

Archival Outreach: SAA's 1976 Survey

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In 1975, THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS, recognizing the need for archivists to seek a new variety of clientele, established the Committee on the Wider Use of Archives. Openly espousing the position that experience with history-in-the-raw is everyone's right, the committee has lobbied successfully for an increasing number of annual meeting sessions devoted to such activities as archival education, exhibit techniques for documents, publications, and multimedia presentations of archival theories and materials. In 1976 the committee decided to launch an ambitious survey of "outreach" programs underway in four hundred archival institutions nationwide. The decision to subject these institutions to yet another survey was not lightly made; however, the potential value, not only of the information to be gleaned but also of the thought processes to be probed in obtaining it, outweighed the negative aspects of the undertaking.

The committee's initial goal was to create a vehicle for sharing information about outreach programs—a simple directory telling who was doing what. Such a reference tool would be helpful to archivists contemplating similar ventures, particularly if it presented specific information describing the type and scope of individual programs and projects; the nature and source of the services, skills, and funds required to produce them; and some evaluation of their success. This desire for depth led to the inclusion of questions asking how outreach programs were managed, not only in terms of what resources were required, but also where those skills, services, and funds were located and whether they were found within or outside of the institution controlling the program.

The second goal of the survey, though indirect in its method, was almost more important than the first in its potential value for archivists. Simply stated, the second goal was to encourage, by requiring detailed analysis of individual components, careful thought about and attention to overall program planning.

The first level of analysis involved archivists in identifying the outreach elements within the institutions of those archivists. By very broadly defining the term "outreach" to encompass all activities and programs promoting a greater awareness or use of archives, the committee hoped to challenge traditional thinking on the subject. An open-ended definition might lead archivists to look more closely at their own programs to rediscover those activities that serve to increase client awareness and appreciation of the work and collections of the archives.

The second level of inquiry required archivists to think systematically about the outreach efforts they had underway or in final planning stages. Survey ques-

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tions inviting respondents to assess total program/project cost could cause some discomfort, despite the fact that the same “hard look” information was required by budget officers and granting agencies alike. Though focused upon existing programs, the questions were designed to help archivists with future projects. The ability to produce detailed information on cost effectiveness demonstrates that the elements comprising a program have been thoroughly reviewed, a practice that helps to avoid many embarrassing situations caused by failure to plan for hidden costs such as staff time and supplies for in-house services.¹

Coming up with a questionnaire to accomplish all these goals was in itself a formidable task. Reducing everything-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-outreach-programs to a compact format proved to be an impossible task. As a result, the institutions selected for the survey received a three-page, single-spaced “Procrustean bed,” as one respondent termed it, that called for information in short form.² Recipients were asked to complete one questionnaire for each program they felt might fit under the umbrella definition of outreach.

The forms went out; and, within the eight weeks following, some of them came back—23 percent, to be exact. Predictably, many of the four hundred archivists found reason not to respond to the survey; and the reason not least often found was the work required to complete one form per program. But those ninety who did the work took great pains to give detailed information about their programs.

Data from the completed questionnaires was abstracted for manipulation into interpretable form. The first of three statistical tables matches program category with the type of institution reporting (see Table 1). There are two points of

Table 1 Returns of the Survey		
	NUMBER	PERCENT OF TOTAL
(I) Number of questionnaires returned*		
(A) Different institutions:	90	23
(B) Total responses (including letters)	165	
(1) Outreach programs reported-total:	133	
(2) Institutions reporting no program:	28	
(3) Incomplete form:	4	
(II) Reporting institutions by type		
(A) Government archival institutions:	31	34
(B) Historical society		
(1) State level:	7	8
(2) Local level:	3	3
(C) University:	33	37
(D) Private library, Foundation	16	18

* Number of questionnaires sent: One each to four hundred institutional members of SAA, with instructions to duplicate one form for each program.

¹ Sample copies of the basic three-page questionnaire, and the survey report form to describe each program, may be obtained from SAA headquarters.

² Joseph S. Van Why, director, Harriet Beecher Stowe House and Stowe-Day Memorial Library, Hartford, Connecticut, to Ann Pederson, June 4, 1976.

special interest in this profile. First, while it was not surprising that the ever-increasing university archives accounted for the largest number of respondents (33), it was interesting to note that government archives were not far behind (31). This relationship probably results from the interaction of two factors: the mandate which public archives have "to serve the public," and their potentially larger resources than many private institutions. The second observation of note relates to the categories of programs reported (see Table 2). Publications and exhibits were neck-and-neck for the title of most frequent outreach effort, together accounting for a hefty 38 percent of all programs. Next in popularity were lectures/seminars/conferences (12 percent) and slide presentations (9.8 percent), followed by internships/institutes and source material packets (both 5.3 percent). The remaining 27 percent consisted of films, radio/tv, photographs, on-site visits (6.8 percent), oral history (3 percent), workshops (2.3 percent), and unique programs which did not fit into any of the above categories (7.6 percent). Approximately one third of the public archives and universities, and over one half of the private libraries, replied that they had no outreach programs. Undoubtedly some of these negative reports are simply a result of definition. For example, some institutions reporting no outreach programs have well-established publications programs, one of the two most frequently reported outreach activities.

Table 2
Types of Outreach Programs Reported by Institutions

TYPE OF PROGRAM	TYPE OF INSTITUTION				TOTAL
	Government Archives	Historical Society	University	Private	
Exhibits	12	3	10	1	25
Film	2			1	3
Internship/Institute	5	1	1		7
Lectures/Seminars	8		5	3	16
On-site visits	7			2	9
Oral History/Audio Tape		2	2		4
Personalized instruction	1				1
Photographs	1	1		1	3
Publications	10	3	9	3	25
Slides	4	3	5	1	13
Source materials	4	1	1	1	7
TV/Radio	4	1			5
Video tapes		2			2
Workshops		1	1	1	3
Other	4	1	3	2	10

A close look at the programs reported reveals that they serve the three distinct audiences shown in Table 3. The classification of *Professionally Oriented* encompasses all reported programs directed toward the archival and related professions. Internships, institutes, workshops, lectures, seminars, conferences, and other formal training opportunities comprise this class, as do "how to" publications, video tapes, slides, instructional on-site visits, and expositions of all kinds aimed at describing one's collections for scholars. The programs grouped under the heading *Educator Oriented* center on efforts to develop student use and appreciation of archives through participation in special tours, events, or learning opportunities, and through the use of source material packets.

Table 3
Outreach Programs Categorized by Audience Appeal

PROFESSIONALLY ORIENTED	EDUCATOR ORIENTED	PROMOTION/PUBLIC ORIENTED
Lectures/Seminars	Lectures/Seminars	Lectures/Seminars
On-site visits	On-site visits	On-site visits
Special events	Special events	Special events
Publications ("How To")	Publications (Guides)	Publications
Audio Tapes ("How To")	Exhibits	Exhibits
Internship/Institute	Workshops	Film
Photographs ("How To")	Slides	Slides
Video tapes ("How To")	Source materials	Radio/TV

The final class, *Promotion/Public Oriented*, includes programs which incorporate two different appeals to the public at large. One of these appeals is subject oriented and is designed to build an appreciation or awareness of a particular historical person, place, or happening. Exhibits, publications, films, and commemorative events which deliver historical information accented by archival materials fall into this category in the sense that they only indirectly promote archival work. In the second type of appeal, the project focuses its content directly on an archives or on some aspect of archival work. Slide presentations, films, traveling exhibits, and radio/tv public service spots describing archival programs and services provide good vehicles for a direct appeal for patronage.

Several outreach activities included in Table 3 appear in all three audience classes. These might be termed cross-over or overlap efforts in that they have broad potential appeal for professionals, educators/students, and the general public, and they are adaptable enough to serve these several groups simultaneously. It is not surprising that programs of these types scored well in popularity in the survey.

Far beyond compiling a descriptive list of the types of outreach activities, the Committee on the Wider Use of Archives sought to provide the interested reader with an opportunity to study how individual programs were produced. Full information about staff time, skills, and funding would be absolutely essential data to any archivist considering a similar undertaking. To this end, infor-

mation about the number of staff and the amount of time required to create and operate, circulate, and distribute each specific outreach program was requested. In addition, respondents were challenged to analyze costs, to identify their sources of funding, and to distinguish between in-house services performed and those obtained through contract with outside vendors. Finally, recipients were asked about their methods for promoting an outreach program or product once it had been developed, and for evaluating its success.

The responses to this production and evaluation section of the questionnaire were by far the most interesting and significant aspect of the survey. Many reporting institutions did not respond fully or accurately to the questions posed. Responses relating to budget were especially spotty, particularly to those questions asking the institutions to give the proportions of funds expended from their own budgets, from outside grants, and from other sources. It is important to emphasize that institutions surveyed were not asked to disclose specific sources of funding or dollar amounts; thus "confidentiality" was rendered invalid as an excuse for failure to respond. Only one question was optional (a question asking for the proportions of funding from various sources), so the fact that the information was not "required" is also a poor explanation. Needing to account for the dearth of fiscal data, the committee was led reluctantly to the unflattering conclusion that many archivists (67.7 percent) reporting to this survey did not know the basic facts about the cost of their outreach efforts. In the twenty institutions (32.3 percent) that gave breakdowns of expense, 20 percent included only items and services that had to be purchased outside the institution. Of all respondents, 73.2 percent failed to account for staff time and supplies already available in-house, but equally expensive in that they had to be diverted from other programs. The attitude that staff time and supplies are already paid for gives archivists a false picture of what outreach, or any other program for that matter, is costing them. This situation further aggravates the feeling held by a number of archivists that outreach programs are a drain on the regular work of accessioning, preserving, and describing archival materials for research use. Under such conditions, outreach programs truly rob these core activities by diverting staff time and operating money from them. A far sounder plan includes careful, long-range planning to include the needed funds and staff to allow each outreach effort to stand on its own feet. The obvious lesson here is that archivists, instead of simply muddling through from year to year complaining about a budget dictated by others, need to seize the initiative in determining not only what their programs need but what funds are required in satisfaction of these needs.

This reluctance to assess costs and to plan adequately for funding explains the types of responses received concerning the services performed in-house as opposed to those contracted for outside the institution. Most outreach programs were conceived and executed in-house (97.7 percent). The idea for the program, its basic planning, the overall direction of it, and much of the research for text content and illustration were conceived and done by the archivists, in 96 percent of the cases. The most frequent types of services contracted for with outside vendors were manufacturing of the finished unit, typesetting, professional printing, photography, and layout and writing. The determining factor in the decision of which services were to be done in-house and which were to be contracted for was, of course, the enthusiasm and skills of the staff, primarily

those of the initiator of the idea. In the area of services, there was one surprise. That was the fact that a number of institutions contracted for typing rather than having it done in-house. For typewriting to have been contracted with any frequency attests to the prevalence of a long-standing problem for archivists, the lack of clerical support.

Two other information categories neglected by reporting archivists were those dealing with systematic outreach product promotion and evaluation. Of the reports received, none attested to any continuing, multifaceted promotion or evaluation effort, and most identified informal, one-time campaigns. Descriptive flyers and brochures for distribution by mail or display in high traffic areas were the most frequently noted promotion device (84 percent). Few archivists (1.6 percent) reported any organized evaluation program beyond simple word-of-mouth feedback, though for exhibits or special events a guest register with a space for comments might be utilized. The most ambitious efforts (95.2 percent) reported simply asked those reviewing or using an outreach product to complete and return a questionnaire. Certainly, designing effective promotion and evaluation tools takes skill and effort, but how responsible is an archivist who commits thousands of hard-won dollars to creating a product without any thought for its success? Indeed, is not such neglect being penny-wise and dollar foolish?

As a final observation on the survey, the fact that 30 percent of the institutions responding reported that they had no outreach programs confirms the general reluctance among archivists to view outreach as a worthwhile, much less essential, archival function. Those archivists who included outreach activities in their programs seemed to consider them as extras or one-shot affairs. Almost all of the outreach projects reported were sparsely funded. As one archivist aptly put it, "If it costs money, the scheme is out."³

While funds to support archival programs and services are still in short supply, when most of us must scratch for every dime simply to continue our programs, not to mention improving or expanding them, our present fiscal plight indicates that we the keepers of future history are failing to learn from the past.

We continue to identify archivists and other scholars as our major audience, clients, and ultimate protectors, ignoring the others in our midst who are demanding archival services. We also take for granted the existence in the public mind of an innate understanding of the indispensable nature of our work as caretakers of man's collective memory. We assume that we shall always survive, that our work will go on, that our collections will not be neglected or dispersed through indiscriminate sale, that our society or some powerful scion of it (Lorenzo di Medici reincarnated?) will protect us and our work from modern day Ostrogoths and Savonarolas. All of the assumptions lead us to shirk our responsibility to develop the understanding and appreciation of archives among the citizenry of our society.

The opportunity for such development is presenting itself now, every day. Archives are being visited by persons who, before this, would have never thought of doing so and who now are using our collections in unexpected, even heretical, ways. To those of us of an elite persuasion, the unread and the unwashed are, if not beating down our doors, at least inquiring about what we do and what we house. Those of us of a more egalitarian stripe find our long-ex-

³ Leonard J. McDonald, Archivist, Bermuda Archives, Hamilton, Bermuda, to Ann Pederson, June 1, 1976.

pressed wish to reach and to serve the people at least on the threshold of fulfillment; but, regardless of what varied views we archivists have of our new public and what sensibilities the new clientele may lack, there is one overriding quality they do possess: potential.

The capacity for directly or indirectly appreciating and supporting our work has been more or less ignored in the services we traditionally have offered and in the efforts we have made to encourage clients to work for program and service improvements. This neglect is particularly damning for those of us in public institutions. If we are truly a government of the people, then why not let the people participate in the archival endeavor?

Immediately, skeptics wave the bloody shirt of fear, evoking images of unruly mobs, vandals, and thieves assaulting our doors. But are we really afraid of such boogeymen or do we actually fear the work a new clientele will bring us?

The time, effort, and imagination required to make archival materials safely available to those who already appreciate them and know how to use them is minimal compared to that required to initiate total neophytes. Does not all the talk of potential damage and abuse of collections and facilities really boil down to the reality of resistance to the challenge of change?

In the final analysis, we must be responsive to the environments in which we find ourselves in regard both to the holdings which we accession and to the research needs we serve. How can we be the mirror of our times if we shut ourselves off from the larger society and its institutions, and how else can we guarantee the continuing existence and appreciation of our programs if we make little or no effort to educate the society we profess to document?

SAA COMMITTEE ON THE WIDER USE OF ARCHIVES
Survey Participants

<i>Name of Institution</i>	<i>Types of Programs Reported</i>
University of Alaska Archives	Exhibit
Archives of American Art (Detroit, Michigan)	Exhibit
The American College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania	Oral history
University of Antioquia (Medellin, Colombia)	Security microfilm project
University of Arkansas	Exhibits, lectures, publications
Leo Baeck Institute	Exhibits, special events, seminars, lectures, publications, on-site visits
Bermuda Archives	Lectures
California State Archives	Exhibits, publications, lectures, on-site visit, special events
Public Archives of Canada	Exhibits, conferences, source materials, publications
Chicago Historical Society	Exhibits
Circus World Museum Library	Exhibits
University of Delaware	Seminar
Duke University	Exhibits, publications
Eisenhower Library	Internships, institute, research project
Episcopal Diocese of Utah	Publication
Fairview Museum Corporation	Photographs

Name of Institution

Fort Worth Public Library Outreach
Program and North Fort Worth
Historical Society
Georgia Department of Archives and
History
Georgia State University

Glenbow-Alberta Institute
Harvard Law School Library
University of Hawaii Archives
City of Hermosa Beach (California)
Honolulu Municipal Reference and
Records Center
Hoover Institution on War, Revolution,
and Peace
Houston Metropolitan Research Center

Archives of the University of Illinois,
Urbana-Champaign
Indiana Historical Society Library
University of Iowa
John F. Kennedy Library

Kentucky Department of Library and
Archives
Memphis State University
University of Michigan
Mississippi Department of Archives and
History
University of Missouri
Nebraska State Historical Society

Nevada Historical Society

Northeastern Nevada Museum
New Hampshire Historical Society
Oregon Historical Society
Oregon State Archives
Radcliffe College
Radford College
Franklin D. Roosevelt Library
Stanford University Archives
Temple University, Urban Archives
Center
Texas State Archives

The TUBAC Historical Society
Utah State Historical Society
Vermont Historical Society

Medical College of Virginia
Washington State Historical Society
Eastern Washington State Historical
Society
Wayland College Library
Westminster College
State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Types of Programs Reported

Oral history

Publications, exhibits, photographs, film,
internships, institute
Lectures, special events, slides,
workshop, publication
Source materials, film
Exhibits
Internships
Records management, archives
Awareness program, including exhibit,
slides, and publication
Publications, lectures

Video tape, slides, lectures, self-
instruction program

Video tape, exhibits, publications
Publication (incomplete questionnaire)
Publications
Source materials (teachers' kits),
exhibits, films, slides, curriculum units,
conferences
Publications, press releases, public TV
presentations, lectures, internships
Exhibits, publications
Lectures, conferences, exhibits

On-site visit
Slides, oral history
On-site visits, source materials, lectures/
seminar, internships, TV, exhibits
Slides, publications, loan program, radio/
TV
Slides
Exhibits
Video tape
Tours, exhibits, lectures
Slides, publications, exhibits
Exhibit
Publications, on-site visits
Exhibits
Publications

Facsimile packet, posters, slides, special
events, exhibits
Publication
Special event
Slides, source materials, video tape, oral
history
Publication
Publications
Slides, photographs, video tape, oral
history
Source materials
Slides
Exhibit