



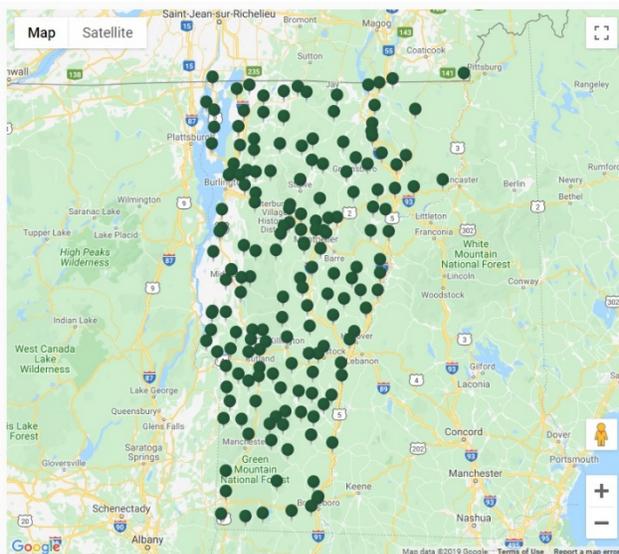
Vermont Historical Society Local History Engagement & Strategic Initiatives 2019

Report compiled by Eileen P. Corcoran, Community Outreach & Media Coordinator

As it has been said before, "History is people." ...In such cases it would seem that the past does not belong just to you or me, but to all of us and our children's children. Youth looks today for a vision to follow. It is only by sharing Vermont's great heritage that we can really feel sure it will be preserved and passed on. (Vermont Historical Society News & Notes, 1953)

History informs our future. (survey response, 2019)

Local Historical Societies in Vermont



There are approximately 190 local historical societies & museums in Vermont. That's about one historical society per 3,300 people. The majority of these are all volunteer organizations. Many have physical collections (objects and archives), own buildings (often historic) and are very programmatically engaged with their communities- through talks, school programs, community events, and historic preservation initiatives.

Some have been steadily working for decades, others wax and wane with activity, and even today, new ones are being formed.

Current directory map of local historical societies on the VHS website. Historical societies without a physical location are not represented.

Services VHS already provides for LHS

What is now known as the League of Local Historical Societies & Museums (LLHSM) at the Vermont Historical Society (VHS) formally began in 1953 with a Local Historians conference, and continued with a series of local history displays at the State House and including listing local history events in the VHS newsletter.

Over the years, the annual conference became a perennial event. It was supplemented by many of the programs and services we have now- awards, periodic workshops, and a local historical society directory/passport. At one time there was a small grant program. For a number of years, History Expo was also a main point of engagement with and for local historical societies. In 2010, with the dissolution of the Vermont Museum & Gallery Alliance (VMGA), VHS also took over some of their programs which are reflected in current services.

Current offerings from VHS for local historical societies, museums, and other cultural organizations include:

- *Local History News*: A biweekly e-newsletter which includes listings of LHS events.
- *Technical Assistance & Mentoring*: Organizations can contact VHS with questions regarding collections care, grants, policies, or any other organization issue. Workshops and other training are also offered periodically.
- *Web Directory & Map*: of all Local Historical Societies and Museums organized by county.
- *LLHSM Achievement Awards*: Given annually to recognize meritorious exhibits, publications, individuals, and more.
- *Local History Gallery at the Vermont History Museum*: Presenting 6-month rotating exhibits created by local historical societies & museums.
- *LLHSM Annual Meeting*: Yearly conference offering the chance to network, share ideas, issues, and learn from professionals.
- *Traveling Panel Exhibits*: Easy to install exhibits on a variety of Vermont history topics
- *Backstory Vermont*: Intern matching program in partnership with UVM/Center for Research on Vermont
- *Pub Trivia Packets*: A fun & easy way for organizations to host Vermont trivia events

An informal review of what other state historical societies do for local historical societies (LHS) show similar activities. This often includes providing advice/technical assistance, workshops/conferences, informal get-togethers, traveling exhibits, directories, and e-newsletters.

Strategic Initiatives

In 2018, the Vermont Historical Society (VHS) embarked on a strategic planning process, the result of which was a plan covering 2019-2024 with four main goals (see appendices). Strategy 2 was defined as:

We will recognize and support local history efforts; understanding that local societies are an integral part of sharing and preserving Vermont's story.

Within that, three initial concentrations/priorities were established:

- 2.1. Ongoing professional development
- 2.2. Vermont History App – Local History Guide
- 2.3. Grants to Local Societies

In addition, there were projects/programs potentially involving local historical societies for Strategies:

1.3.2 : Use Digital Vermont to assemble statewide catalog- Local Society engagement/training.

3.2.2: Travelling Exhibit- Produce panelized exhibits of topics that would be of broad interest to local societies and libraries state-wide.

3.2.3: Local Gallery Exhibit- Engage local societies and small museums in mounting exhibits in the Local History Gallery, approximately two-per-year.

To better understand the needs of this group and to better refine our activities under this goal, a series of programs were undertaken in 2019 to engage and gather input from local historical societies, museums, and partner organizations around the state. These included:

- **Local History Engagement Sessions:** Seven sessions were held around the state from June-September (see appendices). 117 people from over 60 organizations attended the sessions. The majority were with local historical societies, but it also included libraries, museums, state agencies, public access tv, and publishers. At the sessions we discussed: roles for historical societies/museums and how we can create success in those areas; the value and importance of LHS; and how to build capacity in the areas of Support, Networking/Info Sharing, Programs, & Public Information/Advocacy.
- **Local History Survey:** Concurrent with the sessions, a survey was deployed seeking input similar to the sessions, along with more data-driven questions related to programs/services for local historical societies (LHS). The survey received 36 responses.
- **Additional Discussions/Input:** Additional dialogue was also sought with other organizations & agencies in the state who work in the arts and cultural field to discuss their work with/for LHS, investigate areas of overlap/potential partnerships, and seek input.

Given we are an all-volunteer board with 2 members who work full-time jobs, we are doing a good job. - survey response

Current Challenges

The issues and challenges LHS face in Vermont are very similar to those faced by historical societies around the country. These include:

- Collections: too many, need care, not diverse
- Need for more people/volunteers
- Historic preservation/old buildings that need work and \$
- Difficulty with engagement and fundraising.

These are not necessarily new challenges. A report from one of the first LHS conferences noted that *Ms. Pinney urged local historical societies to be “newsworthy” and said that any society*

could stay in the newspapers as long as it had a real story to tell. She also emphasized the importance of frequent meetings and attracting the interest of children and young people. (Vermont Historical Society News & Notes, 1954)

Opportunities

But not everything is a challenge. At each Engagement Session we started off with introductions and “Favorite Things” people were doing at their organization (on the survey, the question was framed as “most successful program/achievement”). A wide variety of amazing ideas and programs were mentioned, with many being centered around the larger themes of Programming, Collections Care/Management, and Historic Preservation/Buildings projects.

STEM/cultural heritage workshop- it was successful because it combined two important topics and was place-based and hands on for local students; we also partnered with 4 other agencies/nonprofits. - survey response

Many of these “successes” at their core centered around community activity and community involvement. Everything from walking tours to working with genealogy researchers; restoration of historic buildings to creating climate-controlled spaces for their collections. LHS are doing great things with a small amount of resources, and are proud of it. One thing that came out of sharing these achievements, and from the survey, was the greater desire to share these successes amongst themselves, and more broadly with

the public.

This is also reflected in some of the ways mentioned on how we can collaborate to overcome the challenges we face: cooperative ventures (pr/marketing, programming), resource sharing, broader information sharing & professional development. Many of the same things that also rose to the top when we talked about building capacity and VHS services for local societies.

Primary Role of Local Historical Societies

The value and role for historical societies in the 21st century is a much discussed topic. At each Engagement Session, attendees were asked to pick their “Top 4” roles for LHS from a list (see appendices). We then used the top vote getters as focus points for discussion at that session.

Distinct choices emerged with 3 roles being selected twice as often as the second tier choices (including survey results as well). These three: Educating the Public, Preservation of Material Culture/Historic Objects, and Preservation & Access for Archival Materials are also perhaps the most “classic” roles for historical societies.

For these roles, the following ideas/challenges/themes were most prominent

Educating the Public (including children)

- Working with standards & VT curriculum
- How do you work with schools?
- Technology & sharing stories
- Partnerships for expanding educational opportunities & programs
- LHS have the educational content

Preservation & Access for Archival materials & Preservation of Material Culture/Historic Objects (these were often combined at the sessions because they are similar, so themes are joint)

- Digitization & access
- Too much stuff
- How do we preserve items?
- Importance of “original” items/inherent value

Secondary Roles

A secondary tier of roles (Historic preservation, Preservation of "Place", Genealogy resource, Promote civic engagement & pride, Contextualize & interpret history, and Cultural heritage tourism/promoting Vermont) brought out general trends that centered around community building, partnerships, and LHS as resources- including as a bridge between the past and present (providing context)

Local history is a bedrock of importance for our ability to think accurately and with subtlety about our past. In today's maelstrom of misinformation, we build from local histories to help us reflect and keep it real- survey response

Another segment of the Sessions asked attendees about the “Value & Importance of LHS”. This proved to be difficult for people to articulate in some sessions- distilling down the “why” of who we are and what we do, and then being able to talk to others about it. Some trends did emerge. Common values included:

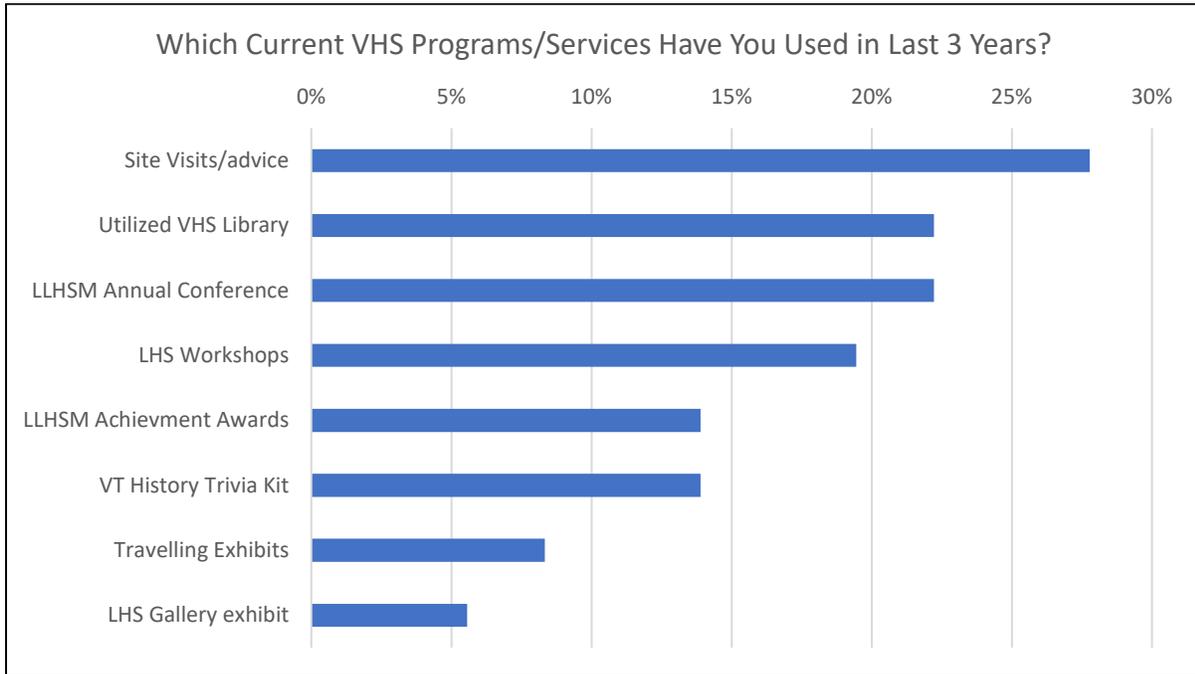
- Providing information/content,
- Serving as community builders/community identity, and
- Contextualizing history/connect past & present

Preservation of collections/buildings/past, serving as an economic driver, and promoting civic engagement/knowledge were also mentioned, though much less often.

Some other opportunities that emerged to increase relevancy and value included better engagement with new residents, playing a larger role in town/community planning, and telling difficult histories.

The difficulty in talking about “value” also reiterated comments in other parts of the sessions about the need for more training on pr/marketing, as well as the possibility of undertaking more statewide advocacy and/or history projects.

VHS Services: Use and Expansion



The survey and feedback at the sessions seemed to indicate very positive thoughts towards the services VHS currently provides. The LHS Enews was especially appreciated. There were also generally very positive thoughts for VHS technical assistance, site visits, the annual conference, and directory. General ideas on how to potentially expand/change current services included:

- Expand Enews calendar to include online version
- Increase technical assistance by bringing back Mentors Program
- Encourage/Support more regional get togethers
- Collate more online resources

A yearly “check-in” with an active LHS Directory update was also mentioned positively. This will allow for making organizations better aware of VHS programs/services, as well as help in determining which organizations are truly still active or not.

LHS are also important Institutional members of VHS, although Institutional member costs (\$50) having stayed constant for over 10 years. Discussions within the organization continue to focus on how services are linked to memberships, what membership benefits are available, and how we better articulate the value of the membership fee in relation to the services VHS provides. For example, the \$50 membership fee would be recouped with one email or phone consultation, with a site visit being 3x the value of a membership. Continued evaluation and testing is needed to determine how best to cover our costs while maximizing engagement and not creating unrealistic financial burdens on LHS. Potential solutions may include more “tiered” membership levels, with different services/benefits available, or establishing a more robust fee structure for expanded LHS services.

Building Capacity (Support, Networking, Programming, Public Information)

Help us get the word out that we could be so much better if we could somehow stimulate more people to participate and, if they would, they would find out exactly how enjoyable local history can be. It is amazing to watch this happen when it does- survey response

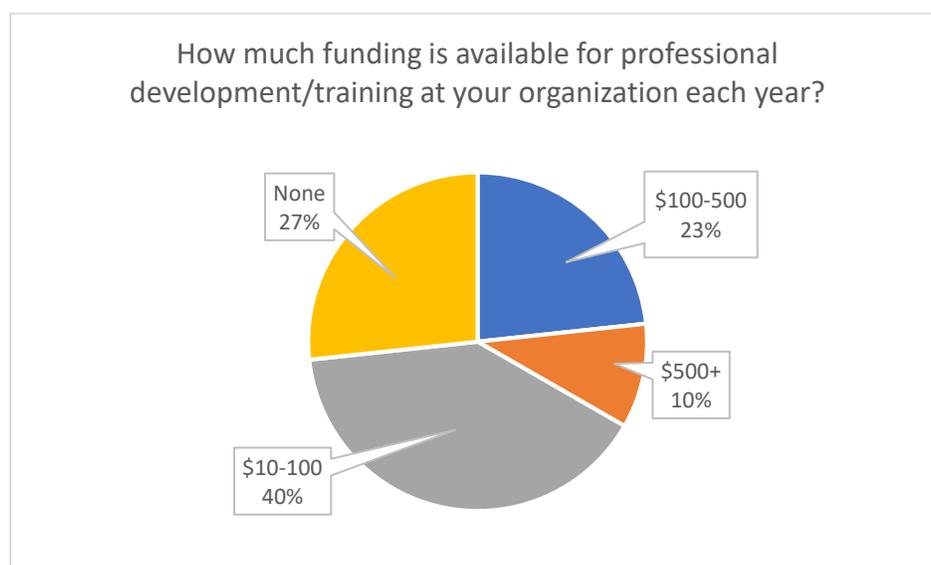
Another component of our discussions centered around ways in which we could build capacity- both what VHS could do, and what LHS could do. This was framed around the areas of: Support, Networking, Programming, and Public Information. Input in these areas presented three common themes:

Information Sharing: from VHS to LHS, amongst themselves, with the public

- Online/collated resources, including an online calendar, more updated directory, expanded Enewsletter/event sharing, and shared forms/policies
- Media and advocacy work: opportunities and information on how to connect with different types of media, legislators, and the public.

Knowledge Building: workshops, training, online resources

- Professional development/training needs- top mentions were collections care & management/preservation; fundraising/development; and organizational management/volunteer recruiting. Similar to on the survey where categories were limited. Programming/exhibits was another top choice on there.
- One-day workshops or conference were most desired methods for training/prof development, followed by a mentor (per survey).
- While the survey indicated a limited amount of money at organizations for professional development, the biggest barrier cited, by far, was “time needed to devote to training”



Joint Programs: themed exhibits, open house weekends

- Funding opportunities/programs specifically for LHS
- Annual themes/joint projects: potentially focused around anniversaries or “popular” history
- Statewide presence: A Local History day at the State House, History Weekend
- “Ready-Made” materials to borrow, like our current trivia, traveling exhibits, and education kits

Leveraging Partnerships

VHS is not the only organization in the state with programs and services that can assist LHS. Other organizations/groups in Vermont that have applicable programs and services include, but are not limited to:

- Vermont Arts Council: Cultural Facilities Grants, arts grants, arts directory
- Vermont Humanities Council: Speakers Bureau, grants
- Vermont Historical Records Program (Vermont State Archives & Records Administration): technical assistance/site visits, training, archival resources
- Vermont Department of Libraries: workshops, libraries w/history collections
- Preservation Trust of Vermont: Historic Preservation education, grants
- VT Division for Historic Preservation: historic markers program, grants,
- Vermont Arts and Culture Disaster & Resiliency Network (VACDaRN): a newly formed network of arts & cultural organizations focused on emergency preparedness and response.
- Conservation and Collections Care Alliance (CCCA): A new network of professionals working together to support the care and conservation of our region’s cultural heritage collections and materials.

VHS staff already actively participate in partnerships and joint programs with many of these organizations. For local historical societies, VHS’s role should continue to be helping to inform LHS about the applicable programs and opportunities that these organizations have; share the needs & value of LHS with the larger cultural community and state; and support new initiatives that can have a positive impact on LHS.

Next Steps & Recommendations

I have always found staff at VHS to be helpful and prompt in answering queries I have had. I think, being untrained volunteers, it is important for us to have a mentor we trust and respect- survey response

The positive feedback on VHS’s current programs & services does not lend itself to necessarily cutting or scaling back any current initiatives, and there may also be some possible expansion or refinement of those existing programs.

If no programs/services are cut, then an increase in capacity would be needed to further initiatives identified as important/

needed in this planning stage. The following initiatives would be fairly easy for VHS to implement with an increase in staff time devoted to LHS work and minimal funds.

- **Online LLHSM Resource Portal:** Expanded pages/section for LHS featuring links/resources. Additional components could also include an online calendar with ability to import event submissions and a Listserv/communications area. These additional components may need additional funds/website infrastructure.
- **Regional Meet-Ups:** While some LHS already meet on a regular basis (ie.- Franklin & Grand Isle LHS), VHS can help to facilitate additional group meetings on a regional basis.
- **Local History Day at State House:** Presentation in the Card Room on LHS
- **Mentoring Program:** Revitalizing the previous program to provide a mentor to organizations to help with a specific issue. Additional funds to pay a small stipend to mentors would be essential to expanding this program.

A secondary tier of potential projects would only be possible with additional, substantial funds, staff capacity, and/or expanded partnerships. These would include:

- **Shared Resources (equipment, supplies):** Potential to work in tandem with larger digitization or cataloging projects as for DigitalVermont in VHS Goal 1.3.2
- **Annual History Weekend/ Themed Programming:** VHS can continue to inform and participate in smaller initiatives coordinated by other groups (such as the Vermont Suffrage Centennial and upcoming Bennington Battle anniversary). Further discussions with other organizations (such as the Department of Tourism & Marketing), a review of similar initiatives elsewhere (such as NY's Path to History Weekend), and increased programmatic resources would be needed.
- **Local History Grants:** Identified as strategy 2.3 in the VHS plan. Further work is needed to determine priorities, define grant parameters, and establish an endowed fund.
- **Statewide Catalog/Digital Vermont:** This is identified as a strategy under Goal 1.3.2 in the VHS plan.
- **Expanded Directory/App:** The VHRP/VSARA and the Vermont Arts Council are both potential partners for an expanded or integrated directory. Further discussions with other stakeholders in the state would be essential for establishing a more robust app.

(See appendices for a chart of categorized current and potential VHS services)

Further work is needed with development staff, other strategic implementors at VHS, and potential outside partners to prioritize next steps and determine long-term feasibility of resource burdens. Ultimately, the best course will need to be charted to maximize positive impact for VHS in tandem with the best results for LHS. Some of the potential projects listed may not be implemented, or they may be led by other organizations or groups instead of VHS.

Conclusion

The history community in Vermont is vibrant. But, it will take work to keep it that way. The small size of our state and intense competition for nonprofit & community resources means we must do it together. A cookie-cutter “collect, preserve, share” historical society is not going to be the answer for every community.

VHS can lead the way as a statewide mentor, resource, and example, while allowing for LHS to determine what is best for their organization and community. Overall, VHS programs and services for LHS will continue to have the most impact by helping:

- Encourage active planning for sustainability
- Provide tools for learning and knowledge building
- LHS engage with their communities and with each other.

We look forward to continuing conversations within the organization, with LHS, and beyond to chart the best course for a positive future for local history in Vermont.

Thank You

To our Engagement Session hosts: Jamaica Historical Foundation, Lincoln Historical Society, Manchester Historical Society & Manchester Community Library, Old Stone House Museum, Saint Albans Museum, and Waterbury Historical Society,

To the Walter Cerf Community Fund and the Windham Foundation for their support of the project.

To the following for speaking with me about programs, services, and needs for LHS: Martha Dale & Priscilla Grayson, Colonial Dames; Peggy Pearl, St. Johnsbury History & Heritage Center; Meg Campbell, Preservation Trust of Vermont; Amy Cunningham, Vermont Arts Council; Rachel Onuf, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration; Jason Broughton, Vermont Department of Libraries.

Appendices

- VHS Strategic Plan
- Information on Engagement Sessions
- Summary of Survey Responses
- Summary of Engagement Session Input
- Current LLHSM Service Information
- Chart of current & potential LHS Services



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OUR MISSION

The Vermont Historical Society engages both Vermonters and “Vermonters at heart” in the exploration of our state’s rich heritage. Our purpose is to reach a broad audience through our outstanding collections, statewide outreach, and dynamic programming. We believe that an understanding of the past changes lives and builds better communities.

OUR VISION

Through its rich collections, dynamic programming, effective outreach, and resolute leadership, the Vermont Historical Society endeavors to preserve the past, inform the present, and promote Vermont’s shared legacy to the future.

OUR PROMISE

To Connect You To Vermont’s Story



DID YOU KNOW?

We preserve and interpret over

50,000

catalogued books and serials

30,000

photographs, broadsides, maps, manuscripts, ephemera, films, and audio materials

20,000

items in our object collection

20,000

people view our weekly public history program

Vermont Historical Society

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Barre, VT 05641

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STRATEGIC GOALS & SUMMARIZED STRATEGIES

1. Provide Vermonters and Vermonters-at-heart the resources to access Vermont's rich historical collections from anywhere in the world.

The Vermont Historical Society understands that in our rapidly digitizing world, patrons expect to be able to access as many resources as possible in a digital and online format. Though nothing can replace experiencing collections in real life, we endeavor to provide greater access through museum and library objects cataloged online as well as developing a state-wide platform for use by local history groups. Strategies include:

- Catalog and convert from paper records key manuscript collections
- Inventory, assess, and catalog select museum collections
- Redevelop institutional web presence
- Develop platform for statewide history use

2. We will recognize and support local history efforts; understanding that local societies are an integral part of sharing and preserving Vermont's story.

There are over 190 local historical societies in Vermont as well as numerous small museums and library collections that tell our important cultural story in unique and diverse ways. The Vermont Historical Society is dedicated to supporting this work in ways that are directed by both the field and the small organizations themselves. Strategies include:

- Regional workshops and training sessions as well as yearly conference
- Develop and deploy an enhanced statewide digital history guide
- Provide direct grant funding to local groups doing important work



DID YOU KNOW?

Each year, we have

6,000

field trip visitors

1,500

students utilizing history
lending kits

400

students participating in
Vermont History Day

We serve

191

local historical
societies statewide

Vermont Historical Society

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3. Vermonters will increase their knowledge of our state's past and understand how their unique experience impacts and shapes this ongoing narrative. Guests will enrich their visit through deeper understanding of Vermont and its people.

The Vermont Historical Society believes that history is the collective story of a society. Those stories can be shared, specifically individual, or community-wide. Those experiences continue to evolve as new perspectives are added and as the perspective of time is applied. Through programming, exhibits, and direct engagement, the Historical Society will continue to be a driving force in historical literacy. Strategies include:

- Long-term study to determine the state of historical literacy in Vermont
- Digital engagement through mass media and participatory content
- Special exhibits at our two locations and at host venues around the state
- Inviting outside groups to curate exhibits within the Society's walls

4. To build resilient and connected communities, students will understand Vermont's history and its place in the broader world.

As the education of Vermont's young people changes from a state-wide curriculum to personalized learning and flexible pathways, Vermont Historical Society will actively participate in and advocate for the inclusion of state history in learning standards. The Historical Society will provide resources to educators and specific outlets for individual students and classes. The Vermont History Museum will continue to provide an enriching venue for classes exploring their state's capital and its history. Strategies include:

- Needs survey of state educators
- VHS Digital resource for students expanded and updated
- Grow and further develop National History Day program
- Develop in-museum enrichment programs and maintain curriculum lending kits

BUILDING A STRONGER HISTORY COMMUNITY

For over 60 years, the Vermont Historical Society has provided programs and services to Vermont's local history and museum community. Current offerings include an annual conference, workshops, site visits & advice, the Local History Gallery, and more. In our most recent strategic planning process, updating and expanding those services was identified as one of the primary strategic areas.

Now we need your help to determine what that means.

Join us at one of our Local History Engagement Sessions taking place over the summer and fall. We'll come together to talk about the role local historical societies & museums play, common obstacles we face, and how we can work together to build a stronger history community statewide.

EVENT SCHEDULE

June 14, 1-3pm

Lincoln Historical Society
Burnham Hall, Lincoln, VT

July 12, 10am-12pm

Jamaica Historical Foundation,
Jamaica, VT

July 24, 9-11am

Vermont History Center,
Barre, VT

August 2, 10am-12pm

Old Stone House Museum,
Brownington, VT

August 23, 10am-12pm

Manchester Community Library
Manchester, VT

September 6, 10am-12pm

Saint Albans Museum,
St. Albans, VT

September 28, 12-2pm

Waterbury Historical Society,
Waterbury, VT

RSVPs are appreciated to help us plan for space and refreshments.

RSVP online here: vermonthistory.org/LHengagement

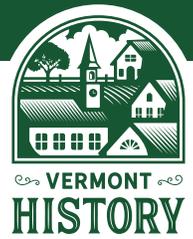
Can't make it to a session?

Fill out our Local History Survey here: bit.ly/LHengagementsurvey

Questions?

Contact Eileen Corcoran at (802) 479-8522; eileen.corcoran@vermonthistory.org

Support for this project provided by the Windham Foundation



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Vermont Historical Society: Local History Engagement Survey 2019

Summary of Responses

The Vermont Historical Society (VHS) conducted an online survey in Summer 2019 seeking input to better understand the needs of local historical societies (LHS) and museums around the state, and to better refine VHS programs and services aimed at this audience. The survey received 36 responses.

The following information is provided for general information purposes only, reliant on data analysis available via Google as well as some subjective qualitative analysis.

General Information on Respondents/Organizations

- 76% were a Local Historical Society/Museum
- 75% have budgets under \$25,000
- 56% are All Volunteer
- 83% are members of VHS
- 49% of respondents were board members of their organizations
- 59% have a building they own, 27% are in a donated or shared space
- 88% have object collection, 85% have photograph and/or archival collections
- 74% have their own website, 59% have a Facebook page
- Types of programs they present:
 - 75% Exhibits
 - 83% Talks/presentations
 - 47% Walking/outdoor tours
- Planning Documents
 - 33% have a Collections management policy/procedures, 22% have an Emergency Preparedness plan.
 - Almost 1/3 of respondents were unsure which plans they may or may not have and/or if they were updated in the last 5 years

Roles and Challenges for LHS

- Most important roles for LHS/museum
 - 85% Educating the public
 - 65% Preservation of material culture/objects
 - 62% Preservation & access for archival materials
- Biggest Challenge: Lack of people (staff, volunteers) 71%
- What do you want others (the public) to know about LHS?
 - We are important 59%
 - We welcome your involvement 65%
- Organizations are finding the most success with Program related activities (talks/presentations, community events, workshops, tours, etc.) 44%

Community Building & Training

- Organizations were most interested in these types of Community Building activities:
 - Group meet-ups (in person) 59%
 - Group themed exhibit or program 48%
 - LLHSM Annual Conference 45%
- Areas/topics where they most need training
 - Collections care/preservation 52%
 - Exhibits 46%
 - Fundraising/development 33%
- Type of training they are most likely to take part in
 - 1-day workshop (single topic or multiple topics) 56%
 - Mentor Match 33%
- A majority of organizations (66%) have less than \$100/year available for professional development activities.
 - 41% say staff/individuals pay for their own professional development.
 - 41% use free/online resources for training
- The biggest limitation in being able to take advantage of professional development/training is Time (42%), twice as much of a limitation as Cost (22%).

VHS Programs & Services for LHS

- 76% subscribe to the VHS Local History Enews, 73% of them open it “Always”
- 47% utilized VHS programs services in the last 3 years
 - Site visits/advice 46%
 - LLHSM Annual Conference 36%
 - Utilized VHS Library resources 36%
- 53% have not used VHS local history services in the past 3 years because they were unaware of services.

LHS Directory

- 74% would be able to update their Directory info via an online portal
- 78% most interested in Directory as Webpage/Website
- Other potential items in expanded Directory/App they would find most useful?
 - Historic Site Markers 91%
 - Historic Landmarks/Buildings 91%
- Additional potential features they would like to see in the Directory:
 - Events listings/calendar 79%
 - Individual location maps 52%

Digital Portal

- 52% very interested in participating in statewide shared digital collections portal
- 32% would be able to provide high-quality digital images for an online portal, but most were unsure about their abilities to provide metadata & catalog information.
- Respondents, would be most interested in collections portal that featured Photographs (80%) or Archival/document collections (80%)

Exhibits

- 48% have permanent exhibits that change rarely
- Only 24% very interested in traveling exhibit from VHS
 - Why not? 33% Don't have space or the people to install exhibits

Grants for LHS

- Grants for the following would be most useful
 - Collections care/management 66%
 - Exhibits 53%
 - Digitization/collections access 47%
- Most indicated completing applications and reports would be something they can do, but only 36% indicated they could provide matching funds.
- Only a small number of respondents have applied for grants in the past 3 years, but most were successful when doing so. They most often applied to Private foundations (22%)



Summary Report Local History Engagement Sessions 2019

In Summer/Fall 2019, the Vermont Historical Society (VHS) held community conversations with local historical societies and museums around the state to come together to talk about the roles they play, common obstacles we face, and how we can work together to build a stronger history community statewide.

The sessions were held:

- June 14, 1-3pm, Lincoln Historical Society- Burnham Hall, Lincoln, VT
- July 12, 10am-12pm, Jamaica Historical Foundation, Jamaica, VT
- July 24, 9am-11am, Vermont History Center, Barre, VT
- August 2, 10am-12pm, Old Stone House Museum, Brownington, VT
- August 23, 10am-12pm, Manchester Community Library, Manchester, VT
- September 6, 10am-12pm, Saint Albans Museum, St. Albans, VT
- September 28, 12-2pm, Waterbury Historical Society, Waterbury, VT

117 people from over 60 organizations attended the sessions. The majority were with local historical societies, but it also included libraries, museums, state agencies, public access tv, and publishers. The following general themes and discussion points were explored at these sessions.

Favorite Things

At each Engagement Session we started off with introductions and “Favorite Things” people were doing at their organization. A wide variety of amazing ideas and programs were mentioned. They fell into these general categories:

Type	
Programs/Events	21.6%
Collections Care/Management	16.2%
Historic Preservation/Buildings	14.2%
Outreach/Engagement	12.8%
Digitization/Access	8.8%
Education	7.4%
Misc	5.4%
Publications	4.7%
Partnerships	4.1%
Admin/Governance	2.7%
Contemporary History	1.4%
Development/Fundraising	0.7%

Top 4 Roles

At each Engagement Session, attendees were asked to pick their “Top 4” roles for LHS from a list. We then used the top vote getters as focus points for discussion at that session.

Distinct choices emerged with 3 roles being selected twice as often as the next choices. For these roles, the following ideas/challenges/themes were most prominent

Educating the Public (including children)

Working with standards & VT curriculum

How do you work with schools

Technology & sharing stories

Partnerships for expanding educational opportunities & programs

LHS have the educational content

Preservation & Access for Archival materials and

Preservation of Material Culture/Historic Objects *(these were often combined at the sessions because they are similar, so themes are joint)*

Digitization & access

Too much stuff

How do we preserve items

Importance of “original” items/inherent value

Role	# of Votes
Educating the Public (including children)	76
Preservation & Access for archival materials	67
Preservation of material culture/historic objects	63
Historic Preservation	39
Preservation of "Place"	32
Genealogy resource	31
Promote civic engagement & pride	31
Contextualize & interpret history	29
Cultural heritage tourism/promoting Vermont	20
Foster cross-audience conversations	7
Community pillars/leaders	4
Nurture personal & collective identity	4

Value/Importance of LHS

Another segment of the Sessions asked attendees about the Value & Importance of LHS. This proved to be difficult for people to articulate in some sessions- distilling down the “why” of who we are and what we do, and then being able to talk to others about it. The most common values included:

- Providing Information/Content,
- Serving as Community builders/community identity, and
- Contextualizing history/connect past & present

Value	Instances
Community builders/community identity	15
Providing Information/Content	13
Contextualize history/connect past & present	11
Preservation of collections/buildings/past	6
Economic driver	4
Promoting civic engagement/knowledge	4

Building Capacity

Another component of our discussions centered around ways in which we could build capacity- both what VHS could do, and what LHS could do. This was framed around the areas of: Support, Networking, Programming, and Public Information. Commonly mentioned items for each included:

- *Programming*: joint themes/exhibits, coordinating annual activities around events or themes [history weekend], speakers bureau
- *Public Information*: LHS ENews is great, online calendar, coordinated PR w/legislators & other larger stakeholders
- *Networking Opportunities*: regional/annual meetings, shared resource space (listserv, online community, templates, finding aids), partnerships (i.e.-w/libraries)
- *Support*: Advice/mentors, grantwriting/asking for \$, best practices/templates/policies, getting people (volunteers, interns, etc.), Money for “doing” (exhibits, collections care, equipment purchasing, etc.)

When looking across the four areas common themes that emerged included:

Item Category	# of Instances
Information Sharing/Collating	36
Public Outreach/Media	24
Professional Development/Learning Opportunities	18
Joint Projects/Partnerships	11
Technical Assistance/Skilled Help	10
Money/Grants	7
Advocacy	6
Joint Resources/Equipment	4

Professional Development Needs/Topics

At each session, a running tally of professional development/training needs was also kept. These were:

Category	Instances
Collections Care/Management	11
Fundraising/Development	7
PR/Marketing	5
Digitization/Archives	5
Outreach/Volunteers	5
Education	4
Other/Misc	4
Programming	2
Management/Admin	2

Other Common Threads/Notes

- Partnerships & working with others was a common thread. LHS would like to do more, how do they? How does VHS help?
- While collections are important, PEOPLE are integral to what LHS are doing and want to do. How do you keep encouraging and increasing those connections?
- Centralized “resources” pops up multiple times: technology, listserv, equipment, storage, documents, etc. How can we best share information & materials with each other?
- Talking about/expressing the Value of LHS was often difficult. How do we make our case?
- “Favorite Things” match somewhat with most important roles. One area of disconnect is with education. A high number of programmatic/adult education was noted as a “Favorite Thing” but only a small number of school-age educational programming was mentioned.

League of Local Historical Societies & Museums at the Vermont Historical Society

For over 60 years, the Vermont Historical Society has provided outreach and support to Vermont's local history community through the League of Local Historical Societies & Museums.

League Programs and Services Include

- **Local History News**
Biweekly e-newsletter which includes listings for your events.
- **Technical Assistance & Mentoring**
Contact VHS with questions regarding collections care, grants, policies, or any other organization issue. Workshops and other training are also offered periodically.
- **Web Directory of all Local Historical Societies and Museums (with a Map!)**
Is your organization listed and up-to-date?
- **LLHSM Achievement Awards**
Given annually to recognize meritorious exhibits, publications, individuals and more.
- **Local History Gallery at the Vermont History Museum**
Presents 6-month rotating exhibits created by local historical societies & museums. Apply today to showcase your community.
- **LLHSM Annual Meeting**
Offers the chance to network, share ideas, issues, and learn from professionals.
- **Traveling Panel Exhibits**
Easy to install exhibits on a variety of Vermont history topics that you can borrow!
- **Pub Trivia Packets**
A fun & easy way to host your own Vermont trivia events!

Many of the LLHSM services listed here are free. Program fees are greatly reduced for VHS Member Institutions. Learn more about services and membership at vermonthistory.org/LLHSM

Need assistance or have questions?

Contact Eileen Corcoran, Community Outreach Coordinator
at (802) 479-8522 or eileen.corcoran@vermonthistory.org



VHS Programs Services for Local Historical Societies

	Networking/Info Sharing	Public Information/Advocacy	Programming	Support
Existing Programs/Services	LHS Biweekly Enews	LLHSM Online Directory	Local History Gallery	Technical Assistance/Site Visits
		VHS in Networks/Partnerships		
	LLHSM Annual Meeting		Traveling Exhibit Program	LLHSM Achievement Awards
	Online Resources (currently minimal)		Trivia Kit	Workshops (1-2/year)
				Backstory/Geiger Intern Support
Expanded/New Opportunities	Online LLHSM Resource Portal w/Listserv	Online LHS Calendar	Statewide Program Themes (Annual/Biannual)	Local History Grants
	Shared Resources (equipment, supplies)	LHS App	Annual History Weekend	Mentoring Program
		Local History Day at State House	Digital Vermont	
	Regional Meet-Ups			