

ARCHIVES MONTH



Action Guide

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Cover Image: Day before Jewish New Year, East Side Market, New York City, 1899, New York (N.Y.) From NYSA [Digital Image Collection](#)

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INTRODUCTION

What is Archives Month?

Archives Month is an annual, month-long observance of the importance of archival and historical records to our lives. In New York, the observance began in the late 1980s when groups of archivists in various regions of the State decided to hold special events and activities at a particular time each year to increase public awareness of the relevance of archives to modern life. Archives Month in New York is celebrated the same month that includes Columbus Day observed, usually the second week in October.

Over the past several years, many archives, historical societies, libraries, local governments, and museums in New York State have celebrated Archives Month in a variety of ways, ranging from small exhibits and one-day open houses to more elaborate celebrations such as banquets, award presentations, and family history days. The number of institutions and organizations participating in Archives Month has grown from a handful to more than a hundred.

Why You Should Participate in Archives Month

The New York State Archives believes that increased public awareness of historical records can translate into increased financial support for historical records. Activities such as Archives Month and other outreach efforts can help the general public and resource allocators, such as trustees, administrators, and local and state legislators, appreciate and understand the contribution that historical records make to modern society.

Purpose of This Guide

To encourage the development and expansion of Archives Month celebrations in New York, the State Archives has developed this Archives Month Action Guide. Its purpose is to suggest some ideas for the kinds of Archives Month activities that you might want to sponsor, and to provide helpful information on increasing media coverage of your event. Celebrating Archives Month can consume a lot of your time and energy, but it is time and energy well spent. We hope this guide will ease your workload by providing samples of a press release, pitch letter, and proclamation that you can modify to suit your needs, and by offering information about the media, which has usefulness beyond Archives Month. Historical records repositories should work to establish a relationship with local media by connecting their holdings to topical events, by informing media of interesting public programs, and by making the repository a relevant “member” of the community.

If your organization has never held an Archives Month celebration, we hope this guide will serve as a catalyst to do so. If your organization is an experienced sponsor of Archives Month events, we hope you will find some new ideas and information here.

ONCE YOU HAVE OUTLINED AN ARCHIVES MONTH PROGRAM, DO THREE THINGS

- Contact the New York State Archives Documentary Heritage Program services (DHP) or LGRMIF regional advisory officer (RAO) about what you have planned.
 - Many regions have local Archives Month committees that can coordinate dates and topics. The RA or RAO will put you in contact with the committee chair.
 - The DHP or RAO can also serve as a resource for developing, advertising, and implementing your program.

- Submit an activity notice by September 1 to your DHP or LGRMIF RAO.
 - Appendix D includes an Archives Month Activity Notice that you can use to report your activities.

- Write a press release or call your local newspaper and television and/or radio stations and ask them if they will publicize your event.

IDEAS FOR ENLIVENING YOUR ARCHIVES MONTH ACTIVITIES

Your Archives Month activities should integrate both imagination and the kinds of historical records you have. As you plan an event, keep in mind the importance of making the connection between the **event** you sponsor and the **value** of historical records. Otherwise, a fashion show depicting clothing from a particular era, for example, will be nothing more than entertainment with no relevance to the historical records that supplied the information for the show.

The following ideas may stimulate your thinking about activities to promote your organization and its holdings during Archives Month.

The Way We Were—Archival Awareness Days

Based on records in your archives, recreate an appropriate period in the history of your community (a particular historic in October, for example, would be ideal) and generate the interest of local government officials, schools, merchants, civic organizations, churches, arts groups, etc. for a community-wide celebration. Specific events, such as those below, might be organized. Stores might roll back prices on some items to the levels that they were during the period being observed.

A Day in the Life of (YOUR COMMUNITY)

Select one day to examine and exhibit information on everyday life in your community. Who owned what property, and who lived where? What vendors were licensed? Where did people work? What stores were in business, and what wares did they sell? What were the community's primary institutions and who were its leaders? How many carpenters, lawyers, farmers, students, factory workers, etc. lived here? What religious or ethnic groups were present? Current officials, business people, and/or community leaders could make presentations about what life was like on the designated day. Perhaps descendants of individuals who lived in the local community at the time could offer presentations.

Food, Fashion, Fun—From the Past

Organize a dinner dance and fashion show featuring foods, clothing styles, and music popular in earlier times, as documented in local archival material. This event could address a variety of periods in the history of your local community. Develop such an event in cooperation with historical societies, local restaurants, educational institutions, etc.

Genealogy of a Property

Like families, buildings and properties have unique histories which can be traced through historical records. Conduct a “genealogical search” through deeds, tax records, and other records related to one property; this could be a focal point for looking at the evolution of a neighborhood or an entire community. The archival profile could be supplemented by other historical information about what was going on around the property at the time, both locally and nationally.

Archival Scavenger Hunt for Students

As the basis for school art or essay contests, create a “scavenger hunt” for interesting information contained in archival material. Schools would have different levels of student poster or writing competitions (e.g., an art class assignment to create a poster to promote land development in the community in the late 1800s, a creative writing exercise to write a month-long diary for a fictional community leader in a designated year). The projects should be based on actual information from an archives.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RECOGNITION

Your Archives Month celebration is an excellent opportunity to reach out to state, regional, and local decision-makers. It also provides a special and enjoyable way to acknowledge individuals and groups who have contributed to the success of your organization. Consider the following:

- Legislators** Invite your state legislators to your archives event. Senate and Assembly directories are available at these websites: www.senate.state.ny.us and www.assembly.state.ny.us. If your representatives supported legislation important to you, such as the Documentary Heritage Program or the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund, you can offer thanks and generate some media attention. If your legislators have not supported legislation that is important to you, Archives Month can be a way you get them interested in your programs and the work you do.
- Regents** Ask the regent from your region to participate (check an up-to-date list of the [Board of Regents](#)). The Board charters educational institutions such as libraries and historical societies and in recent years has worked hard to gain legislative support for programs that benefit your organization. Regents like to meet their constituents; including a Regent in your Archives Month activities is a reminder that their scope extends farther than just.

Local Government Officials

Involve local government officials, including your local historian, in your Archives Month celebration. Decision-makers at various levels of local government should know about your program. Such understanding increases the likelihood that they will appreciate and support your efforts.

Volunteers

Recognize volunteers during Archives Month. The cadre of volunteers you depend on would enjoy and welcome acknowledgement of their work. Consider some event or ceremony that lets them know you fully appreciate their contribution to your organization.

Teachers

Make sure teachers in your community know about your Archives Month events. This can be a time for them to become acquainted with your historical records as an educational resource for use in the classroom.

Local Community and Business Leaders

Include local community and business leaders in your activities. Every community has a relatively small group of people who are executives of local businesses, merchants, leaders in service organizations, religious groups, arts associations, etc. Archives Month can be a way to let them know that their community has interesting and important historical records that are relevant to the area's heritage.

If these people respond positively to your invitation, you will greatly increase the likelihood that the media will cover your event. If they are unable to participate in your celebration, the fact that they have received your invitation is a step toward attracting their attention. Don't remove their names from your guest list. Try again next year!

INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDIA

The key to getting successful media attention is establishing rapport with individuals.

Remember:

- They are professionals
- They have deadlines.
- Their most important need is their need for news

You should get to know your local members of the media so you can trust and be comfortable with them, just as you would with any other professional. You want to develop a relationship of mutual trust and respect. Media outlets, whether print or broadcast, generally have four goals:

- To inform
- To advise
- To entertain
- To make a profit

The easier you make it for the media to attain these goals, the more likely you are to get media coverage. Access to the media is access to the public, and the story media prints or broadcasts

can be the story you want to print or broadcast, if you have an understanding of how these outlets work.

WHO'S WHO IN THE NEWSROOM... AND HOW THEY CAN HELP YOU TELL YOUR STORY

The size of a newsroom staff varies greatly, but the structure remains consistent among local news organizations. To deal effectively with the media, it's important to contact and work with the appropriate individual. Titles may differ slightly from outlet to outlet, but here is a look at the key people in newspaper, television, and radio newsrooms.

Newspapers

Publisher The top executive responsible for all news and business management decisions. Answers to the owner (often is the owner). Except at small publications, the publisher is seldom involved with day-to-day operations.

Editor The top executive responsible for news coverage and editorial decisions. Answers to the publisher. At small publications the editor selects stories, oversees writing and editing, writes editorials and personally addresses readers' concerns and responds to complaints. At larger papers, the editor sets editorial policy, and makes some decisions on coverage, but is less accessible to the public.

Metro or city editor

Found at medium-size to large papers, these managers answer to the editor and are the key to daily coverage of general interest stories. They determine which stories are newsworthy and assign reporters to cover them. This is the individual who needs to be notified of general-interest news items.

Section editors Includes sports, business and features. These editors are responsible for coverage of special-interest items that fit into their sections. They should be contacted with information that would appeal to readers of their special sections.

Copy editor Responsible for proofreading, shortening stories, and writing headlines. They don't have direct contact with the public.

Reporters General assignment reporters cover the stories assigned to them by their editors. Beat reporters cover a certain topic, such as city hall or business. Reporters appreciate readers who provide leads, topics, and information on possible stories. Even at large papers, reporters will usually have some contact with you about a story idea.

Television Stations

General Manager

Top executive responsible for all station operations. Answers to the owner.

News Director

Responsible for news operations. Answers to the general manager. At large stations, is involved with setting editorial policy; at small stations, will select the stories to be covered and aired; may be the anchor. The news director or an assistant usually responds to complaints or requests for corrections.

Assignment editor

At all but the smallest stations, the key person responsible for selecting stories and assigning them to reporters. Should be the person to whom most information is sent.

Producer

Generally assigned to one newscast (e.g., 6 p.m. news), this person selects the stories to be aired and sees that they are written and edited. Producers also suggest stories to the assignment editor and welcome information for stories that fit their particular newscast.

Anchor

Presenter of the news. May or may not write copy. Some anchors also serve as reporters.

Reporter

As do their newspaper counterparts, TV reporters cover stories that are assigned to them, as well as stories they find on their own. Reporters, not producers, select information and interviews that go into their stories.

Editor

Responsible for the electronic editing of videotape, at the direction of a reporter or producer.

Public affairs director

May work separately from the news department, and is responsible for producing interview and public affairs programs. Should be contacted directly about appearing on those programs.

Director

Responsible for the technical aspects of the newscast while it is on the air, including camera shots, graphics, and video tape. The director literally “calls the shots” from the control room while the program is on the air.

Radio Stations

The management structure of radio stations usually follows that of television stations; however, the newsroom staff is usually much smaller. In some cases the news director is the only staffer; only the largest stations utilize more than a few reporters. The news director frequently determines which stories will be covered and is the person to whom news material should be

sent. Appearances on talk programs are generally booked by the program's host or by the public affairs director.

Remember: When In Doubt, Find Out

Most media outlets will tell you by phone who you should contact with specific information.

TALKING POINTS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

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 period of celebration and recognition, archives serve the public and the media throughout the year.
3. There are more than 1400 historical records programs in New York State, including libraries, museums, businesses, and other organizations. Historical records can also be found in the more than 4,000 local governments in the state. Collectively they contain valuable information for the media to
 - put developing news stories into context
 - explain current issues in historical terms
 - help readers and viewers understand their local communities
 - demonstrate how a local activity or topic relates to a larger issue
 - better inform and entertain subscribers and audiences
4. Historical records are unique, one-of-a-kind sources of information.
5. Archivists, through their understanding of research and contacts with fellow professionals, can help the media locate information about select topics throughout New York.
6. The media maintain their own files of newspaper articles and videotapes which are essential for reporting. They call these files their "archives" or their "morgue". Public historical records programs are a similar resource.
7. To the eye of a trained journalist, many archives can reveal a number of feature article "leads."
8. Historical records programs in the local community often contain information that could help the media find local examples of national or statewide "trend" stories.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PITCHING TELEVISION BROADCAST NEWS

1. Most story ideas should go directly to the news department's assignment editor. However, some reporters on certain beats (health, money, consumer, etc.) do set up their own stories, so you can pitch directly to them. You should get to know those reporters in your market.
2. If you can't offer good visuals to tell your story, then it is not appropriate for television. Reporters do not like "talking heads."
3. Be patient when pitching. Television news reporters and editors often have limited staffing and cannot commit to stories until the morning of the event.
4. Watch local television at different times of the day. This will give you an idea of the format of each newscast, as well as which stories run at what times and who reports them.
5. Consider live interview opportunities on noon programs, feature-oriented newscasts or news/public affairs programs. This will sometimes get around the need to provide a lot of visuals, and it may also give you more time to tell your story.
6. If your story idea is extremely complex, try to develop your pitch around one angle. Most television news stories are one to two minutes in length, which is not enough time to address every aspect of an issue.
7. Just as with newspapers, personalize your story idea whenever possible. For example, offer interviews with the descendants of a family mentioned in the historical record, or with researchers who have made discoveries in the archives.
8. Make television pitches very early in the day. Do not call near or during the broadcast times of any newscasts.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DOING A TELEVISION INTERVIEW

1. Remember to develop your “must-air” points in simple, succinct phrases. A reporter will probably choose about fifteen seconds out of your taped interview to use in the actual broadcast.
2. Watch your “ums” and “ahs.” It is boring to listen to these on live television.
3. The camera will find you. Don't stare into the lens; just talk with the reporter and ignore the technology (unless you have been given special instructions).
4. Don't wear white; it can cause glare. Avoid busy prints that will make the screen jump.
5. For a live interview, ask any questions you might have over the telephone when you are confirming the interview. Don't wait to talk with the interviewer ahead of time, because usually you are rushed right on camera.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PITCHING RADIO BROADCAST NEWS

1. Do your homework: Listen to a variety of different stations to get a feel for the talk show hosts and the topics they discuss. Also take note of the length of the talk shows or segments. Don't pitch an extremely complex topic to a host who does a series of five-minute interviews on different topics.
2. For a call-in program, listen to the type of people who call in and the questions they ask. This is the audience the host has to entertain, and these are the people who have to be interested in your topic in order for a host to have you as a guest on the show. You must make your topic interesting to this audience.
3. Contact the host or the producer of a talk show program to pitch a story. Many times the host produces the program, but sometimes host and producer are separate contacts.
4. Make your pitch as succinct as possible. Show that you've listened to the program. This may include referring to other topics the host has covered that you have enjoyed, etc.
5. Do not call your contact close to or during the talk show program.
6. When you book a guest on a show, fax the host a written confirmation. This should include the phone number of the interviewee. This is very important, because during a show, a host doesn't have time to fumble around for a lost number. Also include the name and title of the guest, the topic, the date and time of the interview, and your phone number in case there is a problem.

7. Fax the host a background sheet about your organization and a fact sheet about the topic. Radio people love these, because it allows them to keep the information at their fingertips. If they forget something on the air, they can quickly refer to the fact sheet.
8. Most of the time, radio news departments are separate from talk shows. Sometimes, however, news directors and anchors host longer public affairs shows on the weekends, so keep this in mind for your pitch.
9. Contact the appropriate person. If you are holding a press conference or releasing news on a particular day, contact the news director at the radio station. Don't call him/her to do feature interviews for newscasts.

PLANNING FOR MEDIA COVERAGE

Begin right after Labor Day

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

Identify contacts

Start by identifying the appropriate individual for you to work with at each media outlet. Once you have the contact name, mail or fax the pitch letter and follow up with a phone call a few days later.

Use talking points

For that telephone conversation, use the talking points from this guide to explain 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 from a number of opportunities which story to pursue. This selection process can change from day to day, depending on what news occurs, the number of staff available, and general interest in the topic. You should try to show the media, from your perspective, why Archives Month is important to readers or listeners.

Provide further information

You may be asked for further information in writing—times, dates of events, background on your local archives, what else is happening around the region or state, etc. Make sure you provide this in a timely manner.

Have spokespeople available

Make sure you have spokespeople available for a talk show, newspaper interview or photograph, or other media opportunity. Bearing in mind the time constraints on most media, you must make such interviews as convenient as possible for the reporter or host. Go to the studio or newspaper office if necessary. Give the reporter telephone numbers where you can be reached should breaking news change the schedule. If plans have been made for media coverage during Archives Month, follow up a day or two in advance with a phone call to assure your contact that everything is ready and to confirm time and place for the interview/photo session.

Send out press release well in advance

For advance notice of your Archives Month activities, be sure you send out a press release in time to make the weekly newspapers, calendar listings, and other media opportunities. When you make the initial call to identify your best contact, ask about how best to receive advance coverage on your scheduled activities and about the media's deadlines for submitting material. Be sure you make the deadlines.

SAMPLE TIMETABLE

September 5–8	Make initial telephone contact
September 11–15	Send advance press release, and send pitch letter to assignment editor
September 18–22	Follow up with call, covering your talking points
During October	Confirm coverage, and make media arrangements
During October	Conduct interviews and photo sessions

APPENDICES

BASICS OF A PRESS RELEASE

- The first few sentences must contain the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the story, and be presented in an active style which captures the reader's attention. Every news release should try to answer all six questions in the first two paragraphs.
- It is important to include basic information in the first or lead paragraph, which should be a short presentation (20–40 words) of the single most newsworthy part of the release. A news release is structured as an inverted pyramid. The most important part of the story *is at the beginning* and, therefore, forms the thickest part of the pyramid—the foundation upon which all else is built. Subsequent paragraphs should give further details in descending order of importance and should reinforce the relevance of the item to the reader.
- Keep the concepts simple and sentences short. Write at a level that matches your intended publishing vehicle. Avoid over-used words that no longer have much impact, such as “heritage.” Vary the sentence structure and use pronouns to humanize the copy.
- The format should be consistent, with a simple typeface used on letterhead, if it is available.
 - Advise the editor (above the first paragraph, on the far left or right) of the preferred timing for use (e.g., “For Immediate Release”).
 - Make the name and phone number of the designated contact clearly visible.
- Include an accompanying photo if you have the resources and if you can provide an image that is an active close-up.
- How the release looks is important.
 - Use 8 ½" x 11" plain bond paper.
 - Leave one-inch to one-and-one-half-inch margins on either side.
 - Indent all paragraphs four to eight units.
 - Double-space all copy and type on one side of the paper only.
 - Write “MORE” on the bottom of each page except the final one, where you should type “30” (the old Morse Code telegrapher's sign-off) if you're a traditionalist, or ###, or simply “END.”

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date

Contact: Contact Company/Organization

Phone #

(LOCAL ORGANIZATION) CELEBRATES STATEWIDE ARCHIVES MONTH

CITY -- (LOCAL ARCHIVES ORGANIZATION), along with hundreds of organizations in the archival community across New York State, will celebrate New York Archives Month, (DATES) with special commemorative activities at the (SITE).

Among the free activities will be (EXHIBIT, PERFORMANCE, TOURS, ETC.) on (TIMES, DAYS). The special events are designed to celebrate the importance of historical records and to familiarize the (NAME OF COMMUNITY) area with the relevance of these materials to the cultural and historical life of the region.

In addition to the entertaining activities and educational programs, tours and exhibits of (NAME OF COMMUNITY)'s archives will be offered. Among those organizing the event are (LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ETC.).

(QUOTE FROM SENIOR LOCAL OFFICIAL—MAYOR, SUPERVISOR, ETC.—ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF ARCHIVES TO THE COMMUNITY).

Similar events will be held in all areas of New York state. (CONTACT THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE PROGRAM ADVISORY SERVICES AT THE STATE ARCHIVES OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REGIONAL ADVISORY OFFICER—LISTING APPEARS IN THIS PACKET—TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE REGION.)

For further information, contact (NAME, PHONE NUMBER OF LOCAL CONTACT).

#

SAMPLE PITCH LETTER

DATE

Editor (Name)
Media Outlet
(Address)
(City, State Zip)

Dear (Name):

As local communities across New York State celebrate National Archives Month (DATES), we in (NAME OF COMMUNITY) will be focusing on the importance of archives and archival material to our community.

We have organized several events to enhance public recognition for the people and programs responsible for maintaining our communities' vital historical records. We invite you to cover these events and to use them as a focal point for a feature story about the (NAME OF ARCHIVES) and the ongoing work we do here.

On (DATES) we will hold (NAME OF EVENTS at (LOCATION) from (TIME OF DAY). This program will feature (DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY).

(NAME OF CONTACT PERSON, ORGANIZER) will be available to discuss with you the event—and the importance of archives—by telephone prior to October (FIRST DAY OF ARCHIVES MONTH). I will call you in the next two weeks to provide you with more information about National Archives Month and how it will be observed in (COMMUNITY).

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

(Local archives contact)

PROPOSED PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the historical records of (MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUR AREA) in (COUNTY, CITY, VILLAGE) are crucial to the way we understand our past and plan for our future; and,

WHEREAS, these records have been professionally administered and made accessible by dedicated, yet often unheralded, archivists; and,

WHEREAS, the work of these archivists and the importance of these records programs seldom receive the recognition they deserve;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, (COUNTY EXECUTIVE, MAYOR, SUPERVISOR) of (COUNTY, CITY, TOWN VILLAGE), declare the period October (DATE) to be Archives Appreciation Month throughout the (COUNTY, CITY, TOWN, VILLAGE), and urge my fellow citizens to participate in the special activities and learn more about the importance of archives and historical records in our communities.

APPENDIX D**NYS ARCHIVES MONTH ACTIVITY NOTICE**

Please return this form to the New York State Archives DHP Coordinator or Local Government Advisory Officer. See Appendix E for contact information.

COUNTY:

DATE OF EVENT:

TIME:

LOCATION (including street address):

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION:

CONTACT NAME/PHONE NUMBER:

TYPE OF PROGRAM (exhibit, tour, lecture, open house, etc.):

TITLE OF PROGRAM (if applicable):

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM (brief one- or two-line description):

EXAMPLE OF A COMPLETED ACTIVITY NOTICE

COUNTY: Allegany

DATE OF EVENT: Tuesday, October 17, 201X

TIME: Noon–1 p.m.

LOCATION (including street address): Blodgett Memorial Library, 16 Main Street, Wellsville

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: Wellsville Historical Society and Wellsville Town Historian's Office

CONTACT NAME/PHONE NUMBER: Jack Donaldson, (716) 589-3472

TYPE OF PROGRAM: (exhibit, tour, lecture, open house, etc.): Lecture

TITLE OF PROGRAM (if applicable): "The 1920s in Wellsville"

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM: (brief one- or two-line description):

Mary Hennessy will talk about growing up in Wellsville and show slides of documents from the town historian's files related to the 1920s.

CONTACTS**GOVERNMENT RECORDS SERVICES****STATEWIDE**

New York State Archives
Cultural Education Center 9A47
Albany, NY 12230

Phone (518) 474-6926
Email recmgmt@mail.nysed.gov

STATE ARCHIVES REGIONAL ADVISORY OFFICERS (RAO)

Look up your RAO by county:

www.archives.nysed.gov/a/directories/dir_staff.shtml#Advisory

DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE PROGRAM (DHP)**STATEWIDE DHP SERVICES**

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Email dhs@mail.nysed.gov