

Creating Public History Master Programs: International Guidelines

Co-Authors: [Thomas Cauvin](#) (University of Luxembourg), [Maria Montt](#) (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile), [Will Stoutamire](#) (University of Nebraska Kearney, USA)

Contributors: Clément Bur (INU Champollion, France), Christine Gundermann (University of Cologne, Germany), Enrica Salvatori (University of Pisa, Italy), Machteld Venken (University of Luxembourg), Tanya Evans (Macquarie University, Australia), Cath Feely (University of Derby, United Kingdom), Sophie Vohra (National Railway Museum & University of York, United Kingdom), Alison Atkinson-Phillips (Newcastle University, United Kingdom), Rebecca S. Wingo (University of Cincinnati, USA), Corin Sweeny Deinhart (Università degli studi di Firenze, Italy)

Why do we need guidelines?

Universities create new public history Master's programs every year. Public history university programs first emerged in the United States (the first public history program was launched at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1976). Public history Master's programs are now established throughout the world (See the IFPH's [map of public history programs](#)) and the number of programs keeps growing. At the same time, creating a new program can be overwhelming and challenging. Indeed, while Public History belongs to the overall historical discipline, it bears some crucial specificity regarding its practices and training.

In 2015, the National Council on Public History in the United States published useful best practices for "[Establishing and Developing a Public History Program](#)." However, the field has rapidly changed in the past few years and numerous programs are emerging outside the United States. Although public history programs were successfully integrated into university systems in the United States, the same practices do not necessarily translate to other countries and contexts. In response to [International Federation for Public History](#) (IFPH) members and partnering universities' needs for a set of teaching and training guidelines to be adapted to a range of international contexts, a [Curriculum and Training committee](#) was launched in 2021. Composed of IFPH members from a variety of national contexts and public history backgrounds, the Committee was tasked with leading practitioner discussions and drafting a new set of model practices to reference when creating Master's level public history programs.

More than 40 participants from all over the world took part in our online discussions. What started as a basic forum for ideas and questions evolved into more structured collaborative writing sessions. With the range and variations of national circumstances, university requirements, departmental objectives, and available resources, there can be no one-size-fits-all set of guidelines.

Rather, this reference intends to offer ideas and suggestions, which may be applied, adapted, and modified according to national, local, and university contexts. Having said that, we strongly believe that these steps can help colleagues (faculty and administrators) around the globe launch discussions on the need and demand for a Master's in Public History program at their institution.

We are aware that each process and institution is unique. As such, this document presents different components for the creation of a public history program, identifies stages and processes, and proposes general guidelines with the aim of offering guidance in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of Master's programs in public history.

While the document is currently only available in English, we hope to have versions of this document in other languages in the near future.

EARLY STAGES

PAVING THE WAY FOR A SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM

1) Team building: Whom to work with?

Creating a public history program is a collaborative team effort. There are many ways to engage in **team building**, which are approachable from different angles. Within your University, you can identify colleagues in your department who practice, teach, or are interested in public history. Team members include colleagues **in related fields** (Anthropology, Communication, Cultural Heritage, Historic Preservation, Media Studies, Museum Studies, among others), as well as centers and institutes, and in-house institutions (libraries, museums, archives, media centers). Colleagues with previous experience in local partnerships are especially useful.

The inclusion from the outset of **representatives of non-academic lay public groups and institutions from the outset**, such as museums and historical organizations, helps strengthen partnerships and collaboration. The team may also at some point include **student or alumni representatives**. The point at which to involve students shall depend on the internal regulations and structures of your institution. Forming networks with other public history programs (within the country and/or abroad) is a strategy that encourages collaboration, the exchange of ideas and experiences, and is an opportunity for the new program to showcase the broader, international significance of the initiative. Team building involves formal and informal conversations. It is very worthwhile to keep records of any these meetings - notes on when, who, and why you met may prove useful in the future steps of the process.

2) Identify existing programs

Identifying and making use of existing resources are critical steps in creating a new public history program. While the University may not yet have a public history program or concentration, there may be **other courses, programs, or initiatives** that cover related fields (cultural heritage, museums, communication and media studies, etc.) and engage with public partners and

communities. Encourage representatives of these courses/programs to participate by either joining the team or offering suggestions and feedback. These programs may already have a list of possible community partners.

When devising a program, other existing public history programs (in your state, region, and country), need to be identified and compared to your proposed program (how similar/different are they). The team should explore whether, and to what extent, the proposed program would compete with neighboring institutions for a limited number of students. Mapping and listing local sites and institutions can be useful. The International Federation for Public History provides an international [map](#) of public history courses and programs. The National Council on Public History also offers a very useful [list of programs](#). Recently, a similar map for Italy was created by the Italian Association of Public History.

Sometimes, programs are not called “public history”, but bear similarities (applied history, cultural heritage, public archaeology, history communication, among others). You will need to explain how your program differs from or complements existing ones. In some contexts (for example in the United Kingdom), one key question is to distinguish public history from heritage studies, museum studies, tourism, or cultural management while recognizing the overlaps. In other countries (for instance in Poland and Germany), it is important to situate your public history program in comparison with history didactics. Making the case for your program’s distinctiveness will be crucial in persuading the university about its viability and sustainability.

Also, consider the potential benefits that a public history course would have for the University - skills, publicity, connecting with groups etc. It can be very helpful to contact well-established regional, national, or international programs for advice and reviews. This is important because proposals will likely have to explain their “uniqueness” to the university administration.

3) Identify Needs and Demands

Before developing a proposal, the team should familiarise themselves with the overall **university process for creating new programs**. What are the administrative steps and persons to contact for the process? What documents, materials, and questions might be requested at different stages of the proposals? When is it possible/recommended to contact the university administration regarding the proposal and preliminary feedback? It may be worth consulting a previously successful proposal to have a better idea of what the process entails - specific language, categories, arguments, challenges. The team should also be aware that specific national rules, regulations, and agendas for creating new university programs may exist.

Justifying the creation of a new public history program requires presenting needs and demands from a variety of perspectives. The team should think about why a new program is necessary and **what purposes it would serve**. Evaluators and reviewers of the proposal will certainly look at evidence of student demand, potential collaborative partners, and job and career opportunities. This step is particularly critical in the context of university budget restrictions and the decrease (in some countries) of the number of students in history departments. In Italy, the

[Italian Association for Public History](#) created a national working group to argue and push for more specific university training and courses. This action led to the development of a cross-university movement. Proposals can therefore become part of a broader national development.

Drafting a preliminary mission or set of goals for your public history program is of paramount importance. A working **definition of public history** can help frame the program, explain the projects, and attract partners and students. It is very important to be prepared to define public history - how it relates to and differs from “traditional” history training - from its roots to present international networks and developments. However, public history can mean different things in different places and to different people. It is worth having a look at how some Public History associations and programs define the field (for example in [India](#), [Germany](#), [Canada](#), or [Australia](#)). Consulting colleagues from peer institutions is also useful for identifying possible curriculum, structures, requirements, recruiting policies, and career opportunities.

During this phase, it is also a good idea to organize focus groups and meetings, as well as surveys with local community groups, institutional partners, and potential employers. Focus groups might consist of colleagues, community partners, students and/or alumni who have found work in public history careers. Partners could include corporations, government institutions, museums and other institutions of culture, social organizations, tourism offices, etc. Focus groups can help identify **potential collaborative projects and opportunities for internships**. Community and institutional partners can help identify career-based expectations for student training. In the case of the University of Wrocław (Poland), partners also helped develop some courses, which they now co-teach. In some cases, partners may be asked to write **letters of support or letters of intention** for the program proposal, indicating that they have and/or will collaborate with and support the program and its students. These letters can help demonstrate the need and demand for your program to university administrators. The National Council on Public History recently published a [survey](#) of what employers consider the most desirable skills for public history professionals. Developing a program around local community and institutional partnerships may also align with growing university interest in community service and civically engaged scholarship (also called “[third mission](#)” in some European countries).

Current students and alumni bring valuable input regarding training needs and demands. Student input can help shape the program and potential course offerings. While you may have a sense of what type of program you would like to create, it is likely that your current students have their own perspective on gaps in their training. Current undergraduate students can share their perspectives on what is needed, what they would like to pursue, if there is a demand for special courses, *etc.* Alumni (especially those who now work in public history related fields) can reflect upon what additional courses and training they wish they would have had. Contacting and keeping alumni in the loop may also result in future internship opportunities.

4) What program to create?

Sketching a preliminary proposal can be done at different steps depending on your calendar, team, and university structure. The program sketch can answer basic questions regarding the type of program and training. Most programs require at least two years of training. Some programs propose a [Master of Public History](#), while others offer a Master of History with a concentration in Public History, such as this [Master of Arts in History, Public History Concentration](#). It may therefore be possible to add a concentration to an existing Master of History. Creating a separate Master of public history program may be more difficult in countries and contexts where public history is not (yet) established as an academic field of study and training. Teams should also discuss whether - and if so to what extent - the Master's program would include and accept online courses. Some programs have recently moved to fully online training (for example, this program at [The University of Derby](#), the [University of Limerick](#), [Universidad Nacional de Quilmes](#) (Argentina), and the [University of Nebraska at Kearney](#)). Although these online programs are in the minority among programs internationally, the question of online training has gained even more relevance during the pandemic.

Regarding the contents, some Master's programs propose a generalist and broad approach while others focus on certain areas. For example, the Master's program at [University Paris-East Creteil](#) (France) offers quite a generalist training while New York University (USA) hosts a more specialized [Archives and Public History Master's program](#). Similarly, the Master's program at Colorado State University (USA) offers a specialization in [public history and historic preservation](#).

This choice also depends on who the target audience is and what types of careers are available for students in your area. Choosing between generalist and specialized fields also depends very much on the existing department/university interest and expertise. Some departments start with single courses or seminars in public history in order to both communicate what public history is and to evaluate students' and colleagues' interest in the field. Other departments will start by creating an undergraduate certificate or concentration.

The proposal process requires you to think ahead about possible types of courses as well as who would teach them. Existing courses that relate to public history (oral history, digital history) or related topics (memories, monuments, films) can be identified in the curriculum. Would a new program require additional hires, guest instructors, and new administrative positions (internship coordinator)? Would the program offer student (teaching) assistantships and/or fellowships? Those questions would likely be asked when presenting the proposal to the department and administration.

5) Testing and preparing the ground: Socializing (in and out)

A central aspect for the creation of Public History programs is the need to advertise, communicate, and discuss public history with colleagues, students, partners, communities, and members of the public. Dialogue with local, regional, national, and international scholars, communities, and institutions is important for developing a successful and effective program.

A) Events

Organizing lecture series or workshops on public history can help spread awareness of the field and promote practices, activities, and opportunities. [Some universities](#) have brought experienced public history practitioners (both academics and those working in the field; local and international) in for public discussions, lectures, or seminars. [Workshops](#) at/with local partners and institutions on doing history in/with the public can also foster interest. These events can be open to current students and alumni who are working in the field. Such events create interest, a demand and can be the basis for future collaboration in/for courses and projects. These events are also opportunities for networking with staff and colleagues from other institutions and departments.

B) Partnerships

Developing partnerships is essential to a sustainable public history program. Partners need to see the relationship with the program as reciprocal, where everyone involved can benefit. When establishing partnerships, it is important to understand how the collaboration would work (rather than thinking that the institution would “help” the community partner), promoting partnership and a sense of shared purpose behind the collaboration. Be aware that partners may have different aims, challenges, and restrictions (for example, autonomy when working with governmental institutions or the agendas of private associations). Partnerships contribute to socializing the program within and beyond the university, and to be in line with what is understood as a “partnership”, both by the institution and the partner. Some institutions have very rigid definitions and require a lot of paperwork, disincentivizing the participation of smaller community organizations. A way out of this problem is to find alternative forms of partnering with outside organizations, such as through agreements or memorandums of understanding. In this sense, a differentiation can be made regarding different types of collaboration. For example, a museum could be interested in hosting internships while some groups may be interested in specific projects (virtual exhibits for instance). Partnerships with governments, local authorities, and public institutions can be especially important in some countries. For this, one can consider the following:

- Other programs within the institution (e.g. Communication or Education)
- Public institutions
- Governments and local authorities
- Private companies or corporations (archiving)
- Museums, archives, and libraries
- National Parks and land management agencies
- Audio-visual production, radio, and TV broadcasts
- Tourism and heritage sites
- Organizations that do Public History as a tool for reconciliation (eg. [Historical Dialogue by GIZ](#))
- Small community-based organisations
- Online companies and associations (online internships developed greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic)

This process can also help students identify the types of institutions where they undertake internships. For example, big institutions, or institutions in major cities will have a different range

of partnership opportunities than regional institutions. Students might also do internationally-focused internships (for example, online collaborations on a specific program).

There are multiple formats in which these conversations or dialogues can develop: from one-to-one email communication to open seminars where members of the community are invited. Developing these relationships with local partners can be slow, and it should begin as soon as possible, and well before proposing the program. Keeping a list and mapping possible partners can be useful.

BUILD THE PROPOSAL

Your proposal must be as complete as possible. Its parts and contents depend very much on each institution and can therefore vary widely. However, some key issues and resources should be considered and planned for ahead of time.

6) Who is going to teach and run the program?

Not a single faculty member program: A public history program cannot be built by or rely on a single faculty member, especially one without a permanent contract. It is unreasonable to expect one individual to be able to teach courses in each subfield of public history, as well as manage internships, theses/projects, and the overall program. Programs should consist of several faculty, instructors, and partners. The wider their expertise and experiences the better, so that the program can propose a variety of perspectives and practices.

Coordinator: One of these members can serve as the program director or coordinator - the exact title may depend upon your institution. That person is the central point of contact for prospective students, university and community partners, and others who would like to inquire about the program. Having a dedicated coordinator can increase student enrollment and retention, as well as accelerate completion of the program. As public history programs often include mandatory internships, an internship coordinator is especially relevant. If the management of internships is also part of the duties of the program coordinator, it should be clearly evaluated as part of their workload - finding, managing, and preserving internship opportunities takes lots of time.

Recruiting students: Who are the targeted students for the program? What will the rules of admission be? Is a Bachelor and Diploma in History necessary or are other diplomas (which ones) accepted too? Is experience in public history (professionals currently working in the field) a key criteria? Can part-time students (professionals from the field) apply and enter the program? Could students attend the program remotely (if an online Master's program)?

Instructors: It is crucial to establish a list of possible instructors and the courses they can offer. It is also important to guarantee that specific public history courses would be available on a regular basis. Depending on the university and department policy, instructors from other departments may also teach courses in the program. Additionally, public history practitioners

(especially those from cultural institutions like archivists and curators) can serve as additional instructors. Establishing and contacting a list of possible visiting public history scholars can also be extremely useful. The creation of the program may require/justify future hires. Continuous evaluation of teaching workload, as well as existing and possible new courses, is central for the sustainability of the program.

Tenure and Promotion: It is critical that public history work, activities, and scholarship - including internship supervision, projects, outreach, grant applications, etc. - be recognized as part of faculty annual evaluation and promotion. The National Council on Public History offers a very useful [report](#) and a [White Paper](#) on Tenure and Promotion in Public History.

7) Courses and Curricula

Setting up a solid and sustainable public history curriculum is fundamental. Lists of courses depend on the objectives and resources of the program and university. They also depend on the instructors and their expertise. However some key requirements should be considered. One of the most challenging aspects is to guarantee and provide solid historical research methodology training as well as public history skills, practices, and theories. While some two-year programs propose research practice and methodology during the first year and focus on public skills and practices in the second year, most programs combine theoretical, methodological, and practical courses.

Most programs propose mandatory *Introduction to Public History* courses. Some programs offer thematic tracks (for instance digital public history, museums, or historic preservation) while others instead propose a more generalist approach to public history. There exist a vast variety of possible public history courses: they include but are not limited to *Public History Theory and Methodology*, *Local and Community History*, *Digital History*, *Oral History*, *Audiovisual production*, *Podcasting*, *Archival Methods*, *Collection Management*, *Historic Preservation*, *Heritage Management*, *Family History*, *Memories and Commemorations*, *Monuments*, *Difficult Pasts*, etc. Optional courses from other departments may appear as useful additions to the curriculum (it is very important to ensure those electives are offered on a regular basis in order to be included in the curriculum). Additional training (workshops) can be provided on other public history skills like, for instance, *Fundraising and Grant Application*, *Copyright*, *Project Management*, *Ethics*, etc.

More and more programs propose international collaborations, as well. This can take the shape of a course (or section) on international public history, online synchronous discussions with programs from other countries, student projects, exchanges, study abroad opportunities, or internships. International Relation Services at your university may provide assistance in finding, contacting, and working with international partners. You can also use the IFPH [map](#) to find and contact other programs. See these examples of international [agreements](#).

8) Internships and Final Evaluation

Internships provide substantive, hands-on experience in public history. They rely upon local and regional partnerships and are critical for future employment opportunities for your students. Internships should be carefully designed in collaboration with host institutions. Successful internships need to have clear objectives and regular monitoring, which should be planned out in advance and in dialogue with the hosting institution and student. Most public history programs require a Memorandum of Agreement with the student and the hosting institution. The [International Federation for Public History](#) and the [National Council on Public History](#) provide resources and model practices. There is now a [general agreement](#) at the National Council on Public History that internships should be paid (this contributes, among others things, to motivation on both sides of the internship, as well as ownership over the work) but this can be difficult to achieve in some contexts and countries.

Defining how progress and learning are to be evaluated in the program is critical. Programs should clarify what forms of assessment and final products are required. Many programs now offer project-oriented courses, sometimes in partnership with local, regional, or national communities and institutions. How to evaluate projects must be clarified. Regarding final evaluation, some programs ask for bibliographical essays on (public) history, but many programs require either a Master's thesis/dissertation, and/or a public history project. Other programs require students to build and present a digital portfolio that lists their public history activities. Public history projects are varied, and may include archival finding aids, short documentary films, guided tours, podcasts, and virtual exhibitions. If available, the choice for the final evaluation may also depend on what the student plans to do after graduation (proceed in academic programs (PhD), gain a teaching certification, work in public history institutions (museums, archives), work in consulting, etc). Programs should consider customizing their final evaluation of student achievement to student's goals and needs.

9) Budget and resources

Developing public history programs requires resources and equipment. Those resources vary according to the specific tracks, courses, and projects. For instance, courses and projects in digital public history require access to computer equipment, software, and potentiality ICT training and support.

Resources may include:

- **Hardware and Software:** Students may need access to computers, the internet, microphones, scanners, etc., as well as specialized software (editing, online repositories, digital storage and webpages, etc.).
- **Space:** Consider creating a laboratory or [space](#) for digital history, oral history, etc. When working on community projects, it is good to have a secured space where students can work with different types of material and software. Libraries should provide access to bibliographical resources, Public History journals, and archival repositories.

- Budget: A specific budget may be required for hiring temporary assistants, organizing public history events (conferences, workshops), and field trips. Designing public history projects may also require specific funding (exhibition design, print, and publication).
- Assistantships: Some Master's programs offer assistantships and/or grants to their students. Others offer free tuition to their students. Funding for those assistantships must be considered and planned in the overall budget. Ideally, public history graduate assistants should be tasked with projects that will build their resumes for a career in public history.

10) After Creation: Short and long term program evaluations

Sustainable programs require constant organization, self-reflection, and evaluations of successes and challenges. Proposals should include and plan for regular internal and external reviews and evaluations. There may exist optional and mandatory evaluations at the university level (and sometimes at national levels) that programs need to follow.

Programs can have plans for periodic self-evaluation of both courses and structure. While evaluations can take place every five years or so, it is good practice to schedule a first evaluation at the end of the first year of existence and one at the graduation of the first cohort of students. Evaluations should consider course contents, internships, student projects, collaborations with partners, careers and job opportunities, and feedback from students, instructors, and partners. Again, it is crucial to stay in contact with alumni of the program (for the purpose of evaluation as much as for building networks of public history practitioners). Evaluation need not be an onerous process, but should include meetings and/or discussions with students, alumni, faculty, and employers to assess the current state of the program.

Comment:

Feel free to use the comment section (below) to share your feedback, add additional resources, or simply comment on the document.

Contact:

Feel free to contact the [Curriculum and Training Committee](#) for more details. You can send us an email at pubhisint@gmail.com

We can also provide help to review program proposals at any stage.

Relevant links

- [Electronic Library of Public History](#), Italian and English
- [Historia Pública](#), Spanish
- [Associazione Italiana di Public History](#)
- [National Council on Public History \(NCPH\)](#), English

- [International Federation for Public History \(IFPH\)](#), English