

Toward a More Data-Driven Archival Profession: Gathering the Information We Need to Improve Our Performance and Broaden Our Inclusivity

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) seeks a \$230,000 National Leadership Project Grant from IMLS to perform a second cycle of its Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States (A*CENSUS II), a comprehensive, two-part survey of U.S. archivists and archival institutions. SAA will survey 1) every self-identified archivist/archival worker in the U.S. to gather information about their demographics, education needs, job placement and status, and salaries, as well as their perspectives on key issues in the field, and 2) the directors of archival organizations to gather data about institutional characteristics, resources, strategic directions, and diversity and equity issues. Data and analyses will be made publicly available to support research and use by archival institutions, archivists, and members of other cultural heritage communities.

National Need for the Project: Archivists are vital to identifying and preserving essential parts of the cultural heritage of society; organizing and maintaining the documentary records of institutions, groups, and individuals; assisting in the process of remembering the past through authentic and reliable primary sources; and serving a broad range of communities and people who seek to locate and use valuable evidence and information. Leaders of archival institutions face significant barriers in making data-driven decisions to benefit their organizations because of the paucity of recent, comprehensive national or regional data about the archival workforce and archival institutions. Further, the archives profession has not fostered a culture of routine and regular acquisition and assessment of critical data about the field, its practitioners, and the environments in which they function. As the U.S. population becomes increasingly diverse and as technologies for recording and disseminating information evolve rapidly, it is essential to gather baseline data about archives and archivists to assess how archival institutions, the profession, and archival education must adapt so that archivists can continue to fulfill their mission to society.

A*CENSUS II would address both needs. When archival institutions advocate for resources, set goals, or benchmark against their peers, they would benefit from comprehensive peer data to facilitate their analyses. When education institutions or professional organizations assess education offerings or design new curricula, they would benefit from access to more accurate information about known gaps or needs. Researchers who study trends in the changing archives workforce, challenges in responding to community needs, or the impact of archives in their communities would benefit from access to comprehensive baseline data about archivists and the institutions in which they work. This project aligns with an IMLS goal to build the capacity of archival institutions to recruit, train, and develop their workforce and to identify trends to support more informed decision-making.

Selected Project Category/Community Catalysts: SAA is the oldest and largest archivist association in North America, serving the education and information needs of more than 6,000 individual archivists and institutions. SAA is especially interested in how workforce data might enhance efforts to increase diversity and equity within the profession.

Phase of Maturity/Scaling: In 2004 IMLS funded [A*CENSUS](#), the first comprehensive, nationwide survey of the archives profession. With a distribution list of just under 12,000 names and 5,620 respondents, the survey provided demographic data about archivists and covered their education, career, and professional development needs, with analyses and data made widely available. In 2020 SAA proposes to build on and expand this survey. Repeating key questions from 2004, the longitudinal data from A*CENSUS II will provide opportunities for comparative analysis. Additional questions will address emerging trends. A second survey for directors will focus on developing a baseline of data about archival institutions.

Project Design/Proposed Work Plan: SAA will partner with a research firm to develop and implement

the surveys and analyze the results. Questionnaire design will be led by an SAA steering committee. For both surveys, we will conduct cognitive interviews and pilot testing prior to deployment. The survey of individuals will be shorter than the 2004 survey but will replicate key questions for tracking. The population for the individual survey is self-identified archivists. Because SAA recognizes that many archivists and archival workers are not SAA members, we will gather our list of participants by using the combined and de-duplicated email lists of national, regional, state, and local archival organizations, as well as those gathered via recent studies (eg, Goldman and Tansey’s “RepoData” project [SAA Foundation, 2017], Tillman and Rodriguez’s “Collective Responsibility” project [IMLS, 2018]) to reach those who work within community archives that may not be aligned with traditional organizations. For the institutional survey, we will contact the institutions represented in the email lists of national, regional, state, and local archival organizations, identify the unit head, and send the survey to that individual. In both cases, we will use individual invitations so that we are able to calculate response rates.

Data analysis will be done using a statistical software package such as R or SPSS. All data will be deposited with ICPSR to ensure that they are widely available to support further research. SAA recently established a Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment to support members’ use and reuse of research data and to ensure that key aspects of A*CENSUS II will be re-administered periodically to provide longitudinal data.

Aug 2020 <i>Project Launch</i>	Issue funding award announcement and begin significant outreach to national, regional, state, and local organizations (eg, AASLH, ASALH, NARA, NCPH, MAC, MARAC, NEA, SCA, SGA, SSA); complete arrangements with research firm partner; schedule working group meetings and other preliminary management tasks.
Sep – Dec 2020 <i>Develop Instruments and Invitee Lists</i>	Survey of Individuals: SAA working group to review previous instrument and findings; identify continuing areas of interest, those that can be retired, and new areas of emphasis; revise instrument; program survey; conduct 5-10 cognitive interviews to test instrument; finalize instrument; gather and de-dupe lists of invitees. Survey of Organizations: Develop thematic areas of interest (including DEI); draft instrument; iterate with working group on revisions; program survey; conduct 5-10 cognitive interviews to test instrument; finalize instrument; gather lists of invitees.
Jan – Mar 2021 <i>Field Survey</i>	Develop survey communications (eg, blog posts, invitation/reminder messages); field surveys to SAA members and other listed invitees via survey platform; field surveys to nonmembers via outreach with other organizations; close surveys.
Apr – Jun 2021 <i>Analyze Results</i>	Conduct preliminary analysis of results; share with working group for input/feedback; conduct further analysis of results; draft report of findings; share with working group for input/feedback.
Jun 2021 – Feb 2022 <i>Reporting</i>	Publish findings in conjunction with major release event at August 2021 SAA Annual Meeting; conduct major communications/outreach effort to ensure that findings reach broadest possible audience; present results at conferences of other cultural heritage organizations (eg, AASLH, ASALH, NCPH); deposit dataset with ICPSR.

Diversity Plan: In support of the critical need to ensure the completeness of the American record, we intend to survey all individuals (professional archivists/records managers, “lone arrangers,” archives workers, community archivists, and public historians) and institutions that are responsible for identifying, preserving, and providing access to records of enduring value to 1) capture the demographics of the “full” archival workforce, 2) understand the needs created by seminal shifts in archival practice and non-custodial archival work since 2004; and 3) conduct a basic assessment of physical repositories and resources.

Budget Summary: Because the scale of the proposed surveys is beyond the capacity of SAA’s 12 staff, SAA intends to 1) partner with a research firm to conduct the studies (estimated expense: \$150,000), 2) provide support for member/volunteer participation (estimated: \$30,000), and 3) ensure strong administrative support from the staff office (eg, publicity, gathering and de-duping lists) (estimated: \$50,000).