Our Work

Book Groups

In Maine Humanities Council book groups people get together to talk about something they’ve all read, guided by an experienced facilitator. Gathered by a host from within their own community, people find words for what they mean to say, listen to each other, and reflect together on poetry, books, and illustrated stories. We work closely with each book group host, and train all facilitators.

Over and over, people have told us that participating in an MHC book group reduces their sense of isolation and burnout, offers a space to practice articulating what they know and see, increases their empathy for others, and creates community.

MHC aims to make book groups accessible to anyone, anywhere in Maine.

In addition to the groups serving particular places and needs below, we are always excited to find new ways to offer book groups.

**Book Group for Work** groups are hosted in workplaces: hospitals, schools, hospice agencies, and domestic violence prevention agencies. Groups bring together staff, volunteers, and community partners who share either a common employer or site, or whose work intersects through shared concerns or service population.

**Let’s Talk About It** series are provided free to public libraries. Its many series enable libraries to bring community members together in conversation around a range of compelling themes that reflect community interests.

**New Books, New Readers** series are at accessible levels for adults with various literacy levels and for speakers of other languages. Groups are hosted by Adult Education Programs, Literacy Volunteers, English for Speakers of Other Languages Programs and Correctional Educational programs.

**Veteran Book Groups** offer Maine Veterans the chance to connect around books, short stories, and poems. This program gives Veterans an opportunity to reflect on the unique concerns they face and provides a safe context in which to explore issues regarding military service.

**Book Group for Youth (pilot)** brings together a librarian and a facilitator to host a book group for school-aged youth, giving them an opportunity to reflect on and discuss important, particular concerns they face in their schools and communities.

... The two critical elements of book groups for participants are the development of meaningful connections with other people, and the fostering of personal intellectual agency through reading. Two of our programs explicitly focus on one of these elements.

**Community Seminar** uses the creation of a new book group as a means of developing and deepening community engagement and agency.

**Read ME** is a statewide summer reading program. Each year a well-known Maine author recommends two titles by lesser-known Maine authors. After a summer of reading and discussing the featured books, libraries and their patrons are invited to participate in a culminating event with all three authors.

Awards

**The Constance H. Carlson Prize** is given in recognition and appreciation of individuals or organizations who have made extraordinary contributions to the state through the humanities.
Events

We work with partners across Maine to develop events that bring people together around books, poetry, art, and ideas.

Poetry Express brings Maine poetry and poets to communities. The MHC partners with a local public library and a local poet. The State Library provides curated resources. Community members select Maine poems, learn to perform those poems in a workshop and host a community poetry reading and conversation event.

Consider This is a community initiative that uses storytelling and visual art to foster discussions on resilience. MHC staff work closely with partner organizations in a community on every aspect of these events.

World in Your Library brings speakers on current events and relevant issues, both local and international, to Maine communities. Free to Maine’s libraries, World in Your Library gives small rural communities access to experts and the opportunity to explore complex topics, gain insight, and broaden perspectives.

MHC staff create two large-scale, one-off events each year.

The Big Question invites Mainers to wrestle with a large philosophical question every year on the third Saturday of October. In a setting suited to the year's task, with expert guides on hand, people get to spend longer than usual thinking, listening, moving, talking, and sharing a meal over one big, relevant question.

Winter Weekend is an evening and a day of stimulating conversations around a book. Scholars offer presentations, delving into history, literature, politics, and more. They build bridges between themes, times, places, and people. Winter Weekend draws back many audience members year after year.

Grants

Our grants support and encourage a deeper understanding of ourselves and one another, building lasting connections and reaching diverse, multigenerational, and rural audiences.

Major Grants offer support for a variety of larger humanities projects such as exhibits, conferences, films, and other initiatives. Major grant projects have well-developed thematic content, broad public outreach, and strong scholar participation. (Up to $7500)

Mini Grants support a wide variety of public humanities projects, such as exhibits, lecture and film series, reading and discussion programs, symposia, cultural celebrations, etc. (Up to $1000)

Arts & Humanities Grants, offered in partnership with the Maine Arts Commission, support innovative community projects with BOTH arts and humanities components. (Up to $1000)

Organizational Support

In our role as a statewide resource for the humanities and an organization with a strong commitment to schools and libraries, the Maine Humanities Council provides hands-on support to initiatives in line with our mission.

Civil Rights Teams Project, based in the Attorney General of Maine’s office, is the only program of its kind nationwide. The CRTP’s mission is to increase the safety of elementary, middle level, and high school students by reducing bias-motivated behaviors and harassment in our schools.

The Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) is a consortium of states working together to provide high-quality summer reading program materials for children, teens, and adults at the lowest cost possible for their public libraries.

Maine National History Day (NHD) is an annual event for teachers and students in grades 6-12 that promotes critical thinking skills through project-based learning. 2020's contest theme is “Breaking Barriers in History.”

Maine Council for Social Studies (MCSS), Maine’s local affiliate of the National Council for the Social Studies, provides social studies educators in Maine with opportunities to build working relationships with peers, a forum for discussion of their work, and institutional representation for their interests and concerns.