

# case study

museum + collaboration





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An initiative of jMUSE, **The Jewish Museums Project** is a web publication that explores how archives, libraries, and museums use their unique strengths and collections to spotlight Jewish history and culture, combat antisemitism, and create lasting change.

The Jewish Museums Project experiments with new ways to present important ideas and innovative content; supports the dissemination of knowledge; and works to ensure that Jewish museums and Holocaust museums can serve as the backbone of Jewish cultural engagement in communities around the world.

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American heritage institutions exist largely in isolation from one another, many facing the same challenges but struggling in silos. From collections management to fundraising, there is almost always something to be gained from sharing information across museums.

**Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM)** is one of those all-too-rare collaborations, an initiative which brings together Jewish institutions from all around the country. In its current iteration, **JAHM engages over 200 organizations from 47 states**. However, this national project took years to increase its scope and impact.

Examining the evolution of JAHM can shed light on the crucial processes and benefits involved in building institutional networks and fostering a more collaborative mindset among Jewish museum professionals. More generally, JAHM provides a framework for how U.S. history and heritage months could expand access and pool resources to engage new publics. See appendix for the calendar of U.S. history and heritage months.



Jewish American Heritage Month began as Jewish Heritage Week in 1980 with an official proclamation in which President Jimmy Carter noted the contributions and accomplishments of Jews throughout American history. The seeds for Jewish American Heritage Month were planted in May 2004 during the celebrations led by the [Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History](#), composed of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA), the American Jewish Historical Society of the Center for Jewish History (AJHS), the Library of Congress, and the National Archives and Records Administration.

Riding this momentum, a group of Jewish community leaders came together to advocate for Jewish American Heritage Month. Thanks to a bipartisan effort sponsored by the late Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL, 23rd district), with support from the Jewish Museum of Florida, President George W. Bush officially recognized May as Jewish American Heritage Month in 2006.

The following year, the JAHM Coalition was formed as a 501(c)3 and convened by the Jewish Federations of North America, the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the AJA, the Jewish Women's Archive (JWA), and AJHS. During the first decade of its existence, JAHM annual celebrations were organized around a theme, including “The American Jewish Experience” and “American Jews in Medical Research,” and “American Jewish Illustrators.”

While undoubtedly a significant achievement, JAHM lacked the resources needed to develop an effective national presence and struggled to produce programming that significantly engaged the public and American Jewish heritage organizations. *As recently as 2017,* JAHM operated on a budget of \$10,000, all sourced from individual donations, with no dedicated paid staff or institutional commitment to help coordinate national planning efforts. Though coalition members brought valuable resources in the form of historical materials from their collections, these annual commemorations failed to gain traction with broader audiences.

In 2018, JAHM found an institutional home base at the **Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History** in Philadelphia. In the Fall of 2019, the museum began working to reshape JAHM from the ground up, aiming to reach a national audience with innovative, useful resources aggregated from institutions and collections across the country.

Just a few months after the onset of the pandemic in 2020, JAHM succeeded in presenting a robust online slate of programs and launched an online hub for learning about Jewish American history and exploring the present-day American Jewish community. Pivoting to a strong online presence, JAHM forged ahead with **over 50 partner organizations**, reaching over 400,000 participants nationwide.

Too often, cultural centers treat each other as competitors rather than colleagues. However, these metrics point to the strengths of JAHM's vision and the leadership provided by the Weitzman Museum, as well as the extraordinary challenges that prompted institutions to band together. Jewish museums, like all museums, were forced by COVID-19 to shut their doors in 2020 and enforce strict admission policies throughout 2021.

Institutions faced a formidable uphill financial battle compounded by crisis: how to reimagine their missions and public purposes beyond physical collections and facilities, with the goal of serving audiences well beyond their physical structures.



Under these circumstances, national initiatives like JAHM presented opportunities for museums and other cultural centers to conduct this existential soul-searching together, with the flexibility of online programming and digital resources both serving as conduits for exploring meaningful connections across the Jewish American experience and facilitating dialogue with allied communities across the country.

For example, in May of 2021, reflecting on the tragedy of police brutality and the subsequent reinvigorated movements mobilized for racial justice, JAHM and its network organizations highlighted historic examples of Jewish Americans standing in solidarity with other minority communities and, in turn, how these communities stood up to defend Jews during waves of antisemitism.

That year, JAHM grew to include **over 80 partner institutions** and reached an audience of over 1 million, demonstrating the power of celebrating diversity and embracing a “more is more” approach to institutional partnership.

The Library of Congress is the government entity responsible for hosting heritage month websites, including Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Italian-American Heritage Month, and Hispanic Heritage Month. JAHM's .gov website contains valuable resources, including online exhibitions and teacher lesson plans with much of the .gov website content focused on World War II, the Holocaust, and the founding of the State of Israel.

By focusing on those specific historical moments, the .gov website remains light on details about the contributions of Jewish Americans to American society. That gap created an opportunity for the Weitzman Museum to introduce a new resource in 2020, when they built **JewishAmericanHeritage.org**.

The .org website, in contrast, highlights the diversity of American Jewish heritage and history, and provides context and content that explores Jewish experience, Jewish achievement, and Jewish identity. The .org website also centers opportunities to learn and engage with the full spectrum of the American Jewish community today, featuring more than 100 curated resources from museums and organizations like [Jewtina](#) and the [Jews of Color Initiative](#) across the country.

[JewishAmericanHeritage.org](#) has also expanded to ensure that visitors can discover a deeper understanding of cultural heritage, learn about the history of antisemitism, engage with family history resources, dive into the stories of extraordinary Jewish Americans, and so much more.

While JAHM serves as an excellent example of museum collaboration, two additional outstanding museum partnerships further illuminate the strengths of multi-institution initiatives: **Hispanic Heritage Month** and **MADE BY US**, both part of JAHM's national coalition of partners. Hispanic Heritage Month, organized by Hispanic Star, which began as Hispanic Heritage Week in the late 1960s, is now a colorful month-long celebration of Hispanic and Latino heritage and culture.

In the fall of 2022, Hispanic Heritage Month and the Smithsonian partnered to commemorate the establishment of the forthcoming National Museum of the American Latino, effectively integrating lectures, performances, and activities to maximize public engagement and elicit excitement around the museum's future. Hispanic Heritage Month also succeeds in making an impact beyond its nationally designated month of September 15 to October 15 by bolstering its online presence through social media, digital exhibitions, online resources for teachers, and a host of audiovisual materials culled from partnering institutions.



MADE BY US, an initiative designed to provide young Americans with a “crash course in history,” is another exemplary institutional collaboration. With a partnership network of over 150 history and civics organizations, MADE BY US stands apart in its broad mosaic of collaborators spanning all of the rich aspects of American history.

Like Hispanic Heritage Month, MADE BY US taps into young audiences through creative social media content, including snappy and informative “60-Second History” videos. MADE BY US is unique in its unconventional collaboration strategies, partnering with *Teen Vogue* to publish stories about the lesser-known historical origins of pop cultural phenomena and working with Airbnb Experiences to create a guide for exploring museums across the country.

These museum collaborations offer inspiration for expanding audiences and fulfilling ambitious educational goals. Analogous to the MADE BY US x *Teen Vogue* collaboration, in 2022 JAHM sought out unexpected partners like the HISTORY channel and Ancestry to reach public school teachers and hundreds of thousands of heritage and history buffs.

Additionally, to fulfill its two-fold mission of educating the Jewish community and educating the broader American public, JAHM expanded its coalition to include non-Jewish organizations such as [Hispanic Star](#) (the organizer of Hispanic Heritage Month) and national history organizations [America250](#) and the [American Association for State and Local History](#).


In 2022, JAHM reached over 10 million Americans through its work with **120 community partners** across the country.

JAHM 2023 continued on a path of exponential growth by expanding upon its mission and reaching more Americans than ever before. In addition to the launch of its first national commercial, JAHM received more than 53 million television, radio, and print impressions, and over 3 billion online media impressions. Hundreds of thousands of Americans engaged through #OurSharedHeritage, #MyJAHM, and #JewishAmericanHeritageMonth social posts, as well as JAHM's first TikTok campaign.

The JAHM-originated appeal to engage public library systems from coast to coast included participation from 12 of the nation's largest public library systems, which helped introduce JAHM to millions of public library card holders. According to a recent Gallup poll, Americans visit the public library nearly twice as often as they go to the movies or attend a sporting event.

As deeply trusted and oft-frequented public institutions, libraries serve as ideal venues for raising awareness about Jewish American Heritage Month.

Like its heritage collaboration peers, JAHM continues to grow by embracing new ideas and responding to the present moment. This creative spirit of evolution resulted, in May 2023, in a monthlong celebration that included **a national coalition of more than 200 organizations**, virtual and in-person events, and new online resources including toolkits to engage with JAHM's mission.

JAHM also bolstered its ongoing campaign to inform American audiences about antisemitism, featuring prominently in the #StandUpToJewishHate campaign to deploy the Blue Square emoji  as a simple, but powerful unifying symbol of solidarity and support for the Jewish community; and, in partnership with CAM (the Combat Antisemitism Movement), supported 38 governors and 135 mayors as they officially recognized JAHM for the very first time.

By mobilizing resources that chronicle the history and the contemporary landscape of antisemitism, JAHM is able to pave the way for future action and alliances within and alongside the American Jewish community.



At the same time, the foresight of certain funders, such as the David Berg Foundation and Leon Levy Foundation, show that philanthropy is at its best when it invests in institutions with the capacity to lead and innovate. These investments in JAHM have helped create the nation's largest network of Jewish cultural content.

In celebrating the inspiring history of the Jewish people, sparking crucial conversations about the Jewish future, and playing a significant role in confronting antisemitism, JAHM provides Jewish cultural institutions with an unprecedented opportunity to engage, reinvigorate and strengthen American communities.

In visioning the future of Jewish American Heritage Month, the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History, the only museum dedicated to exploring American history through the lens of Jewish experience, alongside its producing partner jMUSE, remain focused on empowering a greater number of cultural institutions to use available resources wisely and to fearlessly advance the field as a whole.

Looking ahead, JAHM will work to deepen its impact by continuing to pursue an active 50-state strategy, collaborating with organizations from all corners of the union and developing resources that delve even deeper into the rich tapestry of the American Jewish experience.

For more information on Jewish American Heritage Month, visit [JewishAmericanHeritage.org](https://www.jewishamericanheritage.org).

**FEBRUARY**

Black History Month

**MARCH**

Greek American Heritage Month

Irish-American Heritage Month

Women's History Month

**APRIL**

Arab American Heritage Month

Scottish American Heritage Month

**MAY**

Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Haitian American Heritage Month

Jewish American Heritage Month

Military Appreciation Month

**JUNE**

Caribbean-American Heritage Month

Immigrant Heritage Month

LGBTQ+ Pride Month

**JULY**

Disability Pride Month

French-American Heritage Month

**SEPTEMBER**

Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15)

**OCTOBER**

Filipino American History Month

German-American Heritage Month

Italian-American Heritage Month

Polish American Heritage Month

**NOVEMBER**

Native American Heritage Month

