SAADA
South Asian American Digital Archive
1315 Walnut Street, Suite 320 - Philadelphia, PA 19107

Society of American Archivists
17 North State Street
Suite 1425
Chicago, IL 60602-4061

November 30, 2017

Dear SAA Foundation Board Members,

With support from the SAA Foundation, the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) will create a SAADA Archivists' Collective to participate in the work of collecting and sharing the overlooked histories of South Asian Americans. SAADA's Archivists' Collective will bring together volunteer professional and student archivists from around the country to help increase the diversity of the archival record. Through this process SAADA will also give back to the archival community by supporting the career development of the group's members, who will gain valuable insight and experience into the process of building and maintaining a community archives.

SAADA is a 501(c)(3) national non-profit organization with a mission to create a more inclusive society by giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that reflect their unique and diverse experiences. South Asian Americans have been a presence in the United States for more than 130 years. Early immigrants worked on farms and factories, helped build railroads, fought for India's freedom from British rule, and struggled for equal rights in their new home. Today, more than 4.3 million individuals in the U.S. trace their heritage to South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Maldives. South Asian Americans are an integral part of American society, yet little information is available to the public about this community.

SAADA's collection of more than 3,000 unique items makes it the largest publicly accessible South Asian American archive. Used widely by scholars, students, journalists, artists, and community members, the archive includes rare photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, oral history interviews, videos, and other materials. SAADA's website has received 617,565 visitors in the last 4 years. Further, through digital storytelling initiatives such as its First Days Project (sharing stories from immigrants and refugees about their arrival in the U.S.) and Road Trips Project (sharing stories of travel across the country to reframe an American tradition), SAADA reimagines the potential of community archives in the digital era. SAADA was recognized by the American Historical Association in 2015 with its Roy Rosenzweig Prize for Innovation in Digital History and by the Society of American Archivists in 2016 with the Philip M. Hamer and Elizabeth Hamer Kegan Award.

The initial cohort of the Archivists' Collective will include eight archivists in cities around the country with significant South Asian American populations: New York City,
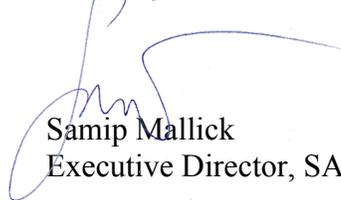
Washington DC, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Members will be recruited through an open call, publicized widely, including on social media and the SAA listserv. Each month, group members will be assigned a mini-project that contributes to SAADA's mission. Projects may include surveying archival holdings related to the South Asian American community in their city, conducting oral history interviews, creating metadata for materials in the archive, planning a fundraiser, or collecting stories at a community event. Group members will coordinate, discuss, and report back to each other through a private online forum on SAADA's website. The group will be led by SAADA's Executive Director and two co-chairs (Emily McNish, an archivist serving on SAADA's Board of Directors and Ayshea Khan, an Austin-based media archivist).

This project will directly support SAAF's priorities and elements of SAA's strategic plan. By enhancing SAADA's capacity to collect stories and materials from South Asian American community groups around the country, this project will ensure the further diversification of the archival record. By creating a network of professional and student archivists working towards a shared goal, this project will also support the career development of archivists, particularly in relation to building a community archives. The connections between archivists in the group will also create a peer-to-peer mentoring network, with archivists sharing skills, experiences, and expertise with each other. Finally, by prioritizing the inclusion of archivists from underrepresented communities in the group, SAADA will create a unique leadership opportunity that helps to further diversify the profession. Ultimately, through their exposure to SAADA's inner-workings, members of the Archivists' Collective will gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to start their own community archives documenting other minoritized communities that have been excluded from the archival record.

A grant of $5,000 from the SAA Foundation will support the staff time necessary to coordinate this group, the software required for connecting group members with each other, and modest stipends to support group members' professional development activities as related to SAADA's Archivists' Collective.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter of inquiry. We look forward to your response!

Sincerely,

Samip Mallick
Executive Director, SAADA