

South Carolina Archives Month: An Event Planning Guide



Planning for Archives Month

Archives month is an annual celebration of the value of South Carolina's historical records and the repositories that care for them. Through public programs, every SC organization and institution working with historical records can publicize the many ways our historical records enrich our lives.

Why Should You Participate in Archives Month?

Archives Month helps the general public and resource allocators such as trustees, administrators and elected officials appreciate and understand that historical records have a contribution to make to modern society. By participating in Archives Month, you show off your collections of historical records and your work with your collections to your community, colleagues and resource allocators, demonstrating the value of the records and the significance of the work you do with them. Many people in your community will recognize and appreciate your collections. Creative ideas for how to use your collections in public programs can draw new interest and support for your work and records.

If your institution or group regularly uses historical records as part of your work, Archives Month is an opportunity to hold public programs that highlight your work and the ways historical records make it happen. Similarly, if your business or organization creates records that in time become valuable for understanding our history, Archives Month is a great time to call attention to your role as a creator of historical records and your contributions to saving important evidence of the past.

Purpose of this Guide

Archives Month is a great opportunity for you to stage an event for the local community and to invite local media and officials. Such events can include interpretive displays, lectures or workshops. This guide provides some tools to plan such an event and tips for coordinating planning and publicity. The checklist is very helpful when coordinating the many details a public program requires.

In the publicity section you will find a list of the many types of media and public relations tools available as well as tips on how to create and use them effectively. Lessons learned in this guide can be used beyond Archives Month too! Historical records repositories are encouraged to maintain good relationships with local media to further outreach goals. Use this guide to assist you in planning and promoting other events throughout the year.

Creation of this Guide

Adapted from the "Georgia Archives Week: an Event Planning Guide, June 2001" with permission of the Society of Georgia Archivists.

<http://www.soga.org/aw/2005/EventGuide.pdf>

Program Ideas

Be imaginative! Involve as many people in your area as you can! The following list of program ideas is only meant to suggest possibilities. Brainstorm with others in your community and in your institution to come up with other ideas that fulfill the spirit of Archives Month and that work for you.

- Create an exhibit from your collections that show activities, people, businesses, buildings and streetscapes. Use records such as maps, store ledgers, city directories, photographs, newspapers, and bird's eye views. Use the exhibit to kick-off a collection campaign for contemporary records and materials from your local downtown or business organizations.
- Conduct a "Look-up" contest for school children by reproducing sections of historic photographs from your collections and encouraging the students to find the items in the community. Decorative items on buildings such as lion heads and gargoyles are especially popular.
- Tape record or videotape oral history interviews discussing the history of the community with long-time downtown merchants, employees, building owners, or civic leaders. Invite one of the interviewees to give a lecture to the local community.
- Mount a "Who Built This Building?" exhibit, which shows the people behind your town's most prominent structures.
- Ask your local newspaper to reproduce an historic photograph from your collections each day or weekly, and ask readers to identify the location of the building. The answer can be printed in the next day's edition.
- Work with teachers to conduct a project: comparing and contrasting downtown business from 1900 with the business mix today, develop a coloring book designed from historic photographs in your collection, or creating family trees using your archival records.
- Prepare a "Then and Now" exhibit displaying historic and contemporary photographs side by side of the same scene, building or person. Make a public appeal for additional photographs for your collections in conjunction with your exhibit.
- Tours, articles, lectures; the programming possibilities are endless.

Event Planning: A Comprehensive Checklist

Below is a very comprehensive line item checklist to use when planning your event. It was designed by the Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Commission to be all-inclusive so that “nothing falls through the cracks.” Do not be overwhelmed by its size. Ignore the items that do not pertain to your event. Begin by answering these critical “first questions” before proceeding to the more detailed list:

- **What is the goal with this project or event?**
- **Who is our target audience?**
- **How much money do we need and what funding sources do we have?**
- **Who can help get the job done?**
- **Who will be the project leader?**
- **What liability and safety issues need to be considered?**

From this list you can establish a master time line as well.

General			
	Person Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Budget finalized and cleared			
Date and time set; does not conflict with any other local or regional events			
Site booked and confirmed; rain location chosen			
Food and beverage arrangements made			
Insurance needs finalized (review rain insurance policies)			
Safety measures if any determined			
Legal matters addressed			

Staging			
	Person Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Time line of activities			
Map of site/location			
Parking			
Power sources			
Location of outlets, extension cords			
Electrician available			
Thermostat to control temperature			
Sound equipment, microphones, special lighting			
Stage Podium			
Seating, clear view from all seats			
Special AV equipment, person to test and operate			
Musicians, taped music			
Special effects			
Set-up and rehearsal arrangements			
Photographer, videographer			
Necessary lodging, transportation			
Storage			
Signs			
Displays, exhibits			
Coat check and restrooms. Don't forget about signage			

Registration, tickets			
Food, catering			

Staging Continued			
	Person Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Area for reporters and cameras			
Security			
Emergency numbers, medical personnel			
Generators for power if needed			
Waste receptacles			

Participants			
	Person Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Speakers confirmed			
Performers' contracts confirmed			
Speeches approved			
Visuals prepared			
Agenda			
Program for attendees			
Name Tags			

Invitations			
	Person Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Guest lists developed			
Design, approval, printing delivery			

Mailing date			
Time, date, location included			
Map of site, location			
Name and telephone # of contact			

Invitations Continued

	Person Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Deadline for RSVP			
Reply card			
Parking			
Confirmation letter			
Reminder phone calls			
Flyers			
Posters			

Publicity Materials

	Person Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Media List			
Advisory inviting reporters and editors to event			
News release			
Backgrounder/fact sheet			
Speech copies			
Photos, slides			
Bios of speakers			
Folder to hold the above materials (press kit)			

Assembly, mailing			
Follow-up with reporters			
Speakers briefed on possible reporter questions			

Publicity: How to work with the Media

With necessary materials in place and plans underway for Archives Month activities, you should begin making media contacts right after Labor Day. Remember a South Carolina Archives Month event will be only one of many events during this time that must compete with important news, issues, and developing stories for the attention of media decision-makers. Be prepared to do follow-up calls, to deal with a variety of busy individuals facing daily deadlines, and to be flexible to meet the media's needs for information.

To start, attempt to identify the appropriate individual for you to work with at each media outlet (newspapers, radio, television station) you wish to publicize your event.

Once you have the contact name, mail, email or fax the pitch letter (see below) and follow-up with a phone call a few days later.

For that conversation, explain the event further and emphasize the importance of the event and of archives in general. Keep in mind that you are "selling" your story concept to an individual who might have to decide which article to pursue from a number of opportunities. This selection process changes from day to day depending on breaking news, the number of staff available and general interest in the topic. You should try to show the media, from your perspective, why Archives Month and your event are so important to their readers, listeners or viewers.

You may be asked for further information. If so, provide more background on your local archives and on what else is happening around the region/ state etc. Make sure you provide this in a timely manner.

You should take responsibility for making appropriate representatives from your organization available for an interview, photograph, or other media opportunity. Understanding the time constraints on most media, make such interviews as convenient as possible. Make sure the reporter has telephone numbers where you can be reached should they have questions or need to change their schedule.

If plans have been made for media coverage during Archives Month, follow up a day or two in advance to assure your media contact that everything is ready and to confirm time and place for the interview/photo session.

For advance notice of your Archives Month activities, be sure you send out the press release in time to make the weekly newspapers, calendar listings and other media opportunities. This would probably mean by the middle of September. When you make the initial contact be sure to ask about the best method to receive advance coverage of your scheduled activities and their deadlines for submitting material. Then it is up to you to make those deadlines.

Public Relations Tools

Choosing the right PR tactic or “tool” is as critical as the execution. Here’s a look at basic PR tools.

News Release

This is the backbone of the public relations business. Reporters receive literally hundreds of news releases each week, so the challenge is to make yours stand out from the clutter. There is one rule you should consider vital; make sure your information warrants a release. If the answer is yes, then follow these guidelines to increase your chance for pickup:

- Double space and use only one side.
- Leave wide margins so editors can make notes.
- Include a contact name and phone number in the upper right-hand corner. Since you want to be accessible after sending the release, you may want to include your email address and any other contact information.
- Start with a headline that is short, catchy and carries a news angle. It will make reporters want to continue reading.
- Keep the release focused on a single topic. Write the release assuming the reader has no prior knowledge of the topic.
- Make it easy to read. Avoid run-on sentences and eliminate industry jargon.
- Get right to the point in the opening paragraph- reporting the most important information first and leave the least important for last.
- Supply a “for more information” phone number for the public to call at the end of the release.
- Apply the “who, what, when, where and why” test in the opening paragraph to be sure you have addressed the important elements of your event.
- Include the name of your organization in the opening and closing paragraphs.
- ALWAYS proofread for grammatical and spelling errors.
- Keep your release to two pages or less. End the first page with the word “more” centered on the bottom; end the entire release with “###” (without the quotes).

- Distribute in a timely fashion, being sensitive to reporters' deadlines. If you want publicity before your event as a way to increase attendance, send it a month in advance.

Photo With Caption

Photos are powerful publicity tools. If you have a good, clear photo showing work-in-progress or a photo from an existing event, send it to your local paper along with a concise caption. The photo caption must explain the picture to the reader in a very limited space. Begin by making certain the caption tells the story through the “who, what, when, and where” in the picture. Check spellings of names and places.

Fact Sheet and Backgrounder

This is an easy-to-read piece that provides the pertinent details about your project or event. Write it using categories of information—project description, who's involved, expected results, important dates, location. The backgrounder is more detailed history of your organization. It would include important dates, personnel, and even your mission statement.

Media Advisory

This is a quick and efficient reminder of an upcoming event. Limit it to one page. In a two column format, list what, when, where, presenters, significance, and photo opportunities along with the corresponding information. Like the press release, a contact name and number should appear in the upper right-hand corner. Since reporter assignments are often finalized as late as the morning of your event, fax the advisory one or two days prior for the best results. Address the fax to a specific reporter or editor, not just the newsroom. Call the morning of the event with a final reminder.

Calendar Notice

Similar to a media advisory, but this time for the reader, the calendar notice is another way to make people aware of your event. Send notices to the community calendar section of the media outlet. Be sure to submit your event to the South Carolina Archives Month Calendar at <http://scarchivesmonth.palmettohistory.org>

Pitch Letter

A well-written letter goes a long way toward generating interest in a story or getting media to use your release. Know the topics the reporter typically covers before you send it, including suggestions on how he or she might use it and a timely news hook. (News hook example: “In conjunction with SC Archives Month...” or “An Archives Month event...”) Keep sentences short and hit on the highlights. When you follow up, keep the conversation brief, don't be shy about pitching your story idea but don't be upset if the writer or editor doesn't bite.

Familiarization Tour

A familiarization tour to acquaint a reporter with your institution or event can be another way to generate a story. These are best scheduled on a one-on-one basis. Arrange for the reporter to spend some time with people behind the scenes. Sometimes if they are familiar with your facility and staff they are more open to working with you.

Print Interview Checklist

As part of your preparation for a print interview, pay attention to the following:

- The reporter's deadline.
- The types of information the reporter wants.
- Be prepared to offer specifics and anecdotal information to back up your statement. To help the reporter write informatively and colorfully, "tell it, don't just say it."
- Send background information in advance that will help guide the interview.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so, and offer to get the information as soon as possible.
- Offer names of other people the reporter might like to talk to as part of the story.
- Ask when you can expect the story to run.

Talking Points

These talking points can be used when talking to the media, pitching a story, or giving interviews. They are useful for "selling" Archives Month as well as archives and historic records repositories in general.

1. Archives Month is a time to focus on the importance of archives and archival material and to enhance public recognition for the people and programs responsible for maintaining our communities' vital historical records.
2. Although the month is designated as a time of celebration and recognition, archives serve the public (and the media) throughout the year.
3. There are numerous historical records programs across the state of South Carolina including libraries, museums, businesses, county and local historical societies, civic organizations and churches. Historical records can also be found in local governments in the state. Collectively, they contain enormous, valuable information for media to:
 - Put developing news stories into context;
 - Explain current issues in historic terms;
 - Help their readers and viewers understand their local communities;
 - Demonstrate how a local activity or topic relates to a larger issue;
 - Better inform and entertain their subscribers and audiences.
4. Historical records are unique, one-of-a-kind sources for information.
5. Archivists, through their understanding or research and contacts with fellow professionals, can help media locate information about select topics throughout South Carolina.

6. Media maintain their own “archives”—files of newspaper articles (the morgue to veteran newspaper reporters) and film footage—that are essential to their reporting. They should consider public historical records programs as a similar resource.
7. To the eye of a trained journalist, many archives would reveal a number of feature article “leads.”
8. Historical records repositories in the local community often contain information that could help media localize national or statewide trend stories.

Sample News Release

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Annie Archivist- Director Anytown Public Library
(123) 123-4567

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAIN STREET PHOTO EXHIBIT SHOWS OFF ANYTOWN'S HISTORY

Anytown, SC. (September, 2009)- Anytown Public Library and the Anycounty

Historical Society announced today an upcoming joint exhibit of historic

photographs of Anytown Main Street as part of South Carolina Archives Month, a

statewide celebration of the importance of historical documents. The photos will be displayed in the Whatever Room of the Anytown Public Library beginning on October 1, 2009 when Archives Month begins.

The photographs depict almost 100 years on Anytown's Main Street, and include images of people going about daily activities, festivals and events, historic buildings and businesses. Over fifty photographs will be on display.

"Photographs are some of the most valuable resources in the study of history," states library director Annie Archivist. "They give a great deal of detailed information about the conditions those who came before us had to face. It is very easy for us to learn important historical lessons by simply studying photographs from different times."

The Anycounty Historical Society donated over half of the photographs on display. Society director Percy Preservationist said the photos tell us not

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only about our community but also about our families as well. "You can find a wealth of information about your family in an old photograph," he said.

Admission to the exhibit is free and is open during the normal operating hours of the library: M-F 9:00am-9:00pm, Sat. 10:00am-5:00pm. Attendees of the exhibit will receive a complimentary interpretive brochure. A sneak preview of the exhibit is now available on the Anytown Public Library's website at <http://www/Anytown.net/lib/news.html>.

The exhibit is part of the annual South Carolina Archives Month celebration. Archives and other historical records repositories throughout South Carolina are putting on numerous public programs to show off the wealth of South Carolina's historical treasures. For more general information about South Carolina Archives Week visit <http://scarchivesmonth.palmettohistory.org/> For more information about the Anytown Public Library and the Anycounty Historical Society's display contact...

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