

CAN WE WRITE *OUR* HISTORY?:

Creating Collaborative Partnerships on People's Guide Entries

A People's Guide to Nashville is first and foremost an opportunity for Nashvillians to document sites of significance in their life and/or in their community. We also recognize that some community members may not feel they have the time, interest or expertise to complete an entry on their own. At the same time, there may be other people interested in helping document sites of significance to communities other than their own.

To this end, in cases where individuals, groups, and/or communities desire assistance in documenting sites of significance, we are encouraging the formation of collaborative partnerships. We imagine that educators and students, in particular, might consider collaborating with community members on an entry for A People's Guide. Such collaborations may provide an exciting and important way to ground coursework and scholarship in the community, and to explore the ways all Nashvillians lives, histories, and futures are interconnected. For a collaborative entry to be considered for inclusion in the guide, it must be community-driven.

What constitutes a community-driven partnership?

- Up front discussion regarding expectations of the roles, responsibilities and relationships between people inside and outside the community on the project.
- People within the community play a lead role in identifying sites of significance, provide help identifying sources of information about the site, play a role in writing, revising and/or reviewing the entry, and are recognized as co-authors on the submission.
- Outside partners are invested primarily in helping the community document sites of significance, and secondarily in completing an entry for the guide (or, in the case of school-community partnerships, completing an assignment).

A community-driven partnership DOES NOT look like:

- Non-community members (including educators and students) seeking information and stories from community members in order to independently complete an entry for submission to the guide, or as an assignment.
- Non-community members claiming sole authorship for something they would not have been able to complete without the participation of community partners.

What constitutes a community?

Just as there is no singular Nashville community, there is no single person or organization who speaks for all Nashville immigrants, women, or workers, for example. In developing a community-driven partnership, we are using *community* to refer to those people who have most directly experienced the social injustices and or worked for social justice in that particular site.

Some thoughts for educators and students hoping to incorporate generating community-driven entries into your course work:

0. Learn more. While we believe this project offers an exciting opportunity for school-community partnerships, the commitments of building community-driven entries may be a challenge to accomplish on an academic timeline. We are happy to think with you about whether incorporating this project makes sense for your teaching/learning environment. In addition, we have developed some teaching and learning modules to help orient teachers and students to the goals and ethics of this project. For more information, contact Amie Thurber at amie.thurber@vanderbilt.edu.

1. Start where you are. While some educators and students in the city are new to Nashville, you are all residents none the less. An excellent starting place in learning more about the communities you are already part of, including your schools, neighborhood, faith organizations, union, or other social groups. There is likely a significant site that challenges mis- or missing information, reveals dominance, or celebrates resistance and resilience, right before your eyes! A People's Guide can be an opportunity to build relationships and knowledge about your own communities.

2. Build from existing relationships. If you have been in Nashville for a while, perhaps you already have existing relationships with individuals, groups, or organizations with whom you would like yourself (or your students) to partner. Existing relationships where you have engaged over time with the community or group on their own terms, as a volunteer, member, or contributor, are particularly promising as partnership opportunities. Given that most social science research is not community driven, if your past relationship has been as a researcher, you will likely need to build new kinds of relationships to change the expectations you and the community have for what a collaborative partnership on A People's Guide could look like.

3. Build new relationship. Perhaps you're interested in learning more about sites of significance in a community with whom you do not have existing relationships. The most appropriate starting point is to get involved in the community and/or organization, on the community's terms, doing whatever work is most needed, while you build your understanding of the history, context, and meanings of sites of significance within this community. Importantly, your involvement should be driven by a genuine interest in and commitment to supporting the work of the community, and not contingent on the community group being involved in the PG project. It may take a while to build your own foundation of knowledge and the relationships needed to discern whether you are the appropriate partner to assist in a community-driven entry, but if your primary goal is to learn more, then you win no matter what!

A People's Guide to Nashville Entry Development: Tips for Partnership Development

1. Before you reach out to an individual or organization:

- Do your homework. Google the person/group. Look for news articles, existing interviews, or papers.
- Have prepared questions and a specific “ask.”
- Have some possible times to meet already blocked out when you are available to meet.

2. Initial contact:

(Sample script) Hello! I'm _____ and I'm a graduate student at Vanderbilt University. I'm currently working on a People's Guide to Nashville, which will be a published tour guide to Nashville. This project is unique for two reasons- 1) the focus is on sites related to social justice struggles in the city, and 2) all entries are being written or co-written by people directly connected to those struggles. I'm interested in helping put together an entry related to (general theme), and I came across your name as someone who would be good to talk to. I've reviewed (websites, archives, etc.) and would love to set up a time to talk with you in person about the project and learn more from your *memories/experiences/knowledge* about _____. Would you be interested and/or able to visit with me sometime in the new few weeks?

If yes: Great! Select time to meet...

- I can also send you a one page overview if the project I'm working on, if that would be interesting/helpful for you. (*If yes*– what's best way to get that to you, email or mailing address?).
- I'm interested in learning anything I can at this point – so if there's any letters, photos, articles, or other memorabilia you think it would be interesting to share, feel free to bring it!

I look forward to meeting with you!

If no:

- I understand! Is there someone else you think I should talk to?

If they need more information:

- See some prompts below.

3. When you meet (or earlier if applicable):

- **Share a little about yourself** and what you are interested in and why – *this is key to relationship building.*
- **Let them know scope of your project** – that you are researching this site with the goal of creating a brief (1 pg.) entry for A People’s Guide to Nashville – an alternative tour guide. You might share the kinds of questions you are hoping to answer.
 - *You could bring sample entries from the website to share*
- **Overview the larger project** – *Share the 1-page handout.* The goal is for this to be a published guide book with companion website –explain that there are no guarantees that the entries will be selected for publication, and that your assignment is to prepare several for submission.
- **Invite their participation**- Part of the goal of the guide is that entries are created by and/or with folks that are directly affected by the sites that are included.
 - Depending on site, different levels of deference may be appropriate:
 - In some case you may ask for *permission*: “I don’t want to assume that I’m the best person to create this entry – but I am eager to learn more. I am happy to do background research, and to visiting with you and anyone else you think would be important to talk to. If I peruse this, I want it to be as collaborative as makes sense given your availability. I see myself as the work horse, but at the very least I’m looking for someone to point me in the right directions, and read over what I put together... if there are people who want to work more closely – to co-write with me, that’s also great. And you could also decide to pursue creating this entry without my involvement – and that would be ok too! Would you be interested in partnering with me on creating an entry for _____?”
 - In some cases, you may ask for *participation*: “I’m reaching out to different people connected with this site, and I’d love to hear about your (or your families) experiences to help me understand more about the history and meanings of this place.
 - Depending on site/partner, different levels of participation may be appropriate. Participation might include:
 - Sharing memories, experiences
 - Suggesting others to talk to
 - Suggesting other sites of significance (keep track of these, even if you don’t research them)
 - Sharing artifacts (letters, photos, articles, memorabilia)
 - Collaborating on writing
 - Editing your entry
 - Identify next steps (and say them out loud) before you leave
 - Make sure you have their contact info to stay in touch

4. After you meet:

- Send a thank you note- acknowledge people’s time/expertise. When they feel valued, they are more likely to want to stay in relationship with you.
- Follow up! Do what you said you were going to do