



Archives in Context

Season 5 Episode 1: Archival Workers Emergency Fund

Aired November 25, 2020 • Length: 27:35 minutes

SPEAKERS

Nicole Milano, JoyEllen Williams, Anna Clutterbuck-Cook, and Lydia Tang

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

archival fund, archivists, workers, mutual aid, American archivists, donations, funds, support, committee, pandemic, applications, foundation, archives, donate

TRANSCRIPT

Nicole Milano 00:10

From the Society of American Archivists, this is *Archives in Context*, a podcast highlighting archival literature and technologies and most importantly, the people behind them.

Nicole Milano 00:26

Hi, everyone, and welcome to another episode of *Archives in Context*. My name is Nicole Milano, and today I'm very excited to introduce everyone to our new cohost this season, JoyEllen Williams.

JoyEllen Williams 00:39

Thank you for that warm welcome, Nicole. I am very excited to be a new member of the podcast team.

Nicole Milano 00:45

And we're thrilled to have you on the team. So JoyEllen and I, along with the entire *Archives in Context* team, want to send a huge congratulations to one of the other cohosts from our podcast, Ashley Levine, who just had a new baby. We're very excited for Ashley and his wife Emily on their adorable new bundle of joy. So today, JoyEllen and I will be speaking with Anna Clutterbuck-Cook, and Lydia Tang, who along with Jessica Chapel, and a committee of dedicated colleagues, helped to create the Archival Workers Emergency Fund (AWEF) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Archives in Context* will be encouraging listeners to donate to the Fund this season, and Anna and Lydia are here to tell us more about it. Welcome to you both.

Lydia Tang 01:29

Thank you. We're glad to be here.

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 01:32

Thank you very much. We're-we're glad to be here.

JoyEllen Williams 01:36

Ok, so let's get started. For our listeners who are unfamiliar with the Archival Workers Emergency Fund, can you explain what it is and how it works?

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 01:46

Yeah. This is Anna. And the Archival Workers Emergency Fund is a donation-based fund that accepts applications from all US based Archival workers who are in economic distress due to COVID-19. So folks can donate if they are still receiving a paycheck and have the financial resources to do that; we're happily accepting donations. But if you're an archival worker, of any kind, you don't have to be an SAA member to request support from the fund. All you have to be is someone who has done work in archival context in the last year, and you know, lost income due to COVID-19. So the application is pretty straightforward. You give a pretty brief description of your job responsibilities related to being an archival worker, which can either sort of be in resume form or just a paragraph describing the sort of work that you do in an archives context, and then a short paragraph describing what sort of financial needs that you have and why you're requesting the money. We give cash grants up to \$1,000. It's a one time eligibility. So for this pilot period, which goes through the end of December, where we're saying people can only request grants one time at this point, to just sort of make sure that it's equal eligibility for everyone. And then the review committee that accepts the applications just has this sort of two tier eligibility we check to make sure that they are an archival worker. It's a yes/no based on their statement about their job duties. And then we have a rubric to sort of figure out what their financial needs are based on their statement. And we scale their level of needs sort of 1,2,3 level of acuteness.

Nicole Milano 03:50

So, Anna and Lydia, let's back up a little bit. How did the idea for this fund arise? And how did the Archival Workers Emergency Fund Organizing Committee come together?

Lydia Tang 04:01

Well, we saw that the Society of American Archivists already had a National Disaster Recovery Fund for archives, but nothing for archivists. It was all during the time of the March COVID-19 closures. There were a lot of layoffs happening all at once, and Jessica Chapel proposed it as- as part of the Accessibility and Disability Section Steering Committee, which I'm also on and other- some other members of the Organising Committee, and we took it and ran with it. So we set up a Google group. And we started with the hashtag of displaced archivists, and we sent out this scoping survey to get a pulse on what was happening. And so with this ad hoc survey, we were getting all of these stories about- about particularly archival workers, especially if they are more processing archivists being laid off pretty preemptively. Everybody was just getting sent home, and sometimes they wouldn't be able to work remotely. So we knew that there was definitely some need there. And so, more people signed on with the- with the Google group. And so we met weekly. And within just a couple of weeks, we put together the proposal, an evaluation rubric, the FAQs, and also the WordPress site. And so, I just wanted to say that this was a huge effort that was primarily spearheaded by Jessica, and I also wanted to acknowledge other people that have been involved in this process: Stephen Booth, Alison Clemens, Anna here and Jennifer Coggins,

Courtney Dean, Steve Duckworth, Carady DeSimone, Rebecca Goldman, Irene Hauzinger, Katharina Hering, Hayley Hinsberger, Valencia Johnson, Carli Lowe, Bridget Malley, Sarah McLusky, Rebecca Thayer, Lauren White, Amy Wickner and Katrina Windon.

JoyEllen Williams 06:13

Thank you so much for mentioning those names. That is truly important. Earlier, you all mentioned that the Archival Workers Emergency Fund operates in conjunction with the Society of American Archivists Foundation. How was the relationship forged between these two organizations?

Lydia Tang 06:33

So we knew there was a lot of need, and also that there was a lot of willingness to help out, but we didn't want to set up a GoFundMe right away because it would just be too challenging to administer the funds as an ad hoc group. So Jessica and I met with the Society of American Archivists Executive Director Nancy Beaumont, and the Director of Finance and Administration Peter Carlson to work out the details. So, because the AWE Fund is administered through the SAA foundation as a 501(c)(3), that means that donations are tax deductible and it also means that there's a lot of accountability and structure for managing the funds. So, so far we've been able to help around 160 archival workers, and dispersed around \$140,000, which is, I think, due in part to the visibility of the clout of SAA, combined with the creativity, resourcefulness, and passion of the Organizing Committee and our archival peers.

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 07:45

I can just add that- so the way that the relationship works currently is we have- so the SAA Foundation approved the proposal that the Organizing Committee put forward to them late March/early April, the Fund started accepting donations April 15, and we started then reviewing applications for funding shortly after that. There is the Organizing Committee is not an official committee of SAA. They continue to sort of be their- a separate group. We do fundraising activities, things like that, sort of separate from the SAA umbrella. We can talk a little bit about some of those things later. There is a Review Committee, which is a formal committee put together by the SAA Foundation after the Fund was approved. Many of the members of that committee are also part of the Organizing Committee that we, both Lydia and I, are on that committee and we are formally appointed by the SAA Foundation Board. There are board- Foundation Board members on that committee as well. And we are the- those are the- that's the group that actually reviews the applications that come in and approves people for funding. And so that's sort of that's the structure right now. And the- this is still the pilot phase of the Fund. So we're coming up on... the foundation is going to be having their next board meeting in October, and we will have a report due to them. We'll be revealing the activities of the Fund up to this point. And they will be considering sort of how things have been going and we'll be talking with them about what happens after December.

Lydia Tang 09:32

So while the SAA Foundation administers the Fund, the Organizing Committee still continues to meet every two weeks. The Organizing Committee has been an amazing group of people to work with. There are seasoned professionals as well as recent graduates. This team has demonstrated to me the strength of what we have with our various backgrounds and skills to contribute to the profession. For example, Carli Lowe has a background

working in development, and she helped make a list of potential donors to approach with promotional materials. To brag about Anna here, she has been our social media maven. When we released our survey on the impact of COVID-19 on archival workers, it received over 100 responses in just the first few days because of her skill with Twitter. She also runs the Persistent Stitches fundraising site for crafts, and leveraged her platform to help archivists who craft contribute their handiwork for the cause. Carady DeSimone contributed the lovely graphics for the AWE Fund WordPress site and the Coffee for Colleagues fundraiser. Amy Wickner and Courtney Dean have been really active with labor issues and labor organizing, which is essentially in spirit of this fund; be organized to help each other which is part of what a union for archivists might do. This is an example of how the Organizing Committee is active and how everyone contributes to support the Fund and our colleagues.

JoyEllen Williams 10:51

As a member of the SAA Foundation Board, I remember when the original proposal came in, and I just want to say we were all incredibly impressed with the speed of it and how powerful it was. It was just we couldn't think of anything better. So kudos to you all.

Lydia Tang 11:08

Thank you. The Foundation Board provided the initial seed funding of \$15,000 and additional support later on. So we're so grateful for the Board's support and in collaboration of the entire SAA staff.

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 11:24

Yeah. Felicia Owens and Peter Carlson have both been- put a lot of time into helping us administer the Fund. They are obviously doing all of the financial and administrative paperwork. Felicia takes all the application data and gets the Review Committee all that information every time, every week. Basically, on a weekly basis we meet to discuss the applications and she gets us all the information we need- and does need- and does all the communication with applicants in order to preserve confidentiality. So yeah, it's we- she is a priceless resource.

Lydia Tang 11:58

We couldn't do what we do without her so.

Nicole Milano 12:01

Yeah, the collaborative nature of this project is really just inspiring. And I think in general, this fund has been very uplifting in what has been a challenging time for- for many archivists. And I think the- the level of support also says a lot about our profession and the people who work in it. And on that same line of thought, the concept of mutual aid seems to have been a driving force behind the Fund, could you provide a bit more information about what mutual aid is and why you felt it was a good fit for the archival community?

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 12:32

Um, yeah, so the idea behind mutual aid it's really kind of a 19th century- 19th century concept, which I think is fitting for archivists and historians. Mutual aid societies were some of the first in insurance societies and sort of labor organizations that came out of the industrialization period, where workers would get together and if someone had, you know, had a workplace injury or needed to- lost their job, the community of workers would come together and support them through that period. They were voluntary organizations, and the idea was

really that people would come together and help each other, it was very reciprocal in nature. And so I think that's- that's what we were... that- that's the model we were operating on. We really wanted to see this as a community coming together to support each other, rather than seeing this as a top down- hit- a handout or- and we really didn't want the process of the application- the application process, or the disbursement of funds, to feel like it was really paternalistic. We didn't want the application to feel like people were having to, you know, really prove that they deserved the funds on any sort of moral or financial level. We wanted it to feel like we were trusting people to tell us what they needed and then we were then turning around and trusting them to do what they needed to do with the funds that we gave them. So that really informed the way that we built the- we built the application. And has really informed the conversations we've had as a Review Committee and the decisions that we've made about how to administer the funds. And we're really hoping that we can- can sort of continue to hold ourselves accountable to that ethic... really don't want this- this entire process to... we will want to continue to have that sort of egalitarian feeling as we move forward with the Fund.

JoyEllen Williams 14:41

So what can you tell us about the impact of the Archival Workers Emergency Fund grants, for example, who are they reaching? Who has been most impacted by COVID 19?

Lydia Tang 14:54

Well, COVID-19 has really exacerbated a lot of existing issues within the archival profession. So it's- it's greatly impacted already precarious workers. So short-term temporary grant-funded hourly workers. It also has really impacted people who fall through governmental aid cracks. So we've been able to help people who, for various reasons, may not have been able to receive stimulus checks, or other types of assistance, such as unemployment, and complex multifactor family situations. We've been able to help graduating archival students who are facing a job market that's pretty nonexistent. And also, older archival workers who aren't in administrative positions who get let go, because maybe their administrator thinks that well, they're approaching retirement age, but might not have been able to retire. And so the need keeps compounding. So I don't think that anybody would have imagined what happened in March. But I also think that nobody would have imagined that we'd still be dealing with this right now, now meaning in the end of September, but it could go on and the repercussions could have- could be still echoing for years. And so we're not sure exactly where we're headed, but we know that there's going to be need and ramifications going forward for a long time.

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 16:45

Yeah, one of the things we have had recent conversations about in both on the Review Committee, and also in our organizing the larger Organizing Committee, is thinking about the scope of the Fund, which is right now very narrowly focused on COVID-19. And- but we- we've had ongoing conversations about how really we hope that the Fund continues to be available to people who are struggling, you know, due to a large number of different crises that might happen. And the recent wildfires on the West Coast are an example of that. And in this context, someone could be struggling with COVID-19 repercussions plus wildfire displacement, you know, and so, when we review applications, we are often seeing people who are struggling with, you know, sort of crisis upon crisis. And, you know, \$1,000 is kind of a drop in the bucket, but it's also, it's really, sort of from a personal perspective, for me anyway, it's really gratifying to know that we can reach out and provide them a little bit of support, at least. There's something really tangible that you can do to make a difference in someone's-

someone's life, at least- at least that much when they're dealing with sort of an overwhelming number of, you know, crises that they really have no control over.

Nicole Milano 18:17

So the fund Organizing Committee has engaged in some creative fundraising strategies to raise money. For example, you had an online silent auction of donated crafts and handwork in July. Are there any events or promotions coming up later this year that archivists and others can support?

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 18:34

So right now the- the current fundraiser that we're doing is called Coffee for Colleagues, or Tea on Me, which is our- we're- we're using that as sort of- Coffee for Colleagues as a, you know, small micro-donations, \$5 for a cup of coffee. We're really hoping to capture small donations that people- people who don't necessarily- can't afford, you know, \$100 or \$200 a pop, but can, you know, offer the price of a cup of coffee, or a pot of tea, hopefully, you know, every month, because sustaining donations can really make a difference. So if you can afford \$5 a month, that's income that the Fund can count on moving forward, and especially as we're looking at this pandemic, rolling into next year and possibly longer. If we know we can count on a broad base of micro-donations to keep that fund replenished, then we are confident that we can support people who come to us in need. And so that's what this campaign has been about, both capturing those small donations and then also building that base of mutual aid and solidarity, building a sense of community, for the people who are making those micro-donations and feeling like they're involved in the Fund at whatever level they can contribute. So it's been really fun. It's a social media campaign. We have a GoFundMe and the money that comes through that goes directly to SAA into the Fund. So even though it's going through a separate platform, it goes right into the Fund and gets dispersed. 100% of the funds will go right to the- right to the AWE Fund and get sent out to applicants. So check that out.

Lydia Tang 20:38

We've also been organizing occasional Q&A panels, and so our first one was a collaboration with the HALO Fund, the Help a Library Worker Out Fund, and MuseumWorkersSpeak. And so these are to basically cross-pollinate across the GLAM fields. And so with these Q&A panels, it's- it also is a- is a fundraiser, it's- it's a sliding scale for people to donate, as they register, and so then those funds are dispersed, whether it's solely organized by the AWE Fund, or whether it's a three-way disbursement with those other mutual aid organizations.

Nicole Milano 21:26

I attended an SAA session this year for the virtual conference in 2020, and I remember there was a session that was around what- what could be considered a happy hour time. And the organizers mentioned, you know, just think of how much you would be spending right now on a cocktail at the conference hotel bar, and maybe donate that to the Archival Workers Emergency Fund. And I thought it was a really great way to really show how easy it is and how-how anything really helps this fund. And I thought that was a kind of creative approach to encourage donations. And I think it worked.

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 21:59

Yeah, I don't know for the Coffee for Colleagues campaign, the median donation has been \$15 a person which I think is a really great... I'm sort of a proponent of like, the lower the median donation is the better, because that's more people involved. So it's been really great to see. I don't know what the median donation for the- the AWE Fund in general has been, but it's been really great to see how many people, I think at this point it's over 750. Lydia, you may have looked at it more recently than I have, but you know, it's- I think we're closing in on between 750 and 1,000 individuals who have donated to the Fund since April 15, which is really an amazing number of- of supporters.

Lydia Tang 22:45

Yes. Many of the donors are listed on the AWE Fund website off of the SAA Foundation website. And so, in addition to individual donors, they also include Sections of the Society of American Archivists, and also many local and regional archival organizations too, so we're so thankful for their support.

JoyEllen Williams 23:10

That's just great. So it sounds like you already have a lot of campaigns, and ideas, and initiatives in place as the pandemic and the economic crisis wear on. But how do you hope to keep the needs of displaced archival workers front and center for the archival profession, maybe in terms of just keeping people aware?

Lydia Tang 23:33

Well, I'm so glad that we've got such a- such a creative and enthusiastic organizing team. And we keep coming up with ideas to be active and present. And so we've got all this data, and we're hoping to release this data in a summary pretty soon. And we're also gearing up for the next round of the survey. So we're hoping to send that out in November. And so this will give us kind of a longitudinal study about what- what happened and how it continues to play out in our profession. We're also continuing with our Q&A panels. And so we're we're currently harkening back to our roots within the Accessibility and Disability Section. For one in October, focusing on the National Disability Employment Awareness Month being in October, focusing on disabled GLAM workers and the intersection of disability with labor issues in the field.

Nicole Milano 24:41

So many of us are already thinking of you and your fellow committee members as superheroes thanks to your efforts this year. But if you could each have an additional superpower, what would it be and why?

Anna Clutterbuck-Cook 24:53

Well, right now, since we're at the beginning of the school year I've just been seeing a lot of people really struggling at all levels from pre-K all the way to postdoc education. And just feeling like, what I would really love is just to be able to grant everyone a gap year. We all need- we just all need time to cope with reality, and recover and- and mourn the losses that a lot of us have lived with so far and sort of cope with what the ongoing pandemic is causing in our lives. And Zoom school is not creating a restful space for that for the students, or parents, or faculty, or teachers, most of us in those situations. So that's what I've been waking up every morning and sort of doom-scrolling through Twitter and being like, I just want to give everyone a break. All the students who are struggling just need some time out. That's a superpower I would ask for right now.

Lydia Tang 26:01

My superpower would also be time related. One of my heroes, being a musician, is the great conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein. And he said, to achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan and not quite enough time. So I'd love the ability to split the minute better.

Nicole Milano 26:22

Those are fantastic answers for both of you. Thank you so much. Thank you both for sharing your thoughts today on the Archival Workers Emergency Fund and how our community members can help support this. We hope all of our listeners think about supporting the Fund today and that you enjoyed our episode. We certainly enjoyed talking to both of you.

JoyEllen Williams 26:43

I just want to say thank you again and this is so important. And I just hope that we don't lose this momentum. This is absolutely needs to remain in the- in the center of our minds, our colleagues and our friends. And so anyway, thank you all for the work that you've done to make this happen.

Nicole Milano 27:00

You've just listened to an episode of *Archives in Context*, the official podcast of the Society of American Archivists. Members of the podcast team include Bethany Anderson, Chris Burns, JoyEllen Freeman (Williams), Nicole Milano, Colleen McFarland Rademaker, and Anna Trammell. Opinions expressed in this podcast are our own and are not reflective of a particular institution. Be sure to like us on iTunes if you enjoyed what you heard, and join us again next time.