Rules of engagement
Strategic communications build strong relationships

Every historical organization has different needs, shaped by its own stage of development and external demands. But among the things that all organizations share is the need to communicate clearly and effectively with multiple audiences. That communication is central to building long-term relationships with key stakeholders, be they your members, volunteers, visitors, board members or funders.

Your communications strategy may vary from audience to audience but your goal should be the same: make each one your partner in carrying out your mission. By instilling in your audiences a sense of ownership in your organization, you'll be successful in persuading them to join you as stewards of your community's history.

Know your target audience
The first step in creating effective communications is to understand the needs of your target audiences. Think about what messages you'll send to each constituent group. What do you want them to know and why? How can you get that information out to them most effectively? And what action do you hope to motivate them to take?

Your various communications with each audience will serve assorted purposes. Here are just some of the reasons you'll need to communicate with them:

- **Members:** recruitment, program promotion, fundraising, membership drives, thanks.
- **Volunteers:** recruitment and retention, training, evaluation, recognition.

- **Board:** recruitment, orientation to responsibilities, fundraising, recognition.
- **Visitors:** program promotion, cultivation as members and donors.
- **Funders:** education about organizational values, accomplishments and fiscal accountability.

Rules of engagement –

Stearns History Museum

With creative marketing, an eye-catching event and a prize drawing to capture attendee names, the Stearns History Museum fêted its members and prospected for new ones at a book launch party for "Minnesota 13: Stearns County's 'Wet' Wild Prohibition Days." Costumed flappers and speakeasy waiters helped draw a record crowd.
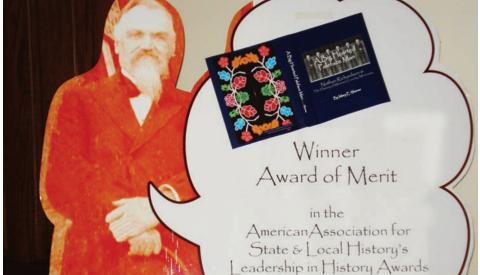
Rules of engagement – continued

It's all in your point of view

Once you've identified your primary audiences, it's time to craft your messages. What makes for engaging communications? Keep in mind the recipient's point of view.

Too many organizations simply report "Here's what we're doing" and assume that's enough to engage their audience. A better approach is "Here's why we do what we do and why it should matter to you." Appeal to your audience's self-interest or sense of responsibility; give them a reason for getting involved. Think of your communications with them as a kind of grass-roots activity; it's all about sharing experiences and working together for the community good.

Morrison County Historical Society

Morrison County founder Nathan Richardson served as the common thread in all Morrison County Historical Society communications for 2006. Newsletters, events, a new history book and this life-size traveling cutout kept the county sesquicentennial and the society's 70th anniversary in the public eye.

Process makes perfect

Efficiency experts say the best way to ensure success is to develop a process that everyone uses to accomplish a given task. For communicating with your constituents, your process should incorporate who writes the messages, what vehicles are used to disseminate them and how frequently the messages are sent. To promote an event, for example, you can maximize the impact of your messages by concentrating them within a particular timeframe, using a variety of delivery methods (e.g., direct mail, newsletters, newspaper, web site). You may choose to send other kinds of messages, such as an annual fund appeal or membership renewal notices, at the same time every year. Don't hesitate to send follow-up reminders; it usually takes more than one try to elicit a response. And don't forget face-to-face communication at events and during fund drives. Many feel

it's the most powerful way to develop relationships that will last.

Whatever your strategy, it's important to reinforce your messages with a consistent look and approach. Some organizations even choose a theme for the year and use it in everything from event postcards to exhibits to annual reports. A coordinated approach and a proven process for your communications are an unbeatable combination that will:

• provide consistency,
• improve quality,
• increase efficiency, thus reducing costs, and
• get positive results.

Best of all, it's a recipe that's repeatable, making it easy to hand over to the next generation of organizational leaders.

Poised for success

Relevance. Timeliness. Repetition. Those factors are key to creating messages that will engage your audiences. So is making them feel that they are high on the list of your organization's priorities. After all, nothing is more crucial to your success than members, volunteers and a board who see it as their responsibility to support your mission and goals. Building strong relationships with those constituents is perhaps the best investment of time and resources you can make. ■

For more ideas on how to strengthen your organization through the use of effective systems, see the enclosed flyer on the Minnesota Historical Society's 2008 Local History Workshops. This year's theme: Systems for Success.

Putting digital images online
Consider the risks before you share visual resources

Sharing digital images is commonplace these days. People routinely post their pictures on photo-sharing web sites such as Flickr and on YouTube, the wildly popular platform for sharing videos. Both sites make anyone's digital pictures instantly available to friends, family and, really, the whole world.

Libraries, archives and historical organizations are following suit, making plans to put digital images from their collections online. Minnesota's historical organizations already are doing something like that through the Minnesota Reflections project, in collaboration with the Minnesota Digital Library (see box, page 4). The digitization project has made many of the state's unique visual resources and special collections widely accessible.

But there are several factors to consider before making digital images available online – technological and legal issues that warrant caution for both hosts of image-sharing sites and users of those images.

Technology issues

There are two ways to manage an online image archive. One is the Flickr model – hosting an application that allows people to upload their photos to a site you manage. This saves time and money for the host because contributors do their own scanning and create their own metadata. But leaving those tasks to others means that quality and conformity are not ensured.

Another challenge posed by this model is that it requires a rather sophisticated application. Increasingly, wiki and blog applications support some of the functions necessary for online sharing. But managing a site will still be a stretch for most small institutions.

Alternatively, the host organization can do the scanning and create the metadata. In this model, someone loans a photo to a repository, which then digitizes it and returns the original to its owner. This method ensures better quality control and conformity of digital images. The challenge comes with the scale of the project. Because the digitization process is labor-intensive, it is harder to manage as the number of photos in the online archive grows.

Legal issues

Whichever technological approach you choose, you are bound by legal issues governing intellectual property rights. Although all computer users have the tools at their fingertips to copy, manipulate and distribute any image, the laws on intellectual property spell out many usage restrictions. Without taking precautions, both users and hosts of digital images can encounter serious problems.

The Minnesota Digital Library offers this caution to its contributors: "Organizations must be able to demonstrate that images, documents and maps are originals and are in the public domain or that they have clear copyright to each object in the application and are able to grant the MDL the right to publish the objects on the Minnesota Reflections web site."

Fillmore County Historical Society

Users of the Minnesota Reflections web site looking for scenes of early industries can view this 1908 photo of workers in Preston's Passe Brickyard, from the collections of the Fillmore County Historical Society.

Digital images online –

Digital images online – continued

The key word here is "demonstrate." Documentation is essential. Just as you document a gift to your museum collection, you need to document a digital contribution to your web site. The documentation should specify the copyright and limitations on usage that pertain to every digital object.

All contributors of images should understand what is at stake – that by sharing their photos on the Web, they are, in essence, surrendering their property to the world. Organizations need to spell that out in a standard form requiring the contributor's signature. Such a document will clarify the terms and serve to protect you if any problems develop.

In addition, your web site should alert users to the risks they might incur. For example, the Minnesota Historical Society posts this on its visual resources database site:

The Minnesota Historical Society assumes no responsibility for infraction of copyright laws, invasion of privacy, or any other improper or illegal use that may arise from reproduction of any image. In all instances, the applicant agrees to hold the museum and its agents harmless against any and all claims arising or resulting from the use of this image and shall indemnify the museum and its agents for any and all costs and damages arising or resulting from any such unauthorized use.

As the recording industry has learned, it is extremely difficult to control the flow of digital content online, no matter how many lawyers are involved. Despite all the warnings you issue and precautions

Pennington County Historical Society

The Pennington County Historical Society has posted its entire photo collection on its web site, including this 1899 view of the Holmes Bros. general store in St. Hilaire.

you take, you may find yourselves the target of a copyright infringement complaint. It will help you manage the situation if you have in place a process by which people can notify you of a possible infringement. For an example of how Flickr does this, go to http://info.yahoo.com/copyright/details.html.

Some good advice

About one thing, there's no argument: content-sharing is here to stay. And for the most part, it is widely beneficial. But as technology changes and laws evolve, there are some gray areas. So here, to sum it up, are the basic precautions

you should take:

- Keep a written record.
- Document all contributions, decisions and transactions.
- Define rights retained by the contributors and those transferred to your organization.

Make the process as simple as you can so it is easy to manage. And make it a habit – an integral part of your routine. If you have any doubts along the way, talk to a lawyer. The advice you get from your peers – or this Tech Talk – and all your good intentions are no defense should a dispute arise. ∎

About the Minnesota Digital Library

The Minnesota Digital Library Coalition (MDLC) – professionals from libraries, archives, historical societies and museums across Minnesota – has created a digital collection of the state's unique resources and special collections. Dubbed Minnesota Reflections, the digitization project to date involves more than 20,000 photographs and images from 75 participating cultural heritage organizations. The MDLC provides the server, database environment and imaging support for the project. A searchable database helps users access the resources. To see what Minnesota Reflections has to offer, go to reflections.mndigital.org.

A birthday to remember
Minnesota's Sesquicentennial rings in a year of statewide events

In May, Minnesota reaches its 150th anniversary as the 32nd state in the Union. But the observance has already begun. A book has been published, an exhibit opened, a medallion struck and commemorative stamp unveiled. There's much more to come. This month, Minnesotans launch a yearlong, statewide commemoration with events and activities that promise to reach all corners of the state. For an overview of what's in store, go to www.mn150years.org.

Overseeing the enormous undertaking is the Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission, its staff and volunteers. Among their charges: to garner broad participation by the state's citizens, communities, organizations and institutions; and to raise awareness of how the stories of our past shed light on our understanding of ourselves as Minnesotans.

One of the many sectors the Commission wants to engage is Minnesota's network of county and local historical organizations. "This 150th anniversary is the state's time to shine," says Tane Danger, Sesquicentennial communications director. "But county and local history groups keep the light burning all the time as stewards of Minnesota's past. Their participation will make this year even more memorable."

How your organization can participate

There are many ways in which your historical organization can take part. Here are just a few of them:

• **Promote your MN 150 events.** The Sesquicentennial Commission serves as a clearinghouse for local events and projects. Among promotional tools available: an online events calendar, e-newsletter, Sesqui-blog, Community Resource Guide and Sesquicentennial graphics. Register your event at www.mn150years.org/eventform.html and get free use of the official Sesquicentennial logo.

• **Showcase your community.** Sign up for exhibit space at the Statehood Festival and Expo, May 17-18, on the State Capitol grounds. Or join the lineup of exhibitors in the Big Top Chautauqua tent at the 2008 Minnesota State Fair, themed "Happy Birthday, Minnesota!" "We're looking for communities of any kind to share their unique expressions of Minnesota's spirit," says Claire Plank, Sesquicentennial community outreach coordinator. For more information, e-mail info@mn150years.org or call 651-296-1870.

• **Jump on the Capital for a Day bandwagon.** Five communities will serve as State Capital for a Day during the week of May 12-16: Bemidji, Detroit Lakes, New Ulm, Thief River Falls and Winona. If one of them is near you, be sure your historical organization gets involved.

• **Augment your merchandise mix.** Add Sesquicentennial merchandise to your museum's gift shop. New from MHS Press: "Minnesota 150: The People, Places and Things that Shape

Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission

A Minnesota Sesquicentennial stamp of the Mississippi River near Winona was unveiled in October. It will go on sale nationally in May.

Our State." There are also flags, pins, shirts and medallions; you can even customize a commemorative medallion for your organization or community with the Sesquicentennial logo on one side. Go to www.mn150years.org for all the links you'll need to order.

Winona County Historical Society executive director Mark Peterson chairs the Programs Committee of the Sesquicentennial Commission. "Lots of towns and counties, including Winona, have already had our own sesquicentennials, and there are many more to come," he says. "For the local history community, it's only natural to focus on those home-town observances. But don't stop there. This is a great opportunity to look beyond your own community to your place in the larger context of the whole state." ■

State grants-in-aid awarded

Forty applicants to the Minnesota Historical Society's State Grants-in-Aid program received a total of $171,557 during the fall cycle of fiscal year 2008 – up from 23 grants the previous fall totaling $58,000. A one-time funding increase from the Minnesota Legislature accounted for the growth.

Organizations and municipalities in 30 counties were awarded grants for projects aimed primarily at improving collections storage, collections management, the safety of collections and historic properties, and access to information.

Big Stone County: City of Ortonville, $5,000, to repair the front stairs of the Ortonville Free Library, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Chippewa County: Chippewa County Historical Society, $3,334, to expand archival storage.

Clearwater County: Clearwater County Historical Society, $859, to install a museum security system.

Cottonwood County: Cottonwood County Historical Society, $2,370, to purchase microfilm copies of newspapers.

Crow Wing County: City of Ironton, $14,125, for a historic structure report on Ironton City Hall.

Dodge County: Dodge County Historical Society, $3,370, to purchase PastPerfect museum cataloging software.

Douglas County: Douglas County Historical Society, $1,000, to upgrade the handicap ramp and porch of the Knute Nelson House, listed on the National Register.

Faribault County: Faribault County Historical Society, $18,792, to preserve the foundation of the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, listed on the National Register.

Freeborn County: Freeborn County Historical Society, $509, to purchase microfilm copies of newspapers.

Goodhue County: Goodhue Area Historical Society, $468, to improve museum lighting.

Hennepin County: Brooklyn Historical Society, $509, to purchase PastPerfect museum cataloging software.

Hennepin County: HCMC Historical Library, $1,478, to upgrade collections storage.

Hennepin County: Three Rivers Park District, $4,890, for an oral history project.

Hennepin County: Westonka Historical Society, $7,500, to publish the book "Classroom Voices."

Hubbard County: Lake Itasca Region Pioneer Farmers, Inc., $8,000, for interpretation of the J. Neils/Red Lake Sawmill.

Itasca County: Itasca County Historical Society, $2,725, to preserve the Grand Rapids Review photographic collection.

Kittson County: Kittson County Historical Society, $3,500, to replace its microfilm reader/printer.

Lake of the Woods County: Depot Preservation Alliance, $3,500, to upgrade the furnace and ductwork at the Canadian National Railways Depot, listed on the National Register.

Lake of the Woods County: Lake of the Woods County Historical Society, $1,585, for web site development.

Le Sueur County: Le Sueur County Historical Society, $575, to purchase microfilm copies of Le Sueur County newspapers, 1997-2003.

Marshall County: Old Home Town Museum, $1,732, to purchase PastPerfect museum cataloging software.

McLeod County: McLeod County Historical Society, $1,772, for quilt storage and preservation.

Morrison County: Morrison County Historical Society, $4,058, to preserve the Stanek Photography collection.

Mower County: Mower County Historical Society, $5,372, to conserve the flag of Company K, 4th Minnesota Volunteer Infantry.

Nicollet County: Nicollet County Historical Society, $885, for artifact storage.

Otter Tail County: Friends of the History Museum of East Otter Tail County, $4,500, to implement the audiovisual component of the "Coming Home" exhibit.

Pope County: Pope County Historical Society, $6,349, to upgrade exhibit lighting.

Ramsey County: White Bear Lake Area Historical Society, $391, to purchase microfilm copies of newspapers.

Red Lake County: Lake Pleasant Township, $4,975, for restoration of the Lake Pleasant Town Hall and School.

Renville County: Danube Historical Society, $1,493, to purchase PastPerfect museum cataloging software.

Renville County: Renville County Historical Society, $1,717, to microfilm township records.

St. Louis County: City of Tower, $1,410, for security and fire detection at the Tower Depot Historical Center.

St. Louis County: Friends of B'nai Abraham Synagogue, $10,000, to upgrade heating and ventilation systems at the B'nai Abraham Synagogue, listed on the National Register.

Sherburne County: Sherburne County Historical Society, $875, to preserve newspaper photograph collections.

Stearns County: Stearns History Museum, $10,000, to upgrade environmental controls for collections storage.

Traverse County: Traverse County Historical Society, $1,311, to purchase PastPerfect museum cataloging software.

Wabasha County: Wabasha County Historical Society, $7,500, for the final phase of geothermal heating and cooling at Reads Landing School, listed on the National Register.

Watonwan County: St. James Opera House Restoration, $15,000, to restore the west-side storefront of the St. James Opera House.

Winona County: Winona County Historical Society, $7,100, to reroof the Willard Bunnell House, listed on the National Register.

Wright County: Wright County Historical Society, $1,028, to purchase microfilm copies of newspapers.

New electronic filing required for small organizations

Beginning in 2008, small tax-exempt organizations (gross receipts of $25,000 or less) that previously were not required to file federal tax returns may be required to file an annual electronic notice – Form 990-N, also known as the e-Postcard. This filing requirement applies to tax periods beginning after Dec. 31, 2006. Organizations that fail to meet this annual filing requirement for three consecutive years will lose their tax-exempt status.

Among exemptions are churches, organizations included in a group return, and section 509(a)(3) supporting organizations required to file Form 990 or Form 990-EZ.

The IRS is developing an electronic filing system for the e-Postcard (there will be no paper form) and will publicize filing procedures when the system is ready for use.

To receive notification when the new filing system is ready, subscribe to the IRS's Exempt Organization Update (go to www.irs.gov/charities and click EO Update). You will receive a regular e-mail newsletter with updates about tax policy issues, services and information affecting tax-exempt organizations. ▪

AASLH award nominations sought

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) is currently accepting nominations for its 2008 Leadership in History awards, recognizing excellence in the preservation and interpretation of local, state and regional history. Awards are given for projects, individual achievement and organizational excellence.

Now in its sixty-third year, the awards program honors exemplary work by

federal, state, regional, county, and local historical organizations; special-subject organizations in related fields such as oral history, genealogy, folklore and archaeology; privately owned museums; and individuals. Nominees need not be members of AASLH to qualify.

For guidelines and nomination forms, go to www.aaslh.org, e-mail hawkins@aaslh.org or phone the AASLH office at 615-320-3203.

Deadline: To nominate your own or another historical organization, submit a nomination by **March 1** to AASLH state co-chair Ben Leonard, Nicollet County Historical Society, 1851 N. Minnesota Ave., St. Peter, MN 56082. Nominations will be reviewed by a national committee this summer; awards will be presented during the AASLH annual meeting in Rochester, N.Y., in September. ▪

A Minnesota native, Grabitske received his B.S. degree in history from Mankato State University and completed his master's degree in public and nonprofit administration at Metropolitan State University. His lifelong passion for history has shaped his career. "I started my work life in 1991 at the Blue Earth County Historical Society," he says. "I'm delighted that, in my new assignment, I can continue serving our vibrant local history community."

In addition to his new duties at MHS, Grabitske also serves as regional awards chair for the American Association for State and Local History. In September 2007 he became chair of the Field Services Alliance, the national organization of professionals who assist local historical organizations.

"These are exciting times for our Local History Services office," says Britta Bloomberg, head of the Historic

Preservation Department. "I look forward to working with David as he continues to shape the course of this important work with our local and county partners."

Congratulations, David! ▪

Grabitske to head outreach services

David Grabitske has been named the new manager of outreach services in the Minnesota Historical Society's Historic Preservation Department, replacing Tim Glines who retired in July 2007.

Grabitske has worked at MHS since 1996, first at Historic Fort Snelling as a living history interpreter and later at the MHS Reference Library. He joined the staff of the Historic Preservation Department in 2000 as grants and field programs associate, a position in which he has traveled extensively throughout the state, becoming a familiar figure in Minnesota's network of county and local historical organizations.

Sign up for spring workshops

Strong organizations strike just the right balance between finding fresh ways to approach their work and relying on proven systems to get things done. The Minnesota Historical Society's 2008 local history workshops, titled "Systems for Success," explore strategies for achieving that balance.

The enclosed flyer has all the details – venues, topics, workshop agenda and registration information. Plan now for a day of learning and networking with colleagues from around the state. And bring along some of your staff and volunteers. We promise ideas aplenty. ▪

Minnesota Historical Society

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