

## Project Justification

### What need, problem, challenge, or opportunity will your project address, and how was it identified?

The Moore Free Library (MFL) proposes to use IMLS APP funding to create and maintain a mechanism for community members to share and record personal stories and disseminate those stories through a web-based digital archive and Instagram feed. Participants will be able to create digital copies of physical artifacts (scanned journals, letters, postcards and photographs, as well as digital photographs of three-dimensional objects) that are linked with their spoken stories. We will create a broad network of community members from Newfane and Brookline, Vermont and build the library's capacity to collect, preserve, and share oral history. This project will build on decades of work that has collected oral and written histories of local people and will include those stories in the new digital and publicly available archive. This project answers a need expressed by town residents to have better access to local history and stories by and about the community.

In January of 2019, MFL conducted a community needs assessment to gauge what community members believed was currently available as a repository for local stories. There were 81 responses with 86% saying they did not believe there was a mechanism in place to collect and preserve stories about the community and 83% saying they had their own stories or knew of others with stories about the community. 100% of the respondents said they wanted to learn more about Newfane history and 100% said they enjoyed hearing stories about local history. When asked to rank "which means of sharing local history would you use, if it existed," a library website was the number one choice. (Community Memory survey results, attachment). The library plans to answer this need with this project.

### Which of the three Project Categories does your project address?

This project addresses the Community Memory category.

### How would you qualify your library as small and/or rural?

Newfane is a town of about 1,600 people (2017 census estimate) in the rural Green Mountains of Southern Vermont. MFL is a small, independent library that has served as a central meeting place and trusted source of information in the community for 121 years. The library serves residents of Newfane and neighboring Brookline (population 525 in the 2017 census estimate). Newfane and Brookline also share a zip code and post office, as well as an elementary school and volunteer fire department. There are four food service establishments in Newfane (none in Brookline) but the library is the only free gathering place in the two towns. MFL is open for twenty hours per week, five days per week and has one part-time employee, a Library Director who works 24 hours per week. There is also a dedicated crew of volunteers who put in an average of 39 hours per week of unpaid time to keep the library running.

As of October 1, 2019, there are 777 library members (patrons who have a library card and who can check out materials; there is no charge for membership, but it is limited to Newfane and Brookline residents) and in 2018 the MFL had 7,440 visits, or an average 620 visits per month. Many visitors to MFL don't check out materials, but use the computers or wi-fi (many community members do not have internet access at home, and most do not have cell coverage), read the newspaper, use the bathroom, borrow the telephone, or just visit with others. This is a small, rural library serving a small, rural community.

### Who will benefit from your project? How have you engaged them in your planning?

Current and former (and future) residents of Newfane and Brookline would be the prime beneficiaries of this

project, as well as those interested in the stories of people from these communities. These towns are communities with a strong interest in their history. The Historical Society of Windham County (HSoWC) was founded in 1927 in Newfane, the County seat. The Society's two museums house an invaluable collection of artifacts, documents (including journals and photographs) donated by Newfane and Brookline residents or relatives of residents dating back to the 18th century. Since 2013, the Society's annual meeting has featured a storytelling portion, where residents from Newfane and Brookline share "stories of days gone by." Telling stories is a very popular pastime in this area.

In 2002, an oral history project called "Newfane Remembers," was undertaken with the fifth and sixth graders at the NewBrook Elementary School. It was dedicated to collecting and preserving the recollections of residents about life in town in times past. A selection of those recorded oral histories was published by the Elementary School students in house as well. The project has continued since then outside of the classroom on a more informal basis: Historical Society members have created oral histories over the years, and articles based on the recollections of residents have been published in local newspapers by permission of the interviewees. Close to 50 hours of cassette tape recordings have been collected since the inception of the Newfane Remembers project and remain in that format in storage. (More recently, oral histories have been digitally recorded and stored on a computer.)

The library's mission is *to collect, preserve and deliver in a welcoming, convenient and responsive manner, library materials in print and in electronic formats to meet the informational and lifelong learning needs of the members of its community. In addition, we seek to provide cultural and environmental enrichment through various forms of art and nature.* This project is in keeping with that mission.

MFL has engaged the community in the planning for this project through the survey administered in January, as well as by getting input from the project partners, the Historical Society of Windham County, Senior Solutions and Brattleboro Area Hospice. Senior Solutions is the area's Agency on Aging and provides a wide variety of services to older adults in Newfane and Brookline, including the Friendly Visitor and Vet to Vet programs, which are both based on conversations and building community connections with isolated seniors. Senior Solutions visitors note that storytelling is a main part of visiting, and recording, preserving, and making public these stories is a way to let the voices of the storytellers live on. The Brattleboro Area Hospice, an all-volunteer, non-medical hospice organization, also will partner with MFL on this project, committing to enroll hospice volunteers in the trainings and then taking that training to hospice clients who have ties to Newfane and Brookline. HSoWC has approximately 400 members and is the key organization for history related events in the area. All three organizations have provided input on this grant proposal.

#### What best practices or prior IMLS funded work will inform your approach?

By working with the Vermont Folklife Center (VFC), we will be trained in and will be sure to employ best practices in community oral history collection and archiving. The Vermont Folklife Center has a 35 year history of providing training and resources to small organizations throughout the state to collect and preserve oral history. In this century, they also have developed training and best practices around digital archiving and dissemination of those audio files. VFC is working with one of the 2019 APP Community Memory grantees and we believe what they learn from that project will help inform our work.

The website that will house the stories and images will use Omeka, an IMLS-funded open source web publishing platform that has been used for a variety of community oral history projects. All digitization work will be conducted in accordance with the Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative (FADGI) best practices for audio preservation and digital access.

The library would be pleased to work with the mentor organization that IMLS pairs it with and to participate in

the Community of Practice. Because this is such a small library, learning from more experienced partners and sharing in the professional development will be greatly welcomed and will help ensure best practices all around.

*How will your project address the goals of APP? The goals of this initiative are to support projects that strengthen the ability of small and/or rural libraries and archives to serve their communities and to build grantee capacity through participation in a Community of Practice*

This project will serve the community by creating a free web-based archive and Instagram feed that will house existing community memories and stories with the ability to grow and add more stories and digital images. This will help build and enhance relationships in the community. By dedicating time to participate in the Community of Practice and by continuing to offer ongoing community memory days beyond the grant funding period, the library will have the capacity to continue this project into the future.

### **Project Work Plan**

#### *What specific activities will you carry out?*

With the support of the IMLS funding, MFL will host annual three-day trainings, facilitated by the Vermont Folklife Center, that will prepare participants to be proficient and confident in interviewing and recording people and in managing the digital version of those stories and related artifacts. In addition to the attendees identified by the project partners, this training will be open to the general Newfane and Brookline public. The workshops will be widely publicized by the partner organizations, as well as in the *Commons*, the free weekly newspaper that serves Windham County. MFL will send direct mailings to all the residents in the two Newfane zip codes, and all the partners will publicize the project's trainings, as well as opportunities to be interviewed and the web archive in their own notification streams (online and print). Front Porch Forum, a free online community bulletin board that is widely used by the community, will also be used to publicize the project.

The training provided by VFC is as follows:

- **Interviewing & Recording (5 hours)**

An overview of the Vermont Folklife Center's ethnographic approach to interviewing and a discussion of the methods and ethics of recording other people's stories. Attendees will work in teams to conduct practice interviews—gaining first hand experience with the process, and familiarizing themselves with the complex challenges of balancing interpersonal engagement with interviewees while simultaneously using audio recording technology to document the interaction.

- **Editing Basics and Using Omeka (4 hours)**

A hands-on introduction to basic audio editing for anyone looking to create interview-based audio content, from simple cuts and excerpts to the core skills needed to build a longer-format podcast. Participants will learn to trim, cut, assemble and mix a simple audio piece using free, web-based editing software (Soundtrap).

- **Scanning & Digital Photography and Embedding in Omeka (4 hours)**

How to create digital copies of physical objects, using a scanner (for photographs, journals, letters and other flat things) and a digital camera to capture images of three-dimensional things (like human beings and artifacts). Participants will learn how to make these digital images part of the story stream tied to the audio recordings on Omeka.

As a result of the trainings, a dedicated corps of at least fifteen people each year will be fully prepared to conduct, record, and upload interviews and make digital copies of artifacts. At least five of these fifteen will also become so proficient that they will feel confident to train others in the VFC's best practices in doing this

recording and archiving. We expect that some people may not wish to perform the editing and uploading to the site and will prefer to work on interviewing/recording only. In those cases, the recordings will be shared with other trained volunteers who feel confident in doing that work.

A new website will be the centrally visible component of this project. It will be a searchable, indexed collection of stories and will use Omeka, an IMLS-funded open source web publishing platform that has been used for a variety of community oral history projects. The site will incorporate both the free Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS) transcription software and the free open-source “Stories Matter Visualization Tool” application, developed by Canada’s Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University. This software allows for a visual mapping of stories so that users can see where keywords intersect and can listen to a variety of stories told by the same person, or about the same subject. The web site will be free and open to the public to use and selected stories will be posted to an Instagram account specifically created for this project.

Additionally, the library will facilitate drop-in and planned times where people can share their stories without being interviewed by dedicating private space in the library for people who want to tell their own stories without being interviewed. The Community Memory team will suggest broad quarterly topics (such as harvest, snow, holidays, summer, work, etc.) which people may choose to use as a starting point for their stories.

The existing cassette tapes from the Historical Society’s collection would also be digitized, indexed, and added to the Omeka site as part of this project. The digitizing will be done by a vendor and the indexing work will be done by the HSoWC, (October 2019 - March 2020 and October 2020 - March 2021, when the museum is closed).

The project coordinator will promote the project and the web site to local press (*Reformer* and *Commons* newspapers) and will put on several programs in the library to show users how to access the site and listen to the stories presented on it. This is expected to ramp up interest for the next round of trainings, as well.

In August of 2020, the HSoWC holds its annual meeting, which is another opportunity to promote the project, and record more stories that can form part of the corpus, once the grant period begins. In addition, in August 2021, Newfane will host the biennial Windham County History Fair (further indication of how history-minded this community is) and the group will use that opportunity to showcase the project as well as to collect additional stories.

*Who will plan, implement, and manage your project? Which member of the project team will participate in the Community of Practice? Will partners be engaged and, if so, for what purpose?*

This project will be coordinated and managed by Erica Walch, the Library Director of MFL. Her schedule and salary will be increased by 10 hours per week to allow for this additional work. Erica is an experienced project manager, having planned and completed numerous projects in adult education and workforce development in her professional life. Rachel Onuf, Coordinator of the Vermont Historical Records Program and the evaluator for this project, will be the participant in the Community of Practice activities.

The key partners working in tandem will come from Senior Solutions, Brattleboro Area Hospice, and the Historical Society of Windham County. Staff from these partners will meet monthly to check in on the project and plan events. The partners will publicize the project and will commit at least five volunteers to attend each of the annual three-day VFC trainings. All of these partners have identified their contact people for the team and those commitment letters are in the application package.

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the project activities and participation in the Community of Practice?

The MFL director will dedicate ten hours per week to the project, and the evaluator will attend the in-person Community of Practice meetings. The \$47,452 in funding from IMLS is critical to carrying out these activities; without that significant support, the project would not happen. This project will build the capacity of the Library Director and community members to carry this work forward, and the library will support additional time for the Director to continue this work, but no one in this small rural community has the resources needed to fund the training and initiation of the work without funding such as the IMLS is offering.

What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?

The risks to the success of this project include changes in personnel and volunteers in the partner organizations and people not agreeing to have their personal stories shared on the internet. The first risk is managed by the agreement from the organizations to participate, even if the identified staffer or volunteer is no longer in that role when funding is awarded. The second is expected to be mitigated by the training provided by VFC and by the desire to join in after hearing personal stories of peers on the public website. After attending the training, attendees may decide not to interview anyone. The risk of participants feeling uncomfortable in interviewing others should be mitigated by the VFC training.

How will you measure your progress and evaluate your project performance goals?

Evaluation will be ongoing with the project, with key program staff meeting regularly to check their progress against the schedule of completion and the workplan. All workshops will include an evaluation component (satisfaction and what was learned surveys, which will contain IMLS required language) for participants. Team members will check in after events to discuss how they went and if training objectives were met. There will be sign in sheets at all workshops and public events, which will allow for an accurate collection of numbers and residency of people involved. The number of interviews uploaded is easily quantifiable. Web site visits and analytics will be tracked and recorded. The team will repeat the questions asked in the community needs assessment, which was done in January 2019, in September 2021 (after the History Fair) and see if responses have changed; this data will be included in the final project evaluation.

The team expects the mentor organization and Community of Practice to keep evaluation in the forefront and to help refine the evaluation plan if funding is received. Rachel Onuf from the Vermont Historical Records Program has also offered to assist in evaluation planning. This information from interviewers, interviewees, and those involved in making the stories available online will help the project to continuously assess performance goals and make adjustments as needed to ensure that community members are satisfied with their involvement. VFC will help the team develop a best practices and how-to manual for undertaking community-centered research. A full calendar of the work plan is found in the Schedule of Completion.

## **Project Outcomes**

What are the intended results and outputs of your project? How do they address the need articulated in your Project Justification?

As a result of this IMLS grant funding, the following outcomes are expected at the end of the two-year project:

- At least 30 community members trained in listening/interviewing and recording oral history stories
- At least 20 adult community members using Omeka software independently to upload and index digital

recordings

- All existing deteriorating cassettes and stored audio files digitized and indexed in Omeka site
- At least ten community members confident to deliver this training to peers
- Minimum 135 new audio stories uploaded to Omeka site
- Project director will share information about this project to other local small and rural libraries and historical societies interested in implementing a community memory project in their library.
- All partner organizations will have embedded interviewing and uploading of stories and digital copies of artifacts as part of their regular practice and the project will continue beyond the IMLS funding period.

These outcomes directly address the need articulated in the Project Justification: community members' desire for a web-based digital archive of local stories.

*How do you define success for your project?*

This project will be considered successful when there is a widely-visited website to which community members can add audio stories and digital images that can be easily found by subject and topic, and which will last into the future. Success will also mean that members of the community gather together and learn about each other in new ways through listening to each other's stories and then sharing those stories with others.

*What is your plan for collecting and reporting data on your goals and outcomes?*

Once the website and Instagram account are launched, we will collect data on visits monthly. We will count attendees at all workshops, and count the number of stories shared and uploaded. On the qualitative end, VFC will include satisfaction surveys in their workshops. Project partners will collect information on how proficient their volunteers feel at the various tasks of interviewing and uploading files.

*How will you sustain the benefits of your project beyond the funding period? How will you sustain the lessons learned and knowledge gained through the community of practice?*

The project will be sustained by the MFL's commitment to continue to pay for the hosting of the web site, and to pay the project coordinator for additional weekly hours of time after the funding period, the ongoing monthly interviewing days and scanning days, and ongoing meetings with staff from partner organizations.

In short, the funding from IMLS would have a profound impact on the lives of many people in this small corner of Vermont, and it would make a lasting change in the practice of the Moore Free Library.

Moore Free Library Community Memory Project  
 Schedule of Completion  
 Year One September 2020 - August 2021

	9/20	10/20	11/20	12/20	1/21	2/21	3/21	4/21	5/21	6/21	7/21	8/21
Website creation (VFC) and Instagram Account (project coordinator)												
Publicity, direct mailing, news articles												
Monthly team meetings												
Digitization and upload of existing recordings ("Remembers" cassettes and Annual Meeting storytelling files) (project coordinator and all team)												
Three part Community Memory Trainings (VFC)												
Interviews begin, goal of 35 stories collected by end of March 2021 (partners and public)												
Drop-in recording space in library open to public												
Interview editing and uploading begins (partners and public)												
Check-in on progress towards goals (project coordinator and all team)												
Promotion of Round one of recordings, planning for booth at history fair (all)												
Bi-annual History Fair with booth for more recordings and showcase of web site												

Moore Free Library Community Memory Project  
Schedule of Completion  
Year Two: September 2021 - August 2022