

# Documentation Strategy: Mastodon or Retro-Success?

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## Abstract

Documentation strategy emerged in the 1980s as a proactive, collaborative alternative to passive acquisition. Difficulties implementing geographically based projects followed early successes with projects at the American Institute of Physics. By 1996, many archivists dismissed this approach as impractical and never evaluated documentation strategy in the light of digital affordances and challenges. This article analyzes and identifies strengths and weaknesses of five fully implemented documentation strategy projects, including two in the electronic environment. It identifies parameters within which documentation strategy can be effectively implemented and provides thinking points for using this approach in the digital age.

## Introduction

In 1986, Helen Samuels proposed documentation strategy as an innovative, proactive, and collaborative approach to creating a more usable historical record than was then being acquired through passive collection. The following year, the *American Archivist* published a case study of projects the American Institute of Physics Center for the History of Physics (AIP Center) had conducted since 1961 using a similar approach. These ideas stimulated enormous optimism about the documentation strategy approach, as well as much healthy criticism. After 1986, however, three case studies reported disappointing results, and, by 1999, a majority of archivists came to view documentation strategy as “impractical.” As a result, documentation strategy has not been re-evaluated for its relevance in the digital environment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helen Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” *American Archivist* 49, no. 2 (1986): 109–24. The following articles provide case studies or overviews of documentation projects: Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, “Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study,” *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 12–47; Richard J. Cox, “A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York,” *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 192–200; Timothy Ericson, “‘To Approximate June Pasture’: The Documentation Strategy in the Real World,” *Archival Issues* (1997): 5–20. In addition, the following articles report on fully implemented documentation research projects: Joan Warnow-Blewett, Joel Genuth, and Spencer R. Weart, *AIP Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations: Final Report Highlights and Project*

After defining documentation strategy and reviewing selected literature, this article presents a point-by-point evaluation of five implementations of documentation strategy—two well-received projects twenty years apart at the AIP, two geographically based projects funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), and an ongoing, Web-based project: the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Religious Archives Network (LGBTRAN). The analysis indicates that documentation strategy is neither a “Holy Grail” nor a “mastodon,”<sup>2</sup> but an effective tool in limited circumstances—when the project topic is narrowly focused, a committed institutional partner sustains the project financially and administratively, and knowledgeable advisors within a self-identified community or discipline provide leadership. The analysis also indicates that documentation strategy is an effective outreach and public relations tool. The online LGBTRAN project in particular demonstrates the potential of the Internet to facilitate collaboration and enhance access. The paper concludes by discussing the potential of documentation strategy as a tool to collect digital records proactively.

### Documentation Strategy—A Working Definition

According to Richard Cox, one of the leading proponents of documentation strategy, the term was first defined at a session of the 1984 Society of American Archivists conference. The concepts behind it, however, began in the early 1970s as archivists grappled with problems in selecting from the mass of modern documentation to document contemporary social movements, under-represented groups, and cultural shifts not well represented through traditional acquisition practices.<sup>3</sup>

*Documentations* (College Park, Md.: American Institute of Physics, 2001), also available online at <http://www.aip.org/history/pubs/collabs/highlights.html>, accessed 15 March 2004. Joseph Anderson, “Difficult to Document: The History of Physics and Allied Fields in Industrial and Government Labs,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 3 (Winter 2005): 7–21; Robert Horton, “Cultivating Our Garden: Archives, Community, and Documentation,” *Archival Issues* 26 (2001): 27–40; David Danboom, “Rethinking Rural America” and Dean Carlson, “Reflections from the Land,” in *Documenting Change in Agriculture and Rural Life: Perspectives on the Issues* (North Dakota State Historical Records Advisory Board and Minnesota State Historical Records Advisory Board, 2001), also available at <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/shrab/AgRuralLifeWeb.pdf>, accessed 4 April 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Campbell Turner, participant with the Milwaukee documentation strategy project, characterized the difficult project as “a mastodon who’d wandered into the La Brea Tar Pits [and] died of exhaustion,” Judith Campbell Turner, “To the Editor,” *Archival Issues* 22, no. 2 (1997): 100.

<sup>3</sup> Documentation strategy was first mentioned by Andrea Hinding in 1981 in a talk before the Association of College and Research Libraries. She used the term “documentation strategies” for an approach that began with “asking simply, what is the total amount of information being generated and how . . . to determine which portions of that information to select for preservation?” Andrea Hinding, “Toward Documentation: New Collecting Strategies in the 1980s,” in *Options for the 80s: Proceedings of the Second National Conference of the Association of College and Research Libraries* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1982): 535, 537. Nine sessions at the 1984 annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists were devoted to documentation strategy. Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1990), 293. See his footnote 2 for a brief history of the development of this idea.

Documentation strategy presents a cooperative approach to the acquisition problem, recommending that efforts to document a topic or area of activity begin with a study by a group of experts, records creators, archivists, and users. As envisioned, the advisory group would rely on their expert knowledge of the topic/area to determine what constitutes adequate documentation and proceed to create a detailed plan for preserving these materials. Coordinating acquisition across multiple repositories is a key feature of the approach. These repositories, in turn, would cooperate in providing comprehensive description and reference. The advisory board would also be responsible for developing public, institutional, and financial support for these projects. A second feature is generating documentation, such as oral histories, needed to fill gaps in available records.<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning, consensus on a single definition of “documentation strategy” was complicated by the ongoing evolution of the approach. For a time, the term was popularized and used to refer to almost any collecting initiative. The 1992 SAA *Glossary* definition reflects the difficulty in determining a single, comprehensive meaning for documentation strategy. It reads:

An on-going, analytic, cooperative approach designed, promoted, and implemented by creators, administrators (including archivists), and users to ensure the archival retention of appropriate documentation in some area of human endeavor through the application of archival techniques, the creation of institutional archives and redefined acquisitions policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The key elements in this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the adequate documentation of an issue, activity, or geographic area.<sup>5</sup>

In her initial presentation, Samuels sharpened the meaning of documentation strategy by contrasting it with other approaches to acquisition. Documentation strategy, she wrote, is more comprehensive than a collection policy, which is usually stated as broad goals to guide a single institution. Documentation strategy is more rigorous in its approach than collecting initiatives or “collection centers,” such as the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the Chemical Heritage

<sup>4</sup> Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” 111–14, 116. See also Hackman and Warnow-Blewett, “Documentation Strategy Process,” 12–47.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis J. and Lynn Lady Bellardo, “Documentation Strategy,” *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*, in *SAA Archival Fundamentals Series* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992). In 2005, Richard Pearce-Moses defined the term as “a methodology that guides selection and assures retention of adequate information about a specific geographic area, a topic, a process, or an event that has been dispersed throughout society.” Richard Pearce-Moses, “Documentation Strategy,” *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), available online at [http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term\\_details.asp?DefinitionKey=225](http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=225), accessed 4 November 2007.

Foundation, and the Charles Babbage Institute for the History of Information Processing, which facilitate placement of papers on an ad hoc basis.<sup>6</sup>

Documentation strategy also differs from functional analysis, which also includes study and categorization of a field or organization before acquisition. Documentation strategy may employ a functional analysis, but it also identifies pertinent records and plans for their preservation. In addition, a single archivist usually carries out a functional analysis on behalf of a single institution; documentation strategy brings together experts, creators, users, and archivists to coordinate acquisitions among multiple repositories.<sup>7</sup>

### **Literature Review: Case Studies, Hypothetical Projects, Theory, and Criticism**

To account for the discrepancies between initial hopes and subsequent disappointment in documentation strategy, this literature review focuses primarily on writings about fully implemented projects. While there are an abundance of articles about hypothetical projects, they do not help evaluate the conditions, resources, and time frames of actual documentation strategies. This section reviews articles that introduced documentation strategy, case studies of implemented projects, proposed projects with functional analysis components, and preliminary projects that Warnow-Blewett calls “documentation strategy research projects.” A review of the criticism of documentation strategy completes this section and presents the issues considered in the conclusion.<sup>8</sup>

In 1987, a year after the *American Archivist* published Helen Samuels’s article introducing documentation strategy, Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett published another seminal article, “Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study.” They offered detailed forms and instructions for implementing a documentation strategy project. While they wrote that documentation strategy was experimental and only an adjunct to conventional appraisal and acquisition practices, they followed these caveats with sweeping arguments that the changing nature of documentation required archivists to move away from passive collecting (especially of organizational records) to

<sup>6</sup> Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” 115. Although these centers also preserve the documentary history of their fields, as of 2007, they did not qualify as documentation strategy projects because they neither identify collections nor develop a detailed plan to coordinate their preservation. Phone conversation with archivists at the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, and the Chemical Heritage Foundation, and email, dated 27 February 2007, from Thomas Misa, director of the Charles Babbage Institute.

<sup>7</sup> Helen Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 254.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Warnow-Blewett, Joel Genuth, and Spencer R. Weart, *AIP Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations: Final Report Documenting Multi-Institutional Collaborations* (College Park, Md.: Center for History of Physics American Institute of Physics, 2001), iv.

assume a new responsibility for identifying, acquiring, and preserving records more representative of all of human society. The potential for sweeping changes stirred the profession, stimulating numerous hypothetical projects, as well as critical responses.<sup>9</sup>

A documentation strategy project began almost immediately in 1986 to document Western New York (WNY). It ran to 1988. Richard Cox, then on the staff of the New York Historical Records Program Development Project under Larry Hackman, authored a case study about the project. He concluded that the project failed to meet its goals because the goal of documenting all human activity in western New York was “unrealistic for a process that was entirely new and untested” and that the scope “stretched the limits of the documentation strategy concept.” Cox, however, highlighted the positive contribution this strategy made to communication and cooperation among partners in western New York. His later volume, *Documenting Localities: A Practical Model for American Archivists and Manuscript Curators* (1996), emphasized the advantages of documentation strategy for comprehensive collecting in geographical areas.<sup>10</sup>

A second case study focused on a project in Milwaukee designed to test the feasibility of the approach in an urban setting. Timothy Ericson, who, like Cox, taught the Society of American Archivists seminar on documentation strategy, wrote the study. Unlike Cox, Ericson became disillusioned with the applicability of documentation strategy to the problems facing archivists in the 1990s. Disappointment is writ large in his 1996 case study. He reported that inadequate intellectual control of collections on the part of the participating repositories precluded effective analysis of collections across the metropolitan area. These participating repositories also could not or would not amend their collecting policies in favor of a citywide collecting strategy. Ericson concluded that these conditions were endemic and that documentation strategy was impractical.<sup>11</sup>

Other articles about documentation strategy projects concerned topically, rather than geographically, defined projects. Cox proposed documentation strategy as an approach to study evangelical religion as early as 1986, and architectural records ten years later. In these studies, as well as in his 1990 book, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States*, Cox continued to write positively about the value of

<sup>9</sup> Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” 116, 123; Hackman and Warnow-Blewett, “Documentation Strategy Process,” 20, 13; Joan Warnow-Blewett et al., *Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations: Final Report Highlights and Project Documentations*.

<sup>10</sup> Richard J. Cox, *Documenting Localities: A Practical Model for American Archivists and Manuscript Curators* (Landham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1996); Cox, “A Documentation Strategy Case Study,” 192–200.

<sup>11</sup> Ericson, “‘To Approximate June Pasture,’ ” 7–8. Ericson joined the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee after the NHPRC grant had been awarded.

documentation strategy in meeting an archival goal of gathering and preserving a useful documentary record.<sup>12</sup>

Numerous articles proposed and discussed entirely hypothetical examples of topical documentation strategies. Articles proposing documentation strategy projects about technology in the Highway 128 corridor around Boston (1987), recreation in New England (1987), quartz mining in northern California (1990), and Conservative Judaism (1994) attest to the attractiveness of the idea. The very fact that more hypothetical than actual cases are found in the literature suggests that documentation strategy had more appeal than applicability.<sup>13</sup>

Two topical strategy proposals stand out because they integrated functional analysis in their documentation strategy projects. The Evangelical Archives Conference convened a group of advisors in 1988 to identify the functions and activities necessary to document evangelism. This group identified seven areas and evaluated existing documentation in each area as a first step toward a documentation strategy. However, the strategy was not carried any further. Joan Krizack outlined a project documenting the health care sector. She proposed beginning a documentation strategy with a functional analysis of a single institution, followed by collaboration with other institutions within the sector to coordinate a complete historical record while avoiding duplication. Her excellent outline for coordinated collecting also was not implemented, even as mergers in the health sector might have facilitated streamlining the records.<sup>14</sup>

Other articles described documentary efforts that incorporated only a few steps of the documentation strategy. For example, Ellen Garrison described using “documentation strategy” in the collecting initiatives of the Center for

<sup>12</sup> Richard J. Cox, “Evangelical Religious Institutions Consider Their Archival Needs: A Review of the 1988 Evangelical Archives Conference Proceedings,” *Provenance* 8 (Spring 1989): 66–79; Richard J. Cox, “The Archival Documentation Strategy and Its Implications for the Appraisal of Architectural Records,” *American Archivist* 59 (1996): 144–54; Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1990); Richard J. Cox, “The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective,” *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994): 11–36.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Alexander and Helen Samuels, “The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy,” *American Archivist* (Fall 1987): 518–31; Maureen Jung, “Documenting Nineteenth-Century Quartz Mining in Northern California,” *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 406–18; Jack Wertheimer, Debra Bernhardt, and Julie Miller, “Toward the Documentation of Conservative Judaism,” *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 374–79; T. D. Seymour Bassett, “Documenting Recreation and Tourism in New England,” *American Archivist* (Fall 1987): 550–69; Richard J. Cox, *A Heritage at Risk: The Proceedings of the Evangelical Archives Conference, July 13–15, 1988* (Wheaton, Ill.: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Cox, *A Heritage at Risk*; Joan D. Krizack, “Hospital Documentation Planning: The Concept and the Context,” *American Archivist* 56 (1993): 16–34. Krizack also edited a book about documentation planning: Joan D. Krizack, ed., *Documentation Planning for the U.S. Health Care System* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Documentation strategy apparently has not been widely applied in this field. The Cederberg-Baker Archives acquired the records of several closed hospitals when ViaHealth consolidated local hospitals in the Rochester, New York, area. The archives acquired materials passively, rather than implementing strategic goals. Phone conversation with Phillip Maple, 4 April 2007.

Popular Music. That project was primarily a collecting initiative by a single repository that used an advisory board. This kind of collecting project remains fairly widespread but lacks the rigorous preliminary planning and multi-institutional approach that is a hallmark of documentation strategy.<sup>15</sup>

Case studies of fully implemented documentation strategy research projects contribute to the literature. One such project gathered rural residents, historians, and archivists to determine the meaning of “rural change” in the Red River Valley on the border of Minnesota and North Dakota. Robert Horton’s consistently intelligent report of the project highlighted the complexities of documenting such an abstract concept as long-term, sociocultural change in rural society.<sup>16</sup>

The AIP conducted a documentation strategy research project of documentation in multi-institutional collaborative research in postwar physics. Its final 2001 report offered a typology, appraisal criteria, and a survey of existing archival practices as a necessary prelude to any project to document collaborative research. This report merited the esteem it received for its groundbreaking investigative reporting on documentation of collaborations and born-digital documentation. Joseph Anderson’s 2005 report about the project argued the importance of thoroughly investigating topics or areas before initiating documentation strategy projects.<sup>17</sup>

Theoretical discussions and criticism complete the literature about documentation strategy. Critics played an important role in shaping the opinions of archivists on the potential of documentation strategy. Frank Boles, perhaps the most persistent critic, argued on pragmatic grounds that archives operate in a culture of scarcity and that documentation strategies demand excessive resources. He held that institutional needs and resources should and do take precedence over broader, multi-institutional efforts. Terry Abraham seconded Boles, arguing that archivists have neither the leisure, the warrant, nor the resources to pursue documentation strategy projects. He characterized the strategy as a “Holy Grail” rather than a tool. Tim Ericson also argued that documentation strategy requires outside funding when very little outside funding is available.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ellen Garrison, “The Very Model of a Modern Major General: Documentation Strategy and the Center for Popular Music,” *Provenance* 7 (1989): 22–32.

<sup>16</sup> Horton, “Cultivating Our Garden,” 27–40. Horton’s article was one of three in the final report on the project, “Rethinking Rural America,” in *Documenting Change in Agriculture and Rural Life*. See fn 1. Other essays included David Danboom, “Rethinking Rural America” and Dean Carlson, “Reflections from the Land.”

<sup>17</sup> For the report of this project, see Warnow-Blewett et al., *AIP Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations*. Anderson, “Difficult to Document,” 7–21.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Boles, “Mix Two Parts Interest to One Part Information and Appraise Until Done: Understanding Contemporary Record Selection Processes,” *American Archivist* 50 (1987): 356–68; Terry Abraham, “Collection Policy or Documentation Strategy: Theory and Practice,” *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991): 44–52 and “Documentation Strategies: A Decade (or More) Later,” paper presented at the Society of American Archivists annual conference, Washington, D.C., 31 August 1995, also available at [www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/papers/docstr10.htm](http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/papers/docstr10.htm), accessed 15 April 2004; Ericson, “‘To Approximate June Pasture,’ ” 16.

On a more theoretical level, Terry Cook criticized documentation strategy for beginning with artificially generated, abstract categories of analysis, resulting in deracinated sets of records without organic coherence. He lamented the “unarchival” quality of this approach. Angelika Menne-Haritz presented more elegant, theoretical objections to documentation strategy based on its use of proactive collecting. She argued that when archivists collaborate with creators and users, they inevitably influence the contents of the record and thus impinge their impartiality and evidential value.<sup>19</sup>

In 1996, Jennifer Miller conducted a qualitative survey of sixteen primarily college and university archivists with an average of twenty years of experience. The majority believed documentation strategy to be impractical and unmanageable because archivists lack the power and funding to implement it. In the same way that enthusiasm for the strategy engulfed the profession in the mid-1980s, consensus on its impracticality swept the profession in the mid-1990s, despite the fact that no published studies analyzed the differences between projects at the AIP Center and later geographically based ones. Although proponents of documentation strategy warned that these projects were experimental, the negative results in western New York and Milwaukee, in particular, overshadowed the positive results of the many ongoing projects at the AIP Center.<sup>20</sup>

### **Methodology and Description of Projects Analyzed**

To assess the practicality of documentation strategy, this study evaluates the implementation of five projects: the original project initiated by the AIP, called the History of Recent Physics (1961–1965); two NHPRC-funded, geographically based projects, Documenting Western New York (1986–1988) and Documenting Milwaukee (1989–1991); and two projects that illustrate documentation strategy approaches for the digital environment—the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Religious Archives Network (LGBTRAN), begun in 2000, and the AIP Center documentation strategy research project called the Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations (1989–2000). Well-known case studies of the first three projects were influential in shaping the opinion of the profession about documentation strategy. This analysis compares the problems the projects encountered and assesses whether the difficulties were integral to the nature of geographical projects or if they resulted from other, identifiable factors. The LGBTRAN online project, however, is relatively unknown, initiated by the LGBT community rather

<sup>19</sup> Terry Cook, “Documentation Strategy,” *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 181–91. Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Appraisal or Documentation: Can We Appraise Archives by Selecting Content?,” *American Archivist* 57 (Summer 1994): 528–42.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Miller, “Documentation Strategies in the Twenty-first Century? Rethinking Institutional Priorities and Professional Limitations,” *Archival Issues* 23 (Spring 1998): 59–74.

than by archivists. Together, these projects provide evidence about the promises and problems of project implementation. (See Table 1.)

Historians of physics concerned about preserving the history of modern physics initiated the AIP History of Recent Physics project. They persuaded the AIP to initiate a project to gather biographical information and collect papers where possible. Project directors quickly realized the AIP was not equal to the task of archiving all historical records about the development of physics. They reshaped the project to facilitate donation to university repositories, and the AIP Center accepted only “orphan” collections. The AIP Center followed this agenda to document geophysics, astrophysics, nuclear physics, among others, over the next twenty-four years. Joan Warnow-Blewett, who participated in many of these projects, developed considerable expertise in managing them.<sup>21</sup>

The AIP Center Study on Multi-Institutional Collaboration, the initial step in documenting postwar physics, became increasingly collaborative and involved many organizations. Unlike prewar physics with its familiar lab notebooks, the records documenting postwar research consist of informal, idiosyncratic

**Table 1.** Documentation Strategy Projects Studied

Project	Dates	Host Institution	Advisory Board	Source of Funding
History of Recent Physics	1961–1965	American Institute of Physics (AIP)	Renowned physicists and historians	Two successive 2-year NSF grants, ongoing AIP support
Documenting Western New York	1986–1988	Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC)	Regional historians, archivists, librarians, legislative aides	2-year NHPRC grant
Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee	1989–1991	Library Council of Metropolitan Milwaukee (LCOMM)	Repository administrators, subject experts, archivists	2-year NHPRC grant
Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations	1989–2001	American Institute of Physics Center for the History of Physics	Historians, archivists, sociologists, scientists, science administrators	10-year study, 3 phases, grants from NSF, NHPRC, Mellon, Department of Energy, and ongoing AIP support
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Religious Archives Network	2000–ongoing	Independent; loose affiliation with Chicago Theological Seminary	Activists, clergy, archivists, librarians, expert historians	3-year start-up grant; ongoing fund-raising

<sup>21</sup> W. James King, “Source Materials for the History of Recent Physics,” *Physics Today* 15 (January 1962): 44–48; James King, “The Project on the History of Recent Physics in the United States,” *American Archivist* 27 (1962): 237–43; Anderson, “Difficult to Document,” 9–10.

communication using electronically accessed data sets instead of lab notebooks. Few structures, administrative or professional, evolved to regulate recordkeeping. No one in any of the fields of physics could state confidently how these records were generated and preserved. Twenty-four years of work with documentation strategy projects convinced the AIP Center that it would have to learn how collaborations documented their research. The center proposed a multiyear project to study subfields of physics successively. Beginning with a functional analysis, the project created a typology of collaboration styles and their documentation, appraisal guidelines, and documentation at risk for loss. Although this report presented a plan to preserve these records in university, government, and corporate archives, Project Director Joan Warnow-Blewett called the project a documentation strategy “research project.”<sup>22</sup>

The Western New York documentation strategy project was the first attempt to apply documentation strategy as developed at the AIP Center to a geographical location. Most of the two years of the project were spent convening the board of experts and surveying and categorizing records from multiple repositories in western New York. The project did not progress to the point where a documentation plan could be developed, and no further effort to implement a regional documentation strategy project in New York was made. The successes of the program consisted primarily of enhanced communication among members of the regional historical community—historians, users, creators, and archivists/librarians.

The project to document metropolitan Milwaukee was a similar attempt to use documentation strategy to coordinate acquisition across an urban area. Initiated by a group of archivists within the Library Council of Metropolitan Milwaukee (LCOMM), it secured the cooperation of all repositories within the metropolitan area. Participating repositories agreed to update collection policies and create catalog records for all of their holdings. In the second year, subject experts convened to evaluate the catalog records relevant to their fields and create a documentation plan. The project failed to meet these goals as repositories struggled to complete the descriptive work. Participating repositories also declined to sign on to a unified metropolitan collecting policy. Among its successes, however, was the addition of over three thousand records to the OCLC national database. Even more positively, the project generated tremendous enthusiasm for historical preservation among city leaders, the press, and the public.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Religious Archives Network operates as an online documentation strategy connecting record creators, archivists, and researchers through its website. The mission of LGBTRAN is to preserve the

<sup>22</sup> Warnow-Blewett et al., *Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations*, iii–v. In the 1980s, the Department of Energy had contracted with the AIP Center to develop guidelines for preserving its records; Anderson, “Difficult to Document,” 13.

historical record of gay and lesbian activism in faith communities of all kinds. Guided by an advisory board, a part-time director/facilitator and archivist staff the project. When initial assessment revealed that many collections from LGBT religious groups had already been donated to existing repositories, project leaders realized that the Internet made it possible to link these collections in a virtual sense. The project shifted to becoming a clearinghouse and resource center to facilitate donation of records to existing repositories and promote their use by scholars. Its website includes over 200 biographies; a catalog of 175 international, LGBT-related religious collections; a growing collection of oral histories; major online exhibitions; and an archives of the monthly newsletter.<sup>23</sup>

Published case studies narrate the start-to-finish exposition for these projects, except for LBGTRAN. The following analysis, however, considers the projects according to the steps of documentation strategy. Thus, component parts are based on

- defining the topic/area,
- appointing the board,
- establishing the host institution,
- devising project implementation, and
- securing funding and public support.

At each step, specific factors contributed to or complicated the completion of each project's goals.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The Topic or Region***

Theoretically, documentation strategy projects can center on almost any topic or area, but some topics are inherently more suitable. These are well defined and have an existing community of experts who understand existing documentation. In addition, documentation strategy is easiest to implement when the key stakeholders have a sense of urgency about preserving this history.

The project to document the history of physics was initiated by historians of physics who perceived a pressing need to preserve vulnerable historical documents in the field. Few archives collected the records of modern scientific research. In 1960, only the papers of physicist Enrico Fermi were archived, while the ten or so universities where most of the prewar research had been done did not collect scientific papers. Physicists recognized that members of the first generation of modern physicists were dying without passing on their stories. Awareness of the need to preserve these records led to the opening of an office

<sup>23</sup> The LGBTRAN website is located at <http://lgbtran.org>, accessed 7 March 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all information is taken from the website, including archived newsletters.

<sup>24</sup> Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?," 116.

in the National Science Foundation in 1958 to support historical projects. In 1962, the History of Science Society held a “Conference on Science Manuscripts” to discuss the urgent need to preserve scientific documents. It published articles from the conference in its journal, *Isis*. The American Physical Society and the American Philosophical Society had just sponsored a documentation project led by Thomas Kuhn at the University of California-Berkeley, called the Sources for the History of Quantum Physics. These conditions contributed a saliency and an urgency that helped the AIP garner the support of the physics community for a documentation project. In addition to the support within the discipline, the Cold War heightened respect for science in the wider public; physicists were responsible for the atomic bomb, the primary defense against Communism.<sup>25</sup>

Leaders within the community also initiated the project to preserve the records of the LGBT religious movement. The loss of so many of its members during the AIDs epidemic heightened awareness within the LGBT community that its history could be lost unless active efforts were made to save it. Leaders also perceived that academic researchers—who, by and large, omitted the role of Protestant churches and Jewish synagogues—were creating the history of the gay liberation movement. Their sense of importance and urgency made it easier to secure support for the project both within and outside the community.<sup>26</sup>

The overwhelming sense of the historic importance expressed by physicists and LGBT leaders contrasts dramatically with the motivation for starting the documentation strategy projects in WNY and Milwaukee. The physics and LGBT projects emerged from within the community, while in WNY and Milwaukee, archivists initiated projects primarily to improve the efficiency and quality of archival acquisition. Evaluating existing documentation—a process that had little urgency—consumed the majority of project time. Inventory and descriptive work proved to be so time consuming that project participant Judith Campbell Turner, librarian and archivist at the Milwaukee Public Museum, characterized the project as “a mastodon who’d wandered into the La Brea Tar Pits [and] died of exhaustion.”<sup>27</sup>

Documentation strategy projects are most manageable when widespread consensus exists on what constitutes the topic. Terry Cook’s complaint about the

<sup>25</sup> King, “Source Materials for the History of Recent Physics,” 44–48; King, “The Project on the History of Recent Physics in the United States,” 237–43; Anderson, “Difficult to Document,” 9–10; “The Conference on Science Manuscripts,” *Isis* 53, part 1, no. 171 (1962); *Sources for the History of Quantum Physics* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1967), available on microfilm.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Bowman, “LGBT Religious Archives Network,” speech given at the LGBTRAN Awards Banquet, 25 April 2003, Chicago.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Campbell Turner, “To the Editor,” *Archival Issues* 22, no. 2 (1997): 99–101, quote on page 100. Hers is the only account written by a project participant. Turner responded to Ericson’s conclusions by faulting the ambitious goals and tight time-line of the project rather than the deficiencies of the repositories. Ericson, “‘To Approximate June Pasture,’” 7; “Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee NHPRC Grant No. 89-060,” Semiannual Report (December 1989–June 1990), 1.

abstract nature of documentation strategy topics has a practical basis. In general, any topic remains abstract and amorphous until practitioners within the field establish structures and refine its boundaries. Academic disciplines are mature fields; well-recognized parameters and structures define them. Physics has the characteristics of a mature discipline. Embedded in an academic setting, academic appointments and laboratory positions define who is a member of the community. Peer-reviewed journals publish the important ideas. These structures make it easy to recognize important figures, even in a community of tens of thousands.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, emerging disciplines or artificially generated abstract entities, such as “western New York,” lack established communities with the expertise and collective warrant to define norms. Geographically defined projects mean that the topic to be documented is nothing less than everything within the geographical borders. The WNY and Milwaukee projects needed to create a framework of abstract categories capable of holding all of history, environment, and culture. They used a framework of fifteen anthropological categories encompassing the breadth of human activity that had been used successfully by state historical societies in Nebraska and Wisconsin to analyze their collections. The universes of documentation in WNY and Milwaukee, however, were large and undefined and lacked recognized, external structures that indicated when an activity, event, or institution merited documentation. Lacking external structures to indicate what would suffice as documentation, project advisors struggled to determine what should be documented. This put an inordinate burden on them.<sup>29</sup>

Both projects chose advisors from local historical societies, archival repositories, and institutions of higher education. In addition, the Milwaukee project created twelve subject advisory subpanels to evaluate potential documentation within more narrow areas of expertise. This was time consuming. Each topic began with the development of a discussion paper concerning the topic in terms

<sup>28</sup> King, “Source Materials for the History of Recent Physics,” 46–48. The project to document physics used the serial publication *American Men in Science, A Biographical Directory* to identify all important physicists, creating a list of approximately 1,250 names. Of these, 437 physicists were included in the project. King, “Project on the History of Recent Physics,” 240; Elmer Hutchisson, “A Proposal for the Continuation of the Project on the History of Recent Physics in the United States,” NSF grant proposal, 1963, Hutchisson Papers, CHP, AIP, College Park, Md.

<sup>29</sup> The documentation strategy project that attempted to define “rural change” in the Red River Valley foundered because experts and residents could not agree on a definition of “rural change” or what would document these changes; Horton, “Cultivating Our Own Garden,” 29–31; Cox, “Western New York,” 194. See a detailed treatment of the categories in Cox, *Documenting Localities*, 132–47. This instrument was based on George P. Murdock’s *Outline of Cultural Materials*, and included various subtopics under each category. Judith Endelman, “Looking Backward to Plan for the Future: Collection Analysis for Manuscript Repositories,” *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 277. Milwaukee archivists used the framework to create the *Guide to Historical Resources in Milwaukee Area Archives*, 1975–1977. A copy is located in the Library Council of Metropolitan Milwaukee Records, Box 1 Folder 13, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 48, University Manuscript Collections, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

of Milwaukee and available documentation. Panelists were unsure how to proceed. A model panel was created and a member of this panel joined the next panel, and so forth until all twelve panels had met. That all panels met and reported out indicates that the projects did not stall for lack of initiative and problem solving, but instead because the diffuse geographical region was underdefined as a topic for documentation strategy.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, topics that are well documented or have good potential for oral history interviews are more promising. Prewar physics was an ideal topic for a documentation strategy project. As an empirical science, it prided itself on exact observations and recordkeeping. The lab notebook and other record types were such familiar sources for laboratory physics that project advisors could predict their existence. When documentation changed after the 1970s, the AIP Center initiated the Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations to identify how collaborations create records and communicate electronically. The fact that the AIP Center initiated the study and received grant support for ten years attests to the importance of understanding documentation before beginning a documentation strategy project.<sup>31</sup>

The LGBTRAN project found many records for LGBT organizations in mainstream religions, while Buddhist and Hindu faith traditions seldom create records and have limited interest in preserving their history. Some leaders were open to oral history interviews, but others (especially pre-1950 leaders and leaders from countries where homosexuality is illegal) feared participating in oral history interviews. These kinds of pragmatic limits must be weighed when choosing a topic for a documentation strategy.<sup>32</sup>

### **Advisory Boards**

Documentation strategy prescribes a strong role for the advisory board in defining the topic, evaluating existing documentation, and writing the strategic plan. Board members' expertise is critical and, in practice, their stature and personal contacts prove valuable in marshalling community support for a project.

<sup>30</sup> "Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee," NHPRC Grant No. 89-060, Summary Report, July 1991. The grantor, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, urged Milwaukee to develop subpanels in the subject areas, perhaps reflecting the experience in western New York.

<sup>31</sup> Warnow-Blewett et al., *Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations: Final Report Highlights*, iii–v. In the 1980s, the Department of Energy recognized the Center for the History of Physics at the AIP had pre-eminence in documentation strategy projects and contracted with it to develop guidelines for preserving its records; Anderson, "Difficult to Document," 13.

<sup>32</sup> Conversation with Jade River, 28 November 2004. One individual from Africa requested his photograph be removed from his biography on the LGBTRAN website. For example, the LGBTRAN collection catalog index lists only one collection for Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. There is only one collection from South America, and none from the Middle East, Asia, or Africa (except South Africa).

The combination of subject expertise and community stature make advisory boards a key component of successful implementation.

In 1961, the members of the advisory board for the AIP's History of Recent Physics project took an active role in its design. As practicing physicists and historians, they knew the "documentary universe" of modern physics and understood which sets of records would adequately document the field. This authoritative identification of the crucial documents contributed greatly to the momentum of the project, as did the board members' stature in the field and their enthusiasm for preserving its history. Advisory board members included Thomas Kuhn, popular author of *The Copernican Revolution* and director of the Archives for the History of Quantum Physics. The chair, Gerald Holton, was the most respected historian of physics in the country. Other board members were on the faculty of Ivy League universities, which lent credibility to proposals submitted to the National Science Foundation (NSF). The board's sense of the importance and urgency of the task helped convince practicing physicists to donate research materials, and, even more importantly, it persuaded nonscientist university administrators to devote resources to collecting scientific records.<sup>33</sup>

When the AIP Center initiated the Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations, it appointed well-known experts within each subfield of physics, including distinguished scientists whose stature attracted attention and lent credibility, to advise that phase of the project. It also included science administrators who could authorize cooperation. Without these advisors, it is unlikely that the AIP Center would have been able to identify and secure permission to interview 450 physicists, most of whom worked in high security research facilities.<sup>34</sup>

The status of these advisors contrasted with the advisors in the project to document western New York. In New York, advisory board members included archivists, librarians, and academic and local historians interested in the history of the region. It also included two legislative aides who participated to enhance communication between the legislature and the State Archives if the documentation strategy model should eventually be implemented as a statewide project. Project historians knew the history of western New York but did not have comprehensive expertise about the totality of its documentation, mostly because the topic was so large and diffuse. The Milwaukee board members had more stature in light of their positions as administrators, directors, and archivists at local repositories such as the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee County Historical Society, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and two other local archives. This board, however, lacked expertise

<sup>33</sup> King, "Source Materials for the History of Recent Physics," 46; King, "The Project on the History of Recent Physics," 238–39.

<sup>34</sup> The fields of physics include geophysics, ground-based astronomy, materials science, medical physics, particle physics, and space science; Warnow-Blewett et al., *AIP Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations*, v.

in all facets of Milwaukee historical sources. NHPRC recommended that a panel of subject experts be convened for each subject covered in the collection analysis. These experts were initially unfamiliar with collection analysis, and training them slowed momentum. In addition, they had a subordinate or consultative role, unlike the initial AIP project where renowned scientists took highly visible leadership roles on the advisory panel. It is unclear if the Milwaukee project used these advisors to create bridges to their communities.<sup>35</sup>

LGBTRAN advisors played a key role in identifying contacts, making introductions, and contributing their expertise. Gordon Melton is one of the foremost authorities on religious movements and author of the *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*. He supplied an extensive list of LGBT-related organizations and leaders in the United States. Other advisors proved indispensable in providing the personal connections within many diverse faith communities. The board membership evolved as the project focused on various faiths. The first board included primarily Protestant men who were leaders in or intimately familiar with LGBT organizations, publications, and leadership in specific faith communities. These advisors could readily identify “gaps” in documentation. When the project expanded to lesbian spirituality and non-Christian communities, advisors with expertise and status within those communities were recruited to the board. It proved essential to include more than token representation from various communities. The number of advisors from the community of focus had to reach a critical mass before they confidently asserted creative leadership. These advisors helped establish trusting relationships, explained communication styles and customs within these communities, helped appraise important collections, negotiated with potential donors, and facilitated partnerships with community organizations. These attributes enabled rapid progress of the project. The lack of advisors with expertise in European organizations provides a counter-example. Without advisors, almost no collections from Europe were listed in the collection catalog, nor did the website carry significant European biographical information. Without expertise, the project had no assurance that it was identifying representative or even legitimate collections of LGBT faith communities in Europe.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cox, “A Documentation Strategy Case Study,” 194–95. Phone call between Richard J. Cox and author, 30 March 2007. This instrument was based on George P. Murdock’s *Outline of Cultural Materials* and included various subtopics under each category. Endelman, “Looking Backward to Plan for the Future,” 277; “Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee,” NHPRC Grant Proposal No. 89-060, 28 September 1988. Photocopy of grant application and reports supplied by project director, Susan Davis. “Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee,” NHPRC Grant No. 89-060, Semiannual Report, June–December 1990, 3. Photocopy supplied by project director, Susan Davis.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1992). The delicate task of building relationships with various communities takes time—another reason to extend the time frame of documentation strategy projects. Phone conversations with Mark Bowman, 2006. A European member was added to the board in 2008 to begin to remedy this difficulty.

### Host Institutions

Host institutions were essential for sustaining documentation projects, and their resources, commitment, standing, and stability gave projects credibility in the eyes of funders. Documentation strategy projects involve an ongoing process of identification and acquisition; host institutions enabled long-term reliability and maintained relationships after the active phase of the projects. When the documentation strategy project was central to the mission of the host institution, the institution stayed committed over the long term.<sup>37</sup>

The AIP is one of the most powerful organizations within the field of physics, with an umbrella group of 185 corporate members and 27,000 individual members; it publishes twenty-seven journals. A *central* mission of the AIP is to enhance public awareness of physics and encourage student interest in scientific careers. Since the history of physics is a fundamental component of the education of future scientists as well as of schoolchildren, preserving the documentary heritage of physics supports a central AIP mission.<sup>38</sup>

The first AIP project proposed to collect and house historical materials at the AIP. In 1963, when it became apparent that the AIP could not archive all the records of physics, the project began encouraging universities to collect the papers of their renowned physics faculties. It acted as an honest broker between creators and repositories. It also demonstrated its ongoing commitment to the documentation project by establishing the Center for the History of Physics in 1965. The center followed through with the initial project and initiated a series of similar projects in the various subfield of physics. Ongoing projects maintained contacts and enhanced the visibility of the history of physics within the professional community. The expanded time frame also permitted thorough work that commanded the respect of funders. In this way, the AIP Center created a sustainable project.<sup>39</sup>

Documentation strategy projects were peripheral to the core mission of the host institutions in New York and Milwaukee. The Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC) was a regional consortium to improve library access and services. The WNYLRC included academic, corporate, hospital, school, and public library systems in six counties. Its consortial arrangement was considered a prototype for statewide heritage organizations that would hopefully emerge after a series of successful documentation strategy projects. However, historical societies were not members of the WNYLRC, and it had only

<sup>37</sup> Marshall, "Documentation Strategies," 67–69.

<sup>38</sup> King, "The Project on the History of Recent Physics," 239; King, "Source Materials for the History of Recent Physics," 44.

<sup>39</sup> King, "Source Materials for the History of Recent Physics," 29–42; Anderson, "Difficult to Document," 10–11; Hutchisson, "A Proposal," 5–6.

a peripheral mission to foster cultural heritage. Nor did the financial structure of the WNYLRC allow it to support an ongoing documentation project. Neither its mission, nor its historic role, nor its financial resources gave it warrant to press for additional funding and support.<sup>40</sup>

The Milwaukee project was administered through the Library Council of Metropolitan Milwaukee, with the significant advantage of an active and accomplished Archival Committee. This committee had already completed a prior NHPRC grant and published the *Guide to Historical Resources in Milwaukee Area Archives* in 1976. This accomplishment gave it visibility within the historical community at the local and national level. The LCOMM, however, was not able to provide ongoing administrative support after the grant-supported phases of the project ended. Project planners hoped to find a permanent host for the project after a citywide collection policy had been drafted. The lack of an ongoing host meant that participants exhausted themselves bringing the project to a conclusion before its funding ended, but had no champion to finalize, celebrate, and sustain that accomplishment. The lack of a financially strong host institution in the geographically based documentation strategy projects made a key difference between them and the AIP projects.<sup>41</sup>

The LGBTRAN project, similar to the AIP projects in many respects, differed because it lacked a committed host institution like the AIP Center. Instead, LGBTRAN was loosely affiliated with the Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), which provided administrative support. The affiliation helped CTS raise its visibility among the growing number of LGBT theology students, but LGBTRAN remained peripheral to the CTS core mission, and CTS did not commit financial or technical resources to the project. The looseness of the affiliation may have enabled LGBTRAN to innovate, take risks, and be more acceptable to non-Christian groups in the short term. A committed host institution, however, would have offered more assurance of long-term maintenance of the website.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Phone conversation between Richard J. Cox and the author, 30 March 2007.

<sup>41</sup> "Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee," Summary Report, 1, 9–10. A similar NHPRC-funded project in the Red River Valley lacked a host institution, and when the project ended, neither of the sponsors, the Minnesota and the North Dakota State Historical Records Advisory Boards, nor any state historical society felt an interest in sustaining the project. Local historical societies in the Red River Valley, which might have been interested, lacked the financial and professional resources to continue the project. Ben Leonard, project manager, presented a paper, "From Independence to Interdependence: Rural Perspectives on Change in the Red River Valley Border Region," at the Midwest Archives Conference in May 2001, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Chicago Theological Seminary has opened an LGBTQ Religious Studies Center, which complements the primarily historical efforts of LGBTRAN. Chicago Theological Seminary, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Religious Studies Program," at <http://www.ctschicago.edu/academic/lgbtq.php> and <http://www.ctschicago.edu/library/LGBT.php>, both accessed 7 April 2007. According to its April 2008 newsletter, LGBTRAN has agreed to affiliate with the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. The CLGS is the largest existing research center on LGBT persons and religion in the United States.

### Project Implementation

Documentation strategy projects are more likely to succeed when implemented as a series of narrowly focused, sequential projects, rather than as single, comprehensive projects. Each project considered here took time to discover how to best proceed. The AIP dropped half of its original goals during the first two years of its initial project. It dropped the idea of publishing a sourcebook in favor of archiving source materials, and it dropped that idea in favor of persuading universities to archive scientific materials. The project began by requesting biographical information from more than six hundred physicists, but as the project evolved, the director spent more time encouraging university administrators to collect the records of physics research. AIP took two years to hit upon an effective combination of outreach to creators, persuading repositories to collect and aligning the project with the larger AIP mission. Once it found the right approach, the AIP used it repeatedly over the next decade to successively document many other subfields of physics. It eventually became the prototype of documentation strategy outlined by Hackman and Warnow-Blewett. In the mid-1980s, when the AIP Center initiated its massive study of multi-institutional collaborations, it anticipated breaking the project into a series of sequential projects for the subfields of physics.<sup>43</sup>

New York went through a similar process of narrowing its ambitions, but the project remained too encompassing and fell short of funder expectations. The New York Archives and Records Administration (NYSARA) initially planned a documentation strategy for the entire state. NYSARA compiled hundreds of thousands of records during the 1982–1983 statewide survey of historical records. It hoped to use a documentation strategy project to analyze these collections in each region of the state, culminating in a documentation plan for the more than two thousand repositories across the entire state. The NHPRC funded a pilot project to document six counties in western New York. It should be noted that in “Who Controls the Past?,” Samuels proposed Berkshire County, a homogeneous rural county in western Massachusetts with a population of

<sup>43</sup> First goals were to 1) publish a sourcebook in modern physics to be useful in classrooms and for historical researchers; 2) begin doing outreach to physicists urging them to preserve their papers; 3) conduct oral history interviews; 4) compile biographies and bibliographies of major physicists; 5) collect and archive historical materials and equipment; and 6) encourage use of historical materials and support education; King, “The Project on the History of Recent Physics,” 239, 240; Hutchisson, “A Proposal,” 4. Philip Alexander and Helen Samuels also argued that documentation strategy projects should be narrowly focused and could be expanded later. Presenting these ideas to the Society of American Archivists conference in 1984, they suggested Route 128, the technology corridor around Boston, as the appropriate size for a project, since “any effort to document so broad a topic as science and technology in all of New England” would be “formidable”; Alexander and Samuels, “The Roots of 128,” 519; Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” 123; “NHPRC Records Program Grant Application,” 24 September 1987, Project on the History of Recent Physics, Center for the History of Physics Records, Center for the History of Physics, American Institute of Physics, College Park, Md.; Warnow-Blewett et al., *Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations: Final Report*, iii–v.

133,000, as an example of a manageable geographical project. Only as the New York project unfolded did it become apparent that “a region equaled the world in the complexity of documentation.” The project never moved beyond collection analysis of manuscript sources to create a documentation plan to govern ongoing acquisition. Instead, NYSARA moved on to other initiatives, apparently concluding that the benefits of strategizing acquisition did not merit the effort expended in analysis. Failing to meet goals within two years ended the project. No data indicate whether the analysis might have succeeded if implemented as small, topical projects sequentially arranged.<sup>44</sup>

The Milwaukee project leaders had the advantage of the experience in western New York, but proposed an even more ambitious undertaking. The project goal was to create an integrated collection policy to be adopted by all partnering repositories in metropolitan Milwaukee. This meant each participating repository had three projects to complete: writing a mission statement and collection policy, completing a collection analysis, and cataloging collections and contributing them to the OCLC bibliographic database (the grant paid for data entry). Twelve participating repositories described 3,659 collections totaling 30,769 linear feet of material, all done by the staff of the participating repositories without additional funding or support. To complicate the already-ambitious project, each participating repository agreed to write and adopt a mission statement, craft a collection policy, complete their collection analysis, and create catalog records for holdings lacking them. Twelve subject advisory panels were convened to evaluate the collections against categories the project board decided were relevant to Milwaukee history. Repositories performed these Herculean tasks, and project staff members entered collections into the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) bibliographic database under the aegis of the LCOMM. Each of these steps deserved to have been a stand-alone project of a year or more cumulating in a documentation strategy project. An extended time frame or sequential documentation strategies, topic by topic, would have been more manageable for the participating repositories. In his case study, Ericson suggested dividing the project into two phases, one specifically for predocumentation analysis and workshops.<sup>45</sup>

An extended time frame would have also provided additional time to manage an effective public relations campaign around the project. Ericson noted that the project heightened the visibility of local archives and generated enthusiasm within the entire metropolitan community. Archival leaders exhort the profession to include public relations as part of archival administration, but it seems from anecdotal evidence that few innovative approaches have been as

<sup>44</sup> Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” 123. See a report of this survey and its findings in *Towards a Usable Past: Historical Records in the Empire State* (Albany: New York State Historical Records Advisory Board, 1984); Cox, “A Documentation Strategy Case Study,” 195.

<sup>45</sup> Ericson, “‘To Approximate June Pasture,’ ” 17; “Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee,” 8, appendix 1, chronology dated 6 February 1991.

well received as documentation strategy projects, which show tremendous potential to educate and energize communities around preservation of historical records and could contribute enormously to the standing of the profession within its community. Given the large scope of the Milwaukee project, it could profitably have been extended over several years with ongoing publicity among creators and users of each of the various topics of the survey. Archivists at partnering repositories could have used the time to marshal public support and convince their own boards of the value of collaboration and cooperation. The Milwaukee project proved that a limited time frame makes a documentation strategy project unmanageable.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike the two two-year grant projects, LGBTRAN was conceived as ongoing organization. Project leaders first worked with LGBT groups within mainstream religious organizations and then approached underdocumented faith communities, such as the women's pagan community and the pre-1950 gay religious leaders whose congregations worshipped discreetly. Oral histories were conducted to create documentation where records were lost. A project to document the Jewish LGBT community was well underway when the initiative to document the history of the African American LGBT religious community began. Each of these subprojects required the expertise of different, additional advisors and sometimes separate funding sources. Each project required focus, years of relationship building, and improvements to the website infrastructure. An extended time frame enabled these to happen.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Funding and Staffing***

An extended time frame requires ongoing funding. Administrators like Boles and Ericson rightly point out that there are few funding sources for documentation strategy projects. The AIP project received funding from the NSF that was four to five times higher (adjusted for inflation) than that of the NHPRC projects. However, the AIP secured ongoing funding because of its own commitment, demonstrated by the opening of the Center for the History of Physics in 1965. Its projects met goals, and its prestigious advisors recommended projects be continued. Over twenty years, project staff gained expertise that contributed to its ability to secure funds after funding sources shrank.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> "Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee," 2–3.

<sup>47</sup> The oral history interviews with pagan women were conducted in 2003; the interview with George Hyde in 2005. The exhibition of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah opened in 2007. These projects reflect the composition of the board and staff.

<sup>48</sup> AIP Center funding came from NSF support for the history and sociology of science; "NHPRC Records Program Grant Application." Jennifer Marshall concluded that the AIP's success partially rested on its sustainability and its approach to documentation as an evolving practice; Marshall, "Documentation Strategies," 64; Anderson, "Difficult to Document," 14.

Financial records for the initial 1961 through 1963 project at the AIP are not available, but records of the 1963 through 1965 phase show that the project hired a full-time director, full- and part-time administrative assistants, two post-doctoral fellows, and a part-time library assistant for two years. The budget supported travel to the major universities to encourage them to collect the papers of modern physics. This grant funded ten times more staff hours than the Milwaukee project. When the grant environment became more competitive in the 1980s, the AIP Center submitted joint proposals to the NSF and the NHPRC for the first two years of the Study of Multi-Institutional Collaborations in order to fund the project staff which totaled 2.4 full-time positions—again four or five times more personnel than the Milwaukee project.<sup>49</sup>

In the WNY and Milwaukee projects, participants and advisors contributed substantial in-kind services, mostly not reimbursed by the grant. In Milwaukee, the grant funded only a half-time project archivist and stipends for the workshop leaders. Considering the ambitious goals of the Milwaukee project, the thousands of catalog records created, coordination among twelve partnering institutions, and arranging four workshops and ten topical panels, the outlay for personnel was minimal. The project accomplished a great deal, but no doubt funding for additional processors and descriptive work would have alleviated the frustration of doing too much with too little. In both NHPRC projects, the library consortiums only administered the grant funds; unlike the AIP Center, neither had discretionary funds to support the project after grant funding ended.<sup>50</sup>

Because the geographically based documentation strategy projects competed for extremely scarce grant resources, critics of documentation strategy felt confirmed in their argument that such projects were too costly to be practical or ongoing. In response, Richard Cox argued that documentation strategy projects provided one of the only alternatives to passive collection. Documentation strategy is, he argued, systematic, thorough, and easy to explain to funders. Projects increase community rapport and support. For these reasons, he argued, documentation strategy projects in geographical locales should be included in ongoing budgets. This would permit their implementation as small, sequential projects; however, to date, there is no evidence that this approach has been tried.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Hutchisson, "A Proposal," no pagination, the budget follows page 10; "Project on the History of Recent Physics." Differences in salaries paid to archivists and staff members across these projects were comparable when adjusted for benefits and inflation.

<sup>50</sup> "Documenting Metropolitan Milwaukee," personnel budget, page 9; overall budget, page 10. Copy supplied by Project Director Susan Davis. When the project goal switched from creating the database to entering catalog records into OCLC, this money was used to enter catalog records.

<sup>51</sup> Telephone conversation between Richard J. Cox and author, 30 March 2007.

LGBTRAN received three years of start-up funding from the E. Rhoades and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, after which it anticipated being able to support the project through private fund-raising. Private fund-raising required ongoing time and resources. It included creating a monthly e-newsletter, maintaining relationships with a large donor base, and securing grants for special projects. A self-supporting approach to funding had the advantage of demanding and thus fostering close connections with the community being documented. The risk remained that donations would not cover expenses. The ability of a documentation strategy project to become self-supporting depends on the dedication and resources of the community being documented; LGBTRAN's model of self-support would be viable primarily for groups with significant financial resources. Since documentation strategy was developed with a hope to document previously marginalized groups, the lack of funding seriously limits it as an approach to create a more representative record of society.<sup>52</sup>

### Appraisal and Re-appraisal

Critics use broad strokes in condemning documentation strategy, pointing to its theoretical and practical problems, and in many cases their criticisms have merit. Terry Abraham's contention that the real world is too complex for centralized appraisal and acquisition is confirmed in the difficulties faced by the geographically based projects. Efforts to simultaneously manage the documentation of "everything" proved cumbersome and as elusive as the "Holy Grail." The fact that documentation strategy projects in the health care sector and in evangelical religion—as well as innumerable hypothetical projects—have been proposed but not implemented indicates that the upfront effort required outweighs intangible future benefits. These difficulties, however, have overshadowed the areas of proven strength of documentation strategy, such as projects implemented as ongoing efforts, as well as its potential with innovative forms of online outreach and access, such as gateway websites such as that of the LGBTRAN.<sup>53</sup>

Ongoing documentation strategy projects offer many advantages, but require committed and competent host institutions whose mission aligns with that of the project. The AIP projects illustrate this. The AIP's advisors were renowned and, as the most prestigious professional association in the field, its ongoing commitment gave the early projects time to succeed. Opening the Center for the History of Physics contributed to the success of the documentation strategy approach in other ways. It testified to the importance of the

<sup>52</sup> After initial start-up costs of \$40,000 annually, expenses have stabilized at two-thirds of that amount, with additional funding directed to specific projects; *2006 Annual Report*, Attachment H, Finances and Fund Raising Report.

<sup>53</sup> Abraham, "Documentation Strategies."

historical record; it promised ongoing stewardship of historical documentation to potential donors, and it signaled this commitment to project funders. Successful projects, in turn, made it easier to secure funding for additional projects.

All of the projects reviewed required start-up time to determine a workable approach and develop expertise in managing the project. The lack of a sufficiently long time frame and a committed host institution in New York and Milwaukee turned difficult but promising first steps into frustrating dead ends. Ongoing projects at the AIP fostered expertise and led to mature relationships with funders. The AIP developed significant expertise in managing documentation strategy projects over two decades. The expertise of its staff and the long-term relationship with funders positioned the AIP Center to undertake the crucially important but extremely complex study of documentation within multi-institutional collaborations. This project provided a model for the entire archival profession of how to research documentation in electronic formats.<sup>54</sup>

Documenting geographical regions is likely to prove more manageable and effective as ongoing projects are divided into multiple subprojects and implemented successively. Subprojects should be based on topics or categories for which knowledgeable and respected experts can be assembled. Subprojects should probably be based on categories that reflect existing and functional community resources rather than abstract, academic, anthropological categories. Community experts and leaders—whether prestigious scientists or corporate executives—are essential to build support within the community. Among the projects discussed here, the involvement of influential leaders was a good predictor of project success.

Documentation strategy projects have enormous public relations potential that can only be helped by expanding a two-year project into a series of interconnected ones. Each subproject presents an opportunity to heighten awareness of the archival mission within each of the various communities. Documentation strategy projects demonstrate to the public what archives do and highlight the archival role in preserving a shared heritage. A host institution should consider a documentation strategy project simultaneously as a collection development initiative and a public relations activity, and budget accordingly. Host institutions should seek resources from local government bodies, state historical records advisory boards, private foundations for topical areas, federal granting agencies, partner institutions, and individual donors. Administrative entities for a project might be operated as public-private partnerships or loosely affiliated nonprofit organizations. Leaders of these ongoing

<sup>54</sup> As a correlative advantage, cultivating “expertise” in innovative approaches such as documentation strategy would help the profession as a whole to respond more nimbly to the challenges presented by electronic records.

projects might be innovators, activists, and publicists who partner with archivists for their technical expertise.

In addition to documenting localities, documentation strategy is probably still one of the most conceptually satisfying approaches to documenting social movements such as the antiwar movement, women's liberation, the AIDs epidemic, the rise of the religious right, and immigration. It is probably also among the most effective because it enlists and utilizes the expertise of leaders from these communities. Despite its appeal, the lack of resources within the archival community has meant that few documentation strategy projects have been implemented. LGBTRAN demonstrates that topical projects can secure funding from outside sources related to the topic or location. These applications require the support and partnership of leaders and institutions with some standing in the field being documented. Archivists interested in funding a documentation project should be alert to possible partnerships with host institutions whose mission is closely related to the topic or area. Viable host institutions are as varied as topics, but might include academic centers, private foundations, nonprofit organizations, ethnic associations, and professional groups.

The Internet presents new possibilities for topical access to archival material. Repositories often enhance access by providing topical browse lists, and many post these lists on their websites. LGBTRAN offers an example of expanding this concept beyond a single institution. Topical websites make searching easier for scholars and other users of these historical resources. The potential role of "virtual archives" for specific topics is immense and is likely to grow as the online environment lessens the importance of bricks-and-mortar locations. A documentation strategy approach is highly effective for developing this kind of topical website. Digital connectivity, in turn, facilitates the communication and collaboration called for with a documentation strategy approach. The LGBTRAN example also suggests that archivists can rely on the skills of activists and leaders within the field to manage project fund-raising and network building.

Finally, documentation strategy has very limited potential as an approach to collecting electronic records. It is widely acknowledged that the rapid obsolescence of electronic formats will require new, proactive methods of accessioning digital records. Documentation strategy entails proactive appraisal, but is guided by experts who evaluate all available documentation of a topic to select a representative historical record. This expertise may take decades to acquire, while formats and means of communication change every ten to fifteen years. In an effort to document postwar collaborative physics, the AIP Center devoted ten years to studying new documentation styles. The cost was enormous and would be prohibitive as a general approach for most topics. Documentation strategy, however, can identify key individuals and offices in a topic or field. Once these are identified, archivists can proactively request copies of all digital documents produced by these creators. Or, archivists can supply these creators

with information about preservation reformatting. This is a minor benefit compared to the overwhelming challenge of preserving electronic records

Documentation strategy, as proponents and critics agree, requires significant up-front resources. Based on prestudy and planning, it is most expensive and inefficient when preplanning is difficult—with poorly defined topics or communities that lack acknowledged experts or committed host institutions. If, however, documentation strategy is conceived of as more than an exercise in collection analysis, it has enormous potential to bring excitement, energy, and expertise from the community being documented to the challenge of collecting a representative record. This is just as true whether the community is in a locality or online. Documentation strategy is well suited to help archivists take advantage of the interconnected world. By building relationships with communities of all kinds, documentation strategy projects can embed the archives in the ongoing life of these communities.