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## **Community Outreach**

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Outreach work should not just be performed as the whim hits, but rather requires considerable planning. A document outlining a strategy to raise awareness about archives and archival activities should be written in cooperation with other area historical repositories. This archives plan should define your repository's roles in the community and that of your local archives collaborative. Make sure that your archival programs are organized and ready to be seen by your public and be prepared to verbalize why your work is worthwhile. Outreach involves making the diverse public aware of archives and their value. Outreach efforts should allow the public to become familiar with the strengths of your collections and enable them to see how archives can be useful in their own lives either as an educational, research, or entertainment resource. As the public sees the value of our collections, they become valuable advocates for the collections' care. They may support exhibits and programs through attendance, or support collections through use, by donating funds, or helping to raise more awareness.

Begin by surveying the community to determine what they think about your organization and its activities. It is often difficult to hear the opinions of your audience, but this will allow you to determine if it is necessary to change community perception of your work and will help you decide what kind of outreach strategy your group needs to take. Most institutions are not aware of exactly how the public perceives them. Many Archives and museums suffer from outsiders' views that they are stuffy places with old dusty things that only the elite or scholarly find interesting for esoteric purposes. Failed efforts to generate interest in archival activities will usually relate directly to negative perceptions or misunderstandings about an Archives' function. Lack of participation in planned events often follows programming efforts that do not take into account your potential audience's perception of your operations. Surveys are sometimes mailed out with tax bills in towns so that they are sure to reach all potential local audiences. The survey can address the following areas:

- Are people aware of the existence of your organization?
- Do they understand what you do?
- Do they know what archives are?
- What role do they see you playing in the community?
- Do they think that your role is vital for preserving the culture of the town?
- Do they feel that your institution/collaborative can assist any of their needs?
- Does your institution appeal to their recreational desires?
- Do they feel that they can or want to serve your institution in a volunteer capacity?
- Do they feel that your work is organized and well managed?
- What kinds of changes would they like to see made in your organization's efforts?

Work to break down any barriers between you and the public. One way to do this is to involve the community in the planning of activities. Ask the public what kind of events they would like to see. Ask for specific ideas about what types of archival programs would help them or most directly affect them. You may find that there is broad interest in popular topics such as genealogy, antique roadshows, and preservation lectures. There may also be other ideas that you wouldn't think about on your own. Provide the public with a list and ask them to check off what interests them and to supply ideas of their own. Use three types of marketing approaches. Use personal contact to get the opinions of members of your organization and their friends. Use targeted marketing through flyers, e-mail, listservs, and phone campaigns to reach specific community groups and use mass marketing through notices in newspapers, radio, television spots, and a web page to attract unidentified people.

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**Through outreach, demonstrate that you are organized, serious, and passionate about what you do and about history. Look at the community and those who use your archives as partners in preserving history and seek to give them a stake in your success. Create an outreach plan that caters to your public's desires and uses their input to form a solid foundation for a successful outreach program.**

"Archives Week" is traditionally held in October and serves to raise awareness about historical records. Begin your plans for National Archives week today! The following is a list you can use to advertise some of the ways citizens take advantage of their local archives. Patterned on the American Library Association's "National Library Week" campaign entitled "Ways to Use Your Library Card", this list cites specific uses for materials in an archival repository. This list can be made into a poster or brochure to help advertise your facility. Add ideas of your own that relate specifically to your organization:

1. Learn the value of surrounding homes in your area / 2. Review a map of your town to see how much it has grown / 3. Learn who lived in your home 100 years ago / 4. Review town by-laws and administrative meeting minutes / 4. Trace your family history / 5. Learn about famous sports figures from your town / 6. Look at your old school yearbook / 7. Learn what kinds of speakers were popular in the past for your club / 8. Track down an old photograph of your grandmother / 9. Look at a newspaper from the day you were born / 10. Look at old-fashioned valentines you can recreate for a special someone / 11. Show your kids a document that is 50 times older than they are / 12. Track down a recipe your great-grandmother would have enjoyed / 13. Look at successful marketing campaigns that you can recreate for your company / 14. Find a long lost relative / 15. Discover old-fashioned kids games that your children may enjoy / 16. Learn about old hiking trails that you can explore / 17. Prove that your house is zoned for agricultural as well as residential use / 18. Read someone else's diary / 19. Discover a lost cave / 20. Find an old font that would be perfect for your business brochure / 21. Touch a document written by someone famous / 22. Learn where the time capsule was buried in your building / 23. Hear the voice of someone who lived one hundred years ago / 23. Teach your kids what a vinyl album is / 24. Design an historical treasure hunt in

your town / 25. Learn to preserve your personal memorabilia as an archivist would so that it last for a lifetime.