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## SOURCING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ARCHIVAL CONTENT: LESSONS FROM THE QUEENS MEMORY PROJECT

The folks behind [Queens Memory Project](#) recently embarked on a weekly residency at Queens Library's St. Albans branch, capturing memories of life in the borough with a scanning station and a microphone. Their visits were part of a plan to gather Queens residents together to make digital copies of photos, audio, and video for Historypin's [Queens: Neighborhood Stories](#) (a project funded in part by METRO).



Engaging patrons in an increasingly porous mix of online and offline venues is a relatively new challenge for projects like Queens Memory Project and Historypin. The promotional strategy for St. Albans, for example, included Facebook invitations, tweets, printed flyers, and conversations with the Friends of the Library group. And once the community gathered in person, their newly digitized assets were ingested into online archives.

As with any new venture, the Queens Memory Project team adjusted their strategy along the way. To find out what they learned about intermixing online and in-person engagement, we spoke with Natalie Milbrodt, director of Queens

Memory Project, who shared the following tips:

**Start with your engaged users.** The Queens Memory Project team visited a Friends of St. Albans Community Library meeting to promote the series of events, and quickly found that the group had a lot of interest in the items that had already been collected. In retrospect, says Natalie, "If we had arranged to come once a month during the Friends meeting, [collecting materials] would have worked much better." In the fall, the team will test out this theory in Sunnyside by working with established community groups as well as the Sunnyside Community Library to organize Queens Memory events that coincide with groups' regular meetings.

**Find tie-ins.** Midway through their series at St. Albans, Queens Memory Project added two hours each visit to collect hip hop memorabilia. This tied neatly in with Queens Library's [31 Days of Non-Stop Hip Hop](#), and the press coverage that came about as a result drew in several more participants.

**Share organically.** While Queens: Neighborhood Stories and Queens Memory Project both endeavor to capture the history of daily life, Natalie found that "many people disqualify themselves as being worthy voices," at times due to a reasonable reluctance to sit for a lengthy interview. "I think it's important to let participants direct how they participate," shares Natalie, "and allow myself to enjoy whatever people want to share while letting them know that they are always welcome to dig in

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deeper and give us more." This approach led to follow-up appointments with at least two St. Alban's community members.

**Have a flexible strategy.** While the residency at St. Albans gained momentum as the month went along, the Queens Memory Project team has also found great success with their "storm chaser" model, where a larger team heads out together to cover large-scale community event to capture man-on-the-street interviews and schedule more in-depth interviews. At the World's Fair Anniversary Festival in May, for example, the Queens Memory Project team reached hundreds of people – and handed out dozens of brochures about upcoming exhibits, programs, and even library card applications. The event was a great opportunity to connect with potential Queens Memory participants about contributing to the program.

Blending online and offline engagement provides new avenues for librarians and archivists to connect with their communities for shared preservation projects like that of Queens Memory Project and Historypin. While the interactions are firmly based in the present day, these modes of connection enrich our ability to reflect on the past and the future of our communities as well.

*Image above provided by Natalie Milbrodt, Director, Queens Memory Project*

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