



Discussion Project Project Coordinator Guide

Through the Discussion Project, the Maine Humanities Council offers comprehensive support to individuals and organizations all over Maine who want to convene members of their community for rich discussions, grounded in texts, of things that matter to them.

Whether the people in a group are linked by their work, their place, or their lived experience, every project is intended to foster real communication and connection among participants through listening and being listened to. Every project's discussions are grounded in the group's shared experience of a compelling text or set of texts. And every project is created with the aim of being both valuable and as easy as possible for a particular community to join – so every project is unique.

Our dream is that anyone and everyone in Maine who wants to, all ages, abilities, and reading levels, engaged in any or many or no work or job, living where you live, with whatever lived experience is yours ... really, everyone, should have the opportunity to join in a sustained, meaningful discussion with others about things that really matter to them. In an effort to get closer to making this dream a reality, we are especially keen to support projects proposed by people and organizations serving those who are most deeply isolated from each other and the wider community, and those whose work has public impact.

We endeavor to conduct all aspects of the Discussion Project in alignment with our [Mission and Vision](#) and with our [commitment to Equity and Inclusion](#).

The Project Coordinator is the linchpin person who makes a Discussion Project happen: clarifying who will gather and what topics and texts they will discuss; reaching out to potential participants and managing registration; taking care of logistics and materials distribution; keeping track of attendance and giving feedback.

The work the Project Coordinator does is grounded in the concrete work of settling schedules and sending reminders and tracking paperwork. But the heart of it is hosting – inviting people to spend time together for a particular, shared purpose, and setting things up so that their time together can be as nourishing and rewarding as possible.

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What does a Discussion Project look like?

Each Discussion Project is unique – created by and for a particular group, in a particular place and time, and unfolding through the interaction of the particular people who meet and talk at each session.

At the same time, all of our Discussion Projects are built on the same basic framework -- a group of people gather and discuss a text they have all encountered – and share the same broad goal of making room for the people who participate to develop a sense of connection, agency, and engagement.

It's important to MHC that the logistics of joining and participating in a discussion be as simple as possible. Every program should be arranged with attention to the participants' actual needs – including timing, preparation, texts, getting there, and the format of the discussions themselves.

Gathering: In her book *The Art of Gathering*, Priya Parker observes that “gathering -- the conscious bringing together of people for a reason – shapes the way we think, feel, and make sense of our world.” We hope that every Discussion Project is a gathering like this, where *these people* have been brought together for *this reason*, at *this time*. People gathering for a Discussion Project are invited to explore together topics and issues that are important and complex and challenging for them to think and talk about. One result is that participants don't spend much time inside their Discussion Project sessions engaging in small talk or catching up with each other personally. Instead, people tend to develop a deeper understanding of each other, seeing more sides of each other, even when some or all of them already know each other from other contexts.

Practicing: By and large, groups gather for a Discussion Project in part because it foregrounds a topic or issue that is important to them in some way – often hoping to learn more about it. A distinctive feature of the Discussion Project is that delivering new *information* about a topic is only a secondary concern; the primary focus is on *how* we engage with the information, narratives, and ways of thinking we encounter when we read and talk together about them. One result is that each participant is thus free to explore and learn from the material in their own way, according to their own lights. Through discussion, participants share their curiosity, insight and experience with others through listening and being listened to. People get a chance to practice learning with and from each other, together.

The Role of the Text

A text can be anything participants read or watch or listen to or look at. A text might be long (like a novel or a feature film) or short (like a poem or a song). People might be asked to read / watch / listen to the text ahead of time or it might be presented or reviewed during the meeting. Sometimes both.

Texts have a two-fold role: they give participants a personal encounter with an author or artist's work; and they serve as a focal point for discussion of ideas, issues, and emotions.

Texts introduce participants to voices, situations, and ways of encountering the world that may be new to them and / or reflect their own concerns and insights in new and unexpected ways. Texts often touch on issues and ideas that participants feel deeply about.

Using the text as a focal point for discussion allows everyone room to be genuinely curious. The process of working together to explore ideas as they are presented by the text alleviates the expectation that participants should see themselves or each other as the center of discussion.

Connection, Agency, Engagement

Over time, as people have told us what it was like for them to participate in one of our discussion series, three things have emerged as especially vital and transformative. These are three of the things we hope arise for Discussion Project participants – at least for some, at least sometimes:

Agency: Feeling able to do things of your own choosing, of your own volition, according to your own best lights and understanding of the situation at hand.

Connection: The felt sense of sharing something important with others – listening closely and being listened to as people share something fundamental, like the urge to find words for how it feels to be alive, to share the effort of understanding.

Engagement: Putting one's own ideas and actions into play in ways that are valuable to the people around you – joining in to do what needs doing.

Application & Selection

The Project Coordinator is typically the person who completes and submits the application for a Discussion Project.

You don't need to have a complete plan of your project in place in order to apply. In fact, it's good to maintain a sense of flexibility. However, **before you submit** an application, we do ask that you think deeply about who you hope to gather and what texts you'd like to engage with.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and a team of MHC staff reviews them regularly. You will be notified as soon as possible after review.

Key collaborators

You, the Project Coordinator

The Project Coordinator is the person who makes a Discussion Project happen:

- clarifying who will gather and what topics and texts they will discuss;
- reaching out to potential participants and managing registration;
- taking care of logistics and materials distribution;
- keeping track of attendance and giving feedback.

The work the Project Coordinator does is grounded in the concrete work of settling schedules and sending reminders and tracking paperwork. But the heart of it is hosting – inviting people to spend time together for a particular, shared purpose, and setting things up so that their time together can be as nourishing and rewarding as possible.

As the meetings happen, you will be the person who sends reminders, takes attendance, makes sure everyone can find the link or the room. Inside meetings, you are also the facilitator's ally in the room.

You will also be the person people in the group come to with questions about the group or talk with about how participation in the group is going for them. They may share with you or need to talk over aspects of the project that are especially rewarding or problematic for them.

But the Project Coordinator doesn't do *everything*.

Community Partners

We strongly encourage Project Coordinators to seek out people and / or organizations in their community who can work with them on their Discussion Project.

It can be very rewarding when several people or organizations work together from the beginning, developing the idea for the Project together, and all working to reach out to potential participants from their own networks.

- Which organizations do you already work with on other projects?
- Which organizations or people also serve the people you work with?
- How about the libraries near you – your public library, school library, hospital library, prison library?
- Who do you know who knows people you'd like to meet?

Even if an idea is already fully formed, it can be very helpful for the Project Coordinator to find one or two other people or organizations who can help with outreach.

If you are working closely with one other person or several, we are more than happy to include them in any meetings and email strings that need everyone's input.

At the same time, the Project Coordinator is still the main point of contact for MHC; information and reminders will be sent to you – and we trust that you will be the one to be in touch with us if any questions or concerns arise.

Facilitator

Maine Humanities has a network of over 75 facilitators across the state. Each came to us through an application, was interviewed, and subsequently trained by MHC staff. When matching facilitators to Discussion Projects, we consider a variety of factors, such as geography, affinity groups, and interests, among other things. Facilitators are contracted as the project's details are finalized and compensated after the final session.

The facilitator will be the person who holds the discussions inside each session by doing things like:

- setting expectations and establishing a structure for discussions,
- offering prompts or asking questions,
- inviting people to put their attention onto one text or another, or providing additional texts
- making sure there is space for everyone to speak and listen.

The Project Coordinator welcomes people in, takes attendance, and helps set the tone for the group through their own participation in the discussion.

The facilitator is your most important collaborator as the sessions unfold. They will look to you for help in understanding the needs and expectations that your group has, before the group starts and as the series goes along, and will share with you any concerns or insights that arise for them.

Close and consistent communication between the Project Coordinator and the Facilitator is important to a Discussion Project's ease and success!

Anyone coordinating a Books Only Discussion Project is encouraged to use our [Facilitator Toolkit](#) as a resource to support their facilitation.

MHC Point Person

Every Discussion Project is assigned a Point Person from among the MHC program staff. Your point person will work with you particularly closely during the planning phase of your project but will be available (and delighted!) to talk with you about anything that arises throughout the duration of your Discussion Project.

In particular, your Point Person will:

- Introduce you to your facilitator and help settle location and scheduling
- Help develop or refine your outreach plans and reading list
- Order your reading materials and send them along to sites and facilitators as they're ready
- Provide some promotional materials for the Project Coordinator to print and use in marketing and outreach
- Serve as a sounding board, help with troubleshooting, give you pep talks, cheer you on

Books Only Discussion Projects have much less contact with Maine Humanities staff. Your point person will order your reading materials and connect with you several months after the start of your program to check-in and collect attendance. **We encourage all of the key collaborators to remain in close communication.**

- Are you finding it challenging to recruit participants?
- Are many more people than you expected wanting to register?
- Is there a delay in getting or distributing the reading materials?
- **Be in touch your MHC Point Person** – we really do love to talk about these things with you!
- Would it be helpful for the facilitator to know more about the dynamics of your group?
- Or for you to know more about what the facilitator plans to do?
- **Be in touch with your facilitator** – they are really committed to making *your* Discussion Project as rewarding as possible for your group!

Better yet, email both at once! More communication is better than less.

Successful collaboration relies on each of the people collaborating on a Discussion Project understanding their role, asking for help when necessary, communicating their needs, and using each other as resources.

Planning

Discussion Projects need generous lead time. There are many things to set in place after you've been awarded. It might require more time than you expect to:

- clarify the core goals of the project;
- settle logistics;
- conduct mindful outreach;
- select and distribute reading materials;
- allow participants the time they need to fully engage with the text

A Maine Humanities staff member will reach out to begin the planning process shortly after you have been awarded a Discussion Project.

Once a Facilitator has been confirmed, we'll loop them into the process. If you are planning your project in collaboration with other colleagues or community partners, your point person can help you decide when it's best to include other collaborators in these meetings. Depending on the scope of your project, it might take several meetings and/or extended communication via email to refine specifics. You should reach out with any issues you run into, or details you'd like to talk through, no matter how small!

The **key elements of planning** are:

- Clarifying the goals of the project
- selecting or confirming which texts the group will read
- settling or confirming a meeting location and/or online platform
- choosing dates and times for your project's sessions

- developing a strategy for reaching out to potential participants
- settling a process to register participants and distributing reading material

Choosing Texts

Your MHC point person will help you finalize the texts for your group. Here are a few things to consider when you're thinking about texts:

- **Consider centering or including stories, novels, and/or poems.** Fiction and poetry can allow people to approach even very concrete issues in genuinely new ways: through a side door, zoomed out to show the whole picture, illuminated by being in a different universe, or accessible as felt experience through metaphors. Over and over again, we hear that people and groups find fiction and poetry help them see and feel things they are concerned about or familiar with in a new light,
- **Consider which perspectives, voices, and varieties of lived experience are represented by the authors and texts you choose.** It's important to us that the texts draw from the full diversity of lived experience, and foreground voices and perspectives that have routinely been ignored or marginalized.
- **Choose texts you are really enthusiastic about reading and sharing.** Even though different people react differently to different texts – which is part of the reason to gather and talk! -- it's so much more likely that discussion will be lively when the texts are vital and alive.
- **Remember that texts can be from any genre!** Graphic novels, illustrated or wordless books, short or long stories or books, fantasy or science fiction or romance or mystery, poetry or prose or plays ... podcasts or lyrics or pictures ...
- **One book can be enough! Or a handful of poems, or a few pictures.** Meaningful discussions can develop with even very short texts at their center. Consider how much time and capacity the people you hope to gather have to spend on this project, and then give them a little bit less to read.
- **Availability and accessibility.** Whatever you choose, we have to be able to get copies of those texts to your participants in the formats they need in order to access them easily and well. Consider things like the reading level of your group's participants, whether anyone might need an audio book, or whether print or online access is available for everyone in your group.

Many groups choose to focus on or include one of our **Featured Reads** – books that we feature in larger programming – Read ME, Readers Retreat, National Book Festival, special initiatives as well as in Discussion Projects. We are excited to know that people all over Maine are reading these books! We provide a variety of extra resources around our Featured Reads. There might be recordings of author interviews, additional texts and information, and / or opportunities to attend other kinds of events across the state.

It's helpful if you have some ideas about what you want your group to read and/or discuss when you apply. We also know from long experience that as we work together toward making a project a reality, initial ideas about texts often shift and clarify in unexpected ways.

You are always welcome to reach out to MHC staff before applying to talk over your initial ideas!

Getting your Texts & Materials

MHC will provide you with the books, readings, or other materials your group needs for full participation in your Discussion Project. Once texts have been agreed on for the group, your MHC Point Person will talk through with you how best to get them to you and your group's participants.

There are several ways we can help to distribute your program materials:

- We can get them to you to distribute to participants in any of these three ways:
 - We can **mail them to you via USPS**
 - We can send them to you via the **statewide Interlibrary Loan service**
 - You can **pick up your program materials at our office** in Portland
- We can mail materials **directly to program participants** (Please note, for this method, we'll need complete registration information, including accurate mailing addresses, several weeks before your first meeting.)

Remember to be generous with your timeline. There are many touch points between when a reading list is decided and the day of your group's first meeting. Be sure to factor in plenty of time for your books to be ordered, delivered to MHC, distributed to participants, and, most importantly, to be read by the people participating in your program. It can be helpful to think of your true start date for your project as the date that participants first receive their materials. We all lead busy lives! Making sure there is abundant time to engage thoughtfully with the reading ahead of the first gathering helps to make participating feel easy and accessible.

Location, Schedule, & Set-up

A Discussion Project needs to be convenient and easy for the participants of the group, the facilitator, and you to get to. Whether you're planning to meet in person in a room or on a Zoom link or both, it's important to think through what barriers there might be to all or any of the people you hope will attend, and how they might be avoided or readily overcome.

Similarly, it's important to settle on a schedule that will fit as easily as possible into the lives of the people you are hoping to bring together, including yourself and the facilitator. Some questions to consider when deciding when to meet:

- What kind of work schedules do the folks I'm trying to gather have?
- Are they parents? How might childcare and evening routines factor in?

- What time of year is it? Do you need a snow date? Do you need to meet during daylight? Will holding your project during the summer make it more or less likely to succeed?
- What other things are happening in your community? Are there regularly occurring meetings that could impact attendance for this group? Is there a big event already scheduled on the community calendar?
- What kind of frequency makes sense? Weekly? Monthly?

The setup of the room, whether online or in person, and the basic structure of the sessions should be settled by the Project Coordinator and the Facilitator together ahead of the first meeting.

Some general questions to consider:

- Will you meet up a few minutes before the official start time to settle in?
- Does the Project Coordinator have the biographical information necessary to introduce the facilitator?
- Does the facilitator want to forward any information to participants before the meeting?
- Do you want a waiting room for online participants?
- What is the current participant count? Is there any last-minute information to share about potential group dynamics?
- Should participants come prepared with anything particular?

If meeting in person:

- How will the room be set up? Will you be sitting in a circle? Horseshoe? Will there be tables? Does there need to be space for people to move into smaller groups?
- Is any technology needed? (e.g. a projector and adaptor to share a video)
- Is there anything you plan to provide participants? (e.g. paper, writing utensil)
- Will offering snacks help create the intended atmosphere?

If meeting on Zoom or another online meeting platform:

- Who needs the meeting link and how will everyone get it?
- Who should be host and co-host?
- Should participants have any particular tools on hand? (e.g. paper, writing utensil)
- Will you be breaking folks into small groups? How and when will this happen?

The Project Coordinator should plan to send reminder emails to participants a day or two before, and even on the day of each session. It's especially important when meeting via Zoom or other online meeting platform to make sure everyone has the meeting link handy. Be sure to cc or bcc the facilitator and even the MHC Point Person.

Publicizing and Documenting Your Project

Key Things:

- Use your [Project Coordinator Toolkit!](#)

- Use the branded flyer and web image we provide.

Share information about your Discussion Project before, during, and after. Tag us whenever you post about your project on social media!

Share with your community that you've been chosen to host a Discussion Project

As soon as you've been awarded a Discussion Project, we strongly encourage you to **make a general announcement online**—on social media, in your e-newsletter, on your website. This is a great way to encourage excitement and get the word out early that you will be hosting a Discussion Project. You can find materials to help with this in your [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#).

Talking about the Discussion Project

While topics, texts, and participants are unique from one Discussion Project to the next, it's important to provide a general description of what the Discussion Project is.

The Discussion Project is a specific program of the Maine Humanities Council and your project should be titled and described as such. Copy for sharing in announcements, project descriptions, press releases, and more can be found in your [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#).

Use these tools and resources for talking about your Discussion Project in whatever media channels are most effective in the communities you're focusing on gathering (email, social media, paper flyers, etc.) and share with any community partners.

Branded Flyer and Web Image

Branded Flyer: Your MHC Point Person will provide you with a branded flyer for your Discussion Project. This is for printing and posting in your community, not for web use or social media. Examples of places to post your flyer are your workplace, library, local businesses, the post office, or other spaces for sharing community news.

Social Media/Web Image: Your MHC Point Person will also be providing you with a branded web image that includes up to two book covers and your org name if applicable. Use this image for Facebook events, adding to your e-newsletter, website, or other online use. Additional web images and social media tools can be found in your [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#).

We ask that you do not alter the MHC-branded images that we provide. If it's your organization's policy to include your logo on publicity materials, you are welcome to create your own and include the [MHC logo](#).

Keep talking...during and after

Don't stop talking about your Discussion Project after your first session. If possible, we recommend documenting your project and giving an update on social media, in your e-

news, or on your website at the midpoint and after the last session. This is a great way to share the impact of your project with your community.

Some ways to let people know:

- Share a picture of everyone holding one of the featured texts.
- Make an announcement of how many participants have attended.
- Encourage participants to take pictures and share their experiences on social media.
- Share a story of the Discussion Project as a press release with your local paper.

Visit your [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#) for further tools and resources.

Gathering Your Group

Recruiting participants from the full diversity of the community your Discussion Project was intended to gather is vital to the success of the project.

While we have a range of resources and tools you can use, *how* you use them should be appropriate to the people you are hoping to reach and invite to participate.

Share the invitation to participate through whatever channels are most effective in the communities you're focusing on gathering (email, social media, paper flyers, etc.) – and also brainstorm with your MHC Point Person and any community partners. What might be the best way to make genuine connections with people you hope will join your group?

Personal invitations from respected people within a community are often the most successful, particularly when you are inviting people who have not been part of a discussion group before, or who haven't interacted with you or your organization before. Inviting people yourself and working closely with others who can invite people from their community, will help make your other outreach efforts more successful. Building on existing relationships and developing new ones are part of the process of gathering your group.

There is more about outreach and publicity in the section on Publicizing and Documenting Your Project. Materials to help you are available in the [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#).

Registration

We ask that you register everyone who plans to participate in your group – even if they are only going to be able to attend one session of the series. Registration information helps us to share with our funders and partners about the reach of our programs, to have a clearer picture of long-term connections with people in Maine, and to continue to communicate with people who love our programs!

We send all participants our monthly e-newsletter, our print newsletter (2 times a year), and our Annual Report. **The Maine Humanities Council does not share any personal**

information with any other organization or person. Participants are able to opt out of being added to our mailing list.

We ask that you collect the following information for each participant in your Discussion Project:

- Name
- Email address
- Full mailing address:
 - Street or PO Box
 - Town
 - State
 - Zip code
- Option to opt out of mailings

We encourage you to use whatever format or system works best for you to collect this information. For some folks this looks like a simple spreadsheet, while others might use an online form. This can also be a moment for you to collect some simple feedback such as how participants found out about the program or whether they are connecting with your organization for the first time.

Two sample registration forms (Excel and fillable PDF) are available in the [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#) for download. If you need additional guidance, your point person can offer suggestions on how best to collect registration information.

PLEASE NOTE: If you choose to have MHC ship books directly to participants, we will need complete registration information, including complete mailing addresses, several weeks before your first meeting.

The First Session

It is probably no surprise that the comfort level of participants generally increases with each meeting. MHC trains facilitators to take a substantial portion of the first session to highlight what the program is and isn't, collaboratively create and agree to group discussion norms, and provide everyone a chance to use their voice through introductions and a check-in. This helps establish a supportive group environment that encourages each individual to embrace moments of discomfort and participate as their full selves.

It's especially important that the project coordinator and the facilitator check in with each other after the first session – right after this first meeting is the optimal time to make adjustments if any aspect of the group felt off to either one of you and to notice and nourish what either of you saw as especially good.

How did it go? Compare notes! Share insights!

- What went really well; what should we keep doing? What was clunky or off; what should we change?
 - How did the text land? Was it the right one? The right amount of reading/listening?
 - How are the group dynamics?
 - How was the room set up or the Zoom/tech?
 - How was the agenda, the timing, the structure of the discussion?
 - What else?

This conversation between you and the facilitator will help ensure that future discussions achieve your aims for the project.

Once it's up and running

The remaining sessions often fall into an easy rhythm:

Project Coordinator and Facilitator check in a few days prior to the session; a reminder goes out to participants with meeting details (date, time, location/link) and the next reading assignment; and, if anything comes up, it gets talked through – by any or all: Project Coordinator, Facilitator, Community Partners, MHC Point Person. Ideally, you are looping in your point person on all issues that arise, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem in the moment.

Every so often, an MHC staff person will ask to sit in on a single session, often to observe a facilitator who is new to our roster or a program partner that we are working with for the first time. Occasionally, another facilitator may ask to visit a group for a peer observation. Please introduce this new person if they visit your group. While it's important that the group is made aware of the visit, the observer won't need any additional time on the agenda. They may very gently participate in the discussion but they are primarily there simply to notice what is happening in the room. Depending on the nature of the visit, they may schedule a time to follow up with you about what they felt and heard during the discussion. Your point person will initiate the coordination of any visit.

The last session

During the final session, it's helpful to reserve time for additional reflection on the project as a whole. It can be productive and beneficial for groups to look back at previous readings or discussions and talk about some “ah ha” moments or things people have learned over the course of the Discussion Project.

We ask that the Facilitator and Project Coordinator work together to gather participant feedback. Your program point person will point you to the appropriate survey in the Project Coordinator Toolkit. If it feels important to allow the group to end their project in conversation with each other, consider setting aside 10 minutes for people to complete surveys well before the meeting's end time.

Tracking & Paperwork

When your project ends, we will ask for you four important things:

- **Attendance** numbers for each session
- Participant **Registrations**
- A summary of **In-kind** contributions
- **Feedback** about the project

Attendance

We ask that you keep track of the number of people who attend each session of your Discussion Project. A sample attendance sheet is available to download [here](#). These numbers are essential for the reporting required of us by the National Endowment for the Humanities and other funders.

You can send this information to your point person in the body of an email, as an attachment, or simply let them know during your debrief conversation.

Registrations

We ask that you register everyone who plans to participate in your group – even if they will only be attending one session out of a series. Registration information helps us to share with our funders and partners about the reach of our programs, to have a clearer picture of long-term connections with people in Maine, and to continue to communicate with people who love our programs!

Registration information should include the following for each participant:

- Name
- Email address
- Full mailing address
 - Street or PO Box
 - Town
 - State
 - Zip code
- Option to opt out of mailings

We encourage you to use whatever format or system that works best for you to collect this information. Two sample registration forms (Excel and fillable PDF) are also available to download in the [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#). If you need additional guidance, your point person can offer suggestions.

If you have provided this information at the start of your program, you need not provide it again.

In-kind

The National Endowment for the Humanities and other funders ask that we report how much the partners we work with contribute in time and expenses. Preparation time (including meetings with us); unpaid attendance by staff or volunteers; costs incurred by sites for refreshments, publicity, meeting space, and WiFi can all count as [In-Kind contributions](#).

Report your In-Kind contribution using our online form. You can find the link in the [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#).

Feedback

Your feedback is so important to us! It helps us to deepen and improve our programs; talk about programs more effectively with potential collaborators, participants, and funders; and most importantly, it helps us to better understand the experiences of our valued partners.

We ask for feedback from Project Coordinators, and we ask Project Coordinators and Facilitators to work together to gather feedback from participants.

Your point person will invite you to meet with them after the program ends to talk through how the program felt for you, any issues that arose, and what ideas you might have for the future.

We also need and use feedback from participants. You have the option of using either an online survey link or a paper survey that folks can fill out by hand. You can find the links and/or download the PDF in the [Project Coordinator Toolkit](#). The facilitator often takes the lead on distributing participant surveys but please connect with them about how you can assist them with this. The Project Coordinator is in charge of returning any paper surveys. You can either scan or mail them to your MHC point person.

We take all the information you give us very seriously!

Not only does our funding depend on it, but also the suggestions and trends we see in this data carry significant weight as we make decisions about our programs.

Your MHC point person will send an email reminder about paperwork and feedback surveys towards the end of your Discussion Project. If you have additional needs or questions about the paperwork process, please let your point person know.

Please note, there are slightly different reporting requirements for a Books Only Discussion Project. We will still need to get attendance numbers for each session as well as an In-kind report from the Project Coordinator and, at the end of your series, you are encouraged to have a debrief conversation with your MHC point person. While participant feedback is

greatly appreciated for a Books Only Discussion Project, it is not required. Similarly, participant registration information is always welcome but not required.

After my Discussion Project, What Next? What Else?

It's common for Project Coordinators and participants to feel energized by the experience. Perhaps it sparks interest in a particular topic or genre or highlights a newly discovered appreciation for gathering community in general. Maybe it's generating ideas for a different program to address a need that surfaced during discussions. Regardless of what ideas are bubbling up, we have resources to help you keep the conversations going.

If we could just get the books ...

There are a variety of ways to get sets of books!

- The [MHC Book Bank](#): we list overflow books we have on hand, you request what you want from among them, and we send them to you – all for free!
- Books Only [Discussion Project](#): if you have a particular plan in mind, with a facilitator and a theme and a set of readings that you want to use – and just need the books, [apply here](#). We review applications on a rolling basis.

Other MHC programs

We have a range of other programs that bring people together in various ways:

- [Readers Retreat](#) - An annual event diving into one extraordinary book.
- [Read ME](#) – a statewide summer reading program featuring Maine authors.
- [Maine Speaks](#) – public presentations by local experts on a variety of topics.
- [The Big Question](#) – an annual event exploring a large timely question.
- [Grants](#) – funding to support humanities-based projects in Maine communities.

Timeline & Checklist

- ☐ *You receive notification that you've been awarded a Discussion Project*
- ☐ Look through the materials in the [Project Coordinator Toolkit]
- ☐ Let your community know that you have been awarded a Discussion Project!
 - <<Project Coordinator Toolkit>>
- ☐ Your MHC Point Person will initiate the planning process.

The Planning Process

Please allow a generous timeline. You'll need at least 8 weeks before your Discussion Project starts.

How many times will your group meet?

- ☐ Figure out how many sessions you will need for your project
- ☐ Decide how frequently you will hold your meetings

What texts will you use and how will participants get them?

- ☐ Discuss and decide on the texts your group will use.
- ☐ Settle on how best to distribute materials

When will your Discussion Project start?

The facilitator must be looped in for this part of the planning process if they're not already.

- ☐ Meet with your facilitator to outline the details of the project
- ☐ Agree on a schedule for your group – dates, times, location/platform

Marketing

... as soon as you have the logistics settled:

- ☐ Create or request flyer and/or social media images
- ☐ Submit event information to your Point Person to get onto our web calendar
- ☐ Invite potential participants to join your Discussion Project!
 - Direct outreach via email
 - Direct outreach in conversations
 - Distribute flyer
 - Post on social media
- ☐ Register participants

... more than 2 weeks before your first meeting

- ☐ distribute materials to participants

... 1 week before your first meeting

- ☐ Send a reminder of meeting information to all participants – dates, times, location / link – and anything else they need to know about participating
- ☐ Check with your facilitator to see if there's anything they want to add to this communication

Hold your Discussion Project sessions! Meet and discuss!

- ☐ Take attendance at each meeting
- ☐ Keep your group's participants in the loop: remind them of sessions and texts, let them know if anything comes up or changes
- ☐ Stay in touch with your Facilitator and MHC point person
- ☐ Distribute surveys at the final session

... within 2 weeks after the last session

- ☐ Complete and send us your end of program paperwork
 - Attendance
 - Registration
 - In-kind Form
 - Participant feedback
- ☐ Debrief with your MHC Point Person