



## Identifying and Working with Partners

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- The “Key Three”
- Historical Societies/ Museums
- The Public Library
- Schools

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One of the most important steps you'll undertake in the early planning stages of any Maine Memory Network (MMN) project is determining who you'll work with to get the job done. The “you” in question refers on the micro level to individual people, and on the macro level to organizations within communities. In both cases, the partners must learn to work well together in an efficient and substantive way.

### THE “KEY THREE”

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In general, **local historical societies/museums, public libraries, and schools** are the organizations most involved in Maine Memory activities. They are often thought of as **primary stakeholder organizations** in their community's history. These organizations have frequently been the ones to digitize collections, create online exhibits, and build websites in MMN.

Any additional partners your project might invite on board—town departments, civic institutions, businesses, community centers, arts organizations, social service agencies, etc. – clearly play an important role as well. Each partner brings particular strengths and resources that, drawn together, have the potential for creating a strong, multi-faceted team. But it is the “Key Three” that generally have the greatest stake and for whom this document is most applicable.

Here are some of the strengths and resources that each of the Key Three contribute when it comes to local history projects, followed by some of the issues or challenges you might encounter when working with those organizations—and possible solutions.

### HISTORICAL SOCIETIES/MUSEUMS

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Historical societies, museums and other organizations with historical materials provide the building blocks of Maine Memory Network-based local history projects—the collections. There would be no digitizing, no online exhibits, no website-building without them. The same can be said for the local history knowledge contained within the people that serve these organizations—it is priceless and as valuable as the collections themselves.

Historical organizations offer:

- Historical collections and (sometimes) space to house them
- Members knowledgeable about the history behind the collections, and willing to both advise others and take on project work
- Members knowledgeable about the care of collections
- Work space (sometimes)
- Potentially, a project coordinator might be the president or other board member, or simply a dedicated volunteer who supports increased access to the collections, a willingness to work with others (including possibly students), and who values the ability of technology to expand the reach of the society (if not yet a complete understanding of how it will do so)
- Other staff or members who are willing to devote time to work on the project, or who are willing to be interviewed for the knowledge they possess

Working with historical organizations may also present challenges. These include:

- **Limited open hours.** Many small historical societies, especially those in very rural areas, may only be open on a very limited basis—only during the summer, for example, and even then, just a couple days a week. Or, if they stay open year round, they may be open just one or two afternoons a week. This presents challenges to a group undertaking a project in a concentrated amount of time that needs access to the historical collections under lock and key.
  - **Solution:** Plan ahead with the members of your historical society to determine how to build in additional open hours, if necessary, to accommodate the project.
- **Small number of, and aging, staff/volunteers.** It comes as no surprise that many historical societies are staffed or served largely by older individuals—those that have time in their schedules to devote to what are mostly volunteer efforts, and for whom preserving local history has become an important concern. In many communities, the active membership/board is quite small so that just a handful of people are doing much of the work. So covering a museum’s open hours, caring for collections, answering questions from the public, and working on your project may all be done by the same one or two individuals. That’s a lot of work to go around, particularly for someone in her 60s, 70s, or 80s.
  - **Solution:** Whether you are part of the historical society to begin with, or part of another organization, request a meeting with the historical society/museum board

before the project begins. Explain the work in detail, but also the many benefits. Encourage more participants to step forward—or, ask that your one or two top participants be relieved of their typical historical society duties during the life of the project so they can devote themselves fully to it.

- **No building.** While we have been referring to “historical societies” that does not necessarily imply a physical space. In fact, a historical society just means a group of people that have joined together to preserve the history of their community. Many times the actual historical treasures are scattered about the community. Some items might be in the Town Office, others in a Fire Department collection. The local library and public schools may each have their own small collections, and there may be a number of hidden treasures in the hands of individuals just waiting for a physical space in which they can be properly housed. Since collections can only go on Maine Memory through a Contributing Partner organization, this kind of spread of items about town can increase the workload and timeline for projects.
  - **Solution:** Your group must be very focused on your project topic. Choose your collections wisely. In this case, fewer collections will serve you better, and items from individuals should only be used if they are absolutely vital to the project. (Note: Maine Memory discourages contributions from individuals unless they are of great relevance to the topic and can easily be contributed via the primary Contributing Partner. A separate “Contributions from Individuals” agreement must be completed by the individual and the CP in these instances.)
  
- **Space issues.** Even when there is a building, there may be little room to display or store items and no real work space. Many historical society buildings are historical structures with small rooms never intended to serve as modern work spaces with the kinds of equipment you will be using for this project. While many such buildings do have office spaces that have been adapted for just these needs, other do not and have no possibilities in that direction.
  - **Solution:** If this sounds like your community’s historical society, you should look for alternative work space. The local library is a good first choice, followed by a school, town office building/community center, or church. Another possibility is a group or team member’s home, although only if that person is willing and able to make the space available on a consistent basis.

- **Difficulty transporting collection items.** The items you will want to scan or photograph all must be moved to one extent or another. At a bare minimum, a photograph must be removed from a plastic sleeve in order to be scanned. Usually, with the help of some white gloves, this is no big deal. But perhaps the items you need require additional levels of transport—maybe they are in storage, or in a display case, or on shelves, or in an off-site location, or they need to be taken to a school so that students can use them in their classroom. Several challenges can arise due to the need to move historical materials. If they are fragile, they may require considerable preparation prior to moving. Or historical society members may balk at having them moved from the building. Or perhaps the items are so large or bulky that just moving them to a spot where they can be properly photographed creates havoc. All of these “movement” issues can cause stress not only to the items but to the people responsible for their care.
  - **Solution:** Assign “caretaker” status to 1-3 people in the group early on. Those, and only those, people are responsible for the transportation of items, whether that’s within the confines of a single building, or from one building to another. Then, draw up a transportation schedule based on the activities of the project. Include the standard Who/What/When/Where/How to outline which items will be transported on the various days of the project, how long they will remain in a given location, what will be done with them, who will be doing the activity, and so on. Everyone in the group should get a copy of the schedule and stick to it as religiously as possible.
  
- **Generational fears of technology/Copyright concerns.** While young people have grown up with computer technology, individuals in their 60s and older—which is by and large the population staffing historical societies—did not, and they may find it daunting and/or off-putting. Some members of a participating historical society or other organization with collections may be reluctant to have those collections digitized. They may fear using the required equipment themselves, or subjecting the fragile photographs, documents, and artifacts to the equipment if they don’t fully understand the processes the material will go through. They may also worry about the digital image once it’s publicly available online and worry about people downloading or printing it for their own purposes.

- **Solution:** In addition to pairing students with elders on the project, one of the best ways to combat these fears is to hold a thorough “info-and-demo” session as early as possible. Your group leaders and/or MHS staff can walk the concerned parties through the technological processes step by step and assure individuals that copyright stays in the hands of the collections’ owners. Remind them that while any page on Maine Memory can be printed out—just like on any other website—each image will bear a watermark with a copyright symbol noting the owner/contributor of the item. Stress that the goal—a national/global trend—is toward greater access to historic collections for use by researchers, students, and the general public.
- **Collections in poor condition or not well-organized.** You may find that the very items you need to use for your project are in poor shape or in disarray. Having to deal with a collection’s preservation or organization issues can add considerable time and detailed work to your project.
  - **Solution:** Assess this as early as possible. If you find that the collections you need to work with are in particularly poor shape, determine if there are enough individual items that can be salvaged for scanning or digitally photographing. Consult Maine Memory’s **Item Selection Guidelines** to see what can be put on Maine Memory and what is too far gone to be worth your time. If most of the collection is not viable and there is not another collection to support your subject matter, you may need to consider a new topic. If the collection is simply poorly-organized, come up with a work plan for getting it into shape. Consult Maine Memory’s **Preservation Guidelines for Collections** and assign 1-3 people in your group to work on putting it in order before actually pulling out items to digitize. **Do not attempt to both preserve/organize the collection and digitize at the same time.**

## THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Libraries have a vital role to play in helping their communities contribute to, use, and benefit from Maine Memory Network. In some cases, libraries have their own historical collections to share. In others, libraries serve as catalysts, encouraging their local historical society to contribute material and helping them to do so. Once resources about the community’s history are online, libraries ensure that patrons,

students, and people throughout the community know about and can access that material along with the other resources in Maine Memory that provide context for a community's history.

Libraries have:

- Public access
- Consistent (and often extensive) open hours
- A dedicated and professional staff
- Publicity mechanisms and media outlets
- Accounting systems in place ideal for grant management/fiscal agency
- High-speed Internet access and equipment (usually)
- Experience working with schools (often); they can act as a “hub” organization to draw other organizations together that may not have worked together before
- Historical resources (publications and perhaps collections)
- Potentially, a project coordinator in the form of the director, reference librarian, or a staff person in charge of library programs
- Likely an ideal meeting and/or community event venue, work/community space, and access to A/V equipment/materials
- Reference staff well-versed in local history and collections (sometimes)

Working with libraries also may present challenges. These include:

- **No meeting/community space.** Some small, rural Maine libraries barely have space for their books and computer equipment, so don't even think about a whole room just for holding meetings or community gatherings. If that's the case, then the historical society either is in the same boat, or no boat at all (and its collections, if they exist, may be stored at the library).
  - **Solution:** The town office, a church, or one of the schools may have work space that can be made available to your group.
- **No equipment.** While most libraries in Maine have at least a couple computers, certainly not all have scanners or digital cameras. And even the computers are dedicated largely to library patrons. Small libraries are especially stretched and may not be able to devote any equipment to your project. If you are unable to secure enough equipment through a Maine Memory

Community Mobilization Grant, or you are participating in Maine Memory without a grant, then you will need to figure out how to acquire the equipment you need to do the activities.

- **Solution:** Whether or not you are partnering with a school on your project, they may well be able to lend a scanner or camera for a period of time. Or perhaps you can invite them to participate! Consider appealing to local businesses for contributions and find creative ways of promoting them in return (e.g. on an acknowledgments page at the end of your exhibit or on your website; during a community gathering to announce your project). Contact a former Maine Community Heritage Project community to see if you can rent or borrow a piece of equipment if it's not being used. Many of these communities purchased equipment for their projects with grant money and may feel generous about helping new MMN communities.
  
- **Perceived “supporting” role.** Even though libraries and library staff can often play a central role in Maine Memory-based local history projects, sometimes they think of themselves as mere supporters to the supposed stars of the show—either the historical society/museums folks who hold the “stuff” that will go on Maine Memory, or the schools whose students will help digitize that stuff, or both. Library staff may profess willingness to help as needed—provide resources, help with research—but otherwise not step forward to take a more active role. This is a shame since often it is the library that can offer professional leadership, facilitation, and/or expert advice to the team.
  - **Solution:** Meet in advance with the library director to identify his/her commitment to the project. Determine which library staff member(s) have the time, interest, and skill set to devote to the project. Stress the library's importance as a key member of the group, without whom the project would not be possible. List the benefits the library will bring to the project, and the tangible and intangible assets you would like the library to provide.



## SCHOOLS

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What could be better? Teachers eager for rich resources and substantive learning opportunities combined with a “captive” audience of high-energy and tech-savvy students. With Maine Memory Network, it’s a match made in heaven! The possibilities for Maine Memory-based local history work with schools is truly endless when you begin with the foundation of digitizing, creating an online exhibit, or building a website.

Working with schools offers:

- Teachers of various disciplines – most often Social Studies, history, and English/Language Arts, but also Technology staff, Fine Arts, and other subjects – who are eager for substantive, place-based, and service-learning opportunities for their students, and who have great ideas for how to implement the material history into their curricula
- Students with assignments to fulfill, technological know-how, energy, and creativity; 1-2 especially engaged students may be invited to sit in on the planning group (and may even become so invested in the work that they go on to volunteer for the historical society after the project ends!)
- Often, work and/or meeting/community event space; if students cannot be easily transported to the historical society to work then it is ideal to have them do the work right at the school
- Access to equipment (almost always)
- Accounting systems in place ideal for grant management/fiscal agency (though beware that schools often have fairly complex bureaucracies in place)
- Expert staff to draw on for advice and assistance, or VIPs (such as the principal or superintendent) who can make presentations to boards and town councils

Working with schools also can present a number of challenges including:

- **Scheduling.** Most public school teachers are tied into very strict schedules and don’t have a lot of room to shift classes around or extend class time without a lot of hassle. If your project is heavily dependent on student participation to get things done, this can slow down the process considerably. A teacher outside the standard curriculum (an alternative education or gifted-and-

talented teacher, for example) or teachers in independent schools may have more flexibility, but even they will need to function within certain time constraints.

- **Solution:** Keep school/student participation well-defined and within the limitations of the school day and class periods. If yours is a long-term project, consider making the school portion a short-term part of it. Keep in mind that “less is more” when it comes to student participation. What may initially seem like just a handful of items to digitize and upload to MMN may actually be a considerable amount of work for a teacher to embed in her already full curriculum.
  
- **Curriculum requirements.** On a related note, while there is no standardized testing in Maine for history, teachers nevertheless have all sorts of curricular requirements that they must abide by. Sometimes, outside projects can be the square peg that must be squeezed into the round hole. This is especially true if the teacher you are working with is from a discipline a little further removed from the traditional subject matter.
  - **Solution:** Make sure the team and the teacher have clear communication from day one. The team must understand exactly the teacher’s goals and which parts of the project the students can work on to fit curricular needs. Remember that lesson plans must incorporate not only MMN activities themselves, but any additional teaching required to get students up to speed. For example, most students entering into this work need a clear understanding of what primary sources are and how they differ from secondary sources. This can take up an entire class period. Teachers must also understand the exact nature of the Maine Memory activities and what the team must accomplish in the project’s time period.
  
- **Transportation/budget.** School budgets are often tight. One of the first things to go is transportation for “extras” like field trips, or any other non-necessity to the core curriculum. This obviously puts a strain on a school’s involvement with an outside project.
  - **Solution:** If your organization or team has gotten a Maine Memory Network grant, some of those funds can be used to off-set cut budgets. If you are doing a project without a grant, consider asking area businesses for help. Or, organize car pools to transport students. If transportation is out of the question, use technology in creative

ways to connect students to other members of the team such as Skyping once a week to discuss particular historic items or research topics.

- **Teacher reassignments/replacements.** It's been known to happen: Teachers sign on to a project and then just before the school year starts, or even after, they are shifted to a new classroom, subject area, or grade level. Suddenly they no longer fit within the realm of your project anymore, and your team is without a teacher just as it's about to begin—or even after it has started—its work.
  - **Solution:** There is really very little that can be done about such sudden, unexpected changes except to “go with the flow.” Meet with the principal and get approval for the new teacher’s participation as soon as possible. If the teacher who has been reassigned is still accessible and amenable, ask him or her to meet with the new teacher to bring him/her up to speed. Perhaps the teacher who is leaving can even attend a transitional team meeting to provide some continuity.

## MORE INFORMATION

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Visit the [Share YOUR Local History](#) section of the Maine Memory Network website, [www.MaineMemory.net](http://www.MaineMemory.net).