

CHAPTER 5
COLLABORATIONS
STRATEGY

Chapter Review

In this Chapter, we identify specific approaches for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park to work with other area historical and cultural organizations and educational institutions. Specifically, we explore opportunities for organizations that are affiliated with the Park to work together on programming, on/off-site exhibits, special events, curriculum development, and packaged activities. We make note of varying degrees of collaboration with the Park and suggest that special designations be given to those organizations and attractions that not only have a relevant thematic or locational relationship to the Park, but are also able and willing to participate in collaborations. We list the roles and benefits of collaborations and conclude by noting the importance of building consensus between and among area cultural/historical groups in connection with the Heritage Park.

Note: During the course of this study, the following historic/cultural organizations were interviewed:

New London County Historical Society	New London Maritime Society, Inc.
USS Nautilus Submarine Force Library and Museum	Antiquarian & Landmarks Society
U.S. Coast Guard Museum	Garde Arts Center
Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council Planning Department	OceanQuest
Marine Commerce Development Commission (Sailfest)	Project Oceanology
Mystic Marinelife Aquarium	Mystic Seaport Museum
Thames Street/Groton Bank community	
Programming Committee of the Heritage Park Advisory Board	
New London Landmarks (attendance at annual meeting)	

Current Collaborative Environment

There is no distinguishable record of collaborations between and among the historical, cultural and educational organizations in the immediate region of the Heritage Park. At best, such collective efforts are sporadic, and one-time in nature.

While some of the organizations get together occasionally, they do not have an ongoing organizational mechanism that is structured to nurture or promote collaborations. The historical organizations are not associated with arts alliance, which is the only organized collaboration in town.

A number of the area's key historical organizations are small and "fragile." They operate on extremely lean staff and financial resources. Visitation levels are not substantial -- often less than 2,000 annually, and the organizations do not have the resources (nor, in some cases the inclination) to market for heavier attendance.

The professional resources within the organizations for collaborations are extremely limited. We found no organization (including the largest) that has a full-time educational coordinator to work on behalf of community collaborations.

Several of the sites that are "designated" park sites are not programming organizations (e.g. Ocean Beach Park, Ledge Lighthouse, Sub Memorial, Thames Street). Also, even though the large attractions of Mystic are nearby, they are simply not considered part of the New London/Groton scene. Nor are the New London/Groton attractions considered a part of the Mystic Area.

Two Levels of Collaborative Participation

In order to acknowledge and respect the diverse capacities of the area's historical and cultural organizations, the following classifications of participation should be included in the collaborations strategy:

Collaborators. A "collaborating organization" would actively and directly participate with Heritage Park programs: as exhibitors at the Visitor Center Showcase Gallery, and as programmers of community educational activities sponsored by the Heritage Park. (see next pages for more details on the roles and benefits of collaborating organizations). It should be noted that some collaborator organizations may not be able (or willing) to be visited by large numbers of public visitors. As such, being a designated collaborator should not imply a large visitation. Some sensitive sites may be classified as "drive-by" or "walk-by" only.

Affiliates. An "affiliate site" would participate with the Heritage Park because of a thematic relationship, but, due to their limited capacity, they would not participate as actively as collaborators. Affiliates would be noted in park brochures, and would have markers on trail and guide maps, but would not be expected to mount exhibits or provide staff resources for collaborative programming.

Criteria for Designating Sites: As Cited in the State Legislation

The following criteria are taken directly from the legislation that created the Connecticut State Heritage Park Program:

Legislative Policy (underlines added for emphasis):

"The general assembly recognizes... that preservation and interpretation of ... heritage can foster revitalization by encouraging private sector investment and tourism. Therefore, the general assembly declares that it is the policy of the state to develop new recreational opportunities in conjunction with the preservation and interpretation of such heritage through the designation of a system of heritage parks so that the quality of life for Connecticut residents may be improved."

Other factors cited in the legislation regarding designation of sites for inclusion in the heritage park:

"... consisting of sites in a region linked by a common social, historical or economic theme"

"... shall not be required to be contiguous to one another, and need not be owned by the state".

Criteria for Designating Sites: As Cited in the State Legislature (continued)

"...shall be consistent with the plan for development of outdoor recreation and other natural resources..."

"... consideration of the significance of the heritage of the sites and the economic benefit to the state."

The legislation requires that (1) sites be approved by each municipality, and (2) the owner of each site consents to its inclusion in the heritage park.

Criteria for Designating Sites: Professional and Organizational Considerations

The following issues are those identified by the practitioners of heritage parks, as we gleaned from our field research in comparable communities and from our experience in heritage park development:

Policy Issues. Does the site's staff and governing body understand and accept the the responsibilities and commitment of resources that come with designation as a heritage park site? How willing is the site's management and governing bodies to work collaboratively with other cultural resources?

Program Relevance and Standards. How significant is the site and the cultural/historical resources it manages and how relevant are those resources to the Park's primary and secondary interpretive theme(s)? What is the nature and quality of presentation and interpretation of the site and its cultural resources. To what degree is the site able to participate in non-exhibit programming such as community education, outreach, conservation, research, etc.? Does it come with programming materials already developed? Does it have the resources or the potential to develop new materials?

Capacities. Programming capability (collection, exhibits, educational resources, etc.).
Visitation capacity (ability to handle substantial increases in attendance).

Institutional Strength and Stability. Does the site have sufficient staff now? What are its current and potential volunteer resources? Has it the financial resources to sustain as is, and/or to expand? How is the community participating with the site , as audience, members, donors?

Roles and Responsibilities of Collaborators

The designation of "collaborator" will come with certain goals for participation as described below. For those collaborators with extensive resources, these objectives can be met in the early stages of park implementation. Those collaborators with limited resources, may achieve these participation targets only over time, as their resources build and grow.

Commitment to the concept and implementation of collaborative programming. The purpose of collaborations is to effect a programmatic synergy among organizations that cannot be accomplished on an individual basis. As such, a major goal of the collaborative program is to strengthen the totality of cultural programming in the region, as well as the capacities of each participating organization. In order to work effectively, it is therefore crucial that each and every collaborating organization be committed to:

improving the quality of their own organization as well as the quality of every other participating group; collaborators are colleagues who care about each other, and should not be in competition with one another; and

expanding the capacity of all participating organizations to present programs, build financial resources, and serve the public responsibly.

Exhibits in the Visitor Center Showcase Gallery. Collaborators will be expected to participate in mounting the changing exhibits in the Showcase Gallery (see Interpretive and Visitor Center Strategy). In addition, other organizations who may be mounting a show might require materials from the collections of other collaborators.

Roles and Responsibilities of Collaborators (continued)

Staff Expertise. Even though some of the collaborators are likely to have small, if not part-time staff, it is expected that the professional paid staff of the collaborating groups will meet regularly, and work together for mutual professional benefit.

Volunteer resources. On a cooperative basis, the collaborators will be expected to provide volunteer resources for any of the collaborative activities sponsored by the Park exhibits, opening, receptions, community educational programs, etc.

Benefits for Collaborators

In return for their willingness and ability to collaborate with the Heritage Park, the collaborator organizations should receive the following benefits:

Increased visitation from being highlighted on maps and trails signage markers.

Potential earned and contributed revenue from grants, admissions, new members, and general donors.

Expanded curatorial capacity resulting from improved collections/conservation/preservation resources and opportunities.

New programming resources derived from exhibit materials developed jointly.

Additional exhibit space through the shows mounted at the Heritage Park Visitor Center.

Public relations and marketing from announcements and releases in connection with heritage park programs.

Shared staff from (1) the cooperative use of their respective personnel; and (2) grants that may be secured for a staff person (i.e. a much needed community education specialist) working for two or more collaborating organizations.

Collaborations Strategy

We recommend the following actions to implement a collaborations strategy for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park:

Finalize the Park's interpretive orientation and Visitor Center program so that the criteria for designating Collaborators and Affiliates will have a solid foundation.

Create and convene a "Heritage Park Collaborations Committee". The Collaborations Committee's first task will be to identify candidate collaborators and convene them in a discussion of possibilities and opportunities to work together. The Committee should immediately identify potential opportunities and funding for a shared staff position.

Create and convene an "Exhibits Committee" to program the Visitor Center Showcase Gallery.. The Exhibits Committee should be comprised of collaborators and members of the Heritage Park's governing Board. Its initial focus should be on the grand opening show of the Visitor Center (Late Spring 1995).

Create and Convene an "Education Committee" to steward educational programming, curriculum materials, and related financial resources for the Heritage Park. The Committee should be comprised of collaborators, representatives of schools and educational institutions, and members of the Heritage Park governing board.