benefits and expectations—and require signatures from participating organizations. The HCC would be an ideal organization to lead this.
3. **Meet Regularly:** Establish a regular quarterly or bi-annual meeting time for DCHP partners to update each other on their recent and upcoming activities.

Introduction

Coneflower Consulting is a woman-owned, limited-liability company based in Lawrence, Kansas, with the mission to empower “mission-driven organizations”—i.e., nonprofits, universities, and government entities—with creative strategies for sustainable growth. Coneflower was hired by Douglas County in April 2025 to conduct a needs assessment for the Douglas County Heritage Partnership (DCHP), a loose coalition of seven area heritage organizations including: Clinton Lake Historical Society, Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council (HCC), Douglas County Historical Society, Eudora Historical Society, Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA), Lecompton Historical Society, and Santa Fe Trail Historical Society.

A needs assessment is a systematic process of determining and addressing the gap between current conditions and desired conditions. It helps identify areas where improvement or change is needed, whether in individuals, organizations, communities, or products. Over the course of six months in 2025, Coneflower conducted:

- Heritage Sector Research
- 6 hour-long Focus Groups with Key Stakeholders
- 17 30-minute Phone Interviews with Key Stakeholders
- Public Survey (110 responses)
- Stakeholder Survey (16 responses)

The results of the DCHP needs assessment are detailed in the following report.

Heritage Sector Research

Coneflower conducted significant research into social, political, and economic trends shaping the nonprofit heritage sector, made up of history museums, historic sites, and historic societies, and found notable findings in three key areas:

- Economic Impact
- Audience Engagement Trends
- Prospective Challenges

The findings from this research are detailed below.

Economic Impact

Museums and historical sites attract tourists, promote economic development, and make communities more desirable for employers. According to the American Alliance of Museums in 2025:

- Museums and historical sites are job creators, supporting more than 726,000 jobs and contributing \$50 billion to the U.S. economy per year.
- The economic activity of museums generates \$12 billion in tax revenue annually, one-third of it going to state and local governments.
- Museums and other nonprofit cultural organizations return more than \$5 in tax revenues for every \$1 they receive in government funding.

- 89% of Americans agree that museums contribute important economic benefits to their community's economy.
- Cultural and heritage tourism travelers spend 60% more and stay longer than other leisure travelers.¹

According to an MMGY Global Travel Intelligence Study commissioned by the State of Kansas in 2021:

- Historic Attractions are the top activity of interest for Kansas visitor prospects, with a 48% interest rate, outranking shopping, culinary experiences, outdoor experiences, and art/performances by 8% or more.²

Audience Engagement Trends

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Heritage Sector was increasing its audiences year-over-year. In 2017, 28% of American adults reported visiting a historic site in the previous year—up 4.4% from 2012,³ and in 2018, total visits to National Park Service historic sites were 109.5 million—nearly double what it had been in 1979. Because population growth was far less over that period, this statistic shows strong per capita interest in heritage sites.⁴

But like many economic sectors that rely on in-person visitors, the heritage sector was hit hard by the pandemic, and while it has rebounded somewhat, according to the American Alliance of Museums, only 55% of museums and historic sites have returned to pre-pandemic levels of in-person visitation. Interestingly, this is not the result of fewer people visiting museums than did so pre-pandemic—prior to the pandemic between 25-31% of people reported visiting a museum in the past year, and in 2025, 33% of people reported visiting a museum in the past year—but the result of fewer repeat museum visitors. In other words, more people are visiting museums, but they are visiting them less.⁵

The heritage sector has continued to struggle with diversifying its core audiences. According to the American Alliance of Museums, the median age of frequent history museum visitors in the U.S. is about 64; casual or sporadic visitors' median age is 48. Such statistics demonstrate the concern that many museum and historic administrators have about their audiences and supporters "aging out." Additionally, visitors to history museums are much more likely to identify as White (~83% in one

¹ "Shutdown Prevention and Economic Impact." American Alliance of Museums. 2025.

<https://www.aam-us.org/programs/advocacy/policy-issues/issue-economy-and-jobs/>

² "Kansas Tourism Brand Perception Study." MMGY Travel Intelligence. February 2021.

https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/kansas/MMGY_Kansas_Brand_Perception_Research_3_4_2021_for_email_0753f75d-1c0f-4346-b58a-18a43d08ddc0.pdf

³ "Humanities Indicators: Historic Site Visits." American Academy of Arts & Sciences. 2018.

<https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/historic-site-visits>

⁴ "National Park Service Visitation and American Engagement with History." American Association for State and Local History, 2019. <https://aaslh.org/nps-visitation/>

⁵ Wilkening, Susie. "Visitation Recovery Trends from the Pandemic: A 2025 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Story." American Alliance of Museums. October 3, 2025.

<https://www.aam-us.org/2025/10/03/visitation-recovery-trends-from-the-pandemic-a-2025-annual-survey-of-museum-goers-data-story/>

survey), whereas casual visitors are more diverse, demonstrating the need for programming and policy that makes heritage sites accessible to all.⁶

Prospective Challenges

With the clear, positive economic impact that visits to museum and historic sites have on communities economically, it would seem uncontroversial to try to increase audience engagement at these sites both cumulatively and demographically, but recent shifts at the federal level have introduced new challenges to increasing audience engagement. Federal funding cuts to history and the humanities undermine long-standing museum and historical site programs, and the uncertainty of federal funding across the nonprofit sector puts new pressures on community donors. Taken together, these funding shifts make it harder for heritage organizations to roll out programming that appeals to new demographics. In addition, heritage organizations are facing increasing pressure to align their content with political agendas, threatening the presentation of diverse and accurate historical narratives. When museums struggle to balance uplifting narratives with honest history, they risk credibility and visitor trust. Unfortunately, these new obstacles to sustaining the related factors of financial security and audience engagement come at a time when museums are already experiencing high staff turnover and burnout, as well as increasing environmental threats, such as extreme weather events, that could endanger historic sites and their collections. This constellation of prospective challenges creates new levels of uncertainty for museum directors, their boards, and their staffs.⁷

Focus Groups & Phone Interviews

Coneflower conducted 6 focus groups—one for each DCHP member organization, except for the HCC and FFNHA, which shared a focus group. These focus groups brought together 8-12 stakeholders from DCHP member organizations and asked them the following questions:

1. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges
2. Do you find it easy to connect with this organization to get information? Are you usually aware of their special events or programs? How do you normally receive information about this organization?
3. What do you think is the value of collaborating across Heritage Partner organizations?
4. What are your hesitations about collaborating across organizations?
5. What other ideas do you have for collaborations with other local groups and organizations?

Coneflower conducted 17 thirty-minute phone interviews with stakeholders nominated by the DCHP member organizations. During phone interviews, stakeholders were asked the following questions:

1. What does Heritage mean to you?

⁶ Ibid. “Breaking Down Visitation by Museum Type: A 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Story.” American Alliance of Museums. February 28, 2025.

<https://www.aam-us.org/2025/02/28/breaking-down-visitation-by-museum-type-a-2024-annual-survey-of-museum-goers-data-story/>

⁷ Boucher, Brian. “Is This the Breaking Point for Museums?” Artnet. September 22, 20225.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-politics-2679093#on>

2. What are some of the strengths of the specific Douglas County heritage organization with which you are most aligned? What are the strengths of the Douglas County Heritage Partnership?
3. What are some of the weaknesses of the specific Douglas County heritage organization with which you are most aligned? What are the weaknesses of the Douglas County Heritage Partnership?
4. What concerns do you have about funding for your organization and/or the partnership?
5. What do you think is the value of collaborating across Heritage Partner organizations? What are your hesitations about collaborating across organizations? What ideas do you have for collaborations with other local groups and organizations?

Comments in the focus groups and phone interviews fell into five key areas: 1) definitions of heritage, 2) organizational and partnership strengths, 3) organizational and partnership weaknesses, 4) funding concerns, and 5) partnership opportunities and challenges.

Definitions of Heritage

For DCHP members, heritage is tied to history, culture, and community identity. Heritage is generally defined very broadly, spanning the distant past to the present. Sometimes it comes in the form of inclusive storytelling, other times it's uncomfortable since it glorifies what some consider to be a problematic past, as can be seen in the word cloud below.



Representative comments related to heritage include:

- *Heritage means our **history**, our **culture**, our **past**, our **identity**. You know.....our **story**.*
- ***Not letting these people be forgotten**, especially if they're the last or only ones in their families.*
- *Heritage is **not always truthful** history, often it's a **glorification** of the past...the sharp corners and ugly sides have to be shaved away.*

These comments underline the challenges that come in this particular political moment as heritage organizations attempt to engage larger and more diverse audiences while staying true to historic fact and the many different communities they serve.

Organizational and Partnership Strengths

Across DCHP organizations, strengths include a dedication to local history, a passionate and largely volunteer workforce, and a deep commitment to preserving historic buildings and collections so that

they can be accessed by all. Personal trust and community ties are highly valued, and the staff of all DCHP organizations were lauded for their leadership and commitment, as can be seen in the word cloud below:



Representative comments about organizational and partnership strengths include:

7

- *[This organization] is a **group of do-ers**...we wear many hats, and that works.*
- *[We have] a really strong **dedication to local history**. There's a really intense focus on making sure that the **local history matters**, trying to make it as **interesting, accessible, and significant** as possible for **anyone** who walks through the door.*
- *[This is a] fabulous **building**, great **collection**, and [**staff, volunteers, and community members**] are really good at accessing the collection.*

These comments demonstrate DCHP staff, volunteers, and board members' intense commitment to engaging the Douglas County community with local history.

Organizational and Partnership Weaknesses

Across DCHP organizations, weaknesses included a labor shortage—a national trend that can be seen across the nonprofit sector⁸--as well as an aging work and volunteer force, limited marketing skills across organizational staff and volunteers, and small budgets. Some DCHP members struggle with their location outside of urban areas, which can make attracting visitors difficult, and all organizations are working hard to reach younger audiences but with varying degrees of success, as can be seen in the word cloud below:

⁸ "The Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis." National Council of Nonprofits. 2025.
<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/nonprofit-workforce-shortage-crisis>



Representative comments about organizational and partnership weaknesses include:

- *[Our biggest weakness is] funding! I would really like to strengthen and diversify our **funding sources**.*
- *We're not good **marketers**, we put out newsletters and we're on Facebook, but we don't have the **budget or staff capacity** for much more than this.*
- *The [people at the museum] are **older people**, people on the committee are older, and we need to **get younger people involved**. I think there are some struggles with getting the community at large involved, but especially younger people.*

These comments demonstrate that DCHP members are experiencing the linked struggle to increase funding and audiences, which is being seen in heritage organizations across the country.

Funding Concerns

Funding was so frequently commented upon by DCHP stakeholders that it deserved its own category of analysis. Douglas County funding is the largest support source for DCHP members, but some noted processes felt unclear and inequitable. Additional revenue came from memberships, memorials, and small fundraisers. Only a handful of interviewees mentioned grants, and most of these were from HCC, which is funded by Douglas County. These results can be seen in the word cloud below:



Representative comments about fundraising concerns include:

- *We've **already applied this year for more grants** than we have in the past several years...[this is due to a] refocus...and coming out of **COVID, tourism fell**...*
- *It's a **mystery** to know what [the county] is looking for in a **budget request**. We're just **guessing**.*
- *Thinking about challenges...One of them is the brand new one: the **unreliability or***

disappearance of federal funding.

These comments demonstrate the uncertainty of funding in the heritage sector at this time, and the anxieties many stakeholders are experiencing about these organizations' financial futures.

Partnership Opportunities and Challenges

Staff and volunteers highlighted their appreciation for collaboration, but community stakeholders generally had limited awareness of other partners in the DCHP. Across most interviews, there were calls for joint programming, shared volunteers, and travelling/linked exhibits, though concerns around ensuring the equitable distribution of funding, workload, and authority amongst DCHP members were prevalent. These results can be seen in the word cloud below:



Representative comments about fundraising concerns include:

- *I think **collaborative exhibits** could be cool. Having one exhibit with different parts at **each location telling a continuous narrative**, could be a way to get visitors to circulate through all of the organizations.*
- *We [could] collectively build a **community of heritage organization volunteers**. If we build the infrastructure to deploy them, instead of each of us doing this on our own, we can employ technologies more and have more specialized volunteers, helping them do what they want to do.*
- *We can all have differing opinions on how we run our own museums, but the **marketing part...we're only stronger by being together**.*
- *Each of these organizations is **protective of their stuff**, when you try to collaborate, they may still **put their own interests first**.*

These comments highlight the enthusiasm partners feel for collaborating on exhibits, volunteers, and marketing, but they also convey concerns about working together.

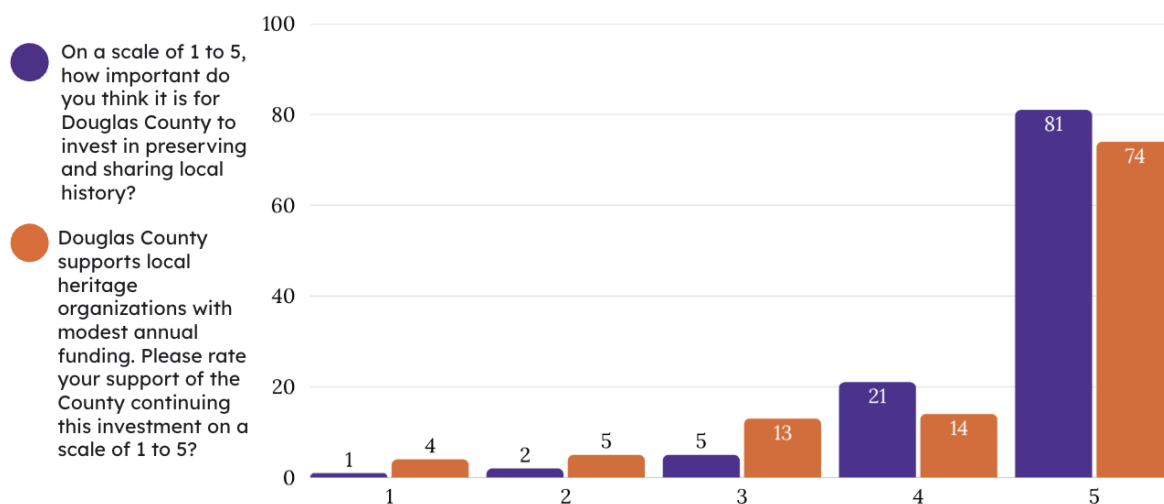
Public & Stakeholder Surveys

Public Survey

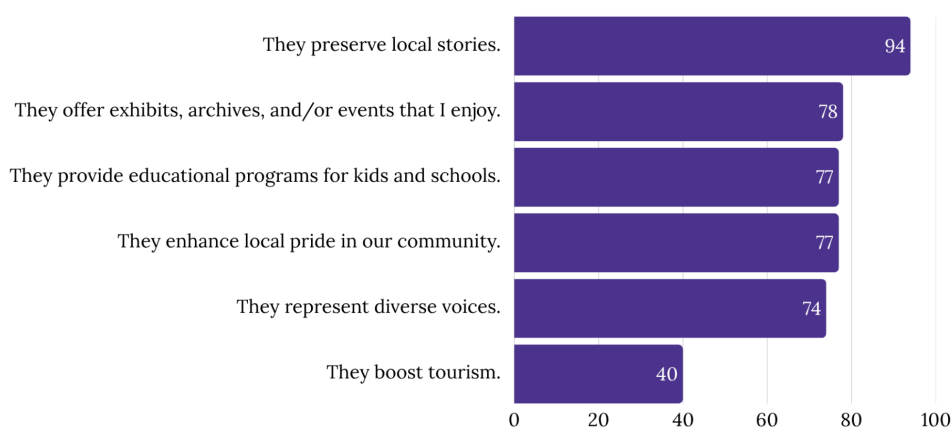
The Public survey consisted of six required multiple-choice and choose-all-that-apply questions with one optional open-ended question. It was open for two months, August 1 - September 30, 2025.

Public survey links were distributed to focus group and phone interview participants to share with their networks and were also distributed on the Douglas County Heritage Partner organizations' social media platforms. There were 110 responses recorded. Below are a sample of questions from the survey:

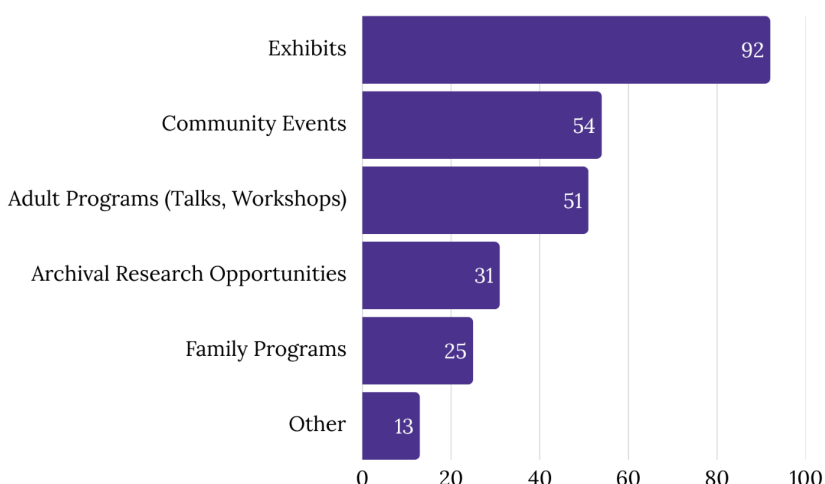
Respondents thought, overwhelmingly, that Douglas County should invest in preserving and sharing local history. This support was mirrored in a question the extent to which respondents agreed that the County should continue investing in local heritage organizations:



The graph below shows answers to the question: “*Which of the following reasons best describe why you value local heritage organizations? (Check all that apply).*” Respondents value these organizations primarily because they preserve local stories, but also because of their exhibits, youth programs, and because they enhance local pride. Tourism ranked low on the respondents’ values.



Similarly, when asked “*What motivates you to visit these heritage organizations? (Check all that apply).*” respondents highlighted Exhibits as the primary reason for visiting. Community Events and Adult Programs like talks and workshops are also reasons for attending. While youth programming was one of the respondents’ top values, Family Programs ranked 5th as a motivator for bringing in respondents. This is likely due to the respondent pool, which is estimated to be an older demographic.

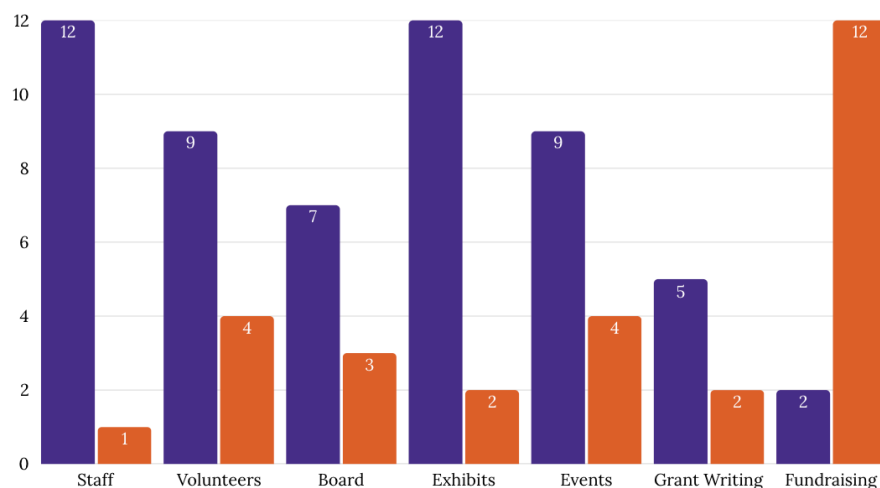


The final, optional question was a write-in question, asking respondents, “*What else would you like to share about your thoughts on local history and heritage organizations?*” Of the 41 responses, the dominant theme was positively supportive (~60%), with a call to *preserve, save, and teach* local history, including some respondents urging for increased funding (“*Please provide all the funding we can!*”). Only ~10% of responses were negative (“*Stop wasting our money.*”), and ~15% offered suggestions for improvement (“*I would love to see Indigenous history better represented.*” and “*I would visit these organizations if a senior program offered rides.*”).

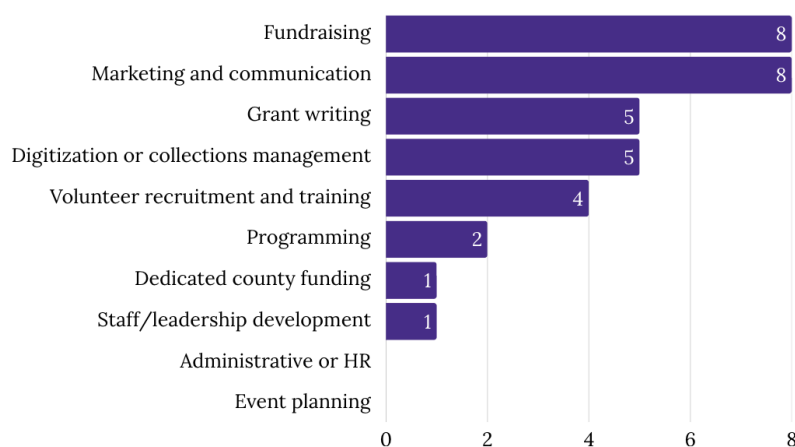
Stakeholder Survey

The Stakeholder survey consisted of ten required, multiple-choice, choose-all-that-apply, and open-ended questions, and one optional open-ended question. It was open for two months, August 1 - September 30, 2025. Stakeholder surveys were emailed to Directors of DCHP organizations for their distribution to additional stakeholders. There were 16 responses recorded. Below are a sample of questions from the survey:

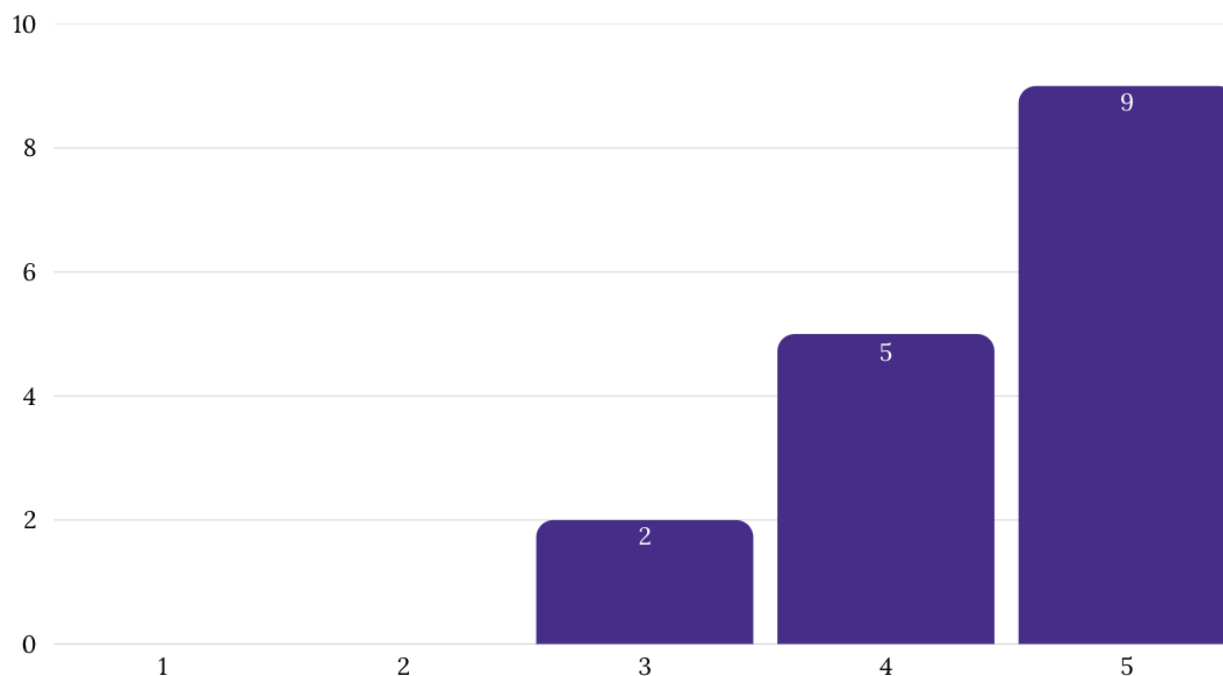
When asked about the Strengths and Challenges of their individual organizations, Stakeholder respondents agreed that the Staff and Exhibits stood out as strengths, while Fundraising was the biggest weakness.



Unsurprisingly, then, we see that when asked about “*What types of support would make the biggest difference for your organization,*” Fundraising Support is tied for the highest ranking, along with Marketing and Communication support. Receiving 0 votes were administrative/HR and event planning support, likely because not every organization has staff to manage this support (some are entirely volunteer-run) and because annual events are often part of flagship organizational programming that have been occurring for many years and, as a result, run quite smoothly.

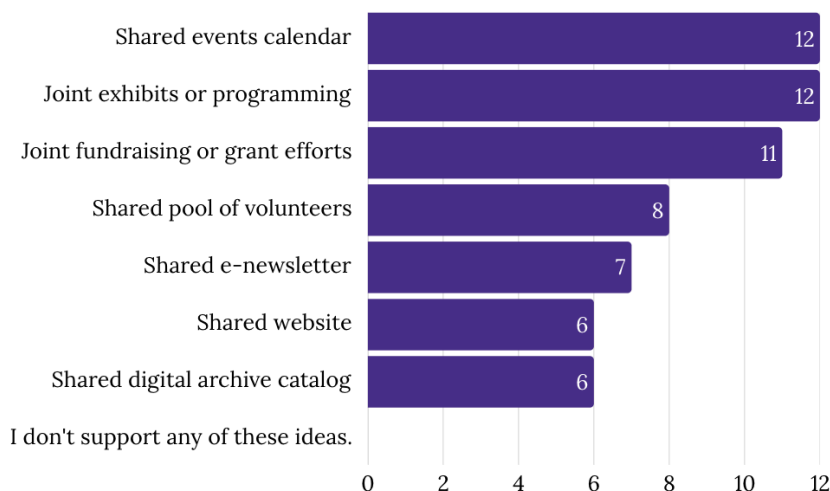


There is support for increased collaboration across organizations, with a majority of respondents ranking their support a “5.”



When asked “*Which shared efforts would you support or see value in?*” respondents highlighted a shared events calendar, joint exhibits or programming, and joint fundraising or grant efforts. This

aligns both with what organizations feel are their strengths (exhibits and events, as seen in the first graph), and with organizational challenges (fundraising and grant writing, as seen in the first and second graphs).



The follow-up write-in question asked about what concerns, if any, respondents had about increased collaboration across organizations. Results were split 50/50, between “*no concerns*”, and a worry about “*support being spread too thinly*,” and the possibility that “*organizations may lose their own voice or identity*.”

The final, optional question asking if there was anything else Stakeholders would like us to know was not answered by enough respondents to preserve their anonymity in this report.

Recommendations

Overarching Recommendations

As a result of the needs assessment, Coneflower has developed the following short list of recommendations.

1. **Start with Low-Lift Strategic Planning Process:** Create a mini-strategic plan for the DCHP, setting a mission, vision, and values for the partnership and outlining one year of 1-2 partnership goals, strategies, and objectives. Goals could be in any of the following areas:
 - Collective Fundraising
 - Shared Contractors
 - Shared Digital Resources
 - Shared Volunteer Base
 - Collaborative Programming
 - Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
2. **Formalize the DCHP partnership:** With mini-strategic plan in hand, develop a written memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clearly lays out what DCHP membership

entails—both in terms of benefits and expectations—and require signatures from participating organizations. The HCC would be an ideal organization to lead this.

3. **Meet Regularly:** Establish a regular quarterly or bi-annual meeting time for DCHP partners to update each other on their recent and upcoming activities.

A one-year strategic planning process will resolve some of the residual concerns that some DCHP stakeholders still have about what the DCHP's values, goals, and objectives are before they are required to commit to a year of participation in the partnership—something which the partners still need to formally do in writing. In addition to including the goal of formally establishing the partnership, this one-year plan should outline 1-2 low-lift goals, most likely chosen from the more detailed list of recommendations to follow, as well as set a regular meeting time for DCHP members over the course of the upcoming year to review progress on the one-year strategic plan and ensure continued communication between the DCHP organizations.

Detailed Recommendations

Throughout the process of conducting the needs assessment, Coneflower was able to assess the extent to which DCHP organizations support the following collaborative project ideas:

- Shared Digital Resources— Strong Support
- Shared Marketing/IT Support – Strong Support
- Collaborative Programming/Events – Strong Support
- Collaborative Strategic Planning –Cautiously Optimistic
- Shared Volunteer Base – Mixed Feelings
- Shared Fundraising – Mixed Feelings
- Shared Admin/HR Resources — Low Support

The following recommendations, drawn largely from stakeholder input as well as research into the heritage sector, outline ideas for how these collaborations could be implemented.

Shared Digital Resources

- **Create a Shared Landing Page for the Partnership:** This site could be hosted by the County, share information about the partnership, include hyperlinks to each individual organization's website, and be a place to host the shared events calendar. Could also pull analytics on where visitors are coming from, where they are clicking, etc.
- **Create a Shared Digital Collections Resource Hub:** Accessible from shared landing page website, this password protected online space for DCHP staff and volunteers could include curatorial document templates, stock images, maps, historical images, a list of collection holdings, etc., so that partners can easily create new exhibits using shared historical resources.

- **Build Shared Events Calendar:** Find an online space to host and maintain a shared Douglas County heritage events calendar so that you can cross-promote and avoid programming on top of each other.

Shared Marketing & IT Support

- **Share Ad Buys:** For example, buy a year of banner ads from The Lawrence Times together, and then allow a different partner org to use that space each month.
- **Collective Contracting:** Hire contract Graphic Designer, Social Media Coordinator, and/or IT manager on retainer collectively and pay for the percentage of services your organization uses.
- **Create Shared Marketing Templates:** Create and share templates for press releases, social media campaigns, fundraising plans, etc.
- **Coordinate Social Media Outreach:** Share stories of partner organizations' successes across social media by regularly tagging and re-posting each other's content. A unified public presence increases visibility and pressure for funding.
- **Promote the Partnership:** Pitch stories to news outlets—whether print, radio, or digital—about the heritage ecosystem in Douglas County and the partner organizations that keep it strong!

Collaborative Events

- **Pool Resources to Make A Splash:** Collaborate to bring in high-profile, diverse historians, speakers, experts, etc. that speak to multiple organizations' audience interests.
- **Host Multi-Site Exhibits:** Create exhibits with multiple stops—one at each partner organization—required for full experience.
- **Invest in Coordinated Transportation:** Explore coordinated transportation options—e.g., a Sunday History Bus that stops at three of the different partner organizations each weekend.
- **Develop a Partnership-wide Relationship with Area Schools:** Increase K-12 participation by pitching multi-organization field trip packages, cross-organizational curriculum development, and joint Subject Matter Expert classroom visits.
- **Co-Sponsor to Cross-Pollinate:** Co-sponsor each other's events to maximize name recognition and cross-pollinate audiences.

Collaborative Strategic Planning

- **Use the Same Planning Timeline:** Encourage all partners to get on the same strategic planning timeline—e.g., all partners create new five year plans for 2026-2030 and then renew them every five years going forward.
- **Share Plan Templates:** Use identical strategic planning templates across organizations so organizational alignments are clear.
- **Complement, Don't Duplicate:** Work together to ensure individual strategic plans are complementary and not duplicative by inviting stakeholders from partner organizations to participate in your strategic planning process.

- **Plan as an Ecosystem:** Create a Douglas County Heritage Ecosystem Strategic Plan collaboratively every 10 years.
- **Share Out Annually:** Meet as a partnership once a year to review strategic plan progress and make plan updates.

Shared Volunteers & Shared Fundraising

- **Share Volunteers:** Share and rotate volunteer pools by using a shared volunteer database (could be located on a password protected section of the shared landing page).
- **Celebrate Volunteers Together:** Pool resources to create an annual volunteer awards event to recognize volunteers for their hard work (could also be a great fundraiser!)
- **Share Fundraising Document Templates:** These could include donor/sponsor benefit guides, solicitation templates, annual solicitation plans and calendars, capital campaign plans and calendars, fundraising event plans and templates, etc.
- **Build Fundraising Skills across DCHP:** Collaborate on fundraising trainings by purchasing group training packages, participating in train-the-trainer programs, sharing the cost of speakers/consultants, etc.

Additionally, Coneflower includes the following recommendations in the areas of evaluation and advocacy to the DCHP as a result of Coneflower's own knowledge of the nonprofit sector and the potential for continued cuts to federal funding for heritage organizations. A DCHP-wide evaluation would provide shared metrics that could be used to make the case for both government and private sector support for the DCHP as a whole, and collaborative advocacy efforts would enable the DCHP to wield more power when interacting with government entities at the local, state, and even federal levels.

Evaluation

- **Create Ecosystem-Wide Economic Impact Evaluation Protocols:** Collaboratively decide on economic metrics used across the ecosystem. Develop a shared survey asking visitors their zip code of residence and how much they have spent or plan to spend on transportation, dining, retail, lodging, and entertainment, while in Douglas County today (for residents) or during their visit (for tourists). Share out quarterly with each other and eXplore Lawrence to understand multiplier effect and impact on TGT.
- **Create Ecosystem-Wide Social Impact Evaluations Protocols:** Work with qualitative researcher at KU (or a graduate student) to use the [Measurement of Museums Social Impact \(MOMSI\) Toolkit](https://museumsocialimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MOMSItoolkitfinalwithlinks.pdf)⁹ to collaboratively create a survey that can be used across partner organizations to measure the social impact of your work.

⁹ "Museum Social Impact Museum Toolkit." Museum Social Impact. 2023.

<https://museumsocialimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MOMSItoolkitfinalwithlinks.pdf>

- o **Add New Entry/Exit Signage:** “Complete a Short Survey to Help Us Maintain Our Funding,” “Thank You for Completing our Survey Before You Go!”, post Survey QR codes, etc.

Advocacy

- o **Cooperate to Advocate:** Work together to create a concise, compelling one-pager that highlights your collective impact and why government funding for this heritage ecosystem is essential.
- o **Represent Strategically:** Send board and staff representatives from multiple partner organizations to speak with legislators on behalf of the ecosystem as a whole and at the same time.
- o **Collaborate on Legislator Invitations:** Invite legislators to visit multiple events on the same day and create itineraries that help them move from one event to the next across organizations efficiently and enjoyably.
- o **Leverage Community Support:** Encourage patrons, volunteers, and local businesses to write letters, provide testimonials, or participate in phone advocacy campaigns for the Douglas County heritage ecosystem as a whole.

Conclusion

The DCHP needs assessment demonstrated that while the individual DCHP organizations are each facing many of the same challenges that heritage organizations across the United States are facing in 2025, the possibility of a partnership between them holds great promise. Together, DCHP member organizations can increase their capacity to engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds, better make the case for the importance of preserving local history to a variety of funders, and, hopefully, secure the financial sustainability needed to safekeep the stories of Douglas County for generations to come.

Appendix: Organizational Executive Summaries

Clinton Lake Historical Society (CLHS)

Strengths

- **Community Pride:** CLHS board members, volunteers, and stakeholders deeply value CLHS and the Wakarusa River Valley Museum's role in preserving unique local history.
- **Dedicated Volunteers:** CLHS has a strong board and the President and Vice President are essential to the organization's functioning. Weekend staff and Museum Studies interns are helpful when well-supported.
- **Exhibit quality and Follow-through:** Despite limited resources, CLHS has a strong track record with grants and exhibitions.
- **Partnerships with Specialists:** CLHS has engaged in productive collaborations with the Kansas Anthropological Association and other expert organizations.

Challenges

- **Workload, Burnout, and Succession Planning:** CLHS is one of two DCHP members with an all volunteer staff. Leadership is concentrated among a few seasoned individuals, and while the organization is working to pull more volunteers in so that the burden can be shared, succession planning is a concern.
- **Limited Visibility:** CLHS struggles to spread the word about the Museum and its programs due to limited marketing and poor physical signage around the Museum.
- **Collections Backlog:** The volume of digital transcription, cataloging, and acquisitions at times overwhelms the small CLHS team, and there is a need for an acquisitions policy.
- **Generational Gap:** Like many DCHP members, CLHS struggles to attract younger community members as both visitors and volunteers.
- **Geographic Isolation:** CLHS's distance from Lawrence and other Douglas County towns makes collaboration and visibility more difficult.

Organizational Opportunities

- **Implement Acquisitions Policy:** CLHS can cut down on the amount of administrative work required to process new acquisitions by creating a strong acquisitions policy that clearly limits the materials the Museum accepts as part of its collection.

- **Strengthen University Partnerships:** CLHS already has an internship program in place but increased partnerships between CLHS and area universities could provide additional expertise, labor power, and youth audiences.
- **Expand Digital Offerings:** CLHS is working on its digital presence, but increased digital offerings—including exhibitions, K-12 curriculum, and activities—would help overcome geographical hurdles for audiences and improve connections to youth.
- **Increase Physical Signage:** Increased signage for the Wakarusa River Valley Museum will make the site more visible to Douglas County residents and visitors alike.

Partnership Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Plan:** Due to constraints on volunteer time, collaborative strategic planning is a low priority for CLHS with questionable returns on investment.
- **Collective Fundraising:** CLHS is open to this but there are concerns about the equity of both work and fund distribution.
- **Shared Contractors:** CLHS is especially interested in a shared marketing or IT contractor.
- **Shared Digital Resources:** CLHS is very supportive of a collaborative digital archive across Douglas County and perhaps a shared events calendar but a clear maintenance plan and division of labor is essential.
- **Shared Volunteer Base:** CLHS is interested in cross-training volunteers to be supportive across multiple DCHP member organizations, especially in the area of marketing and communications.
- **Collaborative Programming:** CLHS expressed an interest in rotating social or fundraising events at different DCHP member organizations for internal relationship-building and external visibility.
- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** CLHS is especially interested in partnering with DCHP members to increase programming related to the Indigenous community and area tribal history.

Representative Feedback

We're all really proud of this museum. For being so small, what Marin, Saundra, and the volunteers have been able to do with grants and exhibits has been very impressive.

We're all volunteers and sometimes it's just easier to do things ourselves instead of explaining them. That's part of why we burn out.

There are a lot of new people moving into the area and no new members. We need to figure out how to reach them—maybe better signage, more in the newspaper, or even snail mail.

Everybody needs to work together, because it's going to get harder to make it by yourself.

We're aging out and the younger people just aren't joiners like our generation. We have to find a way to keep this going.

Douglas County Historical Society (DCHS)

Strengths

- **Professional Staff:** High praise for the Executive Director and the Watkins team, all of whom are widely respected across the county and state.
- **Collaborative Spirit:** DCHS actively builds relationships with smaller organizations, KU, Haskell, the Lawrence Public Library, and others.
- **Educational Programming:** DCHS has strong youth programming—e.g., the playhouse, scavenger hunts, curriculum-aligned lessons for teachers.
- **Collections and Curation:** DCHS runs an accessible museum space with physical artifacts and sensory experiences for kids.
- **Community Trust:** DCHS is known for telling history honestly, including controversial narratives.
- **Historical Reach:** DCHS is described as a potential “keeper of the legacy” in the region.

Challenges

- **DCHS vs. The Watkins Museum:** Most people can easily identify the Watkins Museum of History but don't know about DCHS as an entity or understand how it relates to the Watkins Museum.
- **Geographic Tension:** There is an ongoing perception that DCHS is Lawrence-centric despite attempts at county-wide collaboration.
- **Limited space and Accessibility:** The Watkins Museum building poses challenges for broad community access and large-scale events.
- **Capacity and Funding:** DCHS is underfunded and understaffed for the scale of programming it carries out, leaving it highly reliant on volunteers and partnerships.
- **Low Membership:** In a county with ~120,000 residents, DCHS only has 300 members.

- **Collaborative Friction:** Historic turf issues, personality conflicts, and concern about Lawrence “taking up too much space” have continued to impact DCHS, even though individual DCHS staff—including the executive director—are frequently cited as exceptional collaborators.

Organizational Opportunities

- **Name Clarification:** The relationship between DCHS, the Watkins Museum, and the other Douglas County historical societies that make up the DCHP needs clarification, and a DCHS name change or name refinement could help.
- **Serve as a County-wide Umbrella Organization:** DCHS already provides administrative support and meeting space to external entities including the Clinton Historical Society, Lawrence Preservation Alliance, and the New Generations Society. It could provide these services to other DCHP organizations.
- **Digitize More Collections:** DCHS has the skillset and digital infrastructure needed to digitize more area collections, but funding and staffing may be an issue.
- **Launch County-wide Initiatives:** DCHS has the skillset and financial infrastructure needed for collaborative grant applications, strategic planning, and large-scale programming, but again, funding and staffing may be an issue.
- **Youth-focused Outreach:** DCHS could continue to expand its youth offerings, using field trips and storytelling to create ripple effects into family and community engagement, in the hope of increasing an educated public and cultivating young adult audiences.
- **Unified Voice for Advocacy:** DCHS has the skillset needed to lead advocacy at the state and regional level, helping to present a stronger case for public and private funding through collaboration.

Partnership Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Plan:** DCHS is supportive of a DCHP strategic plan and could provide meeting space and administrative support for the planning process.
- **Collective Fundraising:** DCHS is open to shared fundraising but concerned about equity and the potential for increased tensions with DCHP members.
- **Shared Contractors:** DCHS has the most resources of any of the historical societies in the DCHP, so it stands to benefit the least from a shared contractor, though a shared strategic planning facilitator, a shared maintenance/cleaning contractor, or a shared graphic design contractor could be useful.

- **Shared Digital Resources:** DCHS is supportive of shared digital resources, but is also cautious of the logistical hurdles that this might entail.
- **Shared Volunteer Pool:** DCHS has a strong volunteer base but is open to a shared volunteer database for sharing skilled volunteers in particular.
- **Collaborative Programming:** DCHS is excited for the potential for collaborative DCHP programs but also aware of the costs—in terms of both dollars and staff time—that this kind of County-wide coordination requires.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** DCHS acknowledges the need for broader and more inclusive stories beyond the dominant narrative and is interested in continuing to do this work.

Representative Feedback

You can't talk about the Watkins without talking about [Executive Director] Steve [Nowak] and the transformation he's made here. There used to be no collaboration. There is now.

Money, money, money. So many of the weaknesses are based on funding – if it's not tax dollars, where are you going to get it?

We're excited to tell more diverse stories. The materials we have are often one perspective, and there's so much room to widen that lens.

How could you not want collaboration? A larger whole is always more powerful.

The world is more complicated. The issue is getting more Lawrenceians excited about the rest of Douglas County – these boundaries are random. Through storytelling, people start to see the connections.

Eudora Area Historical Society (EAHS)

Strengths

- **Dedicated Leadership:** Executive Director is universally acknowledged as the driving force behind EAHS's growth, grant success, programming, and visibility.
- **Physical Museum Space:** Renovated with volunteer labor and grants, the Eudora Community Museum, built in 1866 and formerly home to a variety of businesses, is now a well-curated, community-centered museum.

- **Community Engagement:** EAHS excels at partnering with schools for field trips relating to Eudora and Kansas history and working with students.
- **Intergenerational Reach:** EAHS has cultivated a multigenerational audience, offering OSHER classes for retirees and school activities for youth.
- **Municipal and County Support:** EAHS has strong relationships with the City of Eudora and Douglas County, receiving funding from both.
- **Enthusiastic Board:** The EAHS board is passionate, if not always highly engaged beyond leadership.
- **Frequent, High-quality Communication:** EAHS does well with its outreach, publishing a monthly e-newsletter, an annual physical Newsletter, hosting bi-monthly programs, staying active on social media, and uploading its programs to YouTube.

Challenges

- **Limited Funding and Staff:** The lack of funding for staff salaries makes it hard for EAHS to extend its hours or take on new efforts, which could lead to more fundraising opportunities.
- **Board Capacity:** EAHS relies heavily on its Executive Director to lead and fundraise; the EAHS board is not highly active in day-to-day operations (as a working board would be) or fundraising (as a fundraising board would be).
- **Generational Gap:** EAHS is struggling to reach middle-aged adults and new residents who aren't already engaged in their programs.
- **Sustainability Concerns:** EAHS has a strong leader but no succession plan and many of its key partnerships—such as with the public schools—haven't been institutionalized with written agreements.
- **Engagement Drop:** Since COVID, there has been a drop in attendance at public events.

Organizational Opportunities

- **Shared Building with the Eudora Public Library:** Potential collaboration and volunteer/resource sharing.
- **School partnerships:** Expand standards-based materials and outreach across districts.
- **Joint Planning:** Interest in co-planning with the library and middle school.
- **World Cup Exhibits and Tours:** Especially tied to the upcoming U.S. 250th anniversary and World Cup **Shared themes** or joint programs across regional historical groups.

Partnership Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Plan:** EAHS has limited time and funding to commit to strategic planning, so any collaborative plans need to be financially supported with a clear limit on time requirements. There are concerns about whether strategic planning actually matters to funders and how a collective DCHP plan could be equitably led.
- **Shared Contractors:** EAHS is most interested in a shared marketing contractor.
- **Collective Fundraising:** EAHS understands that community partnerships are valuable to funders, but the equitable distribution of funds amongst DCHP partners seems challenging.
- **Shared Digital Resources:** EAHS believes a digital resource hub would increase accessibility and visibility of EAHS's resources.
- **Shared Volunteer Pool:** EACH is cautiously optimistic about a shared DCHP volunteer pool but has concerns about equity.
- **Collaborative Programming:** Worth exploring; concerns about money distribution.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** EAHS is especially interested in how to be more inclusive of younger generations and racially or culturally diverse community partners.

Representative Feedback

[Executive Director] Ben [Terwilliger]'s passion is a big part of their strength. He gets Smithsonian traveling exhibits, involves school kids, and he's really important in helping build community.

Like a lot of historical societies, it's hard to get volunteers anymore. The Board is active, but it's mostly Ben doing things – and that's tough to sustain.

There's value in not duplicating effort. When you apply for funding now, partners are often required – so sharing resources, volunteers, and even a digital library just makes sense.

We need a core organization like NEKLS for libraries, an entity unto themselves but they give us advice, help with grants, resources.

Every generation seems to have an influx of interest in history at a certain point. The challenge is getting people to care before they lose something – to see how history connects to going forward.

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area Strengths

- **Federal Affiliation, Nonprofit Flexibility:** FFNHA (Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area) is a federally affiliated National Heritage Area, recognized and approved by the U.S.

Congress, but it operates as a private nonprofit, allowing local autonomy and adaptability while maintaining NPS partnership benefits.

- **Strong Local Foundation:** Although FFNHA serves 41 counties across Kansas and Missouri, its offices are located in Douglas County and it was started by residents of Douglas County in the mid-2000s.
- **Professional Development Programming:** FFNHA offers its partner organizations professional development workshops, and symposia, as well as a grant program through which they can seek funding.
- **Educational Impact:** FFNHA's longstanding "Bus on Us" field trip grant program has been popular for K-12 schools across the region, and new online educational materials for teachers are helping to support in-class learning.
- **Collaborative Leadership and Stability:** FFNHA's board of approximately 20 members has helped to get the new (as of 2022) Executive Director in place and has a clear transition plan for a new Chair starting in 2026.

Challenges

- **Funding Dependence and Restrictions:** FFNHA has limited ability to use its federal funds for lobbying or fundraising and relies on its member organizations to support those activities.
- **Uneven Engagement:** While FFNHA makes every effort to be equitable, different FFNHA member organizations have different abilities to participate in FFNHA professional development and grant programs due to differences in infrastructure and administrative resources.
- **Unclear Communications:** FFNHA's communication with DCHIP members is sometimes considered unclear, especially when it comes to the legal and financial relationship between FFNHA and Douglas County.

Organizational Opportunities

- **Funding Diversification:** The recent hold on FFNHA's federal funding and the potential for future federal funding cuts have inspired FFNHA to apply for more grants from private foundations and to seek out corporate partnerships.
- **Refocusing Post-COVID:** FFNHA has a chance to reimagine some of its programming and practices in the wake of COVID and a major executive leadership transition.
- **Regional Collaboration:** There is great partnership potential among the 41 counties that FFNHA represents, and there are lots of opportunities for FFNHA member organizations to co-market tourism, heritage travel, and education initiatives.

Partnership Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Plan:** FFNHA is supportive of DCHP strategic planning, but its capacity to support depends on its receipt of federal funding in 2026.
- **Collective Fundraising:** FFNHA could collaborate with DCHP to apply for major private foundation grants and corporate sponsorships.
- **Shared Contractors:** FFNHA has experience providing professional development for historical societies and could assist with specialized professional development opportunities to be shared across the DCHP.
- **Shared Digital Resources:** FFNHA already provides many shared digital resources and could provide DCHP lessons learned from cross-organizational web-based collaborations.
- **Collaborative Programming:** FFNHA could incentivize collaborative programming by making collaboration a criterion for evaluation of its grant opportunities.
- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** FFNHA is supportive of creating welcoming spaces across the 41 counties it serves and could support additional professional development for its members related to building audiences and supporting staff.

Representative Feedback

Douglas County is the only one of the 41 counties that gives FFNHA money — and that works and is fine. They're the most well organized of the counties.

[FFNHA] programs include professional development for our museum partners and public programming.

Although [Douglas] County support is growing, political dynamics, especially around Freedom's Frontier, create friction, and stakeholders seek clarity on the equitable distribution of resources.

I have no idea what [FFNHA] does. I get their email announcements, and basically it looks like a calendar. And some of the things on the calendar have really nothing to do with history.

[FFNHA] doesn't do the same thing that any of the [other] heritage partners do. They don't have a historic site to run. They're a large regional organization; they just happen to be headquartered in Lawrence. Douglas County provides additional support to them by passing heritage money through them, so that they can reach the match they're required to have to qualify for their federal funds.

Heritage Conservation Council (HCC)

Strengths

- **Diverse Expertise:** The HCC board is made up of a wide array of historians, archaeologists, architects, environmentalists, giving the organization a well-rounded perspective on preservation issues.
- **Funding Role:** The HCC is a valued, local funder that is proud to contribute to meaningful projects.
- **Supportive Leadership:** Kaitlyn Ammerlaan is universally praised for professionalism, organization, and as a key liaison to the county and heritage groups.
- **Impactful Projects:** HCC's most impactful projects include archaeology surveys, preservation conferences, Barn Fest, town surveys, and natural history projects throughout Douglas County.
- **Efforts Toward Equity:** HCC intentionally provides support for diverse projects and perspectives.

Challenges

- **Recruitment Issues:** HCC has had difficulty finding and retaining qualified, diverse, and geographically representative board members.
- **Limited Funds, Growing Demand:** HCC's funding hasn't kept pace with increased community interest and Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant application volume.
- **Public Awareness Gap:** Many Douglas County residents are unaware of HCC's role or of their own eligibility to apply for HCC funding.
- **Perceived Power Imbalance:** Because they are aligned with the County and control the Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant funds, HCC is often viewed as more powerful than they actually are by other organizations, and tension around funding distribution sometimes arises.
- **Outdated Perceptions:** Community organizations sometimes have the perception that HCC only funds historical building projects, which is not true/no longer true—there is an ongoing need to shift this narrative.
- **Volunteer Capacity:** Time constraints impact the all-volunteer board's engagement and project follow-through.

Organizational Opportunities

- **Broaden Outreach:** Engage underrepresented communities and organizations through direct email, focused meetings, etc., (e.g., Haskell Cultural Center, Lawrence PRIDE, NAACP, Juneteenth). Be sure to include organizations and communities from across all geographic regions of the County—not just Lawrence.
- **Support More Collaborative Projects:** Encourage heritage groups to unite around big initiatives and apply as partners or consortia to increase their likelihood of receiving HCC funding.

- **Use Models:** Projects like Haskell’s collection digitization could serve as a model for other digitization projects supported by HCC.
- **Clarify Roles and Eligibility:** Try to shift from what is perceived as “grandfathered” funding toward a more open, competitive, and equitable distribution of Natural and Cultural Heritage grant funds.

Partnership Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Plan:** HCC is well-positioned to help coordinate a shared high-level strategic plan for the DCHP with an eye towards cost-savings and efficiency.
- **Collective Fundraising:** HCC could help lead DCHP advocacy at the state level while continuing to support equitable requests for funding from the County in support of joint DCHP infrastructure/projects.
- **Shared Digital Resources:** HCC would be an ideal host of a shared DCHP website and events calendar.
- **Shared Contractors:** HCC could help coordinate shared contract services for DCHP.
- **Shared Volunteer Base:** HCC could again help host a website where a shared volunteer database could be stored behind a password-protected wall.
- **Collaborative Programming:** HCC can incentivize collaborative programming by making collaboration a criterion for evaluation of Natural and Cultural Heritage grant applications.
- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** HCC can continue supporting this work by reaching out to underrepresented communities directly and asking for their input on infrastructure, programming, and next steps. Additionally, HCC can make an organization’s diverse staff and board members, accessible programming, and equitable treatment of underrepresented communities all key criteria for evaluation of Natural and Cultural Heritage grant applications.

Representative Feedback

Kaitlyn makes the process coherent, helps us make informed decisions, and keeps us moving in the right direction.

Recruiting is hard. People have to find it meaningful and have time to volunteer. Retention is a worry.

A huge percentage of the county doesn’t know we exist. We need more advertising and outreach, especially for small projects.

If they actually did work together, it would make more coherence when they’re writing grants—some have strengths, some don’t.

We can’t even ask how to organize differently until we dive into the systemic issue of who’s at the table and who’s not.

Lecompton Historical Society (LHS)

Strengths

- **Bold and Honest Storytelling:** LHS provides an unbiased presentation of both sides of contentious history (e.g., Bleeding Kansas, slavery, women's rights).
- **National Relevance:** LHS attracts visitors from across the U.S. and abroad, and has been recognized in national TV series and history programs.
- **Strong Volunteer Base:** LHS's volunteer base has nearly 600 members, and the organization benefits from over 4,000 volunteer hours annually.
- **Community Hub:** LHS acts as a de facto chamber of commerce; central to Lecompton's civic and economic identity.
- **Successful Programming:** LHS regularly hosts popular events, including the Christmas Tree Festival, Bleeding Kansas reenactments, school field trips, etc.
- **Broad Reach:** LHS promotes its programs through TV, travel guides, newsletters, and a strong social media presence.
- **Leadership:** LHS has a highly committed board of directors and passionate group of volunteers, with the Board President and Staff Member focused on communications and grants being especially recognized.

Challenges

- **Limited Space:** LHS does not have the spaces it needs for its collections and programs—a capital campaign to expand facilities is being considered.
- **Lack of Recognition:** LHS often feels overlooked by Douglas County entities and Lawrence institutions.
- **Perception Issues:** LHS fears that avoidance of the town's pro-slavery history may deter engagement.
- **Youth Engagement:** LHS has had difficulty attracting younger generations and local schools (notably, the Perry-Lecompton school district) to its site.
- **Autonomy Concerns:** LHS is proud of its independence and resistant to outside control or bureaucratic oversight, which can make partnership challenging at times.
- **Cultural and Political Sensitivity:** LHS strives to promote a historically accurate but uncomfortable narrative—a task which is increasingly challenging in the current political moment.

Organizational Opportunities

- **Tourism Potential:** LHS recognizes the potential to connect to broader heritage tourism circuits (e.g., national bus tours including Lecompton, Black Jack, Underground Railroad).

- **Marketing Support:** LHS is interested in a shared marketing contractor who would be collaboratively hired but would assist each DCHP organization individually.
- **Advocate to the State:** LHS's story will attract visitors to Kansas—a more robust partnership with Kansas tourism will help spread the word about LHS's unique holdings and bring in more tourists to Douglas County.

Partnership Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Plan:** LHS is concerned about the bureaucracy and value of creating a shared strategic plan between DCHP members.
- **Collective Fundraising:** LHS is concerned about the equitable distribution of both the work of fundraising and the funds raised if DCHP were to engage in a collaborative fundraising effort.
- **Shared Digital Resources:** LHS supports a shared DCHP website and calendar.
- **Shared Contractors:** LHS is interested in a shared, contract-based communications/marketing position.
- **Shared Volunteer Base:** LHS does not think a shared volunteer base would be useful due its different building location and unique needs.
- **Collaborative Programming:** LHS is wary of this due to its geographic distance from the other DCHP members and some of its past experiences with programming partnerships.
- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** LHS's history might make it a controversial space for this work, but this is also why DEI programming and initiatives could be particularly powerful here.

Representative Feedback

We're not a small-town museum: we have national impact. We tell the true story, not the polished one, and people come here because they know they'll hear both sides of Kansas's history.

We don't have enough room to tell our story. We need a new building to show how Lecompton fits into the bigger picture of American history. Right now, we're bursting at the seams.

There's a real chance to draw national bus tours. Lecompton, Lawrence, the Underground Railroad, Black Jack— we could connect those dots if the emphasis on heritage tourism came back.

Our stories are totally different, but collectively they're what happened. We're open to trying new things together (like marketing support), but not to another layer of bureaucracy telling us how to tell our story.

People are scared to be associated with what it really was because of racism. But just because it used to be that way doesn't mean it's like that now – learn from it!

Santa Fe Trail Historical Society (SFTHS)

Strengths

- **Deep Historical Knowledge:** SFTHS has impressive attention to historical detail and takes pride in preserving local history.
- **Strong Volunteer Base:** SFTHS runs on a passionate and enthusiastic group of volunteers and is very dependent on its executive board members.
- **Community-Engaged:** SFTHS is actively involved in the community through events, cleanup efforts, and school engagement.
- **Robust Partnerships:** SFTHS has strong collaborations with the Baldwin City Library, the Lumberyard Arts Center, and Baker University.
- **Growing Digital Foot Print:** SFTHS has an improved digital presence with a well-done new website.
- **Increasing Membership:** SFTHS has seen membership growth, with younger, more active members joining in recent years.

Challenges

- **Limited Public Awareness:** Fewer people know about SFTHS than should; there is a need for a stronger public presence and more marketing.
- **Aging Leadership and Volunteers:** In addition to the need to attract younger audiences, there is concern over knowledge transfer and succession.
- **Workload, Burnout, and Succession Planning:** SFTHS is one of two DCHP members with an all volunteer staff. Leadership is concentrated among a few seasoned individuals, and while the organization is working to pull more volunteers in so that the burden can be shared, succession planning is a concern.
- **Hidden Collections and Sites:** SFTHS's information and resources are "buried" rather than prominent in city or tourism channels, even though this organization manages multiple major historic sites.
- **No Permanent Location:** The lack of a permanent physical location for SFTHS hampers public visibility.

Organizational Opportunities

- **More School Ties:** Leverage partnerships with Baker University and local schools, especially for Kansas History education.
- **Increase Visibility through Partnerships:** Increase historic tourism through increased City, County, and State promotion, and partner on already popular events like Maple Leaf Festival.
- **Establish a Place:** SFTHS needs a place it can call its own and where people know they can connect with SFTHS staff—whether digital or physical. The new website is a step in the right direction, but consistency is key.

Partnership Opportunities

- **Collaborative Strategic Plan:** SFTHS favors a shared high-level vision over a unified plan; each group keeps its own detailed plan.
- **Collective Fundraising:** SFTHS supports DCHP learning from each other's fundraising efforts and pushing for more equitable distribution of County funds.
- **Shared Digital Resources:** SFTHS supports a shared DCHP website and calendar.
- **Shared Contractors:** SFTHS is interested in a centralized communications/marketing position.
- **Shared Volunteer Base:** SFTHS supports a shared volunteer base but believes it would need dedicated management and training—this work is a potential internship opportunity.
- **Collaborative Programming:** SFTHS supports collaborative programming with specific interest in a joint fundraising event via Douglas County Community Foundation.
- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** SFTHS is very supportive of continued work in this area, with a specific focus on accessibility – including developing wheelchair-accessible trails and providing transportation during events.

Representative Feedback

This chapter is one of the most active in the national association – membership has skyrocketed, the website looks phenomenal, and there's real pride in caring for this history. You can feel the enthusiasm in everything they do.

The work they're doing is incredible, but too quiet. Unless you already know about it, you might drive right past Baldwin and never realize this is where the best ruts on the Trail are.

These are historic assets – the city should see that this isn't just preservation, it's economic development. The Trail could be front and center on the city website, on tours during Maple Leaf, even in Travel Kansas.

We absolutely see value in working together, but it needs a dedicated person. A communications or heritage coordinator who can cross-promote, manage social media, and make sure all the groups get seen.

If we can keep young people hearing about it, through school, Baker, local events, then when they have time later in life, they'll step up. That's how you keep this kind of history alive.