

# Save the Archives 2019 Campaign

NICOLE A. LAGACE

**Agency Strategic Goal:** Increase Rhode Islanders' knowledge of state history and their engagement in civic life

**Objective:** *Provide for an appropriate space for our State Archives that protects them and increases Rhode Islanders' access to the state's historical assets.*

## About the Rhode Island State Archives:

The Rhode Island State Archives is operated by the Rhode Island Department of State under the leadership of the Secretary of State. It is home to over 10 million public records, some dating back to the founding of our nation.

For decades, the State Archives were housed in a leased facility located in a flood zone. Shortly after Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea took office, WPRI did a story highlighting the threat this posed to priceless documents.

Secretary Gorbea began a multi-year effort to advocate for and build a new, state of the art facility. In 2019, I developed a low-budget campaign to *Save the Archives*.

## Save the Archives Campaign Objectives:

- Increase public awareness of and traffic to the State Archives
- Secure funding to move the State Archives to safer facility

All communications strategies are based on the goals and objectives identified in the RI Department of State's strategic plan. This campaign was developed to further the first objective of our second strategic goal.

**WPRI STORY:** [State officials tried, and failed, to fix archives a decade ago](#)



Note: while the campaign objectives were measurable, the number of visitors to the State Archives had not regularly been tracked.

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## Audiences:

- PRIMARY: Legislative leadership (*House Speaker, Senate President, Finance Committees*)
- PRIMARY: General Assembly
- SECONDARY: Educators and local history buffs

## Big Picture Messages:

- Our past deserves a better future. Save the Archives!
- Rhode Island has a rich and diverse history that must be protected. It requires a capital investment to ensure Rhode Island's history is not forgotten by Rhode Island's future.
- Through the State Archives, students can see first-hand how the actions – big and small – of concerned citizenry have shaped Rhode Island's history. In turn, they learn how their own civic actions can shape Rhode Island's future.

Messaging emphasized the priceless documents at risk of being damaged or lost forever due to current conditions.

It also emphasized how the historic documents could grow a future generation of engaged Rhode Islanders.

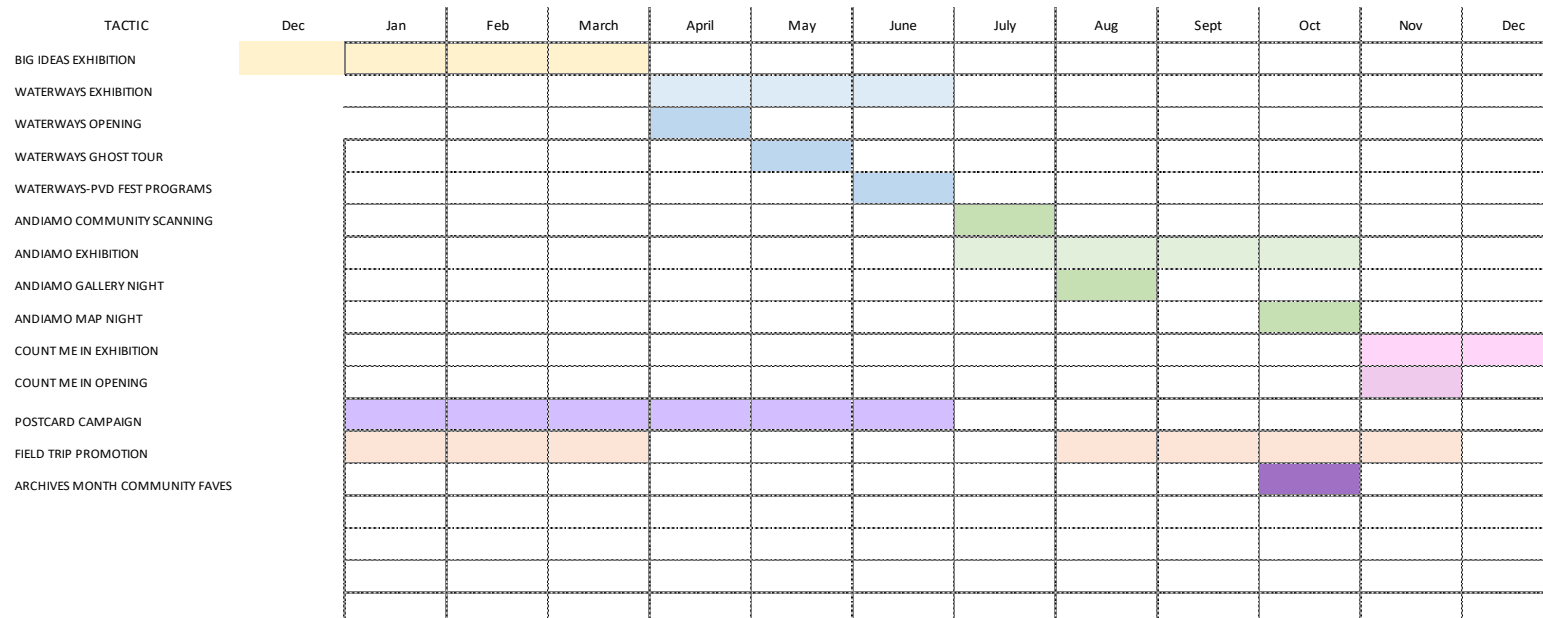
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## Tactics and Timeline:

- Public Programs
  - Three themed exhibitions
  - Evening/after hour events
  - PVD Fest
  - School field trips
- Earned media
  - Pitch feature stories on exhibitions
  - Pitch political reporters about vision for new State Archives facility
- Postcards to General Assembly
  - Social media
    - Community favorites
    - #RIStateArchives #DiscoverYourStory
- Save the Archives Presentations
  - Local historical societies
  - Local Chambers of Commerce
- Treasures from the Archives

<b>Budget:</b>	
Exhibitions:	\$5,000
Social Media:	\$500
Postcards:	\$1,000
Other collateral:	\$1,500
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$8,000</b>



This Gantt chart offered a visual overview of the campaign timeline and public programs.

I also developed more detailed to-do lists with specific deliverable dates.

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## TREASURES FROM THE ARCHIVES

One issue we quickly identified in working to build political support for the State Archives was that legislators rarely visited the downtown Providence location.

I tackled this problem in two ways. First, we brought the Archives to the State House with a pop-up exhibition in the State House Library. Here, a few key pieces – either related to timely historic events or the current State Archives exhibition – were displayed in a protective case.

Second, as seen on the next slide, we developed an exhibition highlighting the contributions of Italian Americans to Rhode Island's rich and diverse history. This exhibition was intended to personally resonate with the Italian-Americans holding key seats of political power in Rhode Island at the time.





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We developed the Andiamo! exhibition to resonate with the Italian American members of the General Assembly, including the House Speaker and Senate President at the time. Evening programs included a community scanning and genealogy event to generate public support.



## GENEALOGY OPEN HOUSE (SEPTEMBER 2019)

*Future researchers joined this open house to learn how State Archives resources can help conduct family history, census, immigration, and demographic research using multiple types of records and tools.*



## ANDIAMO! ITALIANS MAKE THEIR MARK IN RHODE ISLAND RECEPTION (OCTOBER 2019)

*Visitors celebrated the impact of Italian-Americans by viewing the exhibition sharing the story of their role in Rhode Island business, government, and culture through historic artifacts, photographs, and documents.*

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## Earned Media: Features



### SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE:

#### CELEBRATE THE HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND'S ITALIAN COMMUNITY AT THE STATE ARCHIVES

PROVIDENCE, RI – Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea invites the public to come explore the Italian American story in Rhode Island at the new State Archives exhibition: Andiamo! Italians Make Their Mark in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island has the highest population of Italian Americans per capita in the United States, according to the most recent American Community Survey estimate. The new exhibition at the State Archives showcases a variety of cultural artifacts and historical manuscripts to celebrate the culture and growth of the Italian American community in Rhode Island beginning in the late 19th century.

It also features incorporation papers from some of the state's first Italian-owned businesses and organizations, census data on immigrants in Rhode Island at the turn of the 20th century, petitions for naturalization from Italians seeking legal U.S. citizenship, early examples of Italians making their voices heard in Rhode Island government and community groups, and telegrams from John O. Pastore, Rhode Island's first Italian American Governor and U.S. Senator.

"Italian Americans are one of Rhode Island's most prominent and influential communities," said Secretary Gorbea. "They came to America with an incredible work ethic, and despite many challenges in the early days Italian Americans have shaped Rhode Island's cultural and political landscape. Their story is a powerful reminder that immigration to a new place is full of complexity."

Andiamo! Italians Make Their Mark in Rhode Island was made possible through collaboration with several community partners who loaned artifacts and documents, including the Barrington Preservation Society, Forum Lodge #391 - Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America, and the Italo American Club. Items were also generously loaned by State Archives team members.

The exhibition opens on Thursday, June 20th and runs through September 2019. The Rhode Island State Archives is free and open to the public Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 337 Westminster Street in Providence. Two-hour validated parking is available during business hours at Down City Parking adjacent to the State Archives building at the corner of Westminster and Snow Streets.

The Rhode Island State Archives is home to more than 10 million records dating back to 1638. Rhode Island is one of the only states in the country that houses its State Archives in a commercially-leased office space. Secretary Gorbea is working to build a new State Archives and History Center to meet standards set by the National Archives and Records Administration, while ensuring that the public has access to Rhode Island's historic collections.

###



PROVIDENCE

# Historic docs at risk include RI's copy of Bill of Rights, Gaspee Affair texts

by: Bill Tomison  
Posted: May 29, 2019 / 01:09 AM EDT  
Updated: May 29, 2019 / 01:09 AM EDT

WPRI.COM 

SHARE    ...

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WPRI) — An independent study of the current location of the Rhode Island State Archives — a flood plain that gives great concern to Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea — shows just how much history we could stand to lose if disaster strikes.

As the [Target 12 Investigators have been tracking for years](#), the archives have been housed in a Westminster Street building that was supposed to be their temporary home. Rhode Island is the only state in the United States that does not have a permanent location for its most valued historical records, Gorbea says.

Gorbea's office commissioned the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) to study the current space and storage conditions of the items in the archives.

Thirty-five percent of the collection was considered "high priority" for conservation — so fragile that it's going to be damaged if it's simply even handled.

That includes a Rhode Island copy of the Bill of Rights, an 1823 stone printing copy of the Declaration of Independence, and texts from the Gaspee Commission — which investigated American colonists' attack on the British customs schooner HMS Gaspee, and the ship being set on fire — later known as the Gaspee Affair, a significant milestone leading up to the American Revolution.

[View Digital Copies of These Records »](#)

Gorbea says the state needs a specialized, purpose-built facility to store its historic items, and she will continue to lobby for one.

Her office [has proposed a facility near the State House](#) at an estimated cost of about \$52 million; a bond referendum for its proposal could potentially go before voters next year.

Earned Media: Political

## The Providence Journal

Sports Entertainment Lifestyle Food USA TODAY Obituaries eNewspaper Legals 

### POLITICS

## State Archives building a priority for Gorbea

*Now in a temporary home on Westminster St.*

**Katherine Gregg, Patrick Anderson** [kgregg@providencejournal.com](mailto:kgregg@providencejournal.com)

Published 6:53 p.m. ET Jan. 13, 2019 | Updated 10:44 a.m. ET Jan. 14, 2019

[View Comments](#)



A rendering of a proposed new State Archives building on Smith Street in Providence. [R.I. Secretary of State's Office] *The Providence Journal*

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## Experiential Learning



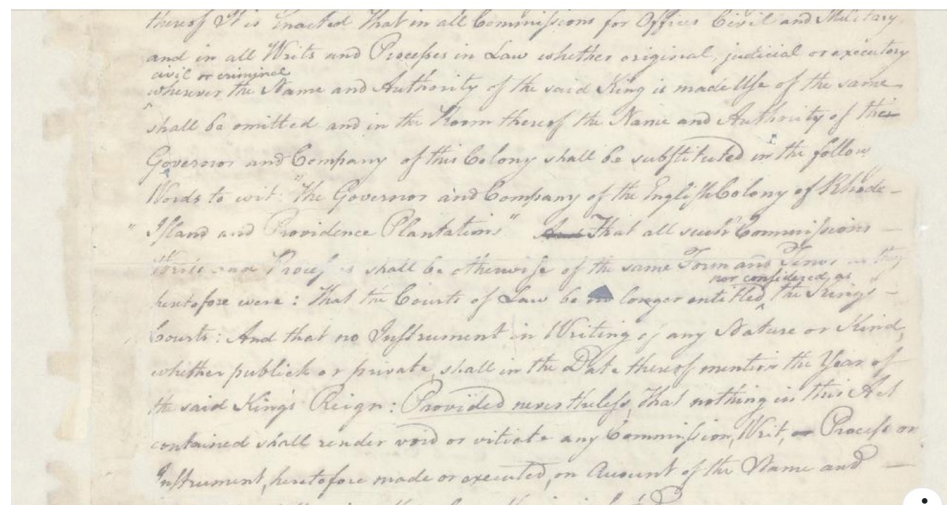
We heavily promoted the State Archives to Rhode Island middle and high schools. We were limited in the number of students the State Archives could bring in at once but used the limitation as an opportunity to emphasize the need for a better facility. (See slide 10 postcard example.)

RI Department of State

September 27, 2019

Teachers: the Rhode Island State Archives is open for field trips! Visit to learn about primary source documents and historic document conservation- use the form on our website for information. <http://sos.ri.gov/divisions/state-archives/students-visits>  
Maestros: ¡los Archivos Estatales de Rhode Island están abiertos para excursiones! Visite para obtener más información sobre los documentos de fuentes primarias y la conservación de documentos históricos: utilice el formulario... [See more](#)

See Translation



SOS.RI.GOV

State of Rhode Island: Nellie M. Gorbea

State of Rhode Island: Nellie M. Gorbea



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Partnering with PVDfest helped build visibility among Rhode Islanders who had never been to the Archives. Over 200 visitors came into the building to view original copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights.

I created handheld signs for passersby to share their love of Rhode Island history on their own social media accounts.

The “Discover Your Story” photo banner prominently placed on the sidewalk outside the Archives to generate attention and draw traffic into the building.

The banner was subsequently used at several other community events.

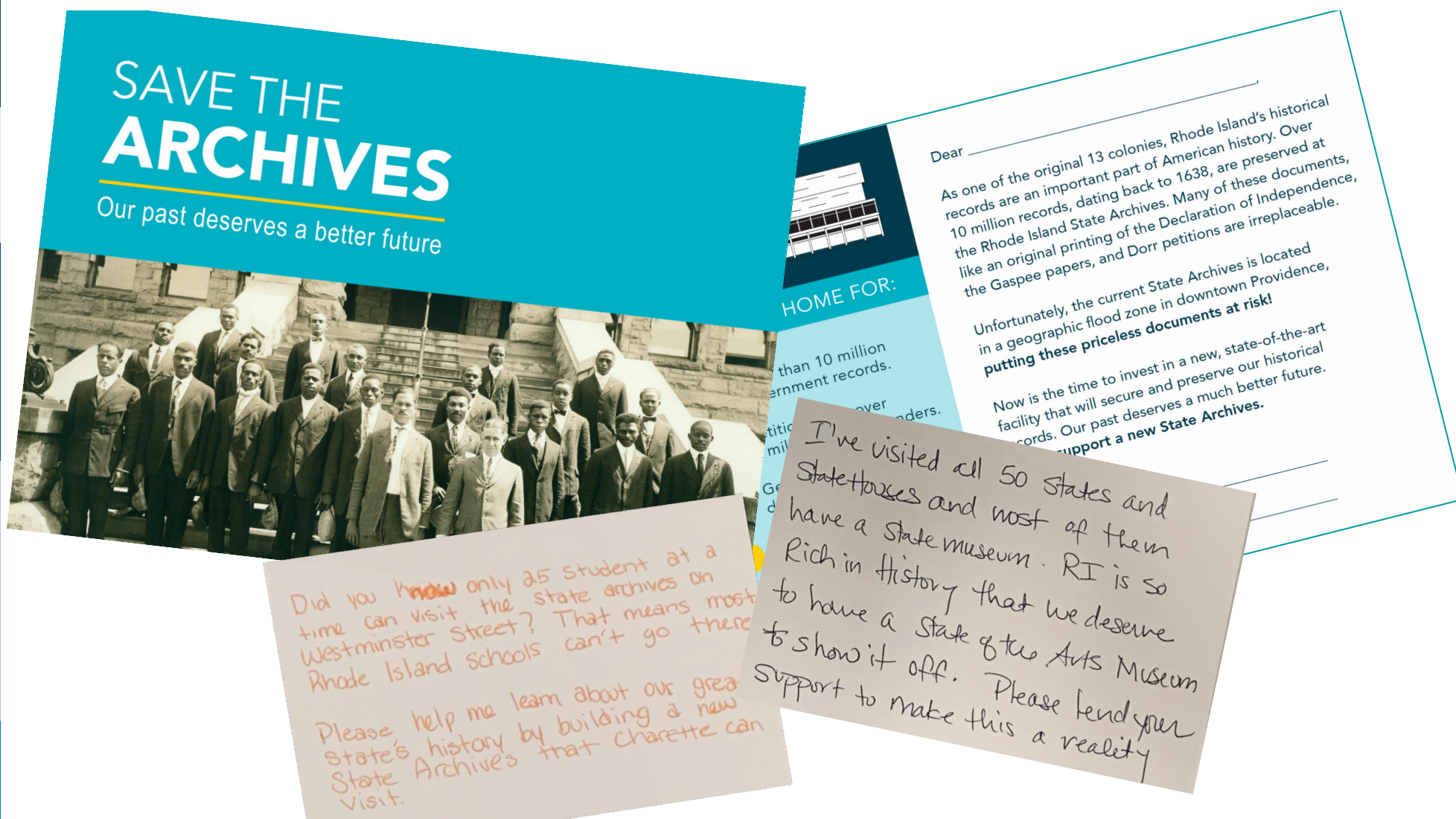




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I developed two postcards to generate public pressure on the General Assembly - one that required only a signature and the other a blank version for people to fill out their own messages. We had a postcard station at the Rhode Island State House near our pop-up "Treasures from the Archives" exhibition. We also had them available at the State Archives and encouraged visitors to fill them out. We collected nearly 1,000 postcards and delivered them to the respective legislators.



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## Community Favorites

From inside the vault at the Rhode Island State Archives, Kasim Yarn, Director of the RI Office of Veterans Affairs said, "Studying American history means studying Rhode Island history." #ArchivesMonth

**"STUDYING  
AMERICAN  
HISTORY  
MEANS  
STUDYING  
RHODE  
ISLAND  
HISTORY  
AT THE  
ISLAND  
ARCH**

Bert Crenca, Artist/Founder of AS220, had this to say about Thomas W. Dorr at the Rhode Island State Archives. "We're still fighting a battle around equity and institutional racism, it is great to remember those who preceded us in the fight for equity." #ArchivesMonth #RIHistory  
<http://sos.ri.gov/virtualarchives/items/show/69>

**WE'RE STILL  
FIGHTING  
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ISSUES OF EQUITY.**

Jessica David, Senior Vice President of Strategy and Community Investments at the Rhode Island Foundation, had this to say about Roger Williams' Providence Deed at the Rhode Island State Archives during American Archives Month. #ArchivesMonth #RIHistory #RogerWilliams  
"Things from our past should make us think, and there's a lot to think about with this document. First, Rhode Island founder Roger Williams is attesting to his agreement with Narragansett Chiefs Canonicus and ... See more

**"THINGS  
FROM  
OUR PAST  
SHOULD  
MAKE US  
THINK..."**

We recruited prominent community members to come to the Archives and take a photograph with their favorite document and express why it matters.



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## Assessment and Evaluation

The Save the Archives campaign was extremely successful in elevating awareness of the rich and diverse historical documents housed at the State Archives. We had close to 800 attendees to our public programs. It was extremely rewarding to see the awe on the faces of visitors when viewing our priceless, historical records in person.

We did ultimately secure the necessary funding to move the State Archives to a safer, more modern leased facility. [That move was completed in early 2021.](#)

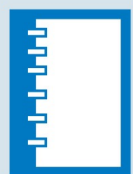


### THE NUMBERS

**177**  
STUDENTS



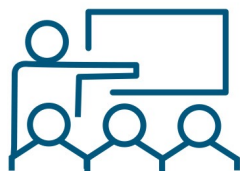
Welcomed over 177 students from 12 groups across Rhode Island.



**784**  
ATTENDEES

Hosted over 784 attendees at 19 different on-site programs throughout the year.

**381**  
PARTICIPANTS



Presented to over 381 members of the community through 18 off-site programs and workshops.

**4**   
EXHIBITIONS  
DISPLAYING  
**106**  
RECORDS +  
ARTIFACTS