



# Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador

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## Project-Based Training Initiatives: A Model for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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### The Need for Community Training

The overall vision of Newfoundland and Labrador's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Strategy is to ensure that Intangible Cultural Heritage is safeguarded as both a living heritage and as a source of contemporary creativity. In the fall of 2008, the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) office of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) completed a provincial needs assessment, to measure the level of awareness of ICH issues at the community level, and to address key areas where assistance was needed.

Almost three-quarters of those surveyed stated their organization or community was currently undertaking an ICH project, and of its type, most said they were documenting or celebrating local traditional knowledge, skills, cultural practices, or tradition-bearers.

Since then, the ICH office of HFNL has worked to provide a broad range of training workshops throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. While this broad approach to providing a general level of training is inclusive, and reached all areas of the province, there was often little opportunity for follow-up support, or on-site guidance as community groups develop their own project.

### Project-Based Training

In response to this lack of follow-up training, one of the techniques that HFNL has developed to safeguard ICH at the community level is what has been titled "project-based training." In this type of training, the ICH office works alongside a community group, from start to finish, as they develop and implement an ICH documentation/celebration project.



Florence Crocker's hooked mat, Trout River (Dale Jarvis); Taking the lines of Mr Vokey's Schooner, Trinity (Dale Jarvis); Mummies Festival, St. John's (Mark Bennett).

ICH staff walks the community through the process of planning and implementing their project, providing project-specific training and community-based workshops throughout the duration of the project. These workshops and training opportunities break down into three rough phases, though these phases may overlap depending on the project:

- Project focus and community plan
- Documentation/archiving of material
- Public presentation

## Phase One: Project Focus and Community Plan

*"Heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it – without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage" - UNESCO 2009*

One of the major issues that plague cultural documentation projects is lack of project focus. Projects that attempt to cover a wide range of topics, genres or geographic areas on a small budget or within a short timeframe quickly become mired. Many projects have simply never been completed, because original goals were unreasonable.

To assist with this, the first phase of the project-based training model is a community workshop which works with the participants to identify a project theme and scope, as well as providing an overview of the methodology and practical matters of creating, designing, and executing effective ICH research project.

This workshop introduces the community to areas of ICH focus as identified by UNESCO, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. The community then identifies diverse local examples of these traditions. It is important that the community itself identifies and decides upon the focus of the project, as it is at the community level that local heritage is defined.

In addition to identifying specific topics and specific genres for study and celebration, the project focus workshops help communities narrow down project scope, geographic area, the time period of the study, and a timetable for required work.

There is a moment in this process which is always tremendously exciting, because up to that point, many communities have never critically identified what sort of projects they want to work on. The project focus phase helps them identify and structure the parameters of a project, and sets out an achievable workplan and goals. Project personnel and potential community partners are identified at this stage, and any gaps in local expertise are identified.



Studying gravestones, Petty Harbour (Dale Jarvis); Mummers Festival, St. John's (Mark Bennett); Threading the needle, St. John's (Chris Hibbs).

## Phase Two: Documentation/Archiving of Material

Identifying and documenting ICH is an important part of maintaining tradition. As noted above, it is important that communities decide which traditions they feel are important to document. Sometimes these traditions are threatened; sometimes particular elders or tradition-bearers will be highlighted. Other communities may choose to record ongoing and important traditions of everyday life.

Once a project theme has been identified, and any lack of local expertise is identified, the second phase of the project-based training model is the development of specific training workshops to address those needs. Information being collected by the community in the form of photographs, journals and other manuscripts, or audio or video of interviews, performances and demonstrations all require different types of training.

In general, cultural documentation training is intended to give a background on how to conduct research interviews in the field. It should give local participants the opportunity to try their hand at creating interview questions and conducting an interview, as well as an overview of ethical issues, and the use of appropriate recording equipment.

## Phase Three: Public Presentation

One of the primary ways the public is made aware of ICH and its importance to the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador is through the formal recognition and celebration of our cultural practices. This can take shape in many ways, from festivals, to public presentations, to school programs, to awards ceremonies. Making ICH research accessible to as many people as possible is as important as collecting the information itself.

The third phase of the project-based training model is to work with the community to take the collected material and present it, in some public way, back to the members of the community. The presentation format largely depends on the tradition or genre being studied. Davis (2010:11) has noted, "coming to understand the many reasons why people engage in a particular tradition could be one way to help choose a presentation format."

A festival for example could include local community performers, those who know about their heritage, and those who live their traditions. School and community programs could include tradition-bearers as speakers and leaders. Towns and organizations could recognize ICH in their commemorative activities and awards ceremonies. All of these approaches encourage ICH tradition-bearers to continue their work, and show that their knowledge and skills are valued.

In this phase, project participants walk through the issues of planning a public ICH presentation, and address concerns such as consulting with tradition-bearers, selection of participants, and the clear communication of expectations and goals.



# Project-Based Training In Your Community

There is a clear interest at the community level in Newfoundland and Labrador in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, and a need for training in cultural documentation. However, the delivery of short-duration cultural workshops, with little-to-no followup, means that the development of ICH projects often stall in the collection stage, or are not attempted in the first place.

A training model that features repeated visits by an ICH development officer in the role of cultural animateur helps build local expertise, and encourages the completion of a manageable ICH documentation project that is accessible to the general public. While it is not the only approach available to cultural workers, project-based training is one tool that allows us to teach valuable ICH documentation skills while supporting the safeguarding, transmission and celebration of traditional knowledge at the local level.

It is the goal of the ICH office of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador to embark on this type of training project where time and funding allows. If you have ideas for a project, contact the ICH Development Officer at the address below.

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## Resources

Davis, Ryan. Festivals and Folklife: Project Planning for Cultural Festivals, An Introductory Guide. St. John's: Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2010.

<http://www.mun.ca/ich/resources/folklifepdf.pdf>

Gravinese, Barbara. Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Online and Phone Needs Assessment Survey Report. St. John's, NL: Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2008

<http://www.mun.ca/ich/NeedsAssessment3.pdf>

ICH Project Planning Checklist. St. John's, NL: Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador.

<http://www.mun.ca/ich/resources/ICHProjectPlanningChecklist.pdf>

UNESCO ICH. "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?" Infokit. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009.

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/01851-EN.pdf>

## Our Mission

HFNL was established in 1984 to promote, preserve and protect the built heritage of the province. In 2008, HFNL was chosen to be the agency that would implement the province's ICH Strategy. Our mission is to safeguard and sustain the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador for present and future generations everywhere, as a vital part of the identities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and as a valuable collection of unique knowledge and customs.