



## Module 3 : Public and Community Engagement Case Studies

Public Engagement around web archiving is a relatively new concept for public library archivists. Few public library archives have engaged systematically in the collecting of born-digital materials, with the result that there are few documented examples of projects or programs that can help archivists and digital librarians plan and carry out collection based engagement activities. Instructive examples will emerge from Archive-It's Community Webs Project and from the ripple effects of cohort members' reports on their experiences to colleagues across the profession. In the interim, public engagement activities carried out in connection with community history digitization projects offer instructive models that can be adapted for community-based web archiving.

The following Case Studies provide a glimpse of the diverse approaches public library archivists are employing to foster increased public engagement with archives, especially digital collections. Crowdsourcing, community albums, social archives, participatory exhibitions, community history apps – these are but a few of the program types that can be seen in the dynamic landscape of archival programming in public libraries today.

The array of evolving practices to advance public engagement with community based cultural heritage materials and digital collections is not highly developed, analyzed or codified. There are as yet no “standards” or evaluation criteria. However, the programs do reveal the extent of archivists' creativity with respect to program development and their commitment to deepening understanding and use of public history collections by members of their local communities.

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### [Allen County Community Album](#) / **Allen County (IN) Public Library**

The Allen County Public Library, serving Fort Wayne and surrounding areas, has a renowned Genealogy Center with one of the largest existing collections of family history. Recognizing that it did not have an equivalent archive for community history, the Genealogy Center developed the Allen County Community Album in 2008. The Album provides a virtual platform for institutional and organizational records, historical documents from individuals and family, and historical photographs reflecting life in Allen County and surrounding counties of Indiana.

The goal of the Allen County Album is to preserve, make accessible, and encourage use of local records, stories, and images of all kinds. According to project organizers, "...this collection will become an increasingly important complement to other collections and will provide an ongoing vehicle for capturing the memories of this community."

The range of memories captured already suggests the diversity of residents' interests and experiences and the value of providing a central digital repository for otherwise isolated documents or image collections. For example, the Firefighters Photograph Collection was donated by one collector and is now being expanded with donations from fire companies and individuals across the region. The collection is valuable not only for its documentation of firefighting but also as a record of buildings, places and people in Fort Wayne.

Since its inception, the Allen County Community Album has proven to be a galvanizing tool to engage community members with local history. It is constantly being enhanced with new community donations from individuals, organizations, families and businesses. As the collections grow, users can benefit from complementary content and, especially, content that heretofore had not been broadly shared.

The Genealogy Center has proven an excellent home for such a project, with an existing infrastructure for digital archiving, including staff skilled in the development of metadata, appropriate equipment, and a pool of dedicated, trained volunteers who help with scanning.

By conceiving and supporting development of the Allen County Community Album, a collectively developed and owned community scrapbook, the Allen County Library and its Genealogy Center have strengthened connections to local and regional residents and stimulated new awareness and uses of local history resources.

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### [Life on a Tidal River: Ebb and Flow of Bangor History](#) / Bangor (ME) Public Library

There are many excellent archive-based educational initiatives underway in public libraries, including those utilizing digital collections. Based on the extent of student and community involvement and the sustained nature of the program, the Bangor Public Library's *Life on a Tidal River* series of student-created online exhibitions stands out. This multiyear initiative was led by Bangor's Local History and Special Collections Librarian, William Cook. In collaboration with other local institutions, Cook has worked with high school and middle school students to create 13 thematic digital exhibits, based on archival sources, that are accessible through the portal maintained by the Maine Memory Network.

*Life on a Tidal River* started in 2008-2009 as a joint effort of the Bangor Public Library, the Bangor High School, the Bangor Museum and Center for History, and two middle schools, with the goal of creating an online history local history portal. Project partners worked together to

select topics for their initial digital exhibits based on three primary selection criteria: (1) the topic(s) had to interest local students; (2) the participating institutions' collections had to support research with primary materials; and (3) the library and museum had to be interested in digitizing the related collections. Once exhibition topics were determined students visited the library and the museum to learn about their primary sources. With assistance from institutional staff and a cadre of community volunteers, they learned how to scan documents, upload images, and prepare text that interpreted the collections in relation to the exhibition topics. Librarian Cook visited each participating school class once a week to work with the teachers and students.

*Life on a Tidal River* has been sustained for over ten years. Although two schools have not been able to continue participating, the project has sustained student and community interest. The 13 exhibit topics researched and developed by participating students range from The Great Bangor Floods of 1902 and 1976 to Bangor and Social Reform Movements of the 1800s and 1900s.

Librarian William Cook reports that the project has benefited all of the participating institutions, but, most especially, the students:

“Middle and High School kids don’t usually have an opportunity to create something real and lasting. The Heritage Project gives them the chance to make a visible contribution to their communities. I see a real change in the kids who get involved - they are enthusiastic and engaged.”

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### [Nashville’s New Faces](#) / Nashville (TN) Public Library

The Special Collections Division of the Nashville Public Library (NPL) has made oral history a key component of its work to collect, preserve and share community history. According to Special Collections Director Andrea Blackman,

“Oral history provides a venue for public discourse about the meaning of certain events or experiences. Interviewees go beyond nostalgia to reflect on the larger significance of their experiences, and the people who listen to them connect more readily than if the reports were far away and abstract.”

Nashville has long been recognized for its national Civil Rights Oral History Project and as well as its extensive collections pertaining to Nashville’s involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. These sources have made the Library a center for ongoing Civil Right programming.

In 2013-14 the Special Collections Division embarked on another major oral history project, *Nashville's New Faces* aimed at recording and preserving the oral narratives of Nashville's newest residents, including individuals from more than 25 countries. The project was part of the American Library Association's StoryCorps @ your library initiative and was carried out in collaboration with the national StoryCorps organization and the assistance of trained volunteers. According to Blackman, "*Nashville's New Faces* is intended to build new understanding of Nashville as being more than white, black and country music." The project involved recorded interviews with recent immigrants and first generation Americans living in Nashville. The interviews were transcribed and digitized and are available for listening through the library's website or in-person at the library.

The collection includes conversations with people from 27 countries, including Latino, Somali, Laotian, Kurdish, Vietnamese, Cuban, Sudanese, and other immigrant communities. Interviewees were invited to bring a friend or family member and discuss whatever they wished. This resulted in a wide variety of conversations covering family, identity, education and more. Many participants have returned to the library and continued their connections with the Special Collections Division.

*Nashville's New Faces* project has provided the basis for other forms of public engagement. *Estamos Aqui: Voces Contemporaneas / We are Here: Contemporary Voices* was a year-long exhibition at the Main Library that featured paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture and mixed media works of Hispanic artists living in Tennessee whose work depicts immigrant experiences. Alongside the works were excerpts from the personal narratives of foreign-born residents from the *Nashville's New Faces* collection.

*Nashville's New Faces* Project was also part of a larger collaboration between NPL's Special Collections Division and Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development. According to Peabody Doctoral Student Jennifer Kahn,

"Together we are seeking to design innovative learning activities that engage youth in scholarship with the library's rich archives of local public history ... We specifically wanted to incorporate the [NPL's 'New Faces of Nashville'](#) oral history collection, which captures the stories of Nashville's residents who are representative of the city's changing demographics and diversification, into our project design."

[One project](#) undertaken by NPL's Special Collections and Peabody College involved middle school students using digital mapping tools, such as Google Earth and Google Maps, to explore stories from the *Nashville's New Faces* collection and to map their own bio-geographies, which showed the places where they and their families have lived.

The *Nashville's New Faces* project adds valuable new material to the Library's Digital Collections while at the same time providing a means of engaging new community members with the library and its archives, and enabling them to contribute to a more comprehensive

portrait of contemporary Nashville. The project is also offering unique source materials, and opportunities for educational activities and interpretive programs, through which Nashville residents can gain new perspectives on the experiences and cultures of the city's newest residents.

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**Community Webs program partners**

