

Libraries as Essential Partners in Anchoring the Historical Record through Participatory Archiving

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Joseph P. Healey Library at the University of Massachusetts Boston requests an IMLS National Leadership Grant in the amount of \$247,612. These funds will allow Healey Library to partner nationwide with libraries, historical societies, community organizations, digitization and preservation experts, and the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) and its hubs to develop a comprehensive toolkit containing workbooks, standards, and best practices. This toolkit will guide libraries in partnering with their communities to collect, preserve, describe, and make accessible community-based cultural heritage materials that could prove to be ephemeral in the digital age. The toolkit will support the goals of the Community Anchors project category by placing libraries as essential partners and experts in documenting the cultural record of American communities.

STATEMENT OF NATIONAL NEED

There is a growing interest in community-engaged “archiving” initiatives throughout the United States. Events where individual community members can contribute photographs and stories to document a town, historical event, or theme have become so popular that the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) initiated a Common Heritage grant category in 2015 to support them. While excitement about bringing community members together to share memories has generated a flurry of collecting activity, many organizations lack the experience or the tools to plan effective events and to collect, process, preserve, and make accessible the digital materials gathered. These unique cultural heritage materials, which ordinary people contribute from family and personal collections, are at risk of being neglected and lost in a manner similar to the many oral histories gathered in the 1960s and 1970s, most of which currently languish on fragile cassette tapes, untranscribed and unavailable to researchers or to communities themselves. Smaller cultural institutions, particularly those that are located in underserved communities or primarily volunteer-run, are uniquely vulnerable, as they frequently do not have the resources to build an in-house preservation and access plan.

Many U.S. institutions use UMass Boston’s Mass. Memories Road Show (MMRS) as a model, seeking to learn from our proven track record, techniques, and methodologies, honed since MMRS’s launch in 2004. Yet our team’s ability to share what it has learned is limited. As a public research university committed to open access, we make the MMRS *Project Handbook* and other publications freely available. While these resources are helpful for many colleagues, they are written for partners with whom we work closely and would be more useful if generalized for broader audiences. We propose creating a set of instructional resources that will be more accessible, engaging, and useful to a range of organizations involved in capturing and preserving community heritage materials. The availability of these resources worldwide will place expertise in state-of-the-art participatory archiving within reach of a greater number of institutions, supporting the broadest engagement in these types of public history programs and populist collecting endeavors.

PROJECT DESIGN

The project team seeks to develop a toolkit that will guide libraries in supporting community events to collect and preserve local cultural heritage materials. As an outgrowth of the Mass. Memories Road Show, this project is MMRS’s response to the many requests for guidance its team receives. We request a project grant to: 1.) develop best practices and guidelines synthesized from over a decade of thoughtful planning and implementation of our own program as well as the expertise of the library and information science community to enable libraries of all kinds to serve as effective professional partners with community organizations interested in participatory archiving, and 2.) develop a suite of resources (the toolkit) that will guide institutions and organizations--regardless of expertise, resources, or technology--in preserving and making accessible materials collected at outreach events, digitization days, and other cultural heritage documentation efforts.

Project Partners and Roles

The Institutional Lead for this project will be the Healey Library and will include MMRS staff. The project team will seek partners from libraries, historical societies, past MMRS participants, past NEH Common

Heritage grantees, and other participatory archiving programs to inform toolkit development. The project team will also work with experts (librarians, archivists, and information professionals, as well as the DPLA and its content hubs) to guide toolkit components related to metadata, digital preservation, and access standards. To ensure that the toolkit meets a variety of community needs and experience levels, the team intends to engage diverse communities across the country at all stages of this project.

Plan of Work (2 Years)

Fall 2018: Hire a full-time Project Manager to oversee grant activities under the supervision of Project Director
 Fall 2018: Secure project partners, conduct needs analysis, review and synthesize past MMRS assessment data
 Winter-Spring 2019: Develop and distribute partner feedback instruments, analyze data and findings
 Summer-Fall 2019: Hire and work with instructional designer on toolkit design and development
 Winter-Spring 2020: Test toolkit with project partners, revise as necessary
 Summer 2020: Publish final toolkit, conduct assessments

Goals and Outcomes

- Develop a toolkit to guide libraries in planning participatory archiving events that meet preservation standards to enable preservation of and access to cultural heritage materials throughout the U.S.
- Partner actively with a wide variety of stakeholders to be sure the resulting toolkit reflects the needs of a diverse range of communities at all stages of the planning and digital preservation processes.
- Summarize and present professional-level metadata and digital preservation standards in ways that are accessible to interested parties from a range of experience levels and backgrounds.

Dissemination Plan

We will develop a communication plan and apply to present at conferences to reach the constituencies that will benefit from this project. Possible conferences include those held by American Library Association, Public Library Association, Society for American Archivists, and the National Council on Public History.

NATIONAL IMPACT

This project offers professionally sound guidelines for preserving and making available cultural heritage materials. The toolkit will offer libraries a scalable, step-by-step model that will guide under-resourced institutions through the planning processes of digital preservation. The toolkit will build and strengthen communities by connecting libraries with local organizations, history buffs, families, immigrants, volunteers, and other participants. Libraries are important community hubs, and this project enhances their ability to bring together diverse participants and to use librarians’ unique expertise as information professionals to anchor a community’s collective memory. Any library will be able to use this model to partner more effectively with their communities in preserving and sharing the stories that document our nation’s collective cultural history.

BUDGET SUMMARY

Budget Item	Description/Notes	Cost
Project Manager	2 years at \$58,000 salary + benefits rate of 37.89%, 3% raise in year 2	\$162,384
Instructional Designer (graduate student)	1 year at 20 hrs/week for 36 weeks at \$15/hour	\$10,800
Travel	Project manager travel to meet with project partners	\$2,000
NVivo Software	Qualitative data analysis tool	\$350
Partner Stipends	Up to 30 partners selected to provide in-depth feedback	\$6,000
Total Direct Project Costs		\$181,534
UMass Boston Indirect Costs	Federally negotiated rate of 36.4% of direct costs	\$66,078
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS	Direct + Indirect Costs	\$247,612