

# Architecting Sustainable Futures:

Exploring Funding Models  
in Community-Based Archives

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Image by Nicole Ferraiolo

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# Shift

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## Introduction

Community-based archives hold some of the most valuable materials documenting the lives of marginalized people, and they mostly reside in spaces outside of traditional academic and government-run cultural heritage institutions. These archives function as grassroots alternatives to mainstream repositories, where communities make decisions about what is of enduring value to them, shape collective memory, and control the means through which people construct the stories about their past.<sup>1</sup> Marginalized communities often create archives in response to being shut out of dominant historical narratives that are primarily supported by mainstream memory institutions, and in maintaining independence and encouraging community participation, they use these archives as a way to collect on their terms and to create new narratives about their history.<sup>2</sup> While community-based archives continue to collect and preserve stories of marginalized people, many of them face difficulties growing their operations, keeping their doors open, and enhancing their programming and collections activities because of a lack of access to funding.

The organizations selected to participate in the symposium included community-based archives that primarily serve or document marginalized people and communities, including LGBTQIA people, indigenous people, African Americans, Latinx people, and victims of police violence and incarceration. Attendees at the symposium included people who worked in community-based archives, cultural heritage and humanities grant funders, academic libraries, museums, public libraries and scholars.

The symposium had five main objectives. They revolved around information gathering and analysis, knowledge sharing, and developing recommendations, all aimed at addressing the long-term sustainability of community-based archives.

1. To understand the broad field of community-based archives, their diversity of scope, intent, and capacity.
2. To understand current funding models of community-based archives.
3. To map the funding landscape for community-based archives.
4. To identify gaps and opportunities to support and build capacity in community-based archives.
5. To make recommendations for different ways community-based archives can receive funding given their capacity.

On September 21st and 22nd, 2018, Shift Design, Inc, with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, hosted **Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives** in New Orleans, LA. The symposium was an opportunity to help equip community-based archives with tools to address one of their most pressing needs for self-sufficiency: sustainable funding.

<sup>1</sup> Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander, "Introduction: Communities and Archives-A Symbiotic Relationship," *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory* (London: Facet, 2009); Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy, and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 71-86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-009-9105-2>; Dominique Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American Archives," *American Archivist* 73:1 (2010): 82-104. <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.73.1.k2837h27wv1201hv>; Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 95-120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-012-9180-7>; IMLS Grant Application, *Diversifying the Digital Historical Record: Integrating Community Archives into National Strategies for Access to Digital Cultural Heritage*, 2016, [https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/lg-73-16-0003-16\\_proposal\\_documents.pdf](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/lg-73-16-0003-16_proposal_documents.pdf); Michelle Caswell, Bergis Jules, Christopher Harter, "Diversifying the Digital Historical Record: Integrating Community Archives in National Strategies for Access to Digital Cultural Heritage," *D-Lib Magazine*, May/June 2017, Volume 23, Number 5/6. <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/may17/caswell/05caswell.html>;

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez (2016) "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing": Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives. *The American Archivist*: Spring/Summer 2016, Vol. 79, No. 1, pp. 56-81. <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.56>

## Methodology

The Shift team used a design thinking approach to plan and implement the two-day symposium, collaboratively mapping the story of community-based archives in the past, present, and future. The origin stories of community-based archives and the work that takes place within and around them are vital to understanding the building blocks, pain points, innovations, and values that are foundational to the development of these unique cultural heritage spaces.

There were five main objectives to the content designed for the meeting:

1. Create a standard definition and aspiration for community-based archives
2. Map the landscape of community-based archives
3. Understand how they have sustained and received funding to date
4. Understand what supports and what limits them
5. Explore the future of sustainability for community based-archives (e.g., financing and other forms of support)

The content for the meeting was designed to inspire action in the participants in four key ways:

1. Share collective knowledge about community-based archives
2. Take a cooperative approach and feel part of a first big step forward to the future of community-based archives
3. Become jointly invested in and ready to contribute to a change
4. Create an actionable spark that commits people to start something new and take ideas forward

**"I was so impressed with the ASF meeting. The conversations I had there felt very honest and productive and seemed to bring participants closer. We identified real problems and brainstormed some immediate actions that could be taken as well as bigger changes that require long- term planning. I've already added some of the themes and concerns raised in this meeting to the agenda of our next review panel meeting, so the initiative is already shaping internal conversations with funders."**

— Nicole Ferraiolo,  
Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR)

## The Big Questions

To structure the conversation and drive towards the objectives outlined above, we framed the two-day session around five big questions. These questions aimed to identify the current strengths, assets, practices and shared experiences of those running community-based archives, identify the risks and barriers to their sustainability and opportunities to support community-based archives to survive and thrive. Each question was given its own space and offered attendees the opportunity to share and explore their experiences through a specific lens.

The five questions were as follows:

1. Past and Present: How We Survived?
2. People: Who We Are?
3. Resources: Funding and Funders?
4. Values: Core Values of CBAs and How to Sustain and Scale?
5. Future: What's the Future Look Like, What's Happened, What Needs to Change?

Each big question became the basis of a debate steered by facilitated, focused discussion and an accompanying essay written by a community-based archives practitioner. This approach helped to uncover relevant and actionable insights into what had happened to date and point towards what must occur in the future to drive the sustainability of community-based archives.

### Day 1:

On the first day of the symposium, participants were supported to contribute to a collective understanding of the value of community-based archives and how they have sustained to date. After a short exercise utilizing the StoryBox<sup>1</sup> framework, designed to build empathy among the group, the participants self-organized around the first three big questions outlined above.

Participants were encouraged to explore each of the three topics throughout the first day, contributing to each question in an additive way that sought first to uncover differing observations, data points, and insights and then to converge around an area of critical focus for the sustainability of community-based archives. Participants independently selected to which big questions to discuss. Facilitators and participants were encouraged to capture discussion through both visual and written transcription to keep a sufficient document of the outcomes and key themes.

<sup>1</sup> Lynette Johnson, "Historypin Launches StoryBox," <https://about.historypin.org/2018/08/03/historypin-launches-storybox-us-one-story-closer/>, August 3rd, 2018.



On the first day, participants were also encouraged to discuss the fourth big question on the value of community-based archives over lunch at Dooky Chase, a legacy black-owned and operated restaurant that is often regarded as a community-based archive as well. This combination of collaborative work and less formal, discursive setting enabled more broad and exploratory discussion and ensured that participants who were less vocal in group settings to share more considered and, in some cases more provocative, input.

## Day 2

On the second day of the symposium, participants were asked to identify some of the major issues that surfaced during day one and to develop some initial solutions to address those issues. Specifically, participants were

asked to identify the challenge, propose a possible solution, explore some of the reasons why the challenge has persisted, describe the types of people who would need to be at the table in order to bring the solution to life, and outline the next steps that would be required to make the idea a reality. This exercise was extremely fruitful in generating thoughtful solutions for addressing some of the issues that surfaced on day one. Part of the reason for the success of this exercise is that the small groups were made up of a combination of scholars, archivists, funders, and community-based archives practitioners, all discussing ways to achieve solutions. Several of the attendees mentioned the benefit of having such a diverse set of professional and personal experiences in the room to workshop these ideas.

**Attendees participating in Day two activity designed to develop solutions for addressing challenges in community-based archives.**



## Key Findings

Throughout the two days of conversations with community-based archives practitioners, cultural heritage funders, and scholars, many topics surfaced that demonstrated the wide range of issues community-based archives face in terms of capacity-building and sustainability. This list of key findings is representative of some of the issues that were consistent throughout the symposium. They represent areas where community-based archives see the most need for measurable change moving forward. These areas include grant funding practices, academic partnerships, business planning, fundraising and revenue generation, and measuring impact. While it is not an exhaustive list of all the issues discussed, we believe that strategic thinking with a focus on developing intentional solutions around these areas could be transformative for growing the capacity and achieving more sustainable solutions to some of the issues facing community-based archives.

### **Community-based archives practitioners would benefit from a peer network offering resources that could support activities related to knowledge and practice sharing, capacity building and sustainability.**

One of the immediate outcomes of the Architecting Sustainable Futures symposium were the collaborations that developed among the practitioners and others in attendance immediately following the symposium. These collaborations are early evidence of the potential of a formalized network to support activities around knowledge and practice sharing, capacity building, and sustainability at community-based archives. A national network that is led by practitioners in community-based archives would be a transformational resource in which collaborative modes of support could be developed and offered to members. Such a network would focus on unique issues faced by community-based archives in terms of access to resources, share in a commitment and responsibility to local and often marginalized communities in ways that traditional archives don't function, and provide ways to maintain the independence of community-based archives as a vital part of how they offer services.

During the symposium, community-based archives practitioners mentioned how important it was to be in community with each other and to see that they were not alone in doing community-based cultural memory work. The symposium was the first opportunity most of them had participated in where the significant issues and successes they experience were prioritized and collectively discussed in a caring environment. Because of this experience, several practitioners in

attendance have since partnered with each other in both formal and informal ways to share information, develop projects, and offer support to each other. For example, one community-based archive in Texas that has developed substantial practices and curriculum around care and collecting archives of trauma offered a free training to the staff of another community-based archive in California. In another example, a digital community-based archive that has had success in securing grants and other modes of fund raising, has offered advice on their strategy on several occasions to another archive that is attempting to grow their capacity around fundraising and revenue generation. Additionally, collaboration and knowledge sharing happened between community-based archives and the scholars, professional archivists, and other information professionals in attendance. These collaborations have resulted in projects that are currently in development that address revenue generation, fundraising, and collections care, among others.

A national network of support, intentionally designed to offer key capacity building and sustainability resources to community-based archives will go a long way in helping these archives to remain independent and viable. A national network of support for community-based archives was also one of the key recommendations of the Diversifying the Digital Historical Record national forums held in 2016 and 2017 that was funded by the Institute for Museum and Libraries Services (IMLS).<sup>1</sup> Community-based archives practitioners have demonstrated the need for this type of network of support and some of how it could benefit the growth and sustainability of their archives and community-centered memory work.

### **Community-based archives want to remain independent despite significant funding and resource hurdles.**

Community-based archives have a strong desire to maintain their independence despite significant hurdles to generating revenue, acquiring and maintaining adequate staffing, and to providing care for collections. Participants articulated the value of not compromising their values, even when access to significant support is on the table. Because community-based archives are often embedded within the communities they serve, they prioritize the needs of the people as a service model. Maintaining independence is key to continuing to function in this way. Some threats to the independence of community-based archives include poorly designed and inequitable project partnerships, funding opportunities that don't recognize their administrative and organizational challenges and the hyper-local ways

<sup>1</sup> Michelle Caswell and Bergis Jules, "Integrating Community Archives into a National Digital Platform: Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations," November, 2017. <http://diversifyingthedigital.org/index.html>

in which community-based archive exist, and a constant lack of adequate resources to maintain operations and collections.

Practitioners in attendance at the symposium shared several examples of how their ability to maintain their independence had been challenged by others since the founding of their archives. Not surprisingly, many of the situations that could potentially put community-based archives in jeopardy of losing their independence and their collections revolve around collaborations with academic libraries, professional archivists, scholars, and attempts to secure funding through grants and other sources. In all of these cases shared by community-based archives practitioners, the most prevalent and threatening underlying assumption was the idea that the archive was not a legitimate or adequate site for housing historical materials compared to the ways that more traditional academic or well funded federal archives operated. These assumptions can lead to damaging effects for the existence of community-based archives that are founded on deeply rooted community values and grow out of marginalized people's desire to see themselves represented in the historical record. Community-based archives continue to exist,<sup>2</sup> and some thrive despite these challenges and only request support to continue to do their work.

**Small donations and one-time funding are available to community-based archives, but substantial and long-term sustainable funding remains elusive.**

*"People give you just enough money to fail."*

— Director at a Community-Based Archive

One of the more significant challenges for community-based archives in terms of fundraising is their lack of access to funding that can contribute significantly to their operations, collections care and programming, and their ability to plan for long-term capacity building efforts and sustainability. While community support in the form of small monetary donations exists, as well as one-time and often restricted funding through grants, supporters, or government entities, community-based archives still do not benefit from unrestricted funding opportunities. Intentional, unrestricted opportunities could significantly boost their efforts to grow their capacity in key areas of their operations or to establish or support existing programs that can enhance their sustainability strategies around staffing, revenue generation, or administration.

There are several reasons this type of funding remains challenging. First, without adequate staffing and operational support, community-based archives have a difficult time putting effort toward the kind of research and planning it would require to attract significant amounts of funding. While there is usually strong community support in terms of volunteers, community-based archives generally function with one or two paid staff members, and a significant number of those positions are at half time or less. This lack of staffing resources significantly restricts the amount of time an archive can take away from their daily operations to research, network, and apply for this type of funding. Second, many of the opportunities to secure large sums of funding that can significantly boost capacity-building and sustainability projects and programs in community-based archives, exist in the form of grants, but the application processes, grant administration, and reporting requirements for these kinds of grants are well beyond the current capacity of most community-based archives.

Ironically, and as a result of these well-known barriers, funding bodies are awarding many of these potentially trajectory-changing grants to more traditional academic based, and already well-funded archives that do not have the same staffing and operational challenges as community-based archives. Third, knowledge about the existence and impact of community-based archives are understandably hyper-local, while these kinds of significant funding opportunities tend to reward more well-known or nationally recognized collections and archives. Additionally, many significant funding opportunities are highly favorable to and mostly designed to support what is seen by many as professional, cultural heritage activity conducted by professionally trained people. Because the work of those founding and working in community-based archives is not widely known, the opportunities to benefit from these funds remain elusive.

Attendees at the symposium discussed these key issues affecting community-based archives access to significant capacity building and long-term sustainable funding, but there are undoubtedly more. Addressing some of these barriers can go a long way to securing the future of community-based archives.

**Community-based archives can develop successful fundraising programs, but some need support to sustain and grow the capacity of those efforts.**

Some community-based archives have successfully developed programs that generate revenue from earned income, donations, and grants, but those efforts cannot be consistently sustained in some cases because the

<sup>2</sup> Yusef Omowale, "We Already Are", September, 2018, <https://medium.com/community-archives/we-already-are-52438b863e31>



existence of the archives themselves is precarious. The sustainability of these programs can be affected by several factors including fluctuations in available staff support and access to funding to continue the revenue-generating activity. Despite the significant hurdles, community-based archives continue to innovate around revenue generation.

One practitioner in attendance at Architecting Sustainable Futures has led an underground railroad tour for the past twenty years where they travel with teachers and administrators from regional school districts to Civil Rights and Black history sites in the southern United States and Canada. The tours generate revenue by negotiating contracts with school districts that support their staff attending the tours. This endeavor has been a tremendous success because it has helped teachers and administrators gain a better understanding of the history and impact of slavery and that in turn has helped schools teach the subject more effectively. That same group is also expanding revenue generating activity to include designing exhibits and loaning them at cost and also loaning content from their vast collection. Another community-based archive successfully runs a fundraising campaign annually as a way to raise the unrestricted funds they need to support operations. In addition to the annual campaign, this archive also raises a significant part of their budget from members of the community whose collections they primarily collect and preserve.

Some community-based archives have also had success with securing funds in the form of grants or one-time funding from local governments like city councils or county governments. Most archives in attendance had secured one or more grants of varying sizes from foundations and federal grant-makers. Some archives also design curriculum based on the content they hold and develop training based on expertise held by their staff or communities and offer those to interested parties at a cost. But while there is no shortage of innovation and hard work put into growing funds to run the archives, much of this work is done by a few individuals who, in addition to raising these funds, spend most of their time running the archive. Several expressed fear that their efforts would not be able to be sustained, or worried about what would happen to the archive after they were gone, especially since there was very little time and capacity for succession planning activities. Growing the capacity of community-based archives to support further revenue generating activity is a vital next step in the life-cycle management of these cultural heritage spaces.

### **Labor required to apply for and to manage grants acts as a barrier to access those funds.**

Community-based archives practitioners at Architecting Sustainable Futures shared their frustrations about the labor involved in the grant application process, whether applying for very small or large amounts of funding. In some cases, it may take up to 100 hours of labor for research, networking, and applying for a single grant, and usually with no guarantee that a proposal will be successful. And while grant writing is typically part of the general responsibilities of professional archivists and scholars as part of the work they already collect a salary and benefits for, grant writing in a community-based archive is additional labor on top of already time, and cash strapped organizations. These are vital hours that can be used to benefit other parts of the archives operations. Instead, community-based archives feel pressure to participate in grant writing activity, as a part of a funding model that may not be designed with their unique issues in mind, as one way to address their significant funding needs.

Additionally, grant management and reporting requirements put extra strain on the already stressed staff. As a result, some community-based archives have decided to no longer seek grant funding because the cost of labor to apply for and manage the grants versus the success rate of securing funding, and the lack of a long term benefit of the funds does not make sense. Addressing issues around the labor required for grant applications and management could help community-based archives participate in the grant process more equitably.

### **Collaborative work with academic partners exists and is desired by community-based archives, but equity and recognition of the legitimacy of the archive should be foundational to the relationship.**

Community-based archives already partner with large academic institutions on a diverse number of projects to varying degrees of success. While community-based archives see value in these relationships, there is an inherent power imbalance that favors the large institutions, and can often put the community-based archive at a disadvantage. In the past, this imbalance has led to several negative experiences between academic institutions and community-based archives, which has caused mistrust of these kinds of relationships. Some of these negative experiences have included patronizing behavior from professional archivists--for example, questioning the skills and expertise of community-based archives practitioners and the ability of the archive to preserve collections. There has also been attempted co-opting of collections and ignoring the central role that the local community plays in the mission and existence of the archive. Despite these issues, community-based

archives practitioners see some value in partnering with large academic institutions on collaborative projects and programs around collections care, digital projects, and funding, etc. but those collaborations must first be based on principles that uphold equitable practices, encourage transparency, and the recognition that community-based archives are legitimate sites for preserving their historical content.

**Community-based archives do not want to compromise their values for funding or partnerships.**

*"Is there money you won't take because of ethics?"*

— Question from a Community-Based  
Archive Practitioner

One consistent theme echoed by practitioners throughout the Architecting Sustainable Futures symposium was that community-based archives were unwilling to compromise their values to secure funding or other types of support. Practitioners recounted numerous examples in the past where partnering with a university to gain access to resources or applying for certain kinds of funding would have put them in situations that betrayed their commitment to their community. While rejecting these opportunities could affect how the archive operates, the decision to not enter into partnerships and collaborations void of ethics or that have questionable values helps ensure the archive's credibility remains intact. Not compromising on values also forces community-based archives, funders, and potential partners to work on more equitable terms. It also encourages community-based archives to engage in more radical self-help practices as part of their work to sustaining their collections and programs.

**A survey of community-based archives would help to identify their needs better and articulate their collective impact.**

During the symposium, several practitioners mentioned the potential benefits of establishing a stronger culture of non-exploitative data collection and analysis of community-based archives. To fully realize the broader potential impact of community-based archives, it is vital to get a better understanding of how they exist, where they are, what they hold, and what they need. New collective knowledge about community-based archives will help to better articulate needs. Data collection can be a strategy for more effectively supporting community-based archives in developing programs that can grow capacity. A more comprehensive understanding of the landscape of community-based archives will also provide a broader view of how these archives impact the communities they represent and broader society.



Attendees prototype ideas for sustainability during a design thinking workshop.

## Recommendations for The Field

These recommendations respond to some of the issues, ideas, and potential solutions we heard from attendees at Architecting Sustainable Futures. They are intended to guide work affecting community-based archives in the future. We hope the community will let them guide their work, but the hope is that people will also add new recommendations, ideas, and innovations to these, as we all engage in the collective work of supporting community-based archives. The recommendations are specifically targeted toward community-based archives, funders, academic partners, and scholars.

Community-based archives like the Shorefront Legacy Center in Evanston, Illinois, the Southern California Library in Los Angeles, or the South Asian American Digital Archive, provide essential services to the communities they represent. They uplift the lives of traditionally marginalized and oppressed people, while also strengthening the fabric of wider society by making sure people are not erased by harmful cultural and historical narratives. Community-based archives have a right to exist. And they should exist in

the ways that the people who create them see fit. In this spirit, partnerships with community-based archives should not jeopardize their independent existence, the security of their collections, or the values they uphold as part of their responsibility to the specific communities they serve. Academic organizations and professionals, especially university libraries and scholars, can be tremendous partners with and supporters of community-based archives by leveraging the vast resources available to them in more intentionally caring ways. Funders can also incorporate more caring and informed practices into their grantmaking activities that consider the unique issues facing community-based archives, many of them having similar struggles of small nonprofits, independent businesses, or unincorporated organizations. Community-based archives have continued to exist despite tremendous hurdles but also with significant and diverse support from the communities they serve. More intentional long term business and organizational planning, and the development of more sound fundraising programs and practices can go a long way to assuring their continued existence and growth.

## Recommendations for Community-Based Archives

### Develop Earned Income Strategies

Grant-funding is not a sustainable business model. All of the successful long-standing community-based archives that participated in the symposium shared stories about how they have found various streams of income to keep their doors open. These significantly varied and all evolved. For most organizations, the archive started with volunteer labor in the early years, but then progressed either in a partnership or through entrepreneurship to become sustainable entities through earned-income strategies that may have included grants, but were not entirely dependent on them. Many organizations were gifted or have acquired real estate that makes it possible for them to stay in locations which are often vulnerable to gentrification. That has given some organizations the ability to leverage their location and develop other sustaining, mission-driven business that provides income. Others have found that publishing and retail sales have been key to ongoing income as well as visibility. Yet others have been able to sustain through membership and other community-supported means. Developing earned income strategies can be critical to the future strategies of community-based archives if that fundraising model fits their work and value system.

### Do Not Compromise Values for Partnerships or Funding

When opportunities for partnership arise, be sure to stick to your values and insist on equal terms and transparency in any joint grants or partnerships. We heard many stories at Architecting Sustainable Futures about community-based archives that made compromises in partnerships because they felt that they did not have the leverage to request equal roles and compensation in funded projects. One example of how an organization can ensure themselves of being fairly compensated for time and intellectual labor is to insist on reviewing the final budgets in collaborative projects.

### Demonstrate Impact and Value to the Community

On the one hand, community-based archives exist because of their critical contributions to the longevity of a place or people. Many organizations that were present at Architecting Sustainable Futures shared amazing stories about the work they do in service to their communities, and the many ways they have documented these activities. They shared how important it was to demonstrate their value to the local community publicly and shared different tools they've used, from anniversary celebrations with city leaders to annual reports, data collection, and publications

about visits and use. All of these tools can help to demonstrate the impact of the archive to the community as a way to grow support or raise funding. Community-based archives practitioners should also create a culture assessment in their field that can help to demonstrate impact and value as the field continues to grow.

## **Recommendations for Funders**

### **Support Capacity Building and Capital Investment**

As noted above, community-based archives are typically small and/or informal organizations, so capacity building initiatives will go a long way in helping them become sustainable. These initiatives could include grant-writing assistance, management workshops, legal assistance, fiscal sponsorship, or many other possibilities that could be facilitated by local or interest area organizations. Secondly, one common theme with community-based archives that have sustained themselves is the fact that they own their buildings. These buildings might have been gifted or purchased but it often means that the inhabitants can stay even while a local area may be changing around them, and thus, they keep the history of a place and people alive despite displacement or gentrification. Therefore, capital investment could be a critical tool for the true longevity and self-sufficiency of community-based archives.

### **Require Equitable Partnerships in Funded Collaborative Projects**

When developing grant program guidelines or reviewing proposals where community-based archives are included as partners, funders should ensure that the archive is treated equitably in terms of labor and compensation. For example, funders can require that the community-based archive be responsible for a certain percentage of the work of the project and that the archive also be allocated a representative amount of the funding for that work. Just as funders require diversity statements from grantees, they can also require a statement of equity that describes specifically how labor and funding will be equitably allocated on the project. It should raise red flags for funders when reviewing grant proposals where the majority of the funding in a collaborative project goes to the academic library partner and the intellectual, emotional, and physical labor is being carried out by the community-based archive. Funders can also flag collaborative projects where the work to be undertaken seems extractive of the collections, intellectual assets, or networks of the community-based archive. These checks can help to ensure that funders do not continue to support projects that can be harmful to community-based archives.

### **Promote Community Compensation**

Community-based archives often hold some of the only links to the past for specific people, places, or groups. There is a value inherent to these holdings and the human networks that have created them. Partnering organizations often profess to provide help to community-based archives in gathering stories or collections, but seldom put a financial value to those stories and collections. Often a researcher or scholar will be paid to “help” gather the stories for a collection, but the contributor will not receive compensation. Unpaid labor is an issue that must be addressed on a wide scale—and we need to begin by acknowledging that community input in cultural projects is often unpaid work.<sup>1</sup> New models for community financial compensation need to be explored and supported at all levels, from partnership design to funding.

### **Adopt Inclusive Funding Practices**

Funders should adopt guidelines and develop new practices for their grantmaking that do not act as barriers to community-based archives and other small cultural organizations participating in the process. Several community-based archives at Architecting Sustainable Futures mentioned how the current funding practices, specifically those around eligibility requirements, the application process, grants management, and reporting, are often barriers for them. Small organizations that primarily function on the labor of volunteers view current practices as unrealistic for the communities they represent. Grant guidelines should reflect that the funder is aware that the cultural heritage field is broad and diverse and that grants are one way that resources can be more evenly distributed across organizations. Because of staffing and financial issues, some community-based archives simply cannot contribute the large number of hours it would take to apply for and administer a grant on their own based current funder practices.

<sup>1</sup> Hali Dardar, Exploring Monetary Value of Cultural Exchange in “Moving Beyond Colonial Models of Digital Memory”, December, 2018, p. 15. <https://about.historypin.org/2018/12/11/decolonizing-the-archive/>



One way to ensure grant guidelines are more inclusive of a diverse range of organizations is for funders to invite community-based archives practitioners to help develop grant program guidelines and to sit on grant review panels. Traditionally, those roles go to professionals working in large government and academic cultural heritage organizations, and that practice has led to the grant programs being designed to mostly benefit those types of cultural heritage spaces. Another way funders can practice inclusivity in their grantmaking practices is to acknowledge that the field is broader than the traditional organizations they typically work with and to actively engage with smaller organizations like community-based archives. Architecting Sustainable Futures was a great example of how that engagement can take place.

## **Recommendations for University Library Partners**

### **Don't be Extractive**

Community-based archives, and particularly those serving marginalized communities, impact the lives of the people they represent in several ways, including recognizing their right to exist, highlighting their contributions to society, and empowering them to imagine futures where they are included. For these reasons, academic library partners should not engage in activities that seek to remove physical or intellectual assets from community-based archives and the communities where they exist. Academic libraries operate as part of universities, and they wield significant privilege and power in all relationships they are a part. When partnering with under-resourced organizations such as community-based archives, academic libraries should leverage that power and privilege in support of promoting the values and furthering the mission and goals of the archive. There are several ways academic libraries can engage in non-extractive ways with community-based archives. For example, if there are community-based archives in the same community with academic libraries, then instead of the academic libraries hiring a professional archivist to work on community archives for the university, the library can choose instead to share the financial resources slated for that position with the local community-based archives to help grow their capacity. Some of the practices required to engage in non-extractive behavior are no doubt non-traditional and will require real effort to adopt but they will lead to a more healthy and inclusive cultural heritage practice, and a more representative shared historical record.

### **Practice Equity**

Despite difficulties, community-based archives continue to exist because supporters and practitioners have extensive skills, expertise, and knowledge to apply to the work of the archive. When university libraries seek to partner with community-based archives, they should recognize the extensive expertise already available in these spaces and ensure sure they are considered in the planning of the project, the sharing of the work, and the allocation of financial and human resources. Practicing equity in collaborative work with community-based archives recognizes the significant contributions individuals and the archives have made to their communities. Practicing equity also builds trust in ways that can help university libraries become more effective community partners.

### **Be Transparent**

In the interest of building trust and developing projects that can be equitably beneficial to community-based archives and their university partners, it is important to practice transparency throughout the whole process, outcomes, successes, and failures of projects. Community-based archives practitioners at Architecting Sustainable Futures referenced instances where university partners intentionally kept them out of the process of planning collaborative work while expecting them to remain available to contribute to the work. A lack of transparency does not only hinder current and future partnerships, but it can potentially put community-based archives at a disadvantage in negotiating their participation in the project and also sets them up to blindly participate in projects that could cause harm to their collections or community. Some ways university partners could practice transparency include citing the work of community-archives partners, honoring the financial value of community-based archives partners by paying for staff time and contributions, and by checking the ratio of funding for any individual project that goes to the university versus community-based archive. In some cases, community-based archives partners are merely asked to partner on projects, but they are not included in the grant writing, budget development, grant management, or project execution. These actions erode trust between

community-based archives and academic partners, and they deny community-based archives staff of opportunities to gain new skills or to sharpen knowledge in these areas. So while a university library may take on the administrative responsibilities for a collaborative project, they should also make sure community partners are part of all elements of the process. This approach could contribute to growing and strengthening capacity in the archive.

### **Honor the Wisdom of the Community**

People who suffer marginalization in society create community-based archives because they feel a need to preserve their history as a way to assert their humanity, to strengthen their local communities, and to ensure their stories are represented in the larger historical record. These archives are mostly maintained by the passion, labor, and wisdom of the people that create them, and those people are usually part of a long-standing local community of support where there is a deep understanding of issues and how to solve them. When academic library partners ignore these crucial aspects of how these archives exist, and their value and impact to their local communities, they miss a vital opportunity to learn and to meaningfully contribute. Academic library partners should honor the wisdom of the local community where these community-based archives exist by listening to the people who are currently doing the work and who have historically been doing the work.

## **Recommendations for Scholars**

### **Don't be Extractive**

In all academic projects that include community-based archives, scholars should always ask themselves what they are bringing to the archive and the community and weigh that against what they are taking away. These considerations should include intellectual resources, compensation, hard resources, and time, etc. Community-based archives are already operating at a disadvantage in terms of resources so your project should actively promote capacity-building and sustainability activities at the archives without placing unnecessary burdens on staff or the community. Scholars should also consider that they enter into partnerships with community-based archives carrying immense privilege. This privilege should be leveraged in support of advancing the mission and goals of the archive.

### **Practice Equity**

Scholars conducting research or working in partnership with community-based archives should ensure they are engaging in equitable ways. The areas where equity fails the most in these relationships are usually around fair compensation to individuals and equitable financial support to the archive on grant projects; acknowledging the intellectual contributions of the archive in researcher success, publications, exhibits, etc.; and labor allocation in collaborative work. Equitable relationships and practices bring benefits to community-based archives that promote capacity growth and that increase the prospects that the archive can achieve sustainability in several areas of their work.

### **Be Transparent**

Trust should be a foundational value upholding collaborative work between community-based archives and scholars. A lack of transparency erodes trust for future relationships between community-based archives and the academic community, including scholars and students. Scholars can practice transparency in several ways including asking critical questions of one's work that can reveal gaps in transparency. For example, does the community understand what I am doing, the broader context of my work, and the potential negative impacts? Or, did the community-based archive help to develop grant budget, are they included equitably, and did they approve the final version? Transparency also protects the community-based archive from entering into harmful partnerships that can jeopardize spaces that are already facing precarity because they are short staffed and under-resourced.

## Immediate Outcomes

The Architecting Sustainable Futures Symposium had an immediate impact on the participants and the work to build capacity and to grow sustainability in community-based archives. Following the symposium, many of these effects were made apparent, and some of the outcomes are below.

### Changes to Grant Program Guidelines

At least one grant funder in attendance at Architecting Sustainable Futures has changed some grant program guidelines based on the experience at the symposium. Staff at the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) shared with us that some new changes to their 2019 guidelines<sup>1</sup> for the Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives<sup>2</sup> grant, were partly inspired by the conversations at Architecting Sustainable Futures. The requests they heard from the practitioner about how funders should build in greater protections for smaller institutions partnering on grants with larger institutions, and to promote more equitable partnerships, was pivotal to some of the changes they made.

Some of the specific changes they made to the guidelines in response to discussions at Architecting Sustainable Futures include requiring the lead applicants to list the primary contact at each partner institution, and informing them that:

*"CLIR may share the submitted application and feedback from CLIR's review panel with the individuals listed here and include them on relevant correspondences." (page 6)*

CLIR has also added a series of tick boxes (page 7) to ensure that:

1. *"The Digitizing Hidden Collections application guidelines have been shared with representatives from all institutions partnering on this project."*
2. *"Representatives from all institutions partnering on this project have had the option to participate in the project design process and have been given an opportunity to contribute feedback and edits to the draft proposal."*
3. *"Representatives from all institutions partnering on the project have been kept informed throughout the proposal design process, and the final application*

*materials have been shared, in full, with the primary contacts listed above."*

The updated application has Added language about equitable partnerships to the "Why we ask" boxes (pages 7-8). and added a prompt specific to collaborative partners in the Budget Narrative section, to promote greater equity in the distribution of funds:

*"Describe how grant funds will be shared by the participating partner institutions and how the proposed distribution of funds will encourage an equitable partnership. If one or more institutions receive a significantly greater proportion of the grant funds than the other collaborating partner(s), explain the reasoning behind this distribution of funds and how it will benefit all partners."*

CLIR staff mentioned that these changes were just a starting point, and they hope the questions they have added to the guidelines will inspire applicants to start thinking more seriously about the nature of their partnerships and will help to increase transparency. Additionally, at least one participant from the Architecting Sustainable Futures symposium currently serves on the grant review panel for CLIR's Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant program. These are compelling examples of the benefit of having community-based archives practitioners and funders in the same room helping each other to understand their practices better and to imagine and create solutions collaboratively.

Architecting Sustainable Futures was a practice in equity in terms of sharing ideas and potential solutions. We hope other funders will be encouraged by the work at CLIR in enacting some changes in their program guidelines that would mark clearer and safer paths to securing funding a for community-based archives and other small, under-resourced, cultural heritage organizations.

### The Sustainable Futures Blog

Part of the Architecting Sustainable Futures project called for essays from community-based archives participants as a way to guide the conversation at the symposium. We commissioned five essays as part of this process. Because the submissions were so rich in how they demonstrated the value of community-based archives and some of the issues they face, we decided

<sup>1</sup> CLIR: Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives Application Guidelines, [https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/09/DHC\\_Guidelines\\_1.18.19.pdf](https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/09/DHC_Guidelines_1.18.19.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> CLIR: Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives, <https://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/>

to make them the foundation for a blog. Sustainable Futures<sup>3</sup> is a first of its kind blog where community-based archives founders and practitioners write about the value of their work and the impact of their archives.

Since officially launching in July 2018, it has become an advocacy space where community-based archives can showcase what they do. To date, the blog has eleven posts with several more in the pipeline to be published in 2019. Since it started, over 6600 people have viewed posts on the blog and posts have been read 2100 times. The blog has an average of 13 visitors per day. We believe these are strong numbers for a blog on community-based archives that is less than a year old and continues to grow. In addition to raising awareness about the existence and value of community-based archives, the blog has also become a resource for students and professors in library and information sciences program. The tweet displayed below is just one example of the several messages we have received from individuals who value the blog as an essential resource for teaching and learning.

### Knowledge and Collaboration Between Community-Based Archives Practitioners Who Met at Architecting Sustainable Futures

"At the Southern California Library, we are already benefiting from the relationships forged in New Orleans. We have shared some of our resources and expertise with other participants, and are scheduling a training with the Texas After Violence Project, a symposium participant, to learn from the methods they use to respectfully document communities experiencing trauma. We are also benefiting from critical feedback from SHIFT staff that we anticipate will strengthen our overall fundraising and sustainability."

— Yusef Omowale, Director of the Southern California Library and ASF Attendee



<sup>3</sup> <https://medium.com/community-archives>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/fromADMwithlove/status/1029559616714276866>



Several community-based archives founders and practitioners in attendance at the symposium connected around similar issues they faced at their archives and were able to collaborate on work post-symposium. In speaking with those who had built these relationships and who were actively working on projects, it was discovered that the real driver of seeking collaboration was because Architecting Sustainable Futures was the first time they had been in the same room with people doing similar work and discussing common funding and programming issues their archives faced. Most of the attendees revealed that although they had been having conversations about capacity building and sustainability within their archives, this was the first time they felt they were part of a community that was collectively trying to address the issue.

This sense of a newly found community was a key reason collaboration between community-based archives grew out of the symposium. These sentiments and the collaborations reinforced the necessity for a more intentional network to support community-based archives grow their capacity and develop sustainable models of funding echoed in other project findings.<sup>5</sup> The impact of knowledge sharing and access to information for organizations that are traditionally resource-poor is invaluable. The Architecting Sustainable Futures symposium demonstrated the potentially immense value of a formal

national network where these relationships can be formed more easily and where they can eventually lead to meaningful collaborative work that benefits community-based archives.

### **Collaborative Project Development and Grant Writing Support**

"I came away from the symposium with a renewed sense of purpose and confidence for the work we do... I made invaluable connections and heard so many similar stories of push-back, misunderstanding and straight-up prejudice, as well as the standard frustrations of funding and legitimacy in the field. I appreciated the fluidity of the schedule and the balance between social activities and breakout sessions. The facilitation was superb (I stole tons of ideas for my own projects!) and everything seemed well organized and well planned. My only complaint is that I'm just now discovering the good work being done by Shift (which is really a failing on my part) and I hope I can continue to be involved."

— Community-Based Archives Practitioner Attending ASF



**Symposium attendees gather for group photo after dinner.**

<sup>5</sup> <http://diversifyingthedigital.org/index.html>

In addition to helping community-based archives connect, the Architecting Sustainable Futures symposium also enabled collaborations between diverse types of organizations. One such effort is a collaborative project under development to build a network that supports capacity building and sustainability in community-based archives and other small, independent cultural heritage organizations, and specifically those documenting the histories and cultures of marginalized and oppressed people. Planning for this collaborative effort has included Shift Design, South Asian American Digital Archive, Southern California Library, Digital Library Federation, and Shorefront Legacy Center. The idea is a direct result of conversations coming out of the Architecting Sustainable Futures meeting, where we heard calls from community-based archives to help develop a support network where ideas, information, and resources can be generated and shared.

In addition to this potential project, several community-based archives in attendance at the event developed new relationships that could support their pursuit of grant funds. For example, Shift Design is both formally and informally assisting community-based archives on grant applications and also connecting community-based archives to other professionals in their networks that could help make grant applications stronger, including digital collections and technical experts, community engagement professionals, and content experts.

### **Increased Funder Awareness of Community-Based Archives Challenge**

The project team intentionally invited several representatives from funding organizations to attend Architecting Sustainable Futures because we wanted to create opportunities where funders could be in the room with practitioners from community-based archives for conversations about capacity building and sustainability. These conversations proved fruitful and contributed to more profound knowledge for community-based archives practitioners about how funders make their decisions. For funders, it was a great opportunity to listen to community-based archivists about issues they face in generating capital, applying for grants, and general administrative operation of small archives operations with little help in terms of staff or other resources. For example, funders were able to listen to archives staff talk about the precarity of existing on project-based grant funding and donations, and not being able to use grant funds for operating costs. Funders were also able to hear about the difficulty for small community-based archives with barely any staff, to navigate the grant application process, while they also heard strategies for addressing that issue, including funding more collaborative community-based archives projects, resist restricting funding only to not-for-profits, and lowering the burden of application and reporting process for community-based archives. The funders in attendance acknowledged these difficulties, including how traditional funding models and strategies could contribute.

**“The symposium was highly useful to me as a funder. It provided much food for thought that I’ve shared with my colleagues and will likely inform the guidelines for our current and future grant programs.”**

**— Grant Program Officer,  
Attendee at ASF**

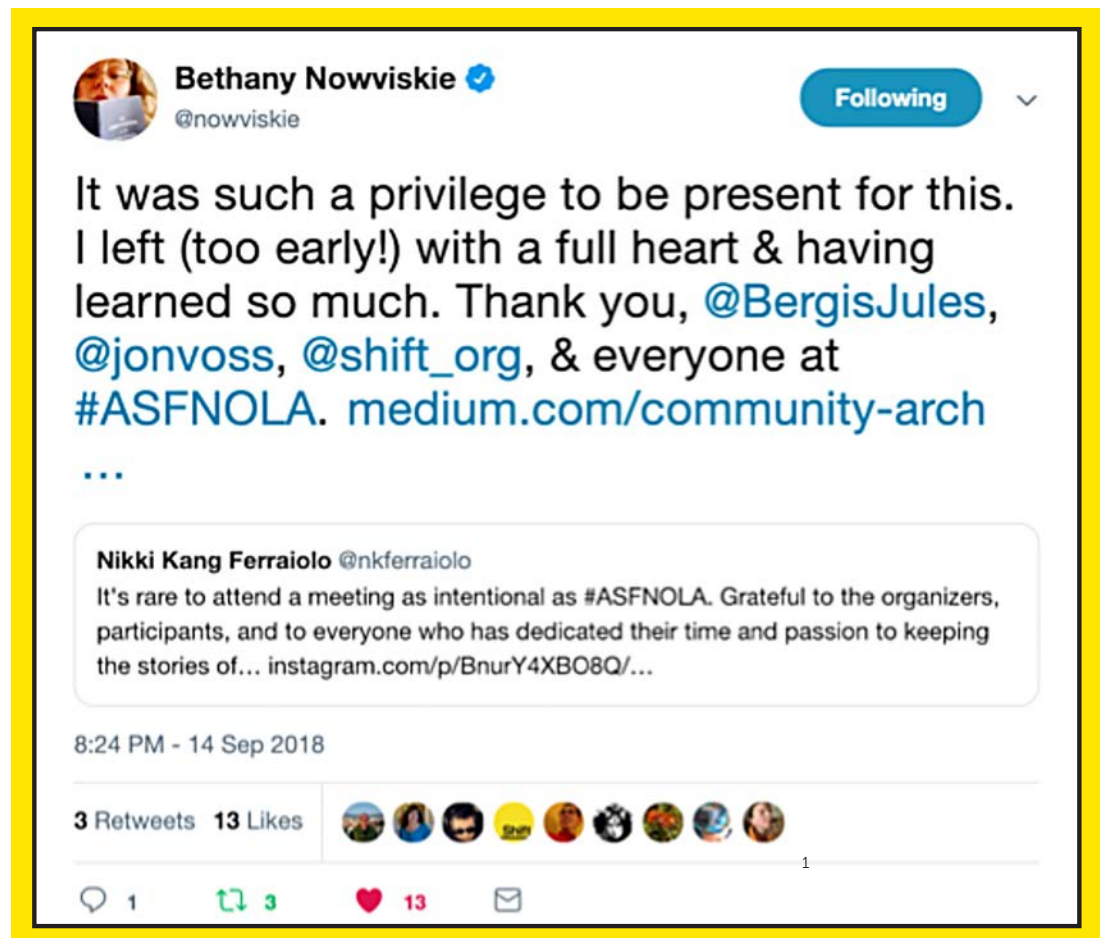
## Attendee Testimonials

*"I had the privilege of attending the Architecting Sustainable Futures Symposium, hosted by SHIFT, and it was exceptionally helpful to me in my role staffing a small community-based archive. These type of gatherings rarely prove worth the time away from under-resourced work at our home organizations, however this was the exception due to the deliberative care SHIFT took in putting this event together. The diversity and quality of participants they invited, and the preparation they put into setting the agenda and facilitation aided us in achieving concrete outcomes that will serve our collective work moving forward. ...We are already benefiting from the relationships forged in New Orleans.*

*We have shared some of our resources and expertise with other participants, and are scheduling a training with Texas After Violence, a symposium participant, to learn from the methods they use to respectfully document communities experiencing trauma. We are also benefiting from critical feedback from SHIFT staff that we anticipate will strengthen our overall fundraising and sustainability. We want to extend a big thank you to the Mellon Foundation for supporting this work, and to SHIFT for putting together such a rewarding event. We look forward to future collaborations."*

*"The symposium was highly useful to me as a funder. It provided much food for thought that I've shared with my colleagues and will likely inform the guidelines for our current and future grant programs. I got a lot out of the small focus group discussions and field trips and meals were WONDERFUL.*

*I loved how community stories permeated every aspect of the two days and how you made the city of New Orleans a central character in the meeting. Opening with the Storybox activity was helpful for establishing a trusting foundation for the symposium, which is particularly important to me given the intrinsic power dynamic between program officers and applicants. The Shift team was wonderful to work with and created a sense of community amongst participants. Tayo was a terrific moderator and Jon's enthusiasm is contagious. The activity that felt the least useful was the one towards the end where we were asked to come up with solutions to problems using a set rubric. It felt like we had to shoehorn many small actionable ideas into a bigger one that diluted the smaller ideas to the point of being lost. But overall it was a unique and inspiring experience. Thank you for all the thought that went into it and for including me!"*



1 <https://twitter.com/nowwiskie/status/1040803554234171392?s=20>



*"I came away from the symposium with a renewed sense of purpose and confidence for the work we do... I made invaluable connections and heard so many similar stories of push-back, misunderstanding and straight-up prejudice, as well as the standard frustrations of funding and legitimacy in the field. I appreciated the fluidity of the schedule and the balance between social activities and breakout sessions. The facilitation was superb (I stole tons of ideas for my own projects!) and everything seemed well organized and well planned. My only complaint is that I'm just now discovering the good work being done by Shift (which is really a failing on my part) and I hope I can continue to be involved."*

*"I was so impressed with the ASF meeting. The conversations I had there felt very honest and productive and seemed to bring participants closer. We identified real problems and brainstormed some immediate actions that could be taken as well as bigger changes that require long-term planning. I've already added some of the themes and concerns raised in this meeting to the agenda of our next review panel meeting (our review panels also serve as advisory boards for our programs), so the initiative is already shaping internal conversations with funders. It's good to know that Shift is planning to do more of this type of work. I'll keep it in mind and do what I can to spread the word. Let me know if there's anything I can do to support ASF follow-up work. I'd love to be part of continued conversations!"*

*"Huge thanks to you and everyone at Shift. That was an incredible couple of days and I know there was a ton of planning that went on behind the scenes to make that as productive as it was. I have a few other thoughts that are percolating, so may send a longer message when I have a chance to put them to paper but for now just wanted to express my extreme gratitude for having had a chance to participate in that event."*

*"Thank you, Bergis, for one of the most impactful experiences in my career! We've always struggled to be on equal footing with our neighbors in the library, but I'd thought it was a one-off kind of thing, not something that was rampant in the field. I have a stronger vocabulary for what we encounter within the university system, and such wonderful new allies to refer to my colleagues. Your team is stellar and the facilitation was dynamic and fun. I heard someone say as she was leaving that she'd never enjoyed breakout sessions but had no problem participating, and I can echo those sentiments. You created an atmosphere of collaboration and respect, and it was such a pleasure to be a part of this process. So, again, many thanks to you and Jon, Tayo, Lynette, and Hali."*

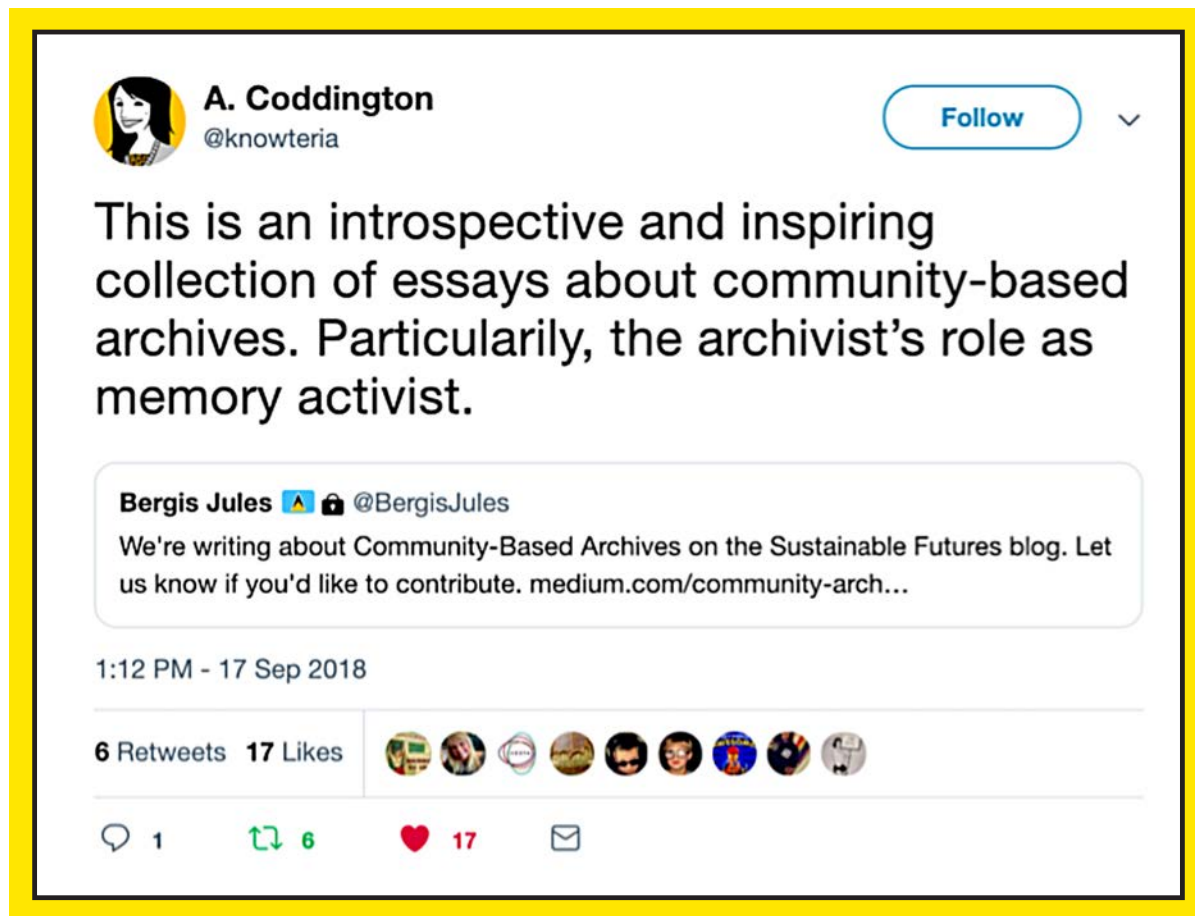
**"I came away from the symposium with a renewed sense of purpose and confidence for the work we do."**

**-ASF Participant**



## Essays

A set of essays were commissioned for the symposium as a way to help guide the conversations during the meeting and to also engage with a broader set of people about our work. The essays were eventually the basis for the creation of the Sustainable Futures Blog,<sup>1</sup> a public forum for community-based archives practitioners, content creators and allies, to write about their experiences. The essays were written by a selection of individuals from the project advisory committee and symposium invitees. Essay authors were chosen because of their extensive experience either founding, leading, or advocating for community-based archives and because they had all expressed interest in addressing how funding can impact capacity building and the long-term sustainability of community-based archives. The essays were disseminated to invited symposium participants one month in advance of the gathering. Essay authors were compensated for their labor.



<sup>1</sup> <https://medium.com/community-archives>

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/knowteria/status/1041782056559304705?s=20>

# Against Precarity: Towards a Community-Based Notion of Fiscal Sustainability

Michelle Caswell and Samip Mallick  
South Asian American Digital Archive



**SAADA “Where We Belong: Artists in the Archive”  
Symposium in Philadelphia** (April 8, 2017)

Since we co-founded the [South Asian American Digital Archive \(SAADA\)](#) a decade ago, we have been challenged by a number of professional archivists working for dominant Western institutions who tell us that SAADA is not an archive, in part, because of what they perceive as our fiscal precarity. How can we be committed to the long-term stewardship of materials when there is no guarantee of our organization’s long-term sustainability? We hope to answer this question with this blog post, both demonstrating some of the specifics of how we have succeeded in becoming fiscally sustainable so far, and arguing more broadly that true fiscal sustainability for community archives coalescing around marginalized identities must be rooted in support from *within the community* rather than from dominant institutions and funding agencies.

First, a very brief note about SAADA. SAADA preserves and makes accessible the history of the more than 4.3 million individuals in the U.S. who trace their heritage to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Maldives, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe. We are a post-custodial archive which means that, rather than accept physical custody of materials, we borrow them from individuals, families, organizations, and other archival repositories, we digitize them and describe using culturally appropriate terminology, make them

freely accessible online, and then return the originals. We have a particular emphasis on collecting materials related to early South Asian immigration to the U.S. pre-1965, to anti-South Asian race riots, to labor, student, and religious organizations, to political activism, and to artists and intellectuals. We collect materials that are not just celebratory in nature, but that reflect the diverse range of South Asian American experiences from the turn of the 20th century to the present.

We have slowly grown SAADA from an organization that had an annual operating budget of \$300 a decade ago (consisting of our own founding donations), to one that has had an operating budget of approximately \$100,000 each year for the last three years. We have also maintained a paid full-time staff member and multiple part-time staff members for the last five years. So how have we done this? Our own early assumptions were that support would come from large foundations and government agencies, the sources that dominant Western institutions have been able to rely on to launch and sustain archiving projects. For us, it has been quite the opposite. Following feedback from grant panel reviewers who thought of SAADA’s work as “too niche,” we instead adopted a strategy of building a broad base of community support. Over the last five years, 927 individual donors have made 3,232 donations of \$73.84 on average to the organization, contributing more than

a quarter million dollars of support. Grant support, when it did come, came first from community-based family foundations and giving circles (like the Asian Giving Circle in Chicago and Asian Mosaic Fund in Philadelphia) that recognized the critical need for supporting grassroots efforts in the Asian American community, which are the recipient of less than 1% of foundation dollars (despite making up 7% of the U.S. population). We've also had to be creative, experimenting with non-traditional funding sources like crowdfunding (we raised nearly \$40K for a book project with a [kickstarter campaign](#)), corporate sponsorships, merchandise, speaker fees, and project-based funding. We've finally begun finding some success with foundation funding, with grants from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and NEH coming in the last three years. But this funding has come for one-time projects, and we continue to rely on our broad base of community support to fund the day-to-day operations of the organization.

As these specifics demonstrate, our independence as an organization has come at a price; we sometimes feel like we're spending more time thinking about fundraising than we are in acquiring, digitizing, describing and promoting archival materials. For us, that equation has been worth it because it has meant that SAADA's priorities are dictated by our board members and users (who are primarily members of the community we serve and represent), and not by an external institution or individual. By acknowledging this, we see how funding has played a central role in enabling our archival work; it is not adjacent to it or an intrusion on it. (Archives of all types would do well to acknowledge how fundamental money is to the archival endeavor.)

As any fundraising professional will tell you, nonprofits need to be creative and diversify sources of income to be sustainable.<sup>3</sup> If you rely on a single individual's philanthropic generosity to fund your organization, you will be beholden to their priorities and their finances. Those priorities are not only subject to their individual whims and the state of the market, but they most likely replicate, rather than challenge the inequalities perpetuated by the capitalist system that rewarded them in the first place. Activists organized under the INCITE! collective have challenged us to think critically about what they call "the non-profit industrial complex" and

have helped underscore for us that if we are to build "liberatory archives," liberatory forms of sustainability need to be baked into our organizational structures.<sup>4</sup>

To be clear: we are not arguing that community archives should **not** accept funding from government agencies or private foundations (such policies would need to be determined by each organization), but rather such sources should be seen as a supplement to broad, community-based support, as evidenced by small gifts from a large number of individuals from within the community. Organizations are accountable to whomever funds them; we have built SAADA to be accountable to a broad base of the South Asian American community and not a handful of elite philanthropists or agencies.

We also wish to acknowledge the relative wealth of the South Asian American community, recognizing that communities most marginalized by racial capitalism in the U.S. do not have the same access to resources that many of SAADA's community members have. At the same time, we are inspired by organizations like the Sylvia Rivera Law Project that are creating membership-driven funding models supported by trans people of color—those made the most vulnerable in our society by all accounts.<sup>3</sup> We are also heartened by statistics that households with an income of \$100,000 or less (92% of all households) contribute 52% of all giving in the U.S. Despite our previous preconceptions about grants and philanthropists, everyday people sustain community organizations.

But for archives to raise money from a broad base of community members, we need to do work that proves history is not a luxury, but an everyday necessity. *How* we do that is one of our biggest challenges as an organization and as a field.

Now, when we get asked about SAADA's long-term sustainability, we respond with another question: How precarious is it to steward collections representing communities of color in predominantly white institutions in our current white supremacist neoliberal climate? The past decade of working on SAADA has shown us that true sustainability is built from within rather than without the community we serve and represent.

<sup>3</sup> Rickke Mananzala and Dean Spade, "The Nonprofit Industrial Complex and Trans Resistance," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 5, no.1 (March 2008) available via Social Science Research Network, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1201022](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1201022).

<sup>4</sup> INCITE! *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Nonprofit Industrial Complex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017)



# Archival Legibility: Sustainability through Storytelling across Generations

Jaime Ann Lee  
Arizona Queer Archives



**“How we as members of local and global communities remember the past is wholly bound up with how we imagine what is possible in the future. In this light, archivists are not just memory activists, but visionaries whose work reconceives imagined worlds through space and time.”**

— Jarrett Drake<sup>1</sup>

**POP-UP Archive Event of the Arizona Queer Archives in collaboration with Feminist Action Research in Rhetoric, FARR, April 2015.** (L to R: Adela C. Licona, Anushka Peres, Ana M. Ribero, and Alejandra Ramírez.)

Last spring, I sat at a café across from the intern working for the [Arizona Queer Archives \(AQA\)](#) at that time. He wanted to meet to, among more, ask me what it was like to be an “older queer.” It was a time of transition for him and he had just had top surgery. He was transitioning from female to male—“not man, but boy,” he explained. Later he had invited me to attend his senior presentation where he acknowledged our café conversation as important for him to understand that he just might have “a future,” one that he might even look forward to. He spoke of the gratitude he felt to see and know lesbian,

<sup>1</sup> [https://medium.com/community-archives/archival-legibility-legitimacy-sustainability-through-storytelling-across-generations-d0849a4f346d#\\_ftn1](https://medium.com/community-archives/archival-legibility-legitimacy-sustainability-through-storytelling-across-generations-d0849a4f346d#_ftn1)



gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) elders in the community and in the archives. Two years earlier, I collaborated with *FARRistas*<sup>2</sup> to create a POP-UP Archive of the AQA. The POP-UP Archive facilitated performances of oral history excerpts from 1970's lesbian feminists<sup>3</sup> at mostly un-marked sites, which were meaningful to those very histories. A number of elder lesbian feminists attended the event and were moved to hear their stories—of a feminist bookstore, a collective living space for women, a feminists-in-the-media organization, and an anti-racist childcare center—performed by a new generation of feminists. Both of these intimate encounters among past, present, and future pose a queer alternative to the traditional concept of 'archives' and the circulatory model of social circulation as an "operational metaphor...in this case for rethinking how performances ebb, flow, travel, gain substance and integrity, acquire traction, and not."<sup>4</sup>

I write about these experiences as an entry point into the important role that LGBTQ-identified archives and their stories as well as lived and living histories can play across generations. Such archives provide evidence of lives having been (or being) lived while also imagining a future. I argue that long-term sustainability of community archives, then, is integral to such imaginings and makes urgent the need for new funding models that are aware and can incorporate the relational power of archival productions and their effects today and over time.

These anecdotes highlight the storytelling element that is generated by and generates community archives. I consider the words 'generating' and 'generations' as linking what community archives *do* in and out of the communities they are established to represent. I also consider the words for their productive implications particularly with regard to sustainable funding. What will it take for such archives to become sustainable? Although the traditional concept of archives delimits how archives can be imagined in both the short and long term, I look to the ways archives are generated by their own community expertise that inform their organizational structures while also recognizing that each community archives is differently situated in and across communities and their stakeholders.

When I founded the Arizona LGBTQ Storytelling Project in 2008 as Arizona's first LGBTQ archives, I owned a multimedia production company and produced social justice documentary films along with videos for local non-profits. I was entrenched in the community as activist, artist, and media-maker. Informed by the principles of social justice media, I trained interested

community members to use video production equipment so that they could collect their own oral histories; and I collected oral histories, edited and compressed them to be streamed in iTunes when video iPods were still the rage. I returned to graduate school in the spring of 2010 to learn how to develop archives. As part of my doctoral research, I founded the Arizona Queer Archives in 2011 and immediately migrated the Arizona LGBTQ Storytelling Project to be its cornerstone collection. I thereby incorporated storytelling as its programmatic focus. At this time, the AQA was given a space in the Institute for LGBT Studies at the University of Arizona. In addition to a small room to build the AQA's physical collections, the Institute for LGBT Studies has financially supported the AQA's growth with graduate assistant labor, off-site storage, and webhosting. As the archives were installed in this particular institutional space and yet committed to the LGBTQ communities I have been co-creating it with, I wrestled with the urgency to keep the archives situated in the hands of community by meaningfully establishing the AQA's mission and collection policies through community forums and ongoing participation.

In my research, I have increasingly been thinking about 'legibility' and how the university/institution often recognizes archives differently than the community because of their distinct attention to community needs, desires, and participation. Whenever community archives are situated at the intersections of university/institution, there are degrees of vulnerability that should be considered and addressed. What does it take for a community archives to be 'legible'? How, then, does 'legibility' play a role in 'legitimacy'? Consider the role that community archives have played in non-dominant communities to legitimate lived and living histories that are often erased, obscured, and marginalized. These thoughts become part of your story.

Drawing on my decades as a filmmaker and producer of media for nonprofits, I return to the Benoven Model for Sustainable Funding. This model employs a four-step plan that focuses on mission and community as intricately linked to the long-term sustainability of non-profit organizations. A part of this model has been a short fundraising video to tell the story of the non-profit through intimate interviews with people whom the organization serves. The video is screened at fundraising events to emotionally connect audiences to the mission of the organization in ways that move them to give as part of a multiple-year giving plan. I am thinking about how such a model might work for community archives. The communities who are a part of community archives are often non-dominant and may be situated

<sup>2</sup> The Feminist Action Research in Rhetoric, FARR, is a coalition of rhetoric scholars called to take action at events of both regional and national significance to respond to social inequities.

<sup>3</sup> See the Southwest Feminist Reunite Group collection of oral history interviews at the AQA's digital repository website: [www.azqueerarchives.org](http://www.azqueerarchives.org). Also check out the forthcoming article on the POP-UP Archive and look for the POP-UP Toolkit at the end. Bentley, Elizabeth and Jamie A. Lee, "Performing the Archival Body: Inciting Queered Feminist (Dis)locational Rhetorics through Place-Based Pedagogies," *Peitho: Journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition*, fall 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Royster, J.J. & Kirsch, G.E. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012: 24

in diverse class locations which requires re-thinking how to ignite long-term giving through relevant levels of giving and participation. Community archives, then, might consider what establishing endowments can do for their organizations in the long term. What changes to such a fundraising model would make it effective for community archives developed through and for economically disparate communities?

Thinking through this model with a focus on sustainability, community archives might ask: What stories do you tell about your archives, your collections, and your communities to garner interest? Does this interest turn into a donation? Why or why not? How might the communities participate in the telling of these stories? And to what ends? What partnerships can be built? How can community archives harness the power of the archives and what it does in and for non-dominant communities to build an endowment to ensure long-term sustainability?

As founder and director of the AQA, I am concerned about its long-term sustainability. I am faculty at the university and have limited time to spend in the archives. Without the time and labor to develop a succinct fundraising strategy, I feel stuck and rely on word of mouth with limited local foundation funding and individual donors. Interns, graduate assistants, and community volunteers help with drumming up fiscal support outside of the university. We have the short term covered but the long term remains uncertain. As archivists and those passionate for community archives, we are the ones to share the archives' messages. We are the ones to generate interest and potential change. Storytelling is at the heart of our work.

What is your story?

# Seismic Shifts: On Archival Fact and Fictions

Jarrett Drake

Harvard Anthropology Department & A People's  
Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland



Protestors in Cleveland, Ohio, marching for truth and justice following the non-indictment of Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson, who killed Michael Brown, Jr. on August 9, 2014. See more items from A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland at <http://www.archivingpoliceviolence.org/>.

Next month I will travel to New Orleans, LA, for the symposium Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives. In advance of that, symposium organizers invited me to write this short commentary for the first session, which is entitled "The Community is the Archive." The first sentence of the session description reads:

*The local communities where community-based archives are based are essential to their development and survival, and underline the social value of community-based archives.*

But let's shift the statement from a declarative to an inquisitive one: *Are local communities essential to the survival of community-based archives?* My argument is that **archivists must shift their paradigms away from the fictive notions of 'local' and 'community-based' towards a more radically precise and politically liberatory language.**

But before I explain why I am using a community archive symposium to challenge the very premise of community archives, I must confess that my own words ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) helped create the problem I am

hoping we will address together at the symposium and beyond. I mention my contributions to the community archives landscape not for their volume or value—indeed, Michelle Caswell and Andrew Flinn have been and remain the concept’s foremost theorists—but to signal a stark separation from previous positions I have espoused. Should you find this commentary confounding to read, be assured that I find it even more confounding to write, yet I do so because I believe it to be more truthful than not.

## Away

That truth begins, in earnest, with the rejection of two words we in archives have come to know, love, and abuse: ‘local’ and ‘community-based.’ I maintain that these terms offer diminishing analytic (and consequently, actionable) value because they constitute the most common of empirical fictions. So compelling are these fictions that they pushed me, in part, to pursue anthropology as a discipline due to its apparent emphasis on examination of ‘local’ and ‘community-based’ phenomena.

How distressing it was, then, to encounter in a foundational seminar the work of anthropologist James Ferguson, who in [this essay](#) deconstructs the dichotomies of local/global and community/state.<sup>1</sup> For Ferguson, these binaries persist because they enable us to think of power and dominion vertically: the local is necessarily ‘down on the ground’ and the global ‘up in the air,’ while the community is likewise a ‘foundation’ and the state a ‘ceiling.’ This view carries damning effects. It further masks and thus entrenches power, rather than revealing and redistributing it. Moreover, it obscures the flows and exchanges between the proximate and approximate, a point underscored more poignantly by the anthropologist Anna Tsing in her article “[The Global Situation](#).”<sup>2</sup>

Archivists who associate themselves and their work with community archives would do well to consider these authors’ arguments and apply it to our own praxis, a reflection that might yield two distinct but compounding conclusions. First, our longing for the local leads us astray and, second, the modifier ‘community’ that precedes ‘archives’ is redundant if not remarkably imprecise. Allow me to elaborate these provocations separately using examples from my experiences as an archivist.

Despite what its name suggests, it would be misleading to characterize [A People’s Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland](#) as a ‘local’ project. Indeed, it contains first-person voices and views of people in the city of

Cleveland, Ohio, who have survived or been directly impacted by police violence. What’s more, the great majority of the incidents happened in Cleveland, as did all of the events to generate the records that populate the archive. Lastly, the archive delivers a mountain of evidence to suggest that the many police agencies in Cleveland function as anti-black and anti-poor terror squads.

However, to bound this project to a locality likewise erases essential facts about the archive’s origins and operations. It emerged, [as we have written](#), from the collaborative brainstorming of more than fifteen people, a small number of whom had never so much as set foot in Cleveland prior. The \$1,265 raised through crowdfunding came from thirty-seven people who were then or now living in different countries and regions of North America; from Michigan to Mexico, from California to Canada. The enormous labor costs for transcription, coding, and data entry were likewise given in-kind by volunteers from places so far flung that it would be nearly impossible to say with certainty where some of the contributors reside, much less why they chose to give their time and talents to strangers on the internet. What one can say, certainly, is that the project was and is far from local. It is, in that same breath, certainly not ‘global,’ whatever that term may mean. The shifting ‘where’ of the archive is not incidental but intentional. It very much increases the likelihood that the archive will persist into time and with it the people’s experiences therein reflected.

The only aspect more misleading about community archives than its yearning for the local is the adjective ‘community’ that in many ways convenes the nascent field into a semi-coherent whole. Prefixing ‘community’ or ‘community-based’ to archives implies that an archive could indeed exist otherwise; that perhaps there are archives independent of communities or not based in them. The community archive literature—which, again, I own my stock in proliferating—seemingly qualifies its modifier in contrast, chiefly, to state-run, state-like, and mainstream archives. Yet this is insufficient on many fronts, especially when one considers Max Weber’s pithy (yet contested, surely) definition of the state as:

*a human **community** that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.*<sup>4</sup>

In this light, ‘community’ archives have largely contrasted themselves to...community archives. For instance, in one of the landmark publications of the community archives discourse, Andrew Flinn, Mary

<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, J. (1998). Transnational Topographies of Power: Beyond “the State” and “Civil Society” in the Study of African Politics. *Occasional Paper of the Roskilde University, International Development Studies*, (19), 45–71. <http://ojs.ruc.dk/index.php/ocpa/article/view/3815>

<sup>2</sup> Tsing, A. (2000). The Global Situation. *Cultural Anthropology*, 15(3), 327–360. <https://courses.washington.edu/globfut/TsingCA.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, F. (2005). Globalization. In *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (pp. 91–112). Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.

<sup>4</sup> Weber, M. (1946). *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.



Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd define community as “any group of people who come together and present themselves as such.”<sup>5</sup> Taking this definition on its own terms, how would one distinguish community archives created by people of an ethnic minority from the state archives that white supremacists and Lost Cause believers created in the Deep South of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century<sup>6</sup>? This is not a rhetorical question. Indeed, in the latter case, men and women of the former Confederate States of America who lobbied for the establishment of state archives truly believed that their experiences and views risked erasure and obliteration. They, too, qualify as representing a particular community, as do the white supremacist terrorists who marched on Charlottesville, Virginia, in August of 2017 to the chant of “you will not replace us” in reaction to the decision by the Charlottesville city government to remove a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee.

By any metric of the definition of “community,” one is compelled to characterize literally every archive as a ‘community archive.’ This is the case for the University Archives at which I worked before leaving the archival profession as well as for the State Archives where I worked before library school. Both repositories represent manifestations of a community coming forward to name itself as such. Moreover, that one of them is a private institution does not absolve it of its proximity and intimate relationship with the state, as indeed Princeton University receives millions of dollars every year from municipal, state, and federal governments in the form of grants and tax breaks. Indeed, the very symposium for which I author this commentary is funded by a foundation created and sustained through federal estate tax codes and the abilities of donors to give money that they are then exempt from paying to the federal government. So, for as much as community archives and those who have done the work (myself included) with them in the US like to contrast themselves with the state, we are convening a forum on said community archives under the extended auspices of the state.

## Towards

To be clear, this is not necessarily an uncommon or undesirable state of affairs. However it does require that we as a group of ‘community archive’ practitioners and scholars begin to name the stakes of our work more candidly and clearly by transitioning to a language of precise political claims and a liberatory lens to accompany it. This includes, I would argue, dropping the ‘community’ and ‘community-based’ modifiers from our vocabulary and lexicon, as it intimates that state-run or state-like archives are acommunal, when in fact they are very much so (visit Princeton Reunions if you disagree). Moreover, this shift requires transitioning beyond static notions of ‘local’ communities where things, people, or ideas are ‘based’ and instead gravitating towards an orientation that envisions the political projects of archives—and, on this point, we must convince ourselves and everyone within earshot—as connections more than places. It is incumbent that we embrace, encourage, and engender archival projects that are intentionally and strategically location-less; or, actually, location-full.

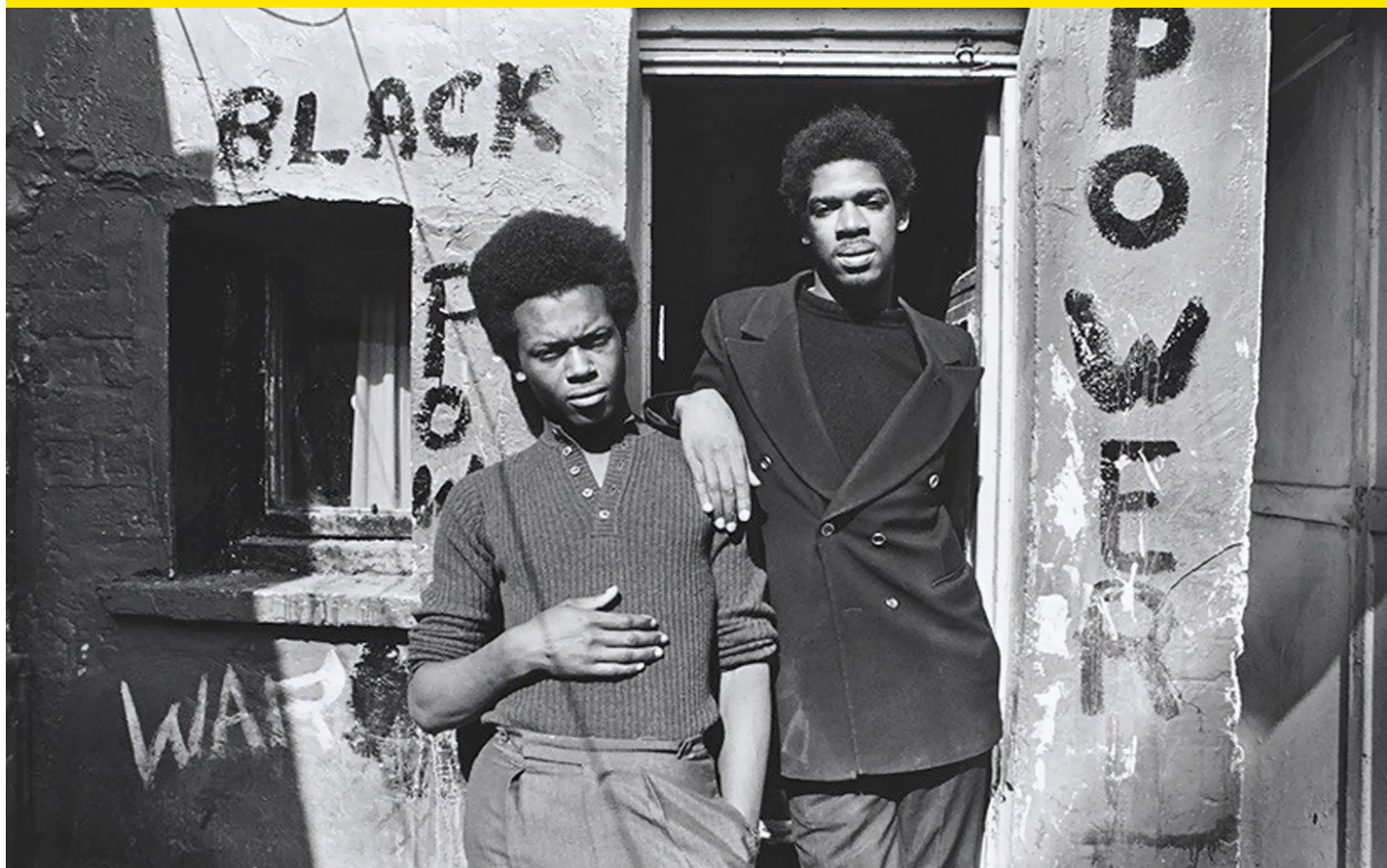
It has been my argument that the field and laborers of ‘community archives’ should radically reframe its orientation to the work and make clear their political projects. This is the true essence of an archive, which, we would do well to remember, originates from the Greek word archon meaning ‘ruler.’ I have no delusion that, suddenly, the majority of the projects that classify themselves as community archives will convene a conference and all agree on their political claims. Actually, it is because I suspect there to be a wide variance of political aspirations amongst community archives that I think it all the more important that we announce our aims. We are not collecting history for history’s sake. In reality, the notion that ‘mainstream’ or ‘state-like’ archives do so might be the biggest fiction of them all. But the fact of the matter is that ‘community’ archives have not fared much better on this front, yet the opportunity exists to embody the seismic shift in paradigms that we want to see in society.

<sup>5</sup> Flinn, A., Stevens, M., & Shepherd, E. (2009). Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream. *Archival Science*, 9(1–2), 71–86.

<sup>6</sup> Galloway, P. (2006). Archives, Power, and History: Dunbar Rowland and the Beginning of the State Archives of Mississippi (1902–1936). *The American Archivist*, 69(1), 79–116. <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.69.1.m462n0564g87jqm0>.

# Imagination and Luck: Capacity Building at Black Cultural Archives

Doreen Foster (Former Deputy Director)  
The Black Cultural Archives



**Colin Jones, *Untitled, 1973–76, from the series 'The Black House'.***  
**Museum no. E.300–2013.** © Colin Jones/ Autograph ABP/ Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

## Imagination

Back in 1981 when [Len Garrison](#) the principal founder of [Black Cultural Archives](#) and his colleagues lamented the impact that alienation from the majority culture and racism was having on young black Britons they believed that the creation of a museum that held all the stories of black presence in Britain was part of the answer. In his poem, “Where are our Heroes, Martyrs and Monuments?” Garrison reflected on the absence of buildings and monuments, statues and plaques that celebrated and marked the presence and contributions

of black people historically and in the present. How much more richer our lives would be if only we knew the stories of our heroes and sheroes. Of the [Ivory Bangle Lady](#) or [Septimius Severus](#), [Seaman William Brown](#) or [Dido Elizabeth Belle](#). What if there were a monumental museum in which their stories were told?

For over 20 years, Len and his colleagues gathered and were given material that chronicled the political, social and cultural context in which black people in Britain were living. During this period the organisation

existed on the precious support of volunteers, principally activists in the community. This dedication created the backbone of the archive which is now one of the most comprehensive collections documenting black life in Britain.

### **Luck**

In 2003 after two decades in rented premises the director (on [secondment](#) from the local authority) saw an opportunity to create a permanent home for the archives and to concretise the significance of the archives to Brixton and Brixton as a site of historical significance to black people in Britain. A derelict long abandoned building was gifted to the archives on a [peppercorn rent](#). The organisation was presented with the challenge of making the case for the financing of a building based culturally specific monument more modest in scale than Len Garrison's vision but monumental in ambition nonetheless. The support of the local authority and a leap of faith by the [Heritage Lottery Fund](#) and other pioneering funders who had never funded a black led capital project on this scale in the UK. The dream of a monument was becoming real.

### **Models of Funding**

The model of funding in the UK is different to that in the United States. Most cultural organisations regardless of scale have traditionally existed on a mixed portfolio of public funding, trusts and foundations, individual giving and earned income. The past ten years has seen a steep decline in funding from the public purse making funding from trusts and foundations hugely competitive. All organisations are being strongly encouraged to increase levels of support from individual giving and earned income. For new organisations a history and track record of successful fundraising are vital to the sustainability and resilience of organisations.

Before the gift of the building, the archives had no history of fundraising however, it was a very lean organisation. There was a single paid member of staff, it occupied rented premises and none of the material was kept in a controlled environment. It went from one person to 15 full-time equivalents in 5 years. This growth was largely supported by one off fixed term funding taking it from less than £60k a year to £700k a year. There is no doubt that the archives could have continued in rented premises with a single member of staff supported by volunteers for another 20 years but, would we be talking about it today and would it have the same impact?

Having a building created opportunities for income generation that rented premises did not afford. There is a shop and a cafe both of which drive traffic to the building and will in time generate a return to support the charity. There is a dedicated learning centre which generates income from a schools programme and public programme. And, an exhibition space which engages visitors with archive material and content that

would otherwise be locked away in the archive store. Each exhibition reaches 10k visitors on average which generates further income—not huge sums however a key challenge has been to develop a culture of paying whether that be for entry to an exhibition or an audio guide. Most exhibitions in the UK are free to enter. The major galleries charge for entry to “special” exhibitions but you can wander in and view the permanent collection free of charge. Growing all these income streams will not create sustainability but it will contribute towards creating a more resilient organisation.

### **Who is it for?**

The Archives have clearly broken the mould at least in the UK. Traditionally, culturally specific spaces were created for culturally specific groups. When we started to refresh the vision and purpose of the organisation back in 2013, we deliberately created statements about our role in completing the national narrative—how can you write about British history without including our stories. Shifting the narrative from a community archive to a national archive has helped to position the work and its importance as a national asset for all rather than a marginal project for a specific community. This does not and has not led to a dilution of the work and what we have to say. If anything it has sharpened our thinking and approaches to engaging with others. And, the diversity of audience that we have attracted demonstrates that apparently culturally specific stories can have mainstream relevance and impact.

### **Impact: History + Building + Professional Staff = Credibility**

Volunteer effort had kept the organisation alive for over twenty years however, it quickly became clear that valuable though volunteer effort remains, it would not have been possible to create and deliver the programmes, exhibitions and a capital project on voluntary effort. The scale of what we have been producing requires a level of expertise, skill and knowledge that the archive is working to develop in volunteers but it is not there yet. Making exhibitions of the quality that we have delivered and maintaining an industry standard storage conditions positions the Archive to collaborate on a more equal footing with other larger and more established institutions. For example, our opening exhibition “[Re-imagine: Black women in Britain](#)” included loans from the [National Portrait Gallery](#) and University College London amongst others and “[Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience 1950s—1990s](#)” the second exhibition, was made entirely of loaned items which we worked with the [V&A](#) to purchase for its collection. Would we have had this level of influence without the history combined with the building and the professional staff?

I look forward to exploring these questions and more at the symposium [Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives](#).



# We Already Are

Yusef Omowale

Southern California Library for Social Studies Research



**Photograph: "The Watts Festival, 1966" by Mark Keats.** In the collection of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. Finding Aid to the Mark Keats collection is in the Online Archive of California.

During the last several years increasing effort has been made to identify how community-based archives can best ameliorate the oppressive effects of dominant archival institutions, as well as support the ongoing labor of what is most generally understood as social justice work. There is seeming consensus as to what a community-based archive should do, and how it should conduct itself. But what is it that will make this work possible? That's is, what are the core values that enable the sustainability of archives that, to paraphrase Audre Lorde, were never meant to survive?

No matter how fundamental, guiding values cannot exist outside of history. Our work, while connected to and informed by the legacies of those who have gone before us, must be rooted firmly in the present. We have arrived at this moment through social movements demanding acknowledgement that we too deserve breath and the joy of life. In response, dominant formations of power have sought to rescue the contradictions of social exclusion and potential attending ruptures, through affirmation, recognition, and legitimacy of minoritized life.



In this context, it is not inevitable that community-based archives represent an alternative to mainstream repositories. In fact, it is more likely that we will serve to undergird the very structures we mean to displace. Today, as foundations, universities, museums, and the like, marshal resources to colonize what remains of the memories of the dispossessed, and author discourses that legitimate such acts—the values we must practice are ones of refusal. Refusal not as an act of negation, but as a condition of possibility.

We must refuse the rules of inclusion, and vocabularies of recognition and legitimacy that are meant to contain our histories. We should not echo articulations that we do not already exist in the archive. We are not marginal or other to the archive, but integral to it. We may be silenced or made invisible, but we have always been present.

Rather than set out to find or discover what has been lost, or made illegible to forms of whiteness, let us begin with the understanding that we have always been here—becoming.

That what, to some, are unofficial or oppositional archives hold the contour of our lived realities, our struggles to exist in landscapes only made possible by our premature death.

A signature achievement of racial capitalism has been to make the pursuit of inclusion and recognition the horizon of our desires. However, inclusion is dialectically tied to exclusion, and the fee for those of us lucky enough to get in is paid by others who do not meet the requirements of empire. As Barbara Smith has noted “Black history’s underlying agenda frequently has been to demonstrate that African Americans are full human beings who deserve to be treated like Americans, like citizens, like men.” That is, to be incorporated into the existing order of capitalism, American exceptionalism, patriarchy and violence.

We must refuse this siren call to offer redemptive narratives and accept conditional affirmation. Too often we struggle to provide archives that offer proof of our innocence. That the violence directed toward us is unjust because we were unarmed, had our hands up, went to good schools, were sober, married the right person, etc. If anything, we should seek to restore the complexities of our humanity, acknowledging the limiting historical conditions that have shaped our choices, and let that serve as the only claim we need to make for a right to peace.

If we are to restore and document our humanity, we must refuse the spectacle for the everyday. The archive has privileged the spectacle to our detriment. Today we can chant the names of a handful of the dead, but these are not litanies for survival. Even community-based archives have proven woefully inadequate in recording the names suffering slow deaths of incarceration,

poverty, and environmental toxicity. We must first seek to archive lives lived in spaces of impossibility.

This archival practice necessitates a refusal of the professionalization of the field. Our communities have always had memory-keepers that intentionally documented and shared our stories. However, the degreed archivist, and approved archival practice, have come to represent the only legitimate way to do this work. Soon there will be institutionally approved ways to do community-based memory work, with attending certification, funding, awards/recognition, and accountability. We should do our best to benefit and learn from the accumulated wisdom of the existing profession, but also refuse attempts at incorporation which will only further alienate our communities from themselves.

In these refusals lie the possibilities of sustainability. Most materially, by refusing offers of inclusion and recognition, and instead demanding redistribution. Our archives have always existed and our communities have always done archival work. It’s being dispossessed of things like our land, our housing, even our health that have made our archives unsustainable.

What we need most are not new institutions with new foundation support, as welcome as that may be, but to continue the struggles for justice and sovereignty for all our communities so that we can continue doing the memory work we have been doing from the beginning.

**“In the trick of politics we  
are insufficient, scarce,  
waiting in pockets of  
resistance, in stairwells, in  
alleys, in vain. The false  
image and its critique  
threaten the common  
with democracy, which  
is only ever to come, so  
that one day, which is only  
never to come, we will be  
more than what we are.  
But we already are. We’re  
already here, moving.  
We’ve been around.”**

— Fred Moten and Stefano Harney

## Advisory Board

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the advisory board members for Architecting Sustainable Futures. These individuals contributed their knowledge and time to the project and helped to make it a successful experience that generated some serious momentum for advancing the work of community-based archives.

- **Michelle Caswell**, Assistant Professor of Archival Studies in the Department of Information Studies at University of California, Los Angeles
- **Andrew Flinn**, Reader in Archival Studies & Oral History and Deputy Vice-Dean of Research in the Department of Information Studies, University College London
- **Ricky Punzalan**, Assistant Professor of Archival Studies at University of Maryland College of Information
- **Jarrett Drake**, Advisory Archivist of A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland and Doctoral Student at Harvard University Department of Anthropology
- **Adriel Luis**, Curator, Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center
- **Dino Robinson**, Founder, Shorefront Legacy Center
- **Lillian Chavez**, Library Director, Mescalero Community Library
- **Lorene Sisquoc**, Curator and Culture Traditions Leader at Sherman Indian High School Museum and Archives
- **T-Kay Sangwand**, Digital Scholarship Librarian, UCLA Libraries
- **Diego Merizalde**, Project Director, National Library of Colombia
- **Patricia Trujillo**, Associate Professor of English and Chicana/o Studies
- **Director of Equity and Diversity**, Northern New Mexico College
- **Rose Mayes**, Co-Founder, Riverside African American Historical Society and the Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California

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## About Us

Shift is a London and New Orleans-based non-profit that designs products and builds experiences to help solve social inequity. Work in the Americas has had a particular focus on cultural heritage, with projects including Historypin, a digital mapping tool used by over 4,000 cultural heritage organizations, and Storybox: story sharing games that bring people one story closer. Shift's recent convenings in New Orleans include the Cultural Heritage & Social Change Summit, the Library Make 'n' Shake, and Architecting Sustainable Futures.