

**SOUTHERN HISTORICAL  
COLLECTION**

# Creating and Growing Community- based Memory Projects

**WILSON  
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY**

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL



**When people come together to preserve and share their history, the result is a community-based archive or memory project. These archives can begin with an existing collection of historical materials, the desire to record and share many voices in the community, or the need to document the activities of a movement or group.**

**You may operate your community memory project independently, or you may wish to partner with a local cultural heritage organization that can help you collect, store, and display materials. You may even consider setting up an independent museum, history center, or archive.**

**HERE ARE SOME STEPS THAT WILL HELP  
YOU EXPAND AND FORMALIZE  
YOUR COMMUNITY MEMORY PROJECT.**

## 1 ORGANIZE AND ASSESS

- Review and describe any items that you have already collected. These could be documents, photographs, films, videos, audio recordings, or digital files.
- Consider what stories, documents, or pieces of the history are missing, and how you will fill these gaps. You might conduct oral history interviews with community members or hold a “history harvest,” where people bring their documents for you to scan or collect.

## 2 BUILD COMMUNITY

- Think about who has been a member of your project already and whether you would like to establish a formal task force, club, or organization.
- Reach out to members of your community who know about topics of interest.
- Build your network via word of mouth, an email list, a Facebook group, or bulletin boards. Explain your mission and invite people to connect with you.
- Some people may wish to contribute photographs, diaries, or documents to your archive. Keep a spreadsheet or list of these people and the items they have. This will help you think about how much physical or digital space you will need to store everything.
- Be sure to talk with a cross-section of people. You want to be inclusive, and not collect only from people you know personally!

## 3 SAFEGUARD AND SHARE

Are you ready to share or exhibit your collection of historical materials and stories? Take steps to safeguard your collection so that it will not be damaged in storage or while you are showing it to others.

- Locate a viewing area, such as a room at your public library or historical society, where materials can be used under supervision. Consider setting up specific hours for people to come see the collection. Let them know if an appointment is required.
- Ask people to wear cotton gloves when handling photographs to avoid smudges.

- Create a spreadsheet or log so that you know which items are being used.
- Consider taking a photograph or making a scan of very fragile items for people to examine so that the original will not be damaged.
- Ask if your local public library can help you draw attention to your collection or can provide support, such as a scanner.
- Upload photographs and scans to a community Facebook page or website to bring attention to your collection. Invite users to come visit!
- Ask the community to help identify places or people in photographs or to interpret documents.

## 4 FORMALIZE

- The National Council of Nonprofits provides helpful advice on starting a nonprofit: [councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/how-start-nonprofit](http://councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/how-start-nonprofit).
- Look for funding to support your community archive. Libraries and historical societies can help you investigate and might even be able to assist with your application.
- Consider whether a physical space, a digital archive, or some combination of both will best help your new organization document and share your history.

## EXAMPLES

### Community partnerships with the University of North Carolina at Chapel at Hill:

- Appalachian Student Health Coalition ([studenthealthcoalition.web.unc.edu](http://studenthealthcoalition.web.unc.edu))
- Eastern Kentucky African American Migration Project ([ekaamp.web.unc.edu](http://ekaamp.web.unc.edu))
- Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance ([hbtsa.web.unc.edu](http://hbtsa.web.unc.edu))
- San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum ([saaacm.org](http://saaacm.org))

### Community archives and memory projects:

- eBlack Champaign-Urbana website ([eblackcu.net/portal](http://eblackcu.net/portal))
- New York City Trans Oral History Project ([nyctransoralhistory.org](http://nyctransoralhistory.org))
- South Asian American Digital Archive ([saada.org](http://saada.org))
- The Living New Deal ([livingnewdeal.org](http://livingnewdeal.org))
- Queens Memory ([queensmemory.org](http://queensmemory.org))

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional examples of community memory projects and a discussion of their importance can be found in the book *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*, by Dominique Daniel et al. (Litwin Books, 2014).



To learn more about community-driven archives and the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, visit [library.unc.edu/wilson/shc](http://library.unc.edu/wilson/shc).

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