

Queens Borough Public Library
Developing a Public Library Toolkit for Best Practices in Community Archiving

Introduction: Queens Public Library (QPL) envisions a future where all public libraries are empowered to effectively engage with their communities in preserving local history. QPL's Queens Memory Project (QMP) seeks a \$249,857, two-year Implementation Grant to develop a comprehensive toolkit for public libraries to enhance their community archiving capacity. This project aligns with Goal 3 of the NLG-L program and addresses Objective 3.2.

Project Justification: Community-driven archiving initiatives enable public libraries to engage local residents and groups actively in the process of preserving local history and heritage. They are a power sharing strategy that respects the agency of those who are inadequately represented in historic collections and contemporary collecting efforts. However, only [45.5% of suburban libraries and 35.9% of rural libraries](#) have someone dedicated to local history or archival collections as part of their job description, indicating that there are not enough public library workers who possess theoretical grounding in community and post-custodial archiving and are fully trained in the methodology of archiving. There is a [need for professional training requirements](#) in cultural heritage preservation. Small libraries may face challenges in terms of available expertise, capacity, or funding to dedicate staff with specialized skills needed to collect, appraise, digitize or catalog local oral stories or artifacts that would be used by scholars, historians, librarians, and the public. One such challenge includes the capacity to utilize advancements in digitization technology that allow for more efficiency in capturing audio and visual artifacts. The changing dynamics of public libraries, which serve as community anchors, means providing access to the latest technology for individuals and community-based organizations such as recording studios, video editing software, computers, printers and hotspots. The accessibility of new technology and software to the public helps further shared digital preservation and access goals. Founded in 2010, QMP has established itself as an influential community-driven archive initiative due to its expertise in community-engaged, post-custodial archiving practices and digital preservation. QPL, in collaboration with its partners, proposes to develop a public library toolkit for best practices in community-driven archiving. The toolkit will provide public libraries of various sizes and settings with the necessary resources to engage with their communities effectively around preserving local history.

Work by practitioners and researchers across the country has yielded [toolkits and other freely accessible resources](#) for conducting community-driven archival work. This project will build upon these resources and those developed by QMP. The guide will introduce creative, effective community-strengthening strategies such as user-centered design techniques and stakeholder mapping, highlighting the preservation, description, copyright, project management, media literacy, and research skills library workers already possess and offering guidance on how to apply those skills in accessible and genuinely useful ways in community-driven archives projects.

Project Work Plan: QPL will establish a three-person project Steering Committee whose members will comprise experts knowledgeable about community archiving, digital preservation, library science, cultural heritage, and community engagement, bringing their perspectives and diverse experiences to ensure the toolkit's relevance, effectiveness, and applicability beyond QPL's context. Preliminary conversations are underway with prospective committee members. The team plans to select one member who is a public librarian currently engaged in community-driven archiving work in a rural community and a scholar whose research both engages community directly and examines the larger ecosystem of community archiving and post-custodial archives practice nationwide. We will also engage a committee member with deep community archiving experience who does not have a professional background in History, Libraries, Museums or Archives. Committee members will (a) review draft versions of the toolkit and offer feedback to ensure that the toolkit addresses the needs of a broad range of libraries and (b) participate in monthly 90-minute work sessions together online to review and amend the toolkit. By combining work-ahead solo assignments with a structured agenda for time spent as a group, we hope to respect committee members' time by using it efficiently and create opportunities for thoughtful reflection and informed discussion while together. Members will travel to various library conferences nationally to strategically recruit libraries that are involved in community archiving.

Phase I of the work plan provides QPL and its Steering Committee the opportunity to develop and document workflows, lessons learned, and strategies for working with community partners, forming the basis of a draft toolkit that will be refined during Phase II. During Phase I, QPL will engage with local partners to digitize and describe their archives including the Haitian Times, Zion Episcopal Church, the Ridgewood Historical Society, and the Queens Historical Society. Project Director Natalie Milbrodt along with QMP Community Coordinator Meral Agish and QPL Digital Archives Manager Dacia Metes will engage staff, volunteers, and community partners in contributing to the toolkit document. Digitization Manager Grace deSagun will provide best practices guidelines around digitization recommendations and QMP Curator Jiefei Yuan will provide recommendations around the production of curated content such as podcasts, exhibitions and social media campaigns. The QMP team will create the toolkit by documenting our process and lessons learned from working closely with these community partners, focusing on their needs. For example, Zion Episcopal Church is interested in launching a reconciliation process with their stakeholders based on the church founders' enslavement of Africans and history with the local Matinecock people who were both part of the church and excluded from it. This involves safely digitizing the oldest hand-written records of congregation history such as births, baptisms, marriage, funeral, and burial details, which are the most relevant and fragile and require the use of advancements in digitization technology. Other needs include privacy and metadata creation. QPL will engage a consultant to create educational lesson plans about the community partners' primary source materials that are being digitized. We will publish those lesson plans on QPL platforms and on websites where teachers source their classroom materials such as the [Digital Public Library of America](#) and [Consider the Source](#). QPL will engage contractors to design the toolkit, conduct community testing with 50 people, translate the toolkit and format amendments to it in Phase II. QPL will report on our work on the Phase I toolkit at the American Library Association's annual conference and other national venues.

During Phase II, QPL will recruit three public library systems of differing sizes and from different U.S. regions that serve patrons in rural, suburban and small urban centers. We will choose library partners by virtue of the quality and feasibility of their plans to work with identified community stakeholders, as well as the linguistic, economic, and cultural diversity of the communities they serve. Cohort members will meet monthly for a structured review and revision of the toolkit and for mutual support and learning as members organize and facilitate their community-driven archives initiatives. Cohort members, Steering Committee members, and QPL staff will co-design and facilitate a webinar open to all public libraries to share the final revised toolkit as a freely downloadable PDF available in Chinese, English and Spanish. A recording of this webinar will be available on the [Queens Memory website](#).

Diversity Plan: The very nature of the program is to encourage archival and special collections management of materials from underrepresented and/or historically marginalized groups. To this end, QPL will utilize lessons learned from previous community-engaged projects that navigated controversial diversity, equity and inclusion issues. For example, QPL learned to hire community members to serve in key planning roles on previous seasons of the Queens Memory podcast, ensuring open lines of communication to community members represented in the project. The Steering Committee will represent diverse perspectives and provide insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by libraries of various sizes in different regions, enabling the toolkit to meet the needs of a broad audience.

Project Results: The project intends to develop national best practices around community-driven archiving in public libraries. QPL will ensure that the toolkit is adaptable, generalizable, and usable by public libraries of various sizes and from diverse communities by incorporating feedback from partners and best practices and lessons learned throughout the two project phases. The toolkit will have a permanent home on the [Queens Memory website](#). The team will also pursue publication and dissemination opportunities such as the Society of American Archivists' Research Forum.

Budget Summary: The project costs \$249,857 over two years. Grant-funded costs include \$12,000 for Travel to conferences; \$154,107 in Equipment for scanning; \$85,300 in Other Costs (\$24,000 for consultants to develop the toolkit document, \$18,000 in honoraria for Phase I partners to select materials, create metadata, and conduct outreach, \$1,500 to develop educational lesson plans for Phase I partners, \$30,000 in subawards to Phase II partners for local community archiving, and \$1,800 in honoraria for partners to disseminate the Phase II toolkit); and \$8,450 in Indirect Costs.