Course Description
Introduction to Sites of Conscience:
Addressing Social Issues at Heritage Sites and Making the Past Matter

This course will introduce participants to the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a worldwide network of heritage sites specifically dedicated to remembering past struggles for justice and addressing their contemporary legacies. Led by 17 Accredited Sites of Conscience and including more than 250 members in 45 countries, Coalition member sites share a common commitment to:

- interpret history through historic sites;
- engage in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues;
- promote humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function; and
- share opportunities for public involvement in issues raised at their site.

Opening dialogue about the complexities and contradictions of history is difficult and challenging work. This course will provide a forum for participants to share interests and problem-solving strategies in developing a deliberate and conscious effort to activate historic sites through innovative programming that brings people together across difference to reflect on the past.

This course uses the experiences of U.S.-based and international sites to foster conversation, exchange and collaboration among museum professionals in tackling the following:

- What are the goals and benefits of this approach?
- How do we demonstrate these benefits to our funders, colleagues and most importantly, our communities?
- How does widening our interpretation to include diverse perspectives allow us to more effectively present history to multiple audiences?
- How does dialogically based programming increase community engagement and institutional relevancy?
- What are the specific steps in creating ongoing dialogue initiatives?
- How do we evaluate the effectiveness of such programming?

Course Goals and Objectives

Using case studies and program models from member sites, the course will introduce participants to the best practices of institutions around the globe in addressing issues of pressing concern in their communities including religious conflict, cultural genocide, immigration and state violence. Through readings, exercises and discussion, course participants will analyze specific strategies developed and employed by Sites of Conscience to increase cultural relevancy and activate historical perspective through public dialogue on contemporary issues. Course participants will have the opportunity to connect with leaders in the Sites of Conscience movement around the globe, from such diverse sites as Memoria Abierta in Argentina to the Gulag Museum at Perm-36 in Russia to the District Six Museum in South Africa. Course participants will also be given access to the Coalition’s Online Forum, where the Coalition’s learning community exchanges proven program models across diverse international contexts. Participants will evaluate and critique the current interpretation at a heritage site of their choosing and propose a program model for use at the site which utilizes Sites of Conscience methodology and practice.