



THE SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET CATALYZING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN SMALL MASSACHUSETTS TOWNS

The humanities help us build common ground. When we come together to study the past, share our stories, and learn from each other, we create opportunities for meaningful conversations about the future of our communities and our democracy. In 2022, Mass Humanities will partner with the Smithsonian Institute to spark discussions about changes in six small towns in Massachusetts.

The Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street (MoMs) initiative brings attention to underserved rural communities through traveling exhibitions that explore common themes in American life. In September 2022, Mass Humanities will welcome a new exhibition, "Crossroads: Changes in Rural America," to these organizations for six weeks each:

Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum	9/10/2022
The Hull Lifesaving Museum	10/30/2022
Rutland Free Public Library	12/18/2022
Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls	2/5/2023
Bushnell-Sage Library, Sheffield	3/26/2023
Athol Public Library	5/14/2023

Mass Humanities will coordinate the tour in 2022-23 and sustain the partnerships with the six host sites for an additional year after the conclusion of the exhibition. Over the three-year period, Mass Humanities will:

- Provide grants to the host sites to support exhibition planning, free public events, marketing, and staff time.
- Host five capacity-building workshops for the host sites in the year preceding the opening of the tour.
- Provide a second year of funding to the host sites to sustain the conversations and partnerships developed during the Smithsonian tour.
- Develop facilitation skills for Mass Humanities staff to better serve grantees across the commonwealth.
- Prepare for a second Smithsonian exhibition on American democracy that will arrive in Massachusetts in 2026 for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

To support these outcomes, Mass Humanities seeks to raise \$128,000 from private sources over the next three years.

BACKGROUND

In 1991, 13 state humanities councils and the Smithsonian's Traveling Exhibition division conducted a survey of 100 small cultural institutions to assess the programmatic and exhibition preferences of rural museums, historical organizations and libraries. The survey found that museums and libraries located in rural areas serve as community centers for residents in small towns who are often geographically, economically, and culturally isolated. Because of their central community roles, small museums are well positioned to offer public programs that are accessible and responsive to local concerns. Since 1994, MoMs exhibitions and resources have traveled to more than 1,800 towns with populations of 500 to 20,000 across the country, reaching than 7.5 million visitors and generating an estimated economic impact of \$99.5 million.

HOW IT WORKS

The Smithsonian partners directly with state humanities councils like Mass Humanities to produce the traveling exhibitions. Mass Humanities pays an exhibition fee to the Smithsonian, and dedicates a member of our staff to coordinating the tour. Nineteen organizations located in towns with populations of 12,000 or less applied to host the exhibition. A review panel including representatives from Mass Cultural Council's Cultural Districts program and the state's Rural Policy Advisory Commission selected the six host sites. Mass Humanities announced the tour schedule in January 2022.

MULTI-YEAR GRANTS

Mass Humanities awards each organization a \$10,000 grant to cover the expenses for planning and hosting the exhibit, including publicity, event costs, transportation, and staff time. Organizations will be eligible for a second \$10,000 grant to sustain a partnership with another local organization in the year following the tour. The additional funding extends the impact of the Smithsonian tour to become a three-year engagement between Mass Humanities and the local community.

TRAININGS AND SUPPORT

Mass Humanities will convene two trainings with the Smithsonian on mounting the exhibit and connecting the exhibition's content to the stories and experiences of each small town. The host sites will attend two additional two workshops with Essential Partners, a nationally recognized, Boston-based non-profit, on facilitating conversations that build trust and understanding across differences. A fifth workshop will focus on audience development. Mass Humanities and Smithsonian staff will be on hand throughout the tour to provide guidance and support to the local organizations.

PUBLIC EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

The Smithsonian programs build a sense of teamwork, volunteerism, and local pride at small museums, libraries, and community centers. Each host site develops its own schedule of free events to connect the national story of the exhibit to local history. Potential events include oral history recordings, presentations by Indigenous residents, tributes to area veterans, and school field trips. For "Crossroads," Mass Humanities asks each site to convene a conversation in partnership with another organization to examine changes and challenges facing their town.

RURAL MASSACHUSETTS

According to a 2019 report by the Rural Policy Advisory Commission, rural communities (those with population densities of less than 500 persons per square mile) comprise 59 percent of the land area in the Commonwealth yet only 13 percent of its population. Totalling 170 communities, rural municipalities face challenges including: small, aging and often declining populations; inadequate infrastructure and transportation; declining school enrollments; acute public health challenges; and affordable housing shortages. Mass Humanities will work with the six host sites to convene conversations about these and other issues facing our small towns.

OUTCOMES FOR 2022-24

- 12,000 residents reached through exhibition and programs
- 36 free public events during tour
- 5 training workshops for participating organizations
- 6 grants of \$10,000 each to cover expenses of exhibit
- 6 second-year grants of \$10,000 to sustain organizations, programs
- 3 original short videos about rural communities
- 1 media partnership to attract audiences
- 1 final report on the events and ideas generated by the tour
- 1 payment to the Smithsonian to bring 2nd exhibit to Mass. in 2026

BUDGET 2022-24

Revenue

Sponsorships and contributions	\$128,000
Federal and State Grants	\$60,000
Total Revenue	\$188,000

Expenses

Grants to host exhibition (6)	\$60,000
Trainings and workshops	\$30,000
Media partnership	\$15,000
Grants for year 2 partnerships (6)	\$60,000
2026 fee to Smithsonian	\$10,000
Videos and additional content	\$10,000
Printing, supplies	\$3,000
Total Expenses	\$188,000