

WORKING WITH LOCAL GENEALOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETIES A FOOD FOR THOUGHT DISCUSSION

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Partnership development is crucial to success of libraries, genealogical societies, historical societies and customers that utilize these collections. Shrinking budgets, staff losses and an increased interest in family history can spread those that provide information and referral to family history researchers thin. Many information providers in a library setting are not just genealogy librarians. Many wear many hats during the 8 hours of the day working. To help with the increased use of local and family history collections, development of a plan for those who are knowledgeable and willing to help with these customers is an art. Reaching out, keeping engaged those individuals who are giving of their time, while getting the best return on your time and effort in creating this plan, projects and relationships should be creative, fun and well thought out.

In our discussion today, we hope to germinate thoughts, learn from each other, get ideas and share ideas that will help us all serve those searching for a personal past more effectively, with success and help them to see the fun in the pursuit, along with the rewards.

Below are some of the types of interaction between libraries and the historical /genealogical groups. These of course can be branched out to other types of groups volunteers that have an interest. There certainly are many more, but these are the ones that come to the top of the list. We will look at some successes and we will address some of the problems that come up as well as thought processes with inherent to each topic.

What are some of the ways that your library could interact with the local genealogical and historical society?

1. Programming – What programming do you provide for family history researchers? How do you get presentations? Do you provide presentations to the societies? What venue do you use?
2. Meeting Host – Many local historical groups do not have meeting space left in their museum and many genealogical societies do not have a building at all. They may use the library for meetings. What are the rules and regulations involved in the space?
3. Publicity – Can these organizations help promote your programming? Can you help not only the local but maybe a further reach group publicize their offerings? How do you let those interested that visit your location know of opportunities for education? Can these partner groups or individuals help you reach out beyond the “preaching to the choir” and get those who are interested but may not even be aware of your collection or the partners to know about you?
4. Collections – The collection of the local historical or genealogical group might be housed in your library, or the local history collection may be the library’s, but the non-profit group may support it and house it. What arrangements are made for use? Who staffs the area? Who buys materials? What budget is used for purchase? What about donations? Who processes those?

5. Volunteerism – Projects never seem to end in a local history room. Can you take advantage of members in the local hist/gen groups to solicit volunteers for your facility? What can you offer them in this area?

6. Development – Can you get that partner group to help support above and beyond purchases for the genealogy collection/area? Maybe that scanner you have been dreaming of for a digitization project, or for a subscription database? And reciprocally, what about using library funds to help publish their book or pay for their meeting speaker in an event held at our facility?

7. Reference – Maybe you are just new to the area and can call on these local groups for help in answering questions, but you will also find yourself helping them explore new ways to research their own history.

8. Technology – Can your partner provide social media, or a website as a venue for your content? Can you provide a “home” on your website for their “content?” What are the rules of your organization regarding the posting of content? The local hist/gen group might have mastered Facebook but they have nothing as permanent as a website, but the library may have a venue for content but needs the local content.

9. Advocacy – What groups are willing to “have your back” and advocate for needs? What issues should we as a city, county, or state institution get involved in? How do we create or work with those that are “Friends” groups, community groups and the like? What if they want us to push for open records or cemetery preservation? Are we allow to do that?

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