



MSA FORWARD Justification Toolkit

With limited travel and training budgets, a strong justification for attending events is more important than ever. Use the tools in this kit to help explain how attending MSA FORWARD can improve your store products, expand your professional network, and provide a new perspective on the best practices in nonprofit retail.

This toolkit will help you determine the full cost of attendance and identify key benefits MSA FORWARD will provide for your store and for your professional development.

Step 1: Review Talking Points for MSA FORWARD

Network with Industry Professionals

MSA FORWARD is a global gathering of professional retailers who work in nonprofit cultural institutions. Through dedicated networking events, exclusive learning excursions, and an expansive expo floor, you connect with peers from diverse backgrounds, make new friendships, and expand your professional network. These connections can help you address challenges, inspire new ideas, and open up partnership possibilities for your store.

The MSA FORWARD 2026 event is being held in conjunction with the 2026 American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting & Expo, which will provide a larger pool of potential contacts for networking.

One-Stop Shopping

The MSA Expo is a one-stop-shop for your annual buying needs. With over 200 wholesale vendors, the Expo floor features a wide variety of products: apparel, books, food, jewelry, home and garden, toys and games, custom products, fair trade, made in America, recycled or green products, promotional items, store supplies and POS systems.

Save on Products

MSA vendors offer attendees special show incentives, which can help you offset travel expenses and save on your year-round purchases.

Consult with Expert Suppliers

Through the MSA Expo, you can meet one-on-one with museum store vendors to discover retail strategies, address current challenges, or identify ideas for growth. From formal meetings to impromptu discussions, the MSA vendors are here to have your needs and provide solutions that will make a lasting impact on your business.

Promotional and Marketing Ideas

MSA FORWARD offers in-depth learning opportunities where you learn best practices and new ideas for store promotions, marketing, and sales. Through the educational excursions, you can see first-hand how local museum stores conduct business and generate sales throughout the year.

MSA's education breakout sessions follow the MSA Knowledge Standards that highlight the core knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the daily responsibilities of a nonprofit retail professional. The full education schedule will be available on the MSA website.

In addition to talking points, reference the Program/Schedule [HERE](#) to learn more about the activities at this year's event. Click [HERE](#) to see a list of the MSA vendors that will be exhibiting at MSA FORWARD.

Step 2: Determine the Cost

Meals are available as a la carte or as a bundle package:

Monday Night MSA NEXT Party – Included (free)

Wednesday Lunch – On your own

Thursday and Friday Lunches – prepurchase a \$25 voucher (per day) – to be used at various concessions. Or be prepared to use a cashless option onsite.

Wednesday Night – MSA Social Gathering at Seaport Independence- \$125 per ticket

BUNDLE: Lunch (x 2 vouchers) and the MSA Social Gathering - \$170

Excursions range in price based on destination. Visit the [Excursion information page](#) for more information.

Step 3: Outline the Benefits

When showcasing the benefits of MSA FORWARD, focus specifically on what you will bring back to your museum as a return on their investment. Use the schedule and the MSA FORWARD website to answer these questions.

- What sessions have relevance to the work you do?
- Which sessions can teach you skills and/or help your team overcome current or future challenges?
- Are there any speakers your organization would benefit from hearing or working with?
- Where are you looking to expand your current product assortment?
- What purchases do you need to make for the rest of the year?
- Which MSA vendors can help you achieve your goals in 2026?
- Can you build partnerships with other museums in your area?
- How are others celebrating MSA's annual day of museum store advocacy, Museum Store Sunday?
- How could increasing your involvement with MSA benefit your museum's practices and growth?
- Are there any vendors that you will be collaborating with on upcoming custom products?

When considering these questions, keep these tips in mind:

- List specific sessions and explain how they will impact your practices.
- Clearly make the connection between your needs and the benefits you are identifying.
- If the approver is outside of your department, don't assume they understand your goals or technical terms. Spell out the impact for them.
- Passion is the best persuasion technique, let yours shine through in your letter.
- In addition, creative solutions may help your request get approved.
- Before meeting with your supervisor, prepare a plan that shows who will cover your duties while you attend the conference.

- Offer to prepare and deliver a short presentation and Q&A session for your colleagues to share what you learned when you return. This way, your coworkers will benefit from your attendance.
- Share speaker handouts and product samples with your team.

Step 4: Draft Your Request

Customize this letter to show the costs and benefits you outlined above. Use the calculation document to estimated costs.

Dear < Approver's name >,

I would like to attend MSA FORWARD hosted by the Museum Store Association. The event is taking place May 19-22, 2026, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It will be co-located with the American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting & Expo. MSA FORWARD brings together professional retailers who work in nonprofit institutions and hosts more than 200 wholesale vendors in their Retail Expo. I am looking forward to this event because it will give me the opportunity to network with my peers from museums across the globe, find new products, and meet with vendors all in one location.

The best part about this year is MSA is now offering FREE registration to MSA Institution members.

(add appropriate information here)

Since I am already a member it is a savings of over \$595!

Or

I can join as a member for \$215 and save \$995 on registration AND have an opportunity for a full year giving me the tools, education and community to enhance our visitor's experience. [Here](#) are all the benefits of membership.

After reviewing the conference schedule and the vendors who will be in this year's Expo, I am confident that what I learn will be directly applicable to my work. I have identified a few sessions I would like to attend and vendors I am going to meet with at the Expo:

Session 1 and how it will benefit you and your store

Session 2 and how it will benefit you and your store

Session 3 and how it will benefit you and your store

Vendor 1 and how they will benefit your store

Vendor 2 and how they will benefit your store

Vendor 3 and how they will benefit your store

*In order to attend the conference and achieve my goals, I am seeking sponsorship of < **total amount you need** > for the following expenses:*

Registration (before 4/17/2026): \$ - FREE

Round-trip Airfare:

Transportation: <\$xxxx>

Hotel: <\$xxxx>

Meals: <\$xxxx>

The opportunity for me to develop a network of contacts, gain knowledge in specific areas of retail management, and meet with retail wholesale vendors, makes my attendance at MSA FORWARD a wise investment that will benefit our museum.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like more information on MSA FORWARD.