“Community engagement” has become an increasingly important aspect of state and local history museums and historic sites to build support, attract audiences, and confront contemporary issues. However, few organizations have the skills or experience to launch and sustain an effective community engagement project. This session will bring together three projects—Haymarket in Boston, James Madison’s Montpelier in Virginia, and House of Seven Gables in Salem—to discover how they successfully engaged three different audiences in the local community—immigrants, African American descendants, and Latino/a middle school students. Based on their experiences and with contributions from the session participants, we will create a list of practical advice and guidance for community engagement projects that could form the basis of best and future practices for the history field. This list will be shared online at EngagingPlaces.net.

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Resources


Haymarket Project: [https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/everyones-history/the-haymarket-project/](https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/everyones-history/the-haymarket-project/)


This session is a follow-up to a 2012 session on community engagement at the AASLH Annual Meeting with Deborah Schwartz (Brooklyn Historical Society), Lorraine McConaghy (Museum of History and Industry), and Max A. van Balgooy (Engaging Places), which drafted the following list of best practices:

**Program/Project**

1. Provide a framework (theme, topic) to provide direction and purpose.
2. Have a clear outcome or end product (e.g., exhibit, online database); it’s not just about process.
3. Make it easy and simple (unnecessary complexity can dampen enthusiasm).
4. Make it fun and cool (e.g., an opportunity to work with experts, tackle new challenges).
5. Let go of perfection and be realistic about the resources (be upfront and honest about capacity and resources)
6. Expect bumps along the road and don’t be discouraged. Adjust your course as needed and be open to changes.
7. Promote the project at public programs and events.
8. Get support from decision-makers (need to get support from executive director/board).

**Participants/Community**

1. Attract a diverse group and reach out beyond the usual group of participants.
2. Go to the places where participants live and work to discover what’s meaningful to them.
3. Invite people to participate and bring others along.
4. Respond to participants and make the relationship personal (don’t communicate as an impersonal organization).
5. Give participants ownership and recognition (e.g. provide name badges at events).
6. Respect the expertise of the participants in the community (trust the participants to good work).
7. Have a alternative ways to participate (e.g., if I can’t read historic documents, what else can I do?).
8. Provide social interaction among participants to fuel enthusiasm and passion.

More at https://engagingplaces.net/2012/10/30/best-practices-for-community-engagement.