

Developing Local Exhibitions and Programs

Museum on Main Street and the state humanities councils expect host venues to develop humanities programs and local exhibitions to complement the Smithsonian exhibition. These programs are a critical component of the Museum on Main Street experience as they provide the missing “local story” needed to complement the national story as told through the exhibition. Host sites that fail to add this local programming component are not receiving the full experience and optimal benefit of hosting a MoMS exhibition. The guidelines provided below and the additional information available at www.museumonmainstreet.org/admin are designed to help host venues develop local exhibitions and public humanities programming to supplement the Smithsonian exhibition.

Step 1: Gather Your Partners

Of course, the first thing to realize is that you can't do it all alone. Partnering with organizations in your community can help develop a broad selection of programs and activities to complement your exhibition. Often times, you can tap into pre-existing community programs and just adapt the theme to fit the *Journey Stories* exhibition. For example, ask the local librarian to select books with traveling themes for the weekly children's story hour, or with enough advance notice, the school drama or music teachers might be able to plan performances based on the exhibition theme. Look at this as an opportunity to establish or strengthen relationships with other community organizations. Potential community partners may include:

- Churches
- Library
- Fairs and Festivals
- Clubs and dance halls
- Historical societies, genealogical societies
- Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Radio Stations
- Video rental store and movie theatre owners/managers

Step 2: Establish Your Committees

Once you've assembled your partners, the next thing to do is to establish committees to take responsibility for various programs and activities. Suggested committees are:

- **PROGRAM PLANNING COMMITTEE:** Many host communities aim for having one exhibition-related program for each week that the exhibit is in town. But don't forget that you might want to plan programs that precede the exhibition, as a way to drum up interest, and some programs even follow the exhibition. To get you started in your thinking, we encourage you to carefully review the *Ideas for Public Programs and Local Exhibitions* provided at www.museumonmainstreet.org. There you might find some program and exhibition ideas that would be a good fit for your community. But don't feel limited to these ideas—if you come up with something else, go for it! We've also assembled lists of books and movies that fit the theme of the exhibition, which might be useful for planning reading programs and film series programs. Don't forget to tap into the knowledge and resources of your state scholar as you work to develop programs that help tell your local roots music story.

- **LOCAL EXHIBITION COMMITTEE:** MoMS expects each host community to develop an accompanying exhibit, which examines the themes of *Journey Stories* from the perspective of the local community. The exhibit may be installed at the museum if space is available or may be installed at a nearby exhibition space in the community.

The primary goals are to put together a **Local Exhibition** that supplements *Journey Stories* by putting a local spin on it and examining the traditions of your community. There are a number of ways to approach exhibition development. You can start by putting out a call for artifacts and then developing an exhibition around them, or you can start by collecting oral histories to determine the story you want to tell about your community and then collecting specific objects to support your exhibition thesis. Both are valid approaches. If the end result is an object-based exhibit that documents local traditions, then you were successful!

If you've never developed a local exhibition before, we've posted some helpful and brief exhibition development articles from the Wisconsin Historical Society on the Museum on Main Street web site (www.museumonmainstreet.org/admin). In addition, there are numerous books available through the American Association for State and Local History (www.aaslh.org) and the American Association of Museums (www.aam.org) that are excellent resources for exhibition development. Also, *Good Show: A Practical Guide for Temporary Exhibitions*, available through SITES, is a good resource for designing and fabricating an effective exhibition.

The Local Exhibit Planning Committee is to be responsible for the following:

- Planning and design of local additions to *Journey Stories*
- Developing exhibit ideas and lists of resources and items needed. (See attached listing of exhibition ideas and suggested objects to collect)
- Developing lists of potential resource providers for the desired artifacts.
- Soliciting those potential providers/partners for help and donation/loan of artifacts. (NOTE: Forms for incoming loan receipt/agreement, deed of gift and receipt of return are provided at www.museumonmainstreet.org).
- Inventory/track borrowed resources and provide appropriate thanks and recognition for gifts and loans
- Overseeing the physical installation of the exhibit
- Overseeing the dismantling and return of exhibit materials

An **Exhibit Installation Sub-Committee** should also be organized for the specific purpose of the physical installation of the exhibit. To assist the museum staff in fabricating the local exhibition this committee could be composed of local architects, handymen, finish carpenters and cabinet-makers, electricians, Plexiglas technicians, graphic artists, and/or printers as needed for the local exhibit.

- **BUDGET and FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE.** This committee is responsible for establishing the budget for local programs and publicity and raising funds to meet that budget. This would include completion of the application for grant funds from the state humanities council. Local businesses and civic organizations are good targets for a project like this--you may want to establish a sponsorship program with varying levels of benefits to entice potential funders. In addition to funds raised, be sure to keep track of donated goods and services, which have a value to the overall project budget.

- **MARKETING & ADVERTISING COMMITTEE.** Publicizing your MoMS exhibition is critical to the success of your project. Develop a marketing plan to help get the word out. This may include billboards (with space donated by local businesses), radio interviews, newspaper advertisements and articles, brochures, web site, etc. MoMS has created a ***Publications and Marketing Toolkit*** to assist local hosts in this endeavor (www.museumonmainstreet.org/admin). Make strategic use of the publicity materials provided by MoMS (brochures, postcards, flyers, posters). If you plan on creating your own PR materials, digital images of the exhibition and the graphic identity for New Harmonies available on the MoMS web site may be of assistance. Be sure to keep extra copies of all PR materials and press clippings for submitting with your final report.
- **EDUCATION COMMITTEE:** This committee is responsible for making the connections with the K-12 community and encouraging their participation in the exhibition and related programming. This would include introducing area teachers to the ***Teachers Guide and Educational Materials*** created by MoMS for *Journey Stories* (available at www.museumonmainstreet.org), Often school groups create artwork or literary pieces to display in conjunction with the exhibition.
- **EXHIBITION HOST COMMITTEE.** This committee is responsible for recruiting and scheduling docents, managing group tours (school groups, senior groups etc) and collecting evaluation data for reporting. Note that MoMS creates a ***Docent Guide*** for each exhibition (available at www.museumonmainstreet.org) and guidelines for conducting a docent program for your exhibition. The ***Close-Out Report*** for the exhibition is submitted on-line—see Evaluation and Close Out Reporting section of this notebook.

Step 3: Establish Your Calendar

It's best to start by noting when you will be hosting the exhibition and then work backwards setting deadlines for various planning components for the project: When are the deadlines for submitting funding requests? When will you begin your publicity activities? What are the deadlines for submission of school projects? When will you install your local exhibition and how long will it run? Then look forward to the period when the *Journey Stories* exhibition will be at your facility and beyond: When and where will your community programs be scheduled? (Be sure to look at the calendar of events for your partner organizations and try not to schedule your programs in competition with major community events.) When are evaluation reports due? Be sure that each member of each committee receives copies of your project calendar and that they're notified of any updates or changes to the calendar.

Remember that as you're planning and implementing your project, help is only a phone call or email away. Don't hesitate to contact your state coordinator, state scholar and MoMS liaison if you have any questions. Your fellow host sites may also be of assistance with suggestions and ideas that they have found helpful.