



## White Paper on Creation of PhilaPlace

NEH/IMLS Digital Knowledge Grant

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### **1. Summary**

The PhilaPlace website ([www.philaplace.org](http://www.philaplace.org)) was launched on December 9, 2009 at City Hall to an estimated audience of 450 people. Included in the celebration were the Mayor of Philadelphia, members of city council, community leaders, organizational partners, and an extremely diverse range of citizens from throughout Philadelphia. Developed as an interactive web-based experience incorporating content from a variety of sources, PhilaPlace has both met the original expectations of the NEH/IMLS grant, and in many cases outperformed the five established goals articulated in the original application: to (1) establish

a model for interacting between the amateur and the expert, (2) bring to light multiethnic perspectives through stories and primary sources, (3) map history through time and space, (4) create new historical and cultural interpretations, and (5) create ongoing resources.

The development of PhilaPlace however was not without its challenges. Specifically, the site launch was delayed by six months, and the entire project delayed over a year primarily because the original website developer went out of business. As a result of the downturn in the economy, staff cutbacks impacted the delivery of a number of support activities such as neighborhood trolley tours and a self-guided walking tour. With the rise of social media a blog was added to the scope, but mobile applications were not, and have had to be addressed retrospective of the grant.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the project happened after the grant was completed. Always considered a ‘prototype’ to understand whether public history could be made available online, the ongoing legacy of the successful “first phase” is an extremely robust technological architecture with the potential for vastly more historical content. In order to sustain further content development for the PhilaPlace website, HSP is seeking to develop a consortium of organizations with similar interests in geo-history. It is anticipated that in this way PhilaPlace can have a shared mechanism of gathering historical information about the community that is developed by, and for, Philadelphians themselves.

## **2. Project Activities**

### **2.1.1 Provide a description of the major activities that occurred during the grant period**

As described in the grant application, the PhilaPlace website uses a multimedia format from a variety of sources, including: five interactive maps (both contemporary and historic), text, photographs, and audio and video clips. The use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology allows visitors to map stories from the past to specific places over time, while the development of a robust content management system (CMS) allows users to make new historical associations and contribute their own content.

### **2.1.2 The Website**

The site includes the following features that the visitor can locate by clicking the tabs along the top banner:

- **Home Page** – this features a historical map of Philadelphia from the HSP collection with rotating sites that pop up in three colors/types: red = HSP provided content, yellow = Partner provided content, and green = visitor contributed content. If a visitor clicks on one of the sites, he/she is taken to the interactive contemporary (Google) map where the site appears and corresponding stories are featured. On the lower half of the home page is a short description of PhilaPlace and what a visitor can do on the site, a “featured” site (rotates from pre-selected sites) and a “most viewed” site. To date there over 1,507 stories in the collection relating to over 211 sites.
- **Map Page** – This is an interactive map designed on a Google mapping platform. It features 5 interactive map layers dating to the present, 1875, 1895, 1934, and 1962 with legends attached. The historic maps were provided by the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network that included maps from HSP’s own collection, the Free Library of

Philadelphia, and the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. From a drop-down menu, the visitor can select the map layer he/she wishes to view. On the left of the map page is “Find Places” which allows the visitor to narrow his/her search by clicking different boxes. Included here is the ability for a visitor to narrow a search by neighborhood from a drop down menu. Also on the left, the visitor can choose to take one of the two tours. We have the ability to add more tours over time to this feature.

- **Topics** – From this page visitors can choose to view stories by a theme or topic that covers every aspect of daily life. There are fourteen topics ranging from “cemeteries” to “work” in the two primary neighborhoods of Southwark / South Philadelphia and Northern Liberties / Kensington. Additional neighborhoods have begun to be populated with content including Fishtown, Germantown, and West Philadelphia. Also appearing on this page is an overview of the history and culture of the neighborhoods. There is the capability to add more topics in the future if the need should arise. Material that doesn’t correspond to a particular site on the interactive map is located here. This makes it possible to accommodate longer essay pieces that don’t correspond only to one particular place.
- **Collection** – Originally to be named Images & Media, based on user evaluations during the build phase, the name of this section was changed to Collection. The Collection indicates the entire digital collection of PhilaPlace including those from HSP, partner institutions, and visitor contributed content. From the left hand column on this page, the visitor can narrow his/her search and can click on a full view of each image to view metadata. Currently there are 1147 images with text entries, 8 audio-only stories, and 82 video and audio segments in the collection.
- **Blog** – Not originally included in the grant application, but added as staff recognized the rapid growth of social media; the blog allows visitors to read posts from the PhilaPlace team, partner posts, and community scholars. Anyone can post a comment. Since launch in December 2009 there have been nineteen blog posts primarily created from HSP staff or partners. Unfortunately very few people follow the blog. From December 9, 2009, to May 26, 2011, there were only 7,072 visits in total that averaged 13 visits/day or 91 visits/week. The answer no doubt lies in the fact that the blog was a late addition to the Website build and continually adding material and monitoring discussions was never included in the workflow. Had the project happened later, social media would have played a far greater role in the PhilaPlace design.

Nevertheless, HSP has sought to ensure that PhilaPlace is incorporated in its regular social media program. The result has been that when blog updates are cross-referenced on HSP’s Facebook page or Twitter account, people “like” the posts and there is a corresponding increase in web traffic to the PhilaPlace site.

- **Educators** – Four themed units provide teacher resources and classroom activities aimed for grades 6-12 aligned with Pennsylvania’s state education standards. Students can learn more about a neighborhood's overall history by reading either of the two neighborhood timelines located in this section. The units are:

1. Mapping Our Neighborhood History ~ a guide to developing a local history mapping project so that students can explore the history and culture of their own communities and neighborhoods.
  2. Mapping South 4th Street to Fabric Row ~ an activity designed to introduce students to GIS mapping through the exploration of maps showing the evolution of Philadelphia's South 4th Street into Fabric Row.
  3. Discovering the 9th Street Market: A Treasure Hunt for Clues to the Past ~ a treasure hunt activity designed to get students to explore 9th Street —virtually or physically — and use these clues to the past to understand the history of the market and the transformation of its businesses and neighborhood over time.
  4. South Philly Kaleidoscope: The 9<sup>th</sup> Street Market Mural ~ an activity that uses the mural at 8th and Christian Street as a way to explore the history and changes in the 9th Street Market neighborhood and to learn about the role of public art.
- **About** – The visitor can read about the mission and history of the project here.
  - **Support** – Visitors can opt to support PhilaPlace through a Google Check Out feature.
  - **My PhilaPlace** - My PhilaPlace allows the visitor to create his/her own personal My PhilaPlace account. The visitor can save his/her favorite stories and places here and access them the next time he/she visits the site. The visitor can also add his/her own story from this section through the “Add a Story” feature. Following the lead of other similar sites (e.g. CityLore’s City of Memory site) in how to approach accepting and reviewing content for publication, PhilaPlace adopted the following three simple criteria for publication: 1. the material submitted cannot contain offensive language; 2. it must be within the bounds of the neighborhoods within which the site currently covers (all material outside those boundaries is saved for future publication once other neighborhoods are “launched”); 3. the submission should fall under at least one of the thematic categories that are listed on the topics tab.
  - **Add a Story** - through the Add a Story feature, a visitor can add up to 600 words of text and can add photographs as well as an audio or video clip. To date 78 “stories” have been submitted by the public.
  - **Search feature** – A key word search feature searches PhilaPlace content.
  - **Social Media** – Visitors can use the social media links on PhilaPlace to spread the word and share stories through Facebook, Twitter, Bloggin, and receive RSS feeds.

At the bottom of the site are tabs for Press, Legal Disclaimer, Credits, Email Sign-Up, and Contact.

### 2.2.1 Community Involvement ~ Advisory Board

From its inception, PhilaPlace assembled a committed 19-member Advisory Board which met ten times between February 2008 and December 2010. As outlined in the original concept of the

project, the advisory board employed a collaborative ethnographic methodology (Collier & Collier 1986) that made decisions through a process of inviting community input. Representatives from a diverse range of cultures (i.e. Mexican, Southeast Asian, Italian, etc.) religious backgrounds (Muslim Jewish, Christian, etc.), ages, and experiences were included. The group was evenly divided between male and female.

The advisory board met often during 2009 and well after the launch of the website into 2010. By October 2010, however, and the end of the grant-phase, PhilaPlace was no longer in a “build” mode, but in a “maintain” mode. With the result that numerous changes in the lives of various members (i.e. new jobs, relocation, etc.), and the need to advance to the next level of content development, led to a re-thinking of the advisory board’s role and composition. Currently, the advisory board is expanding to not just include individuals but also *organizations* that have a stake in systematically adding content to the PhilaPlace website and a shared interest in its growth. For example, as well as representatives from various ethnic and cultural groups, organizational partners include the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Records, the Greater Philadelphia Preservation Alliance, the tourism office, and the Mural Arts Program .

After the successful completion of the grant-funded “first phase” it has been recognized that continually adding original content to the PhilaPlace website cannot be sustained wholly by HSP or through visitor-contributed content alone. Allowing organizations greater ownership and access to the PhilaPlace website by means of a ‘consortium’ or distributed model of content development is considered the next step in terms of sustainability. This brings additional questions of standardizing data and disambiguation to the forefront and will be more fully addressed under the Continuation of the Project section of this report.

### 2.2.2 Community Involvement ~ Partner Organizations

Including the three primary partners: HSP, the Department of Design at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Department of Records at the City of Philadelphia; over 21 organizations collaborated on PhilaPlace by means of content development, promotion and/or resource-sharing. Examples include the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia who co-presented the “Your Place and Mine” share-your-story neighborhood workshops in 2008 by providing staff, promotion and materials; Bryn Mawr College, Drexel and Temple Universities who provided student researchers; The Art Institute of Philadelphia who hosted a photographic exhibition; and neighborhood community associations who promoted and/or hosted resident discussions. Partner organizations also included commercial enterprises such as the specialty grocery Di Bruno Brothers who supplied food at the website launch, and Springboard media who provided computers at the same event at no cost. The website designers, Night Kitchen Interactive, dedicated their summer 2009 internship budget to employing students who interviewed and filmed citizens in their neighborhoods, supervised by HSP personnel.

In addition to attending the Advisory Board meetings, and providing a range of resources, PhilaPlace’s primary partners were introduced at two evening workshops that were held in Northern Liberties and South Philadelphia on October 17 and November 1, 2008. They included: Joan Saverino, the PhilaPlace Project Director at HSP; Patrick Hauck of the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia; Amy Hillier, Assistant Professor, School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania; and Joan Decker of the Philadelphia Department of Records together

with Robert Cheetham of Azavea (formerly Avencia) Corporation. Each presenter discussed their organization and how they were working together on PhilaPlace. There was a question and answer period with attendees and a total of 47 people participated.

### 2.2.3 Community Involvement ~ Programs

As set out in the grant application, PhilaPlace was never intended to be only a web-based project, and had in fact grown out of two very successful trolley tours held in 2006 involving residents and historians. The wider project goals were to include: (1) the PhilaPlace website, (2) self-guided walking tours, (3) “Share Your Favorite Photo Workshops” held in the neighborhoods, and (4) teacher workshops. Not part of the original IMLS/NEH narrative, but nevertheless completed, was the publication of the *Pennsylvania Legacies Magazine* in the Fall of 2007 featuring South Philadelphia; an art exhibition at the Art Institute of Philadelphia, and a range of special community presentations. Also completed were two guided walking tours of each of the neighborhoods led by resident/citizen guides.

The following programs were successfully completed:

- **Content Collection** - The “Share Your Favorite Photo” workshop series were renamed the “Your Place and Mine” event series, and held on two consecutive Saturdays in the fall of 2008 as part of a History Fair. One was held on November 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Queen Village Neighborhood Association, and a second on November 10<sup>th</sup> at St. Michaels Church in Northern Liberties. In each neighborhood attendees had the opportunity to contribute photos to PhilaPlace by bringing in favorite pictures and having them scanned on site. Oral histories were audio recorded in one-on-one interviews with HSP staff, and stories complete with show-and-tell items were recorded by the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Records videographers. To develop a festival atmosphere, each venue featured a popcorn machine, a map of the neighborhood so that people could locate places of personal interest, and prizes such as free memberships, books, City Records photographs, and calendars. A total of 74 participants attended and elderly residents, often accompanied by family members, predominated. Press releases and flyers announcing and reporting on the events were sent to the print media, including community papers and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Follow up stories ran in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the *South Philadelphia Review*, and the *Star/Home News* (covers Northern Liberties/Fishtown). Journalist Elizabeth Fiedler of WHYY public radio attended the Northern Liberties History Fair day and conducted interviews with elderly residents which were later broadcast and posted on the station’s website.
- **Art Institute Photographic exhibition** - In collaboration with HSP and Philadelphia’s Department of Records, The Art Institute of Philadelphia hosted the exhibit, “*Philadelphia Stories: Yours, Mine, Ours.*” A public reception took place on Friday, December 5th, 2008 from 4:30 to 8 pm and a gallery talk with the exhibit curator and professor at the Art Institute, Maria DiElsi, took place on the evening of January 23. The exhibit was designed as a unique look at the people of the city’s neighborhoods through images drawn from the historic photo archives of the City of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP). The exhibition opened on December 4th, 2008

and ran through January 23, 2009 in the 1622 Chestnut Street Gallery of The Art Institute of Philadelphia in Center City. Many of the photographs were drawn from HSP's **PhilaPlace** collection and introduced the PhilaPlace project. Under headings like, "*we eat and drink*," "*we serve community and country*," and "*we pray and we play*," the exhibit showcased images that were both playful and serious, nostalgic and contemporary. Two video clips that would later become part of the PhilaPlace website were shown. These were interviews with Philadelphians telling the stories of their families and neighborhoods to provide a living link between past and present. The exhibition was open to the public for free.

- **PhilaPlace Teacher Workshops** - Two workshops were held at HSP in May 2009. The first, "Exploring Ethnic History with Map Models," introduced teachers to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and showed how it can be a valuable tool to assess immigration and ethnic change over time. The second, "Mapping Our History," suggested approaches for developing local history mapping lessons and discussed ways to incorporate immigration and oral history into such projects. A total of 35 teachers and other public history professionals attended.
- **Senior Citizen Mapping Workshop** - Held at the Stiffel Senior Center in South Philadelphia on July 9, 2009, anthropologists, Rakhmiel Peltz and Rachel Reynolds, and regional planner Amy Hiller from the University of Pennsylvania who were on the PhilaPlace advisory committee, conducted one-on-one interviews with a group of seniors who could speak English and who had lived in a South Philadelphia neighborhood for a long period of time. The PhilaPlace team had to use paper maps to communicate, rather than computers and the Google mapping feature, because the computers at the Center were too slow. After interviewing the seniors and mapping their routes, Hillier's students and HSP's interns recreated them on the computer. The seniors were excited by the event and were able to map daily routes and sites they used growing up in the neighborhood.
- **Introduction to PhilaPlace Workshop** - This workshop was held on January 27, 2010 at HSP whereby members of the public were taught how to use the "share my story" feature on the Website. PhilaPlace project director and project coordinator Melissa Mandell demonstrated the use of the interactive map, how to access audio and video clips, how to create tours, and how to view historical records. Admission was free and 40 people attended.
- **Public History Lectures / Events** – Over the course of the PhilaPlace project HSP was able to coordinate a number of its regular public programs with themes related to PhilaPlace. These included: the history of neon lighting in Philadelphia (April 2009), a tribute the Penn Treaty elm tree (March 2010), the *Global Philadelphia* book launch (April 2010), a talk and music presentation about the history of the Puerto Rican community in Philadelphia (September 2010), and the history of Philly food (April 2011).
- **Walking Tours** – On May 21, 2011, 40 people (20 in each tour) participated in two guided walking tours of South Philadelphia and Northern Liberties. Each tour took

approximately 3 hours and covered around 3 to 4 miles of walking distance. A 5.5 x 8.5 inch, 20-page walking tour guide was made available to each participant. The guide was researched and written by Nathaniel Popkin, a local writer/artist/urban historian, with input by residents. This material is available for download from the PhilaPlace website, and can be used to develop a self-guided tour.

Each tour was delivered by ‘citizen guides.’ The South Philadelphia tour, held in the morning was called the “Territory of Dreams” and began in front of Shank’s luncheonette concluding at lunchtime in the heart of the Italian Market. The tour of the Northern Liberties “Building on Ruins” began in front of the Edgar Allen Poe House and ended in front of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Stops included the German Society of Pennsylvania, the Latvian Society Social Club, and St. Andrew’s Russian Orthodox Cathedral. In addition, participants learned about once-bustling Marshall Street where Jewish merchants sold live fish, poultry, produce, and baked goods.

### 2.3 Marketing

The press release announcing the NEH/IMLS grant was distributed online to over 80 contacts on September 27, 2007. About a year later, a press release announcing the *Your Place and Mine* exhibition at the Art Institute was distributed on September 15, 2008. HSP contracted with Barbara Link at the Melior Group, a marketing and communications professional to develop a marketing and communications plan that included introducing the website to the wider Philadelphia community, and attracting neighborhood audiences to the website. The communications plan was completed in June of 2008 and key message points were developed for use with the press and other public events.

Prior to the launch a flyer was prepared that outlined PhilaPlace and was distributed both on site at HSP and within the wider community. A comprehensive press kit was developed to announce the December 9, 2009 launch at City Hall in conjunction with Lauri Cielo, HSP’s Director of Programs and Communications, and emailed to over fifty contacts. As a result of this correspondence and follow up calls, ten members of the press attended the event. Over 5,000 5 ½ x 8 ½ inch color postcards were also mailed to key community contacts that both served the purpose of an invitation and as an advertisement of the PhilaPlace site. An email version was also sent to HSP’s then list of round 5,000 e-subscribers.

The Melior group worked hard to include news of PhilaPlace in neighborhood newsletters, community centers, churches, schools and other local gathering spots; and these efforts along with all the rest resulted in a stupendous launch party officiated by Mayor Michael Nutter and attended by over 450 people.

Lime Projects (Laris Kreslins), a firm that specializes in social messaging was contracted to research and identify social media outlets for audiences, promote and reach out to social media outlets, and communicate about PhilaPlace. As their report (Appendix A) notes, although the company was able to suggest some changes before the launch to the site to make the information more social-media friendly—most notably by including the blog—it was recognized that the technology had developed too late to take full advantage of the oncoming wave of “viral”

marketing and communications. More information on the Lime Projects findings can be found in this report under Assessments.

A full list of the press releases, blogs and press attention generated for PhilaPlace throughout the run of the grant and onwards can be found on the website under the “blog” tab.

#### 2.4. Changes to the Technology

A number of changes were made to the technology of the PhilaPlace Website. Primarily, the decision was made not to use Fedora, but rather Collective Access as the digital asset management system, and Google Maps as the geographic interface – both open source solutions. Also, recognizing that at the time of writing the original application that social media had not yet emerged, a blog was added.

The project’s main design can be broken down into three primary aspects: Collective Access, an open-source digital asset management system (DAMS); Google Maps API, an open-source mapping function with base map tiles; and a custom PHP “middleware” that integrates these features and serves them to the client browser.

Collective Access represents a mature open-source platform with a wide user base, including art museums, film archives, and historic sites. It is supported and maintained by its creator, Whirl-i-gig, who customized the installation for *PhilaPlace* to support a myriad of metadata and a few features not included in the base install, such as enhanced use of sets to better support a neighborhood tour feature. The strengths of Collective Access—and hence the reason for its selection as part of the *PhilaPlace* design solution instead of Fedora—include strong support for many media types (particularly video), a flexible metadata model, and reliability. In addition, the choice reflected the fact that Collective Access is a truly free and open source platform (though support contracts are available for organizations that might want them).

Google Maps API needs little explanation, beyond that it not only provides the accurate and speedy delivery of map tiles, but also can be used with any properly tiled map. In the case of *PhilaPlace*, the original plan of integrating four historic map layers into the same map interface, was realized. These additional map layers were tiled and served up through a third party historical organization, the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network (managed and operated by the Athenaeum of Philadelphia), who partnered with HSP on the project, and the GIS mapping was completed, as initially planned, by Amy Hiller and her students at the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Custom PHP “middleware,” designed by Night Kitchen Interactive, consists of a robust series of server-side scripts that manage the tasks of mapping interpretative metadata and media from the CMS onto the map layers. The scripts allow visitors to navigate, browse, and filter interpretative information by map, topic and collection. The collection view shows the strengths of using Collective Access as the DAMS because all media types (images, audio and video) can be browsed, filtered and sorted; with each media object having its own detail page with caption, credits, and keywords. In sum, these three “views” support a unique curatorial opportunity to create multiple interpretive paths to the same content, thereby encouraging exploration according to personal user preferences.

## 2.5 Changes to Staff

The PhilaPlace project was conceived and implemented at HSP by Joan Saverino, the Assistant Director of Education under the direction of the Senior Director of Education Katherine Wilson. In May of 2008 Dr. Wilson left HSP to become a member of the history faculty at Georgia State University, and her position was not replaced due to a significant cut in education subsidies for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Education. At that juncture as well as being the Director of PhilaPlace, Dr. Saverino became the Director of Education and Outreach at HSP. The department was led by Tamara Gaskell, Ph.d. There was some disruption to PhilaPlace because some duties previously performed by Dr. Wilson were picked up by Dr. Saverino. Most notably, the trolley and self-guided walking tours were delayed by more than a year.

During the development of PhilaPlace a number of key personnel were appointed on a contractual basis including Media Coordinator, Dwight Swanson, and Project Coordinator, Melissa Mandell. They were assisted by a number of interns supported by Drexel University and the Samuel S. Fels Foundation: Amanda Zellner (6 months in 2009), Ian Charlton (6 months in 2010), Anastasia Saverino (10 weeks in 2009 and no relation of Dr. Saverino). A list of support staff and volunteers can be found under the 'about' tab on the PhilaPlace website.

PhilaPlace was launched in December of 2009, and the NEH / IMLS grant completed by the end of HSP's financial year on June 30, 2010.

Unfortunately when the grant ended HSP was unable to maintain the two full-time positions that had been dedicated primarily to PhilaPlace development. Joan Saverino left HSP in August 2010, and shortly thereafter (October) Melissa Mandell took up another position at the University of Philadelphia.

In December of 2010 Beth Twiss Houting assumed the position of Senior Director of Programs and Services. Under her direction, HSP has been re-thinking how to ensure that new content is regularly added to the site going forward.

## **3. Accomplishments**

As the above report on activities shows, all the goals as originally set out in the grant application were accomplished. From December 9, 2009, to May 26, 2011, there were 72,143 visits to [www.philaplace.org](http://www.philaplace.org). Of those 55,192 were unique visits. During this time span, the site averaged 135 visits/day or 945 visits/week.

As the summative evaluation shows (see under Evaluation), visitors gave the site extremely high ratings with averages ranging from 4.47 to 4.88 in a 5-point scale. For example, 91% said they had few difficulties with navigating the site, 89% said they understood the maps, and 96% enjoyed the use of color and graphics. More importantly 97% said they found the material interesting and clear. As one person wrote: "The concept of the site is very interesting and has inspired me to see more of the city that I have overlooked previously;" and another: "Not only can you learn about places important to the history of Philadelphia, but you can find quaint little stores that had personal or private meanings to the people who lived in the area." 96% said they would visit again.

The public programs in all their various forms have also been very successful. We know, for example, that 16% of visitors are educators who use the PhilaPlace material in the classroom, and a portion of these people have attended teacher workshops. The public history lectures / events average around 60 people (some as high at 120+) and workshops average around 20 people.

PhilaPlace received wonderful formal recognition from the cultural community when it received an honorable mention at the highly competitive Museums and the Web 2010 conference hosted by the Archives & Museum Informatics. Museums and the Web is the most prestigious of the annual Web site conference awards that recognizes great work in the field of culture, science, and heritage online. PhilaPlace received the award in the exhibitions category, which receives the most submissions of any of the competitive categories. The judges complimented the website's technology (i.e. map interface), the "share your story" feature, and the education section. As one judge commented: "*PhilaPlace uses technology to support the experience, rather than dominate it.*" For more information see:

[http://conference.archimuse.com/forum/congratulations\\_mw2010\\_best\\_web\\_winners](http://conference.archimuse.com/forum/congratulations_mw2010_best_web_winners)

### **3. Evaluation**

#### **3.1 Initial Visitation and Social Media Assessment**

A few weeks after the site launched, (December 2009) Lime Projects (refer back to the Marketing section of this report) analyzed online traffic and assessed the possibility of reaching the benchmarks the PhilaPlace team set. These were: (a) to attract 500 individuals to take tours, (b) to attract 100 teachers to visit the education section, and (c) to have 100 user-contributed stories. Lime Projects made comparisons with other cultural content sites and discovered that shortly after the launch people spent approximately 4.08 minutes on the site. The average time, based on other examples, is closer to 2 – 3 minutes. For a full copy of the Report see Appendix A.

In hindsight, this surge in interest can be accounted by the large amount of advance marketing prior to the launch. Now almost eighteen months later, the average time spent is around 2 minutes – in keeping with the norm of other cultural organizations. The benchmarks set by the PhilaPlace team have been partially successful. As of April 2011, 515 people have taken a tour, 16% of visitors are teachers and one can assume at least 100 of these have used the materials in class, and 78 of the projected 100 contributors have added a story.

#### **3.2 Mapping Assessment**

Due to the delay in the initial launch of the site, the participatory mapping workshops to test the interactive mapping concepts were postponed until March 15, 2010. Held at the Goldstein Computer Classroom at the Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania, a questionnaire was administered to 20 participants by Minda Borun, the PhilaPlace assessment consultant. The purpose was to test the user-experience of the mapping features. Nine people were aged between

21 and 30 years old, five were between 31 and 40 years, two were between 41 and 50 years, and four were between 51 and 60 years. There were nine men and eleven women. Three were African American, thirteen were of European descent, and four were Asian.

Sitting in front of computers loaded with the PhilaPlace website, the program started with a self-guided questionnaire. At the end of the session a brief discussion was held about how the site could be improved. A copy of the map evaluations valuation is attached to this report (Appendix B.), but in summary: All of those asked liked the topic and the majority found the design aesthetically appealing. They felt the overall site was easy to navigate, and did not encounter any technical difficulties. Most saw the pull-down menu of maps, however lots of people did not see the “show streets” button. People found the legends useful. 28% tried the “add a story” button, although no one did. All but one person said they would return to the site. The one “maybe” came with the caveat that it would depend on if his neighborhood was added.

Based on this feedback, a number of changes were made to the PhilaPlace site, including: placing the zoom option on the maps in a more visible location, making sure you do not lose your place when exploring content in the “take a tour” feature, making the “streets” option more visible, and making the “add a story” feature easier to find.

### 3.3 Summative Evaluation

After the site had been operable for at least three months an interactive questionnaire was developed by consultant Minda Borun, to assess user’s reactions to the PhilaPlace site. The summative evaluation was based on 214 visitors who completed the survey between March 26 and September 8, 2010. For a breakdown of their demographics refer to the Audiences section of this report.

In order to understand the use of PhilaPlace, it was important to understand how respondents treated online technology in general. 72% said they checked Web-based information “several times a day,” with 94% doing so via a broadband connection. When comparing their website experiences, PhilaPlace received extremely high ratings of between 4.47 – 4.88 and 91% claimed to have no difficulty navigating the site. Understanding the navigation buttons, maps, location pins, links, use of graphics and color, all rated above 89% in satisfaction. The few difficulties that were encountered were with the “tour” portion of the site because they felt that 50 – 60 stops were too many and it was recognized as a downloadable activity, the experience was in fact not interactive.

In hindsight, had HSP been able to forecast the explosion of geo-located mobile technology, the tour component would have been developed in some type of mobile application that can be continually updated and include other reference points such as schools restaurants, and continually changing places of interest. Indeed, a mobile application is being developed at present, with an intended launch by the end of 2010.

When people were asked what they would like to change on the site, most responded by wanting “more content.” Because the grant-funded first phase concentrated on only two neighborhoods in depth (Northern Liberties / Kensington and Southwark/South Philadelphia) people who did not

live in those areas have been disappointed. For example, one visitor commented: “My neighborhood (West Philadelphia) is not included.” This is an issue that is addressed under the Continuation of the Project section of this report.

A full copy of the evaluation is attached to this report (Appendix C.), but as the evaluator, Minda Borun wrote in her report: “PhilaPlace is a very successful and well-constructed Website that is highly valued by its users.”

## **5. Audiences**

The best indication of PhilaPlace’s online audience can be found in the results of the survey that formed the basis of the summative evaluation referenced above. Of course, these demographics only pertain to those people who took the time to complete the survey.

The majority of the participants were fairly evenly spread according to age, with the majority being between 50-59 years (22%) and 30-39 years (21%). 19% were aged between 40-49, 18% were between 20-29 years, and 17% were over 60 years of age. More than half were women (58%), and had college degrees (34%) and/or graduate/ professional degrees (47%). Not surprisingly, most were also residents of a Philadelphia neighborhood (72%) and had a personal interest in history (42%).

Given the cultural diversity reflected in the content and the amount of community involvement, it was interesting to note that 80% were of white or European descent. 7% were African-American, 2% Hispanic/Latin, and 4% Asian. This lack of ethnic diversity does not match those who took place in the Mapping evaluation, whereby 65% of participants were of European descent, and 15% were African-American, and 20% Asian. Perhaps in hindsight, the evaluation could have further broken down ethnic groupings. Given that much of the history in both neighborhoods centers around European immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - Polish, Italian, Russian, etc – the criteria of “European descent” would apply to a large number of people living in those communities. Also, the Asian citizens living around the 9<sup>th</sup> street market of South Philadelphia are fairly recent arrivals, and we know from our partnership with organizations such as the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Coalition (SEAMAC) that language continues to remain a barrier, particularly to the first wave of immigrants who are now elderly. This age group also finds working with computers less intuitive and may not realize that the history of their community can be found on the internet.

## **6. Continuation of the Project**

Since the end of the grant period, PhilaPlace continues to receive around 1,000 visitors a week, and interest in related programming remains high as was recently demonstrated with a fully subscribed walking tour held on May 21, 2011. In April 2010 HSP and three departments of Temple University (the School of Journalism, College of Education, and the Neighborhood Learning Center) received a Provost Seed grant to supervise students over twenty-four months to gather and add more stories about Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. To date about 120 new stories have been added. HSP is also currently working with Drexel University’s Department of History

and Politics to employ a graduate student, David Ahern, for 6 months to add material on the Germantown area of the City. In addition, HSP re-employed Ian Carlton, a former Drexel intern/graduate for months to begin adding content on West Philadelphia in conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania archives.

Beginning in July 2011 a new project funded by the NEH will help process and digitize 21 collections related to ethnic and immigrant history. The stories that come from these collections relating to Philadelphia neighborhoods, will be added to the PhilaPlace Website in 2012.

More strategically, HSP held a meeting on May 17, 2011 with over ten other organizations involved in developing geo-location history websites in Philadelphia, such as the Greater Philadelphia Preservation Alliance, the City of Philadelphia Department of Records, the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, the Mural Arts Program, etc. The purpose of the meeting was to ascertain whether it would be possible for PhilaPlace to act as a central repository for historical content that could be harvested by other organizations for their own sites/uses. It was agreed that an application program interface (API) would need to be developed to allow sharing of information between users/organizations/platforms. In addition, effort would need to be given to disambiguation – or the standardization of terms for place names in Philadelphia. For example, the “Italian Market” is also known as the “9<sup>th</sup> Street Market,” while “Washington West” is also known as “Midtown Village.” These organizations have agreed to join the PhilaPlace Advisory Board and jointly seek funding to work on shared metadata standards as a next step.

Finally, working with the website designers, Night Kitchen Interactive, HSP presented a paper at the Museum in the Web Conference (Philadelphia, April 6-9, 2011) called: “PhilaPlace to AnyPlace: Building a Reusable Community Platform for Mapping and Sharing History.” ([http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/programs/philaplace\\_to\\_anyplace\\_building\\_a\\_reusable\\_c](http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/programs/philaplace_to_anyplace_building_a_reusable_c)) In this paper, HSP and Night Kitchen proposed making the PhilaPlace technology available to other cities and organizations who wished to use it. To date, the Chicago Center for Architecture (CCA) have decided to adopt the AnyPlace / PhilaPlace platform, and a city in Australia has shown interest. Part of the AnyPlace agreement allows upgrades and improvements made by other users to be back-ported to PhilaPlace. In such a way HSP hopes to receive upgrades and improvements in to the PhilaPlace site. The mobile guided tour application that CCA is including in its build, for example, will be added to PhilaPlace by 2012.

## **7. Long Term Impact**

PhilaPlace will continue to provide HSP and other organizations interested in mapping the history of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods a central place to gather, share, and disseminate information. It will also provide Philadelphia residents, scholars, and repositories of history such as HSP an opportunity to meet online, share stories, and communicate. Over time HSP hopes to expand across all of the neighborhoods of Philadelphia and sustain the program through developing a consortium of organizations with related missions.

As HSP continues to process, conserve, and interpret its own collection, the stories that speak to local histories will be added to PhilaPlace where possible – thereby expanding access to HSP’s unique content. One direct result of the PhilaPlace project is that HSP has also adopted

Collective Access as its central digital asset management system (DAMS) and 21,000 digital images are now available on [www.hsp.org](http://www.hsp.org). By sharing the same DAMS, HSP is able to easily share images and information between the PhilaPlace website, organizational website, and other technologies.

Similarly, providing the PhilaPlace / AnyPlace platform to other cities and organizations across the World, will allow HSP to continually upgrade and improve the PhilaPlace technology and create a community of users.

## **8. Grant Products**

Website: [www.philaplace.org](http://www.philaplace.org)

*Philadelphia Stories: Yours Mine & Ours* exhibition invitation card 6 x 4 ½ inches full color produced by the Art Institute of Philadelphia in partnership with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania / PhilaPlace and the City of Philadelphia Department of Records. (5,000 distributed in October 2009)

*Philadelphia Stories: Yours Mine & Ours* exhibition catalogue produced by the Art Institute of Philadelphia in partnership with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania / PhilaPlace and the City of Philadelphia Department of Records. Curated by Maria DiElsi (produced December 5, 2008)

*PhilaPlace Information Flyer*. 11 x 8 inches, full color, developed by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Distributed onsite and within local neighborhoods.

*PhilaPlace launch invitation card* 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches, two-sided, full color. Distributed to approximately 5,000 in June – August 2009.

*PhilaPlace Key Messaging Points*. A communication guide developed by the Melior Group (produced September 14, 2009).

*Cataloguing and Uploading Content to Philaplace.org*. A user guide prepared by Melissa Mandell (produced August 13, 2010)

*South Philadelphia: Territory of Dreams* walking tour guide created by Nathaniel Popkin. 20 pages/ two color. (produced May 2011)

