

COSMA Summit

Feature Speaker: Perceptions of Neutrality

Helping State Museum Associations Navigate Shifting Perceptions of “Neutral”



By Susie Wilkening, Principal, Wilkening Consulting, Seattle

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8:00am AKST/ 9:00am PST/ 10:00am MST/ 11:00am CST/ 12:00pm EST

Over the past few years, many museum sector professionals have rallied around the idea that museums are not neutral. But what happens when audiences disagree? Or when one audience segment’s “neutral” is viewed as a political opinion by another?

And how do our individual values, attitudes, and beliefs shape our views of “neutral?”

Susie Wilkening will delve into her extensive experience in researching the role of museums in American society to explore with COSMA the perceptions of neutrality. Designed to help state museum associations prepare to serve the museums in their states as they grapple with the inevitable controversy, her talk will consider neutrality from multiple angles, including audiences; museum sector professionals; and the media. This talk will take place live over zoom as part of the COSMA Summit.

About Susie Wilkening

Susie Wilkening (she/her) has over 20 years of experience in museums, including 15 years leading custom projects for museums as well as fielding groundbreaking national research on the role of museums in American society.

Susie enjoys sharing her findings at various annual meetings, including the American Alliance of Museums, American Association of State and Local History, Association of Science-Technology Centers, Association of Children’s Museums, and state and regional museum meetings.

Susie is a go-to expert on museums for the media, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Fast Company, NPR, and others. Additionally, she is the author of *Audiences and Inclusion: A Primer for Cultivating More Inclusive Attitudes Among the Public* and is the primary author of *Life Stages of the Museum Visitor*. Susie earned a BS in History, Technology, and Society from Georgia Tech and an MA from the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture at the University of Delaware.