

Remembering Benzie: A Community Memory Project

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Summary: We propose a 2-year project to celebrate the military, agricultural, artisanal, and family memories. We build on retirees' enthusiasm for local history; provide vocational and college-prep knowledge work for high schoolers; enhance and diversify the local oral history collection; and provide community access to video equipment and training. In collaboration with the Benzie Area Historical Society and Museum and the Benzie Central Schools, the Benzonia Public Library will recruit an Intern Coordinator and 2 high school intern cohorts to create community-based oral history videos that will be accessible online, on YouTube, at the Historical Society, and at a public movie screening. By acquiring 4 traveling sets of DSLR still/video cameras and laptops for editing so that student interns can produce HD oral history videos focusing on the traditions, heritage, and future of our community. Colleagues from the University of Michigan School of Information (UMSI), who have previously worked with us and understand our community, will act as technical advisers and coaches in video production, interviewing, archiving, and project management. They will help interns and project personnel gain skills and institutional capacity for developing high-quality products. As the interns and their Coordinator develop skills, they will lead workshops for kids and adults, building community capacity as the Library circulates equipment to patrons to capture memories. Our collaborative vision builds on the success of previous partnerships and each organization's unique capacities.

Alignment to IMLS Agency Goals: To **Build Capacity**, we will bring in external UMSI training so that our Library, partner organizations, and interns have increased technological and preservation knowledge. Our goal is to create local, experienced oral historians who can contribute to future community memory work and serve as community resources. Once trained, project personnel and teens will offer **Lifelong Learning** opportunities to area youth and adults. Given our aging population, it is important that capacity-building for today's professionals (staff at the Schools, Historical Society, and Library) while also laying the groundwork for the next generation (teen interns).

Our Community: Benzonia Public Library (BPL) has served the people of Benzonia Township in Benzie County, Michigan, for over a century. Our area is known for historic lighthouses, Lake Michigan, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, and Interlochen Center for the Arts. With a population of 2705¹ and a 45-minute drive to the nearest small metropolitan area, we are both small and rural. Agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism-related activities are key employment sectors, and many residents work multiple low-wage jobs. In 2016, our largest manufacturing employer closed, increasing economic instability for its 150 former employees. For locals, it is a struggle to get ahead. Meanwhile, high-income visitors and retirees flock here from metropolitan areas, gobbling up affordable housing as second homes. This sets up a tension between low-income, year-round residents and retirees in million-dollar homes. Despite these tensions, BPL honors the community's long-standing tradition of inclusivity: our building once housed one of the first schools to admit students regardless of gender or color.

Why this work is important: **Captures loved ones' voices.** As Roger Dewey, president of our Friends group, said during the drafting of this project, "My father ...participated in a similar oral history project ...

¹ American Community Survey, U.S. Census, 2017

and that is the only recording our family has of him speaking of his experiences as a young pilot in France in 1918.” While today’s smartphones and social media timelines are full of short videos and photo bursts, the personal impact of oral histories’ long-form storytelling is significant. **Honors existing audience for oral histories while connecting youth to the past.** When Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was created, William and Edith Overlease received federal funding to gather oral histories on our turn-of-the-century logging boom. The resulting 1965 book, *Daylight in the Swamp*, remains in print and is the region’s largest oral history initiative². The Library was gifted the interview cassettes, and in 2017-2018, UMSI digitized intact recordings. Over 120 people from our 2000-person service population attended a 2018 lecture on these recordings. However, *no attendees were under age 25*, raising a critical question of how to connect youth to community memory in more compelling ways. We propose giving them a new lens through which to see their community today, not merely the community as it was 100 years ago. *We want to show them how today’s tools can record current history in engaging ways.*

Strengthens intergenerational bonds. Our community is aging: the median age is 49.7, 8.6 years older than the state average³. There are important lessons about heritage, love for community and the area’s natural beauty, and lives well-lived that our elders can share with today’s teens. Many senior retirees from out-of-town held professional positions for which there are few local mentors, adding another layer of potential benefit to teen interviewers. **Increases currently-limited access to paid, knowledge-economy internships for college-bound students.** Benzie Schools turns out smart, thoughtful graduates and was named one of *U.S. News and World Report’s* Top 100 Michigan Schools⁴ (out of 800+) in 2016 and 2017. However, our key industries are manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, and construction, so most jobs open to high school students are service-level. We want students to gain experience (paid, to offset lost work hours) doing creative, intellectual work so they are more competitive with students from opportunity-rich areas.

Strengthens community connections so teens are more likely to return here after college. Engaging with community members and their stories helps teens deepen affinity for our area. We want to kindle youths’ deep community connections so that they will return here to build their careers and families.

Connects high schoolers, community members, and families across generations more deeply. 4 years ago, when Library Director McLaren was hired, there was no youth or family Library programming. Since then, McLaren has built a robust, well-attended youth/family program by building partnerships with local businesses, schools, the Society, the local science museum, and more. This project builds on those partnerships not just to record the past but to actively use local narratives *today* to knit *today’s* community more tightly together as creators and residents. **Provides community members with high-quality digital production resources so they can capture their own memories.** Summer’s tourism season gives us a chance to provide locally-led training and equipment loans to the community. **Develops high schoolers’ research skills.** With no K-12 ALA-accredited library professional, working with primary source material is an identified gap. Our project gives real-world context for primary source engagement.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

We will run 2 year-long cohorts, drawing inspiration from three existing projects: *Veterans History Project (VHP) of the Library of Congress*, *Legacies Project*⁵, and *StoryCorps*. See also: Schedule of Completion.

² <http://benziemuseum.org/shop.html>

³ ESRI Tapestry, <https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/tapestry-segmentation/zip-lookup>

⁴ Benzie Central Schools website, <https://benzieschools.net/>

⁵ <http://www.legaciesproject.org/>

Aug. 2019 (pre-project): Hire Intern Coordinator. Publicize project to teachers and students; inform local media about funding (see Interlochen Public Radio letter). **Output:** *Email/flyer. Evaluation: none.*

Sept. 2019: Getting Started. Recruit a 4-student intern cohort; obtain parent permission for participation; purchase video and computer equipment (see Budget Justification). Create interviewee permissions and protocols with Coach Hardy. Workshops #1 and 2 (agenda in Supporting Documents): Smith and Hardy introduces interns and project personnel to DSLR video functionality, setting up for and conducting thoughtful VHP interviews (including setting up a conducive tone, active listening, and follow-up questions), shooting video, importing into video software, and exporting at required archival standards for YouTube, Historical Society, and VHP. Hardy and Smith available for monthly remote consultations throughout project. **Output:** *2 completed workshops w/agendas. Evaluation: Workshop evaluation (sample in Supporting Docs.)*

Oct. - Nov. 2019: Veterans Interviews. Each intern completes at least 2 VHP interviews. We choose VHP because it contributes our community's story to a national collection, takes on preservation responsibility, and provides scaffolding and structure: a question bank, no editing (30+ minutes of "raw" video only), and a target interview population. These "training wheels" help students and project personnel concentrate on equipment and interview mechanics and workflows. Assistant Library Director uploads VHP videos to YouTube and embeds them into Library web page. Historical Society uploads VHP videos to PastPerfect, sets up iPad stand for visitor navigation of YouTube channel, and sets up interview loops to display on large-screen TV. **Output:** *2 VHP interviews per student submitted to LC, Library web page, Historical Society's PastPerfect; iPad kiosk and screen set up at Historical Society. Evaluation: Workshop evaluation forms completed by interns and project personnel; Historical Society guestbook comments (ongoing).*

Dec. 2019: StoryCorps + Families. ~120 patrons attend Library's Christmas Magic event, at which interns host StoryCorps-style family oral history video stations (~5 min). StoryCorps, originally designed for radio, records two participants who know each other in informal conversations with that are captured by an off-camera engineer. Interns will provide sample questions to families but encourage participants to talk freely about topics and memories important to them. Post unedited video to YouTube, PastPerfect, and Library website. Notify local media. **Output:** *StoryCorps family clips posted to YouTube, PastPerfect, Library website. Social media and newsletter announcements. Evaluation: Christmas Magic interview count; meeting w/project personnel to discuss progress, make work plan and timeline alterations as needed.*

Jan. - Apr. 2020: Editing Video Narratives + StoryCorps. We shift to the *Legacies Project* model, which partners teens and elders (inc. businesspeople, agriculturalists, and artisans) for extended oral history interviews with student-developed questions. The Legacies model preserves unedited interview footage as well as highly-produced short videos (~5 min.) with titles, primary source material, video, and music. Workshops #3 & 4: Smith and Hardy focus on background research, writing interview questions, editing video footage, finding "the story" in extended footage, and integrating primary source material. Repeat family *StoryCorps* opportunity at March's Library-hosted Kids Fun Carnival (270+ attendees); post content in locations listed earlier. Promote new videos to media. Garden Theatre shows promotional slide as trailer for May's public screening. Project Director applies to Library of Michigan's Small and Rural Libraries conference. **Output:** *Promotional slide during previews at theatre; 10 min. of edited video content per intern; Edited videos and Kids Fun Carnival StoryCorps videos uploaded to YouTube, linked from Library*

web page, added to Historical Society's PastPerfect/exhibits. Conference application. Evaluation: Workshop evaluations filled out by interns and project personnel, guestbook at Historical Society.

May 2020: Public Premiere + Workshop, Conference: Each student presents 15 minutes of highly-produced and edited content to a public screening at the local movie theatre (see Letter of Support); Historical Society donors will pay for theatre rental; by not using IMLS funds, we can charge admission and use revenue for future project sustainability. Project Director presents at Library of Michigan Small/Rural Conference (or free webinar using UMSI hosting software). **Output:** *15 min. of edited video per intern updated at locations above; screening at theatre. Evaluation: Community comment cards at theatre, ongoing guestbook at Historical Society.*

June 2020: Wrap Up, Debrief, Plan for Next Year: Interns create a personal online and thumb drive that integrates and reflects on each completed product. This reflective practice helps interns see what they have accomplished, reflect on lessons learned, and consider areas for future growth. Interns “pass on” skills by hosting video workshop for kids at Library. All raw video saved to PastPerfect and external hard drives; all edited video saved to YouTube, Library website. Project personnel and interns meet to review evaluation data and determine potential Year 2 changes. Develop policies for summer equipment checkout. **Output:** *All raw and edited video saved to locations described above. Intern-led youth workshop. Evaluation: Exit interviews and portfolio reviews between Project Director, Internship Coordinator, and interns. Survey based on IMLS questions administered to youth at intern-led workshop.*

July-Aug 2020: Community Creation: Intern Coordinator, having gained capacity through the U-M workshops, leads 2 capacity-building video workshops for patrons at Library. Due to tourist season and high seasonal employment, we anticipate that interns and some project personnel will be unavailable, so summer months focus not on the intern efforts but on community access to video training workshops and making equipment available for patron checkout. **Output:** *2 community workshops; equipment checked out. Evaluation: Circulation records for equipment; surveys w/IMLS questions at community workshops.*

Sept. - Aug. 2021: Recruit intern cohorts and anticipate that interns will move again through the three types of oral history video projects (*VHP, Legacies Project, StoryCorps*), with a similar schedule, outputs, and evaluation models from Year 1. However, we will refine that model based on what we have learned and discussed from exit interviews and June debrief meetings, with some goals distinct from Year 1: 1) to refine our practices to maximize workflows, number of quality video products, and public-facing impact; 2) to consider missing voices that we should capture; 3) to shift responsibility for content expertise away from external consultants and toward local personnel to maximize long-term sustainability. We will shift location and audience for the intern-led workshop in Winter 2021 to adults at the Historical Society, with an audience exit survey grounded in IMLS required questions. We add IMLS reporting to this year's deliverables.

Adequate Budget: Project personnel form our largest expense, but labor costs are low in our community, so small amounts of salaries, honoraria, and stipend go a long way. We use just over 20% of the budget to acquire necessary equipment for four students to film/edit; multiple equipment sets mean our interns can make much more progress in the 20 weekly hours of intern time (5 each) and for Historical Society Museum video displays for visitors. Additional archival storage comes from Historical Society's existing PastPerfect storage (no cost). Library videos are posted to and archived at YouTube at no cost, and we save money by using the existing Library website.

Promotion, Dissemination, and Outreach: We will use existing communication channels for Historical Society, Library, and Schools news, including email to teachers for recruitment purposes, Facebook (our area's most popular social media site), Library and Historical Society website and print and electronic newsletters, pre-show promotional slides at the Garden Theatre, the state's library listserv, and our interns' personal and online networks. For example, when a new video is uploaded to our YouTube channel, we will include a link in our print and online newsletters, post it to Facebook, and send content so our community partners can do the same with their networks. As part of our 2017 renovation, we acquired an illuminated sign that displays on our town's main road, so we will add occasional reminders there as well. Our goal is not to wait until large bodies of work have accumulated but to regularly include links to project deliverables throughout the project. We will also apply for our student and project personnel to present a concurrent session at the Library of Michigan's biannual Loleta Fyan Small and Rural Libraries Conference in May 2020 and, if not accepted, use the University of Michigan's videoconferencing tools to present a webinar about our project to colleagues. Finally, Interlochen Public Radio (NPR) will support the initiative and monitor our students' progress for a potential on-air feature (see Letter of Support).

Project Personnel: We are small but mighty, and we live our mission "preserving yesterday, enriching today, inspiring tomorrow in our community" every day. An average weekly local labor allocation totals just under 40 hours: 20 from interns (5hrs x 4interns), 8.25 hours from Library Staff, 5 from Intern Coordinator, 2.5 from Historical Society Executive Director plus hours from unpaid, skilled Society volunteers (see Budget Justification). Three external partners bring expertise and teaching experience and ongoing consultations. By working with partner organizations with whom we have a track record of success, we will minimize the frictions of newly-formed partnerships. **Project Director McLaren** has forged positive relationships community-wide, recruiting donors, volunteers, and partners. She directed the library's first major renovation in 100 years, worked closely with the IMLS-funded Making in Michigan Libraries project, and receiving the State Librarian's Library of Excellence Award in 2016. **Assistant Library Director Leines** has deep Benzonia roots and decades of experience working in industry and not-for-profits; she has created and substantially improved the Library website. **Historical Society Executive Director Mort** has a record of success with non-profit entities. She has substantially raised the Historical Society's annual donations and made significant digitization strides since arriving a year ago. To build our local technological and interviewing capacity, we will bring in three external content experts with whom we have worked previously on the IMLS-funded Making in Michigan Libraries project. They understand that this is *our* project and that their goal is to share their knowledge so that we have the capacity to carry on the work independently post-project. **Coach Hardy** has extensive research experience with technology and rural communities, as well as archival and interviewing expertise; **Videographer Smith** has facility in video technology, editing, and production. As this project represents our most ambitious project to date, **Advisor Fontichiaro**, project director or advisor for numerous IMLS projects, will support us as we build up administrative expertise and infrastructure. Our **Internship Coordinator** will be selected in August 2019, as the Schools anticipate numerous new hires and anticipate that the role's stipend will sweeten the first-year salary for these educators. Additionally, we are eager to work with IMLS's cohort advisor and fellow grantees to share ideas, gain insight, and maximize success.

Diversity: We focus on intergenerational diversity by pairing teen interns with senior citizens sharing their stories. We also hope to diversify the archived voices of our region by expanding on the 1965 oral history work, updating it with stories of current agriculture (unique crops: cherries, wine grapes), local tourism, post-1965 veterans, and everyday families across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Risk Mitigation: With parents working multiple jobs and limited public transportation, youth transportation is a concern, so we will host weekly Internship events at the high school instead of at the Library. Internship stipends will offset lost student income, maximizing interns' socioeconomic diversity. To facilitate introductions to potential interviewees, we will call on influential community leaders (see Letters of Support). Rather than overextending Library capacity and creating a new archive we would struggle to maintain post-funding, we partner with the Historical Society and use its existing PastPerfect software and workflows. Contemporary access and preservation are facilitated by posting to YouTube and creating a pathfinder on our Library's website and YouTube channel, particularly appealing to our seasonal residents. Should unnecessary expenses arise, our partner institutions have strong relationships with local donors and volunteers. Indirect costs provide an additional cushion. We are also excited that, if awarded, we will gain access to a mentor and cohort of other institutions passionate about their communities, local history, and preserving stories of local value. Being able to tap the collective intelligence of the cohort and our mentor will continue to inspire us and our project, particularly Year 2 innovations and refinements.

PROJECT OUTCOMES: Project Director McLaren will document and measure progress with support from Fontichiaro and the IMLS mentor, using both qualitative and quantitative measures. She will track the project timeline and activities, adjusting as needed and in consultation with project personnel and IMLS contacts. During the four days of expert-led workshops annually, she will administer the IMLS Lifelong Learning and Building Capacity questions (NOFO pp. 31-32) to teen interns and adult project personnel. (Sample in Supporting Documents). At the teen- and Intern Coordinator-led community workshops, she will work with facilitators to design additional questions around the 3 IMLS Lifelong Learning questions and format them into a post-workshop survey. The Library's practice of documenting event attendance will continue, adding monthly recording of YouTube stats. Qualitative community feedback will come from a guestbook at the Historical Society and comment cards at the Garden Theater to gauge visitor engagement as well as connections to personal memories. Additionally, progress will be measured against video production goals: at least two VHP interviews, uploading of StoryCorps family interviews to YouTube; and at least 15 minutes of highly-edited video content for the Garden Theater showcase. She will coordinate June meetings of project personnel to gain qualitative feedback on project design elements. She and the Intern Coordinator will conduct exit interviews and portfolio reviews with each intern to gauge project alignment with the needs articulated in the Project Work Plan. These mixed-methods will be documented in required IMLS reports and in ongoing updates to the Library Board. Finally, we measure success informally by reports from grocery store conversations and requests for repeat events and future partnering.

Sustainability: The Historical Society will secure a donor to pay for Garden Theater rental. This non-IMLS donation allows us to make this event a fundraiser to support future and ongoing project activities after the project's conclusion. Archiving the project's outputs on the Historical Society's PastPerfect system assures long-term access. Equipment will remain available for community checkout.

	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Oct. 2020	Nov. 2020	Dec. 2020	Jan. 2021	Feb. 2021	Mar. 2021	Apr. 2021	May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	August 2021
Intern recruitment, selection, parent permissions, and other paperwork	Administrative	Administrative									Administrative		
Discuss project, adjust as needed, set schedule					Administrative	Administrative		Administrative		Administrative			
Workshops with videographer and coach		Workshop				Workshop							
Collect and review workshop evaluations		Evaluation				Evaluation							
Monthly check-ins with videographer, coach, project management advisor		Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	Workshop	
Gain confidence and skills by filming VHP videos			Oral history	Oral history	Oral history								
Submit VHP videos to Historical Society archive and displays, Veterans History Project, YouTube, external hard drive				Oral history	Oral history								
Gather family narratives at Library events (Xmas Magic, Kids Fun Carnival); post unedited to YouTube					Public-facing			Public-facing					
Collect and review Historical Society guest book data	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation
Interviews with agriculturalists, artisans						Oral history	Oral history	Oral history	Oral history		Public-facing		
Garden Theater video premiere (not IMLS funds)											Public-facing		
Collect and review Garden Theater audience feedback (on index card)											Administrative		
Collect and edit interview footage; post as completed; populate student online portfolios						Oral history	Oral history	Oral history	Oral history	Oral history	Oral history	Oral history	
Intern-led workshop for youth at library										Public-facing			
Evaluation and review of data from youth workshop										Evaluation			
Intern presentations at Historical Society			submit proposal			Video workshop			Lecture Series				
Post-mortem planning meetings, portfolio review, annual review											Administrative		
Intern coordinator leads summer workshop	Public-facing											Public-facing	Public-facing
Circulate equipment to community members											Public-facing	Public-facing	
Record YouTube statistics monthly	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation
Final reporting													Administrative

KEY	
Administrative activities	Administrative
Evaluation and review of data	Evaluation
Public-facing events and their promotion	Public-facing
Workshops/trainings for interns and project personnel	Workshop
Oral history interview planning, filming, editing, uploading	Oral history