

Creating and maintaining intra-museum partnerships for a successful integrated pest management program

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Abstract

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An institution-wide approach is touted as best practice for IPM programs. In order to be fully successful, an institution-wide approach requires “buy-in,” assistance and support from staff who may not otherwise have a direct role in collections care. However, persuading and encouraging staff to modify their behavioral habits can be a challenging and difficult process. How can museums encourage all staff to identify themselves as stakeholders in the care of collections? The Lower East Side Tenement Museum employs several techniques of formal and informal training to educate and train all staff on the role they play in the efficacy of their institution’s IPM program. These techniques have resulted in the creation of successful partnerships between the Museum’s various departments and ultimately, improved collections care.

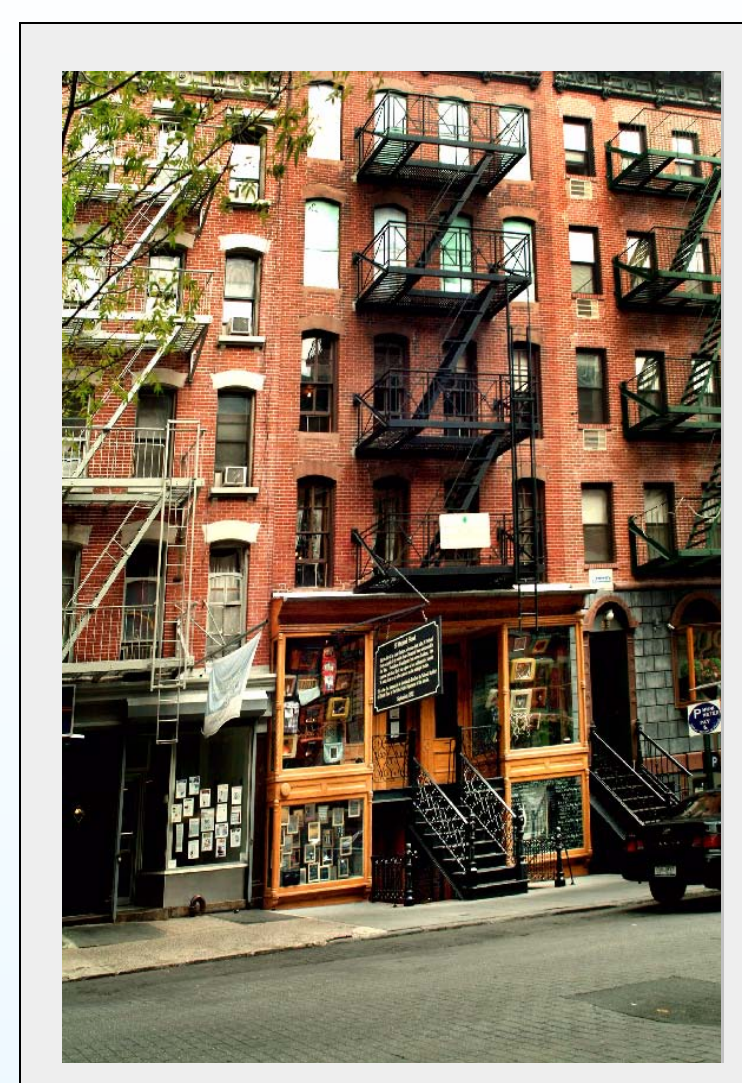
Introduction

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum’s mission is: **to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, a gateway to America.**

The Tenement Museum has assembled the nation’s first collection documenting the urban, immigrant/migrant, working class, poor and tenement experiences. This collection includes 139 linear feet of archival holdings and 8,126 historical and archaeological objects. All collections are housed in three tenement buildings that were constructed in the mid-nineteenth century and are located in our country’s most renowned immigrant neighborhood, the Lower East Side of New York City.

Eighty-eight full and part time staff, as well as 12 interns and volunteers, currently work on-site. A majority of staff give regular tours of the exhibits located in the landmarked tenement building the Museum interprets. The Museum’s archives are frequently used by staff in all departments.

In the Winter of 2004, the Museum drafted an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan outlining the procedures of the Museum’s IPM program. Because of the factors listed below, it was evident that in addition to physical controls, staff participation would be vital for the program to be effective¹:



All staff of the Tenement Museum give tours of the tenement building located at 97 Orchard Street. In 1998 the building was designated a National Historic Landmark. Photo Greg Scaffidi, Collection of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Prevention

- Exterior doors were being propped open, and staff were neglecting to install window screens when windows were being left open. Staff involvement was critical in limiting pest ingress.
- Staff were not properly storing and **disposing of food**.
- Staff were storing cardboard and other materials attractive to pests in areas near vulnerable collections and did not understand why **storage** areas for these items needed to be relocated.

Monitoring

- Sticky “blunder traps” used to monitor insect activity were being accidentally moved, discarded and damaged by staff.
- Because staff were not trained in the identification of pests and signs of their presence, they could not become active participants in the Museum’s monitoring program.

Strategies

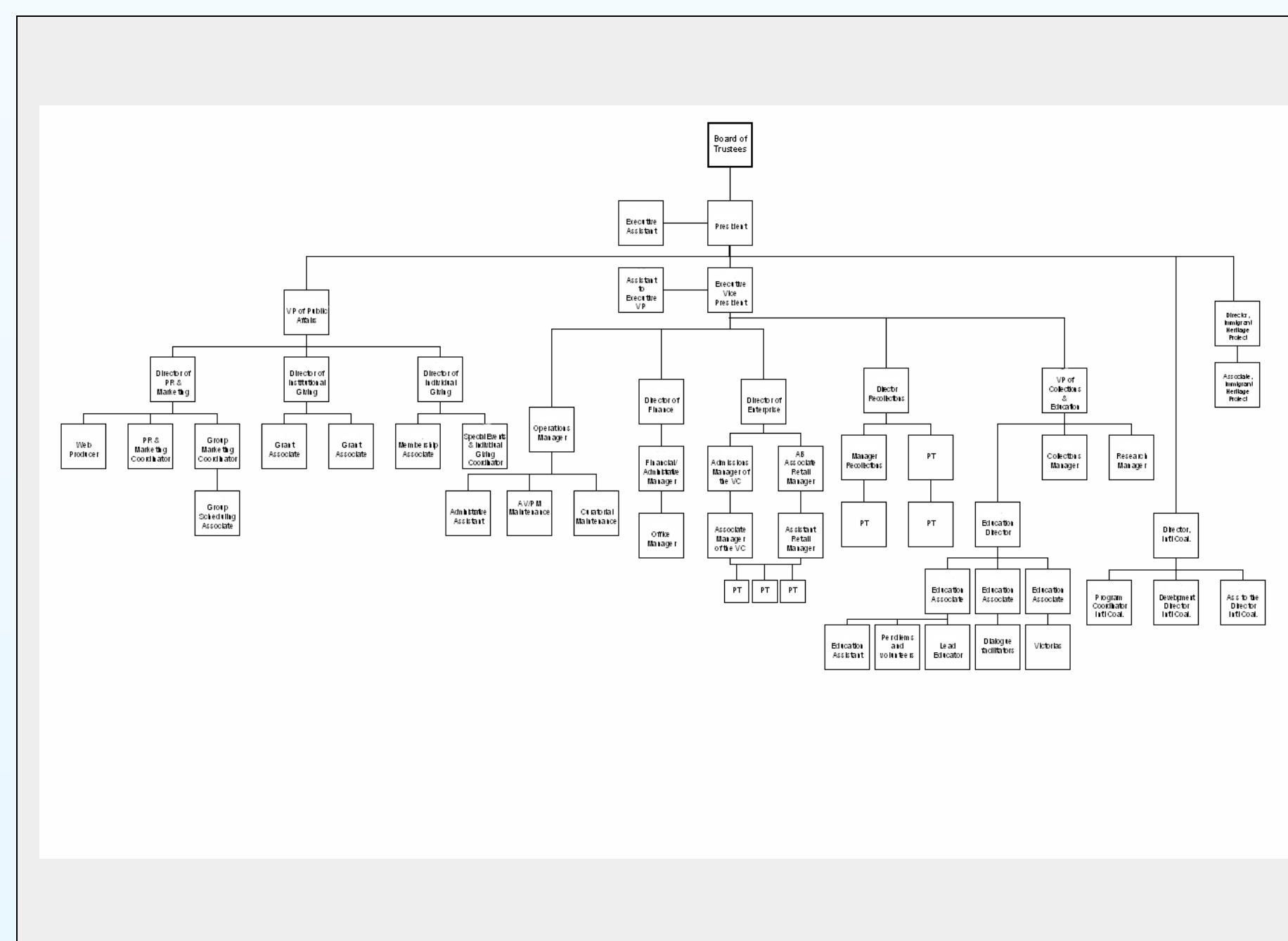
IPM Policy: The Museum’s policy is **documented in writing and applied consistently**. These factors reduce the policy’s likelihood to fail due to disregard².

IPM Procedures: The Museum’s pest management procedures are also **documented in writing and staff roles are clearly identified**. Staff can refer to this document when they have questions about their specific role in the museum’s IPM program.

Signage: Signs were placed in sensitive and particularly vulnerable areas. Signs serve as good **reminders** for staff, and **provide information** for researchers and other visitors in collections areas who may not have received formal training and/or may not be familiar with the institution’s procedures.

Reference Collection: The museum maintains a reference collection of pests, objects damaged by pests, and materials used in the IPM program. Staff are also encouraged to contribute to this collection as a way to participate in the program.

Organizational Chart for the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.



Formal Training: All Museum staff attended two hour-long staff meetings that focused on:

- The Museum’s pest management philosophy and approach
- Training staff to identify pests and signs of their presence

These meetings enabled staff to express any concerns they had about the Museum’s practices. For example, several staff members felt that the IPM program should be as humane as possible, and would not feel comfortable participating in a program that used glue traps for capturing rodents. Staff buy-in could only be achieved by addressing these concerns.

Informal Training: Informal training was provided for new staff, interns and others with regular access to collections areas who did not receive formal training. This training consisted of the same content as the formal training, but was delivered informally. For example, orientation meetings for new staff included IPM training. A benefit of the one-on-one training was that it focused on that staff member’s role in the IPM program.



Items from the permanent collection of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. From left to right: paper handbill found inside 97 Orchard Street advertising the palmistry business of Prof. Dora Meltzer; horseshoe unearthed during archaeological excavation of the rear yard of 97 Orchard Street; portrait of Joseph and Lilly Confino, former residents of 97 Orchard Street. All images from the collection of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Results

After participating in the Museum’s IPM training, staff interest and participation in the program increased. Staff became more diligent in reporting sightings of pests, keeping workspaces free of food and other pest attractants, and preventing pest ingress by using window screens and keeping doors closed. The monitoring program improved since traps were left undisturbed, and disturbed traps were reported to collections staff. As an unexpected result, some staff decided to practice IPM in their homes.



The Baldizzi Apartment Exhibit depicts the home of the Baldizzi family who emigrated to the United States from Italy and lived in 97 Orchard Street during the Great Depression. Photo Steve Brosnahan, Collection of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Conclusion

By definition, IPM programs require the participation and buy-in of all staff in order to be fully effective. Formal training, in the form of staff meetings, combined with a good IPM policy, clear IPM procedures, as well as some informal training, has proven successful at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Investing in the resources to train all staff in your pest management philosophy and procedures may not be practical depending on the size and organizational structure of your institution. However, comprehensive training of this scope should be considered since valuable partnerships with “non-collections” staff can result.

Literature Cited

1. Jessup, W.C. 1995 “Pest Management” Pp. 211-220 in *Storage of Natural History Collections: A Preventive Approach* V.1 (C.L. Rose, C.A. Hawks and H.H. Genoways. Eds.) Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections.
2. Williams, Stephen L. 2005. Policy Theory and Application for Museums. *Collection Forum* 19 (1-2): 32-44.

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