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Archives Hints

Cooperative Historic Record Projects

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"AICS works to encourage collaboration to preserve, organize, and provide access to archival material so that it may benefit cultural organizations, the patrons they serve, and the study of history and information." This mission to encourage collaboration among archives, libraries, and museums is a result of over ten years of experience in these fields. Over the past decade, professionals in these areas have begun recognizing similarities among their occupations. Our first newsletter focuses on the benefits of working together and the ways institutions with historical documents can collaborate to promote common organization, access, preservation and outreach goals.

Benefits of Cooperation

- Reach a larger audience through cooperative outreach projects including exhibitions and lectures
- Develop standardized access tools, town or area wide - Databases and web sites with information about a variety of collections are helpful to researchers trying to determine the best place to find useful resources
- Increase your "people resources" - A group can work together to find solutions to problems and volunteers can be pooled and placed where they are most needed
- Increase your visibility to town government and others in positions of power - A group with common goals can more effectively demonstrate a significant need for support than an individual organization
- Reduce costs for supplies - Purchasing in bulk as part of a consortium is less expensive than purchasing supplies for your institution alone
- Obtain grant funding for collaborative projects - many grantors encourage collaboration

How to Collaborate

Whether you establish a formal incorporated cooperative or an informal group there are basic procedures to encourage the success of the collaborative. Groups are often unsuccessful due to

miscommunication, insufficient planning, or setting unachievable goals. The following are some helpful hints.

Telephone or personally visit everyone in town maintaining archives to announce your intention to establish a cooperative group. Do not be discouraged if there are people unwilling to participate. As your group becomes successful, interest in the collaborative will grow. Set up your first meeting for a date and time that works for the most people. Plan to hold the meeting in a comfortable space such as the meeting room at your local library. Send out invitations to the meeting a few weeks in advance and include the date, time, location, and a brief agenda reiterating the purpose. Send reminder notices or call to confirm a couple of days before the event.

At the first meeting, discuss the benefits of establishing a collaborative and brainstorm some possible goals for the group. For example, plan to work on collection development policies or identify cooperative exhibition projects. Take minutes at each meeting. Even if you are an informal collaborative, you will find that this will keep you organized and moving ahead with your plans. Get contact information for everyone in the group. Make sure that everyone lists more than one way that they can be reached. Set up a date and time and try to establish a loose agenda for the next meeting. Plan to hold monthly meetings if only to touch base and keep the group active. Type your minutes and distribute them to everyone in the group and to collection managers who did not attend the meeting. You may choose to send these out with reminder notices for the next meeting.

Do not schedule excessive meetings. Rather, get the most out of your monthly meetings by sticking to your agenda. Establish a group leader. You may vote for a president or rotate the discussion leader with each meeting. If there is no facilitator you may find that the group has difficulty staying on topic. The facilitator can also ensure that everyone's views are heard.

Continually look for ways to have the group work together towards commonalities. Do not focus too heavily on one goal at the expense of other growth opportunities and do not focus on a goal that emotionally divides the group. The purpose of collaboration is to work towards common goals. Make sure that you know what these are and try not to alienate people who do not have similar ideas. At least in the early stages of cooperation, focus on simple ideas that get the group more organized and more comfortable with each other. Large projects can wait until the group has been functioning smoothly and amicably for a year or two.

Grant Opportunities

Institute of Museum and Library Services – National Leadership Grants

http://www.ims.gov/grants/l-m/l-m_lead.asp

The joint category, Library-Museum Collaboration, supports innovative projects that model how museums and libraries can work together to expand their service to the public—with emphasis on serving the community, using technology, or enhancing education.”

Mass Development - Techdollars: Technology Supporting Non-profits

<http://www.massdevelopment.com>.

“A new Mass Development program that will allow organizations to obtain cost-effective financing for technology equipment purchases and installation”

Massachusetts Cultural Council

http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/grantsfor_organizations/index.html

Provides grants to support core programs and administration, outreach, strategic planning, and professional development. Many other states offer similar grant funding opportunities.

National Historical Publications and Records Commission

<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc> ; <http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/statcoor.html>

Provides grants for Archival Projects to “ensure that records documenting the American experience, are saved and made available for public use”

Northeast Document Conservation Center

www.nedcc.org/surapp.htm

Provides grants to offer “subsidized preservation planning surveys for collections of books, papers, and photographs”

NEH Preservation Assistance Grant Program

<http://www.neh.gov>

“...Grants of up to \$5,000...that support the preservation of materials in libraries, archives, museums and historical organizations.” The grant can be applied to the purchase of preservation supplies, equipment, and storage furniture.