



# Archives in Context

## Season 6 Episode 4: SAA Foundation

Aired July 28, 2022 • Length: 27:47 minutes

<https://archivesincontext.archivists.org/2022/02/18/season-6-episode-4-saa-foundation>

### SPEAKERS

Bob Clark, Beth Myers, JoyEllen Williams, Nicole Milano

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

SAA Foundation, archivists, Foundation Board, support, archives profession, grants, fundraising

### 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.

**JoyEllen Williams** 00:27

Hello, everyone, and welcome to another episode of the Archives in Context Podcast. I'm JoyEllen Williams, and I'm here with my co host, Nicole Milano. Hi, everyone.

**Nicole Milano** 00:40

Today we're excited to be speaking with Beth Meyers and Bob Clark, two members of the Society of American Archivists Foundation Board. Bob Clark, who goes by the pronouns he/him, is director of archives at the Rockefeller Archive Center, a historical research center for the study of philanthropy. In addition to managing a talented team of 32 archives and IT professionals, he actively engages with the Rockefeller Archive Centers records-creating organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation to shape information governance, records management, and archival programs that are responsive to the digital environment. From 2001 to 2015, he served in various leadership roles at the Franklin D Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, including a supervisory archivist, deputy director and acting director. He's also a recovering attorney, having practiced law in New Mexico for seven years before returning to the archival profession in 2001.

**JoyEllen Williams** 01:38

Beth Myers, who goes by the pronouns she/hers, is the director of Special Collections at Smith College, a position held since 2014. She provides leadership and oversight to a unit that averages 20 staff and encompasses the three primary repositories of Special Collections. Myers is responsible for personnel budget, developing internal and external funding streams, working with donors and developing strategic initiatives and planning. She participated in most aspects of the planning and logistics related to the newly built Nielsen Library building over the past seven years. Myers has also been the PI for several major special collections-related

grants and spearheaded the \$1.5 million project Access to Collections project, 2018 through 2021, and the soon-to-launch Access to Collections II: Rare Materials Bibliographic Description Project, 2022 through 2025. A dedicated archival professional, Myers participates actively in the Society of American Archivists, most recently as the chair of the A\*CENSUS II working group and member of the Foundation Board. She has published reviews, articles and book chapters related to the field of archives and special collections. Myers lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, with her daughter Quinn. During this interview, we will discuss the role of SAA's Foundation, its goals for the future, and ways everyone can get involved. Welcome, Beth, and Bob.

**Beth Myers** 03:23

Hi.

**Bob Clark** 03:24

Hey, thanks so much. Glad to be with you.

**JoyEllen Williams** 03:26

For our listeners who are not familiar with the Foundation, can you tell us why we have one for SAA? What are its mission and goals?

**Bob Clark** 03:36

Sure, I'd be happy to talk about that. So the SAA foundation is actually a support organization that provides assistance to SAA in fulfilling its charitable and educational sides of its mission. So what the SAA Foundation does, is it receives money, solicits money, from donations, from grants, from other granting organizations to provide funding for things like awards and professional recognition, travel stipends, to support folks going to the Annual Meeting. It provides grants for research and study in the field of of the archival profession. And it supports the National Disaster Recovery Fund for Archives, which is of course, an important tool during these periods of unstable climate change.

**Nicole Milano** 04:29

Thank you for sharing information about the Foundation. Now we want to hear a bit more about you. How and why did each of you get involved with the foundation? Beth, let's start with you.

**Beth Myers** 04:40

Sure. So I really have always been interested in the Foundation. I was sort of watching it. It's been around now for 10 years and then sort of growing along the way and pardon the expression but sort of creating a foundation for the Foundation. I do a lot of development work in my job both through grants and direct donor relationships. And so I really thought that this was an area that I could give back to the profession. I also want to sort of test and see if the skills that I have in one venue can translate to another. But really, it's about confirming and sort of supporting a belief in the profession that I have in SAA, that money can be used for good, right. And it can be used for things that I believe in and that align with my own professional ethics and goals. To me, fundraising is a lot about connecting people to ideas with opportunities to give and support in areas that they care about. So that is the work of the Foundation at its core, so I'm happy to volunteer and be a part of that work.

**Bob Clark** 05:54

Yeah, and for me, I'm kind of surprised that I joined the Foundation Board. I've never been one of those archivists who has aspired to leadership roles in SAA as a career goal in and of itself. So I've always kind of participated in SAA but not really been actively involved at that level. But what really got my attention was the Archival Workers Emergency Fund, you know, that was created at the beginning of the pandemic. I think it was one of the most inspiring, proactive, forward-thinking things that SAA and the SAA Foundation and the archival community has done for each other, to really support people who were economically impacted by the effects of the pandemic. And it was really inspiring to me. And over the last seven years, you know, I've been working at the Rockefeller Archive Center, where I've gotten an insider's look at how Foundations work and grant-making organizations work. And so I thought that the knowledge, much like Beth, the knowledge that I've that I've gained through working with foundations, both large and small, you know, might translate well to supporting the important work that the Foundation does during this difficult time. And for the next one.

**Nicole Milano** 07:06

I do want to mention as well, that Archives in Context has an interview with the Archival Worker Emergency Fund team, really the team that was behind its creation, if anyone is interested in learning more.

**JoyEllen Williams** 07:17

So you both have told us a bit about your talents and the experiences that you bring to the table to the SAA Foundation, so now I'd like to talk about that a little bit more. The work of the Foundation Board often involves skills and development and administration, maybe things like fundraising, donor relations, budget management, things you all have mentioned. While some archivists regularly use these skill sets in their current positions, many do not since foundation work and archival work differ somewhat. What do you believe motivates archivists to serve on the Foundation Board?

**Beth Myers** 07:58

I'd like to jump in and this has actually come up in conversations a little bit with with Bob and I and others on the Board. I think this is a really important juncture for the Foundation. And this idea that fundraising can feel very inaccessible to a lot of people, it can feel very intimidating. But it really is connecting people from what they care about to where there are opportunities to focus that care in a financial way. I also think that archivists at our core, although we deal all the time in the past, we are the most forward-thinking people as a profession, we care about history in a future tense, right? It's what the next generation is going to do with this. We gather materials together for the evidentiary value and its potential of use of building new knowledge in the future. I just always think archives is ultimately this really hopeful profession that's looking down the road, as much as we care about what's happened in the past. In fact, probably I think we're more forward-looking than we are looking in the past. And that's really important when you want to create and bolster profession. And think about sustainability. And think about the ways in which our profession has changed so radically since its kind of formal founding and the way in the last 20 years have been transformative, and where we need to go, as Bob said, with with supporting around emergency worker funds in like, where do we need the most help in being successful in the future? And so, I do think, yes, it's helpful if you've engaged with budgets or you've gone out and you've done an ask, but really, I don't think it's essential to doing the work. It's really caring about connecting people with things

they care about what we care about as a profession and keeping looking forward, if you're hopeful, if you want to look towards the future for us, the Board is where it's at. I don't know. But what do you think?

**Bob Clark** 10:12

Yeah, I'd also say that the Board is a great place to learn those skills, if you don't have them, if you're not really familiar with budgets, if you're not really familiar with fundraising, or maybe you're not comfortable with making an ask, this is a great kind of, it's not, I wouldn't say low stakes because the stakes are high, we're already you know, our profession is underfunded and underresourced as it is. So our ability to you know, increase the funding support that we can offer is really important. But it's a good, it's a good safe way to expand your skill set. If you know that you need expanding in certain areas, and you aspire to be able to work in fundraising and development or, you know, understand a budget and collaborate effectively with and communicate with other people. I would say too that, you know, even though to best point, we're very forward-thinking and, you know, we're great at dealing with technological change as it pertains to preserving the archival record and making it accessible, we're not so good at applying those same lessons to the way we do other things. And so, you know, we tend to fall into the trap of well, but we've always done it that way. It's just the way this organization has operated for the last 65 years. So we're just going to keep doing it. And I think one of the ways in which, you know, new people joining boards, like the SAA Foundation, they can bring new energy, new ideas to development, to communication, to maybe even the budget itself, you know, helping shift budget priorities when we just went through a big strategic planning process that I think was really really valuable for everybody involved, those who've been on the Board for a long time, and those of us who are new coming in and providing some new perspectives.

**Beth Myers** 11:55

I think that's true, too, around the different perspectives is so crucial. If we're the same people from the same place all sit around the table, looking at each other, that's not a place where I think, you know, real magic is gonna happen, right? Like, it will get things done, and it'll be great. But we need to have different viewpoints and different experiences in the room to talk about it, to really be successful.

**Nicole Milano** 12:24

Beth, I love that you called the archivist profession, I quote, hopeful profession. I think that's a really beautiful phrase. And in that same line of thought, Bob, you mentioned that we as archivists are often underfunded and underresourced. And in that same train of thought, I'm wondering if the SAA Foundation is planning on doing anything related to archival salaries or contingent labor across the country? And if not, is that something that they would consider doing?

**Beth Myers** 12:49

I don't think there's anything particular, I mean, this strategic plan is now public, the draft of it, and it's in a comment period. So please, everybody take a look at it and give feedback. This is sort of a really important moment, I do feel like there's a convergence of different things with SAA, we have a pretty significant change in leadership and staffing within SAA's organizational business end of things of SAA has changed quite a bit. We also have the A\*CENSUS II survey data is going to be coming out and will be shared very widely. And it's both challenging and a confirmation in interesting ways what we're seeing in preliminary that will come out this fall,

we also have the Foundation strategic plan. So these things are all kind of converging, not of course at the exact same time, which would be oh so convenient, but they are coming together where we do need to set priorities around where can the most good be done in the best way? And then also what are the internal process mechanisms we need to make better and easier for people to get access to the funding? So like lowering barriers to both giving, lowering barriers to receiving, like, where's this sort of target funding need to go, where is long-term investment warranted? So these are the places where the discussion is sitting, and I'd be really interested to see how with A\*CENSUS II data coming out how that will affect a lot of different aspects of SAA's thinking.

**Bob Clark** 14:32

Yeah, I'd also add that it's important to remember how SAA Foundation and SAA itself relate to each other. The Foundation is a support organization for SAA. SAA is the Foundation's sole member. And so while we can have a strategic plan that helps us think through the next three years of how we want to do fundraising or how we want to do grant-making we're really driven and by what SAA has determined as the priorities for the organization itself and the membership of SAA moving forward so we're not the tail that wags the SAA dog. SAA is the dog that wags the SAA Foundation tail. And so, you know, they're all the things that you mentioned, Nicole, are really important things of concern to the profession and SAA at large. And the Foundation stands by to support SAA in whatever motions moving forward on those issues it wants and sees fit to mate with the advice of the Council and of the membership. And one of the reasons why we want to dedicate so much energy to increasing our fundraising and expanding the unrestricted Strategic Growth Fund is that we want to be positioned to respond to changes in direction and priorities that SAA has, but also to, you know, emerging challenges that need a quick response like the Archival Workers Emergency Fund was able to do.

**Nicole Milano** 15:58

Thank you both for responding to that. Now, could you tell us about some exciting current or upcoming Foundation projects?

**Bob Clark** 16:07

Okay, Beth, I'll take this one. So, Beth and I serve on a lot of committees together, it seems like within the Foundation, so I'm gonna take the easy one. I think Beth and I are really excited about the opportunities that we're starting to create for expanding the ways in which we communicate about development and fundraising. You know, the Foundation has done it kind of in the same way for a long time. And it was pretty effective, and it raised money, and we were able to do what it is that our mission is with that. But I don't think we were taking advantages of even what aren't really even called "new media" anymore. We just were taking advantages of social media, we weren't taking advantage of the ways in which you can use electronic communication to reach broader audiences. And I particularly wanted to try to expand the fundraising base beyond SAA membership itself, because let's face it SAA membership isn't inexpensive. And a lot of organizations don't support their staff members' participation in SAA. So that comes out of SAA members individual pockets. And so we don't want to just keep going back to the well of membership all the time, we want to create programs that support the profession at large, even if you aren't an SAA member. So I think trying to find ways in which we can go beyond just you know, listservs and user groups, and, you know, the subgroups within SAA is really exciting to me.

**Beth Myers** 17:40

Yeah, and I will add to this chorus of enthusiasm, I 100% agree, it's just not a surprise. But other places I think are exciting as we look forward is into really thinking in deeper complex ways about what stewardship means, what relationships mean, how we relate to one another in the field, how we build those relationships that really recognize that the Foundation is about archivists, helping archivists. And so again, what can we do to build on that in a meaningful way? So not just like throw aways or events that, you know, kind of come and go, but what is a meaningful relationship to folks who want to have that relationship with the Foundation, how do we build that? Modernizing our systems again, so making it easier for giving but also easier for getting, and then recruiting new voices. So doing things like this very podcast, to go out and to say, maybe you've never thought about the Foundation, but we're thinking about you. I mean, not to be creepy, but we'd really like some, we want to keep bringing in that different perspectives into the work that we do, it's only going to make us better.

**Bob Clark** 18:55

We want to meet people where they are and continue meeting them where they are throughout their career, even post career so that if somebody is able to donate \$20, this year, if we maintain and steward that relationship over the course of their career, maybe it's \$50 in three years, and maybe it's \$100 in six years, and then maybe they become, you know, a monthly giver, and then maybe they're so impressed by the steadiness and importance of the Foundation's work, that they even, you know, make provision in their estate planning. You know, I think that is our long-term goal for the development work that we're doing. But, as Beth mentioned, also modernizing the receiving of money from the foundation. So, you know, I'm on the Grants Review Committee, and one of the things that we've been working on is actually using technology to make applying for grants easier, more standardized, and we're just now developing a way in which grant recipients can actually submit their final reports in a much more standardized way electronically, so that we can then use that information to communicate out about the work that we've done and the things that we've supported through grants and broaden awareness in that way as well.

**JoyEllen Williams** 20:10

With all of these upcoming opportunities in mind, what does the future hold for the Foundation in the next three to five years and what is the Board's role in this? I think sometimes people don't always understand the role of the Board and what this group of people does to advance the Foundation.

**Beth Myers** 20:27

Well, luckily, we have a strategic plan that will help us with that. I also, again, I think the strategic planning coming out of Council, as well as the staffing changes, as well as A\*CENSUS II, these are all things that will be real sit-and-think moments for us about how we want to be flexible moving forward. And I think it's actually a really exciting time to be a part of the Board, because there is all of this potential and enthusiasm that's been put on a really good and solid foundation. So, you know, we're sort of through the growing pains of adolescence. And now it's a question of where do we go from here? So there's a real opportunity to shape the vision and the work of the Board now in a different way than I think was possible when it was like, let's create the Foundation. That was the goal, and now we have it. Okay, now, where do we go from here? So there are a number of priorities that are coming out of the strategic plan, some of which we've talked about Bob and I've talked about

or mentioned in terms of modernization and stewardship, what it means to serve, you know, set metrics and goals and how we go about that. What does it mean to have a different kind of staffing relationship support to SAA proper, like, we're really sort of exploring all of this, so yeah, next three to five years, kind of an exciting time.

**Bob Clark** 21:59

Yeah. To your question about, you know, what does the Board do, I think most of us have probably had experiences with different types of organizations where boards have been used effectively or ineffectively, depending upon kind of who's guiding the board process, I would say that this is a very active and proactive board. You know, we all respect one another. We all have very robust conversations about things that we feel passionately about. But it's still done in a respectful way that with the overall mission of moving the Foundation forward. And so I think, you know, I certainly get energized by the meetings that we have, both the larger full board meetings as well as the smaller committee meetings. Because we all want to do our best and make the SAA Foundation, the best version of itself that it can be, and make it really sustainable for the future.

**Nicole Milano** 22:50

How can or should archivists get involved with the Foundation, even if they're not Board members?

**Beth Myers** 22:56

So I'll go ahead and play the role of Captain Obvious with this response. And I think the most obvious way to get involved is to support it in whatever manner in a way that makes sense to you or is feasible for you. I think, knowing that the Board exists is actually a good step forward too, knowing that it is out there, that the work is ongoing, and then being aware of what gets funded, and we have work to do on that end, but to see where the money's being spent, I think that there's wonderful programming and support that doesn't always sort of reach everyone. And so it's like this is, again, we're archivists helping archivists, so let's look at the ways in which that. So knowing our programming, giving, knowing, and then I thought sharing, so like, once, once we've got you, once you're on board, you get, you know, once we've got you and then you know, tell other people about it and share those opportunities, the Board is only ever going to be as successful as its funding programs, and, you know, making sure that we have people applying and that we're getting this money into the hands of folks who need it. So yeah, give, learn share.

**Bob Clark** 24:09

You can't beat a pithy response like that. But I will say, you know, also check to see what type of grants that we offer. You know, if you have ideas for a project, whether it'd be a research project or a study or something that you know, innovative that you want to try, apply for a grant, let us support you because that's just gonna make the profession better. You know, and one of the things that we're committed to supporting SAA is, you know, equity, diversity and inclusion work, there are opportunities through the grant program to help us move that forward as well. So please, please take advantage of that. You know, come find us at the annual meeting, we were hoping to have a really like visible presence at the annual meeting where you're going to be sick of us by the time the annual meeting is over, because we're going to be beating the Foundation drum everywhere we go. So come find us, talk to us, learn more, volunteer. But I will also say this before this winds down, we couldn't do what we do without the support of SAA's executive director and staff. They are just amazing at all the support



that they give to us in terms of scheduling the meetings, facilitating the meetings, doing minutes, providing us the data that we need to make effective, high-quality decisions. So let's just make sure that we we make visible the invisible work of the staff of SAA that helps us do what we do.

**Beth Myers** 25:34

A thousand times agree.

**JoyEllen Williams** 25:36

Wonderful. And for our final question, what superpower would you each like to have and why?

**Beth Myers** 25:45

Okay, I really struggle with this question. Because I inevitably feel like I should say something like the capacity to generate real peace. But what I actually think is, as I'm aging, like regeneration would be pretty amazing. Because like, I could get my knees to stop hurting is what I'm saying. So yeah, I don't know, Bob. I'm so curious.

**Bob Clark** 26:10

So this was a tough one for me, too. I'm torn. I kind of like invisibility because as much as an extrovert as I am, my social batteries run low after a while. And so I would like to just be like, peace out, folks. I'm gone. But I also have always really, really loved Samantha on Bewitched and Jeanne in I Dream of Jeannie's ability to teleport themselves wherever they wanted to go. And that seems kind of cool too, because I can also get out of social situations by doing that. So either invisibility or teleportation a la Samantha and Bewitched.

**JoyEllen Williams** 26:47

That's a great, I love it. Beth and Bob, thank you so much for speaking with us today and giving our listeners an inside view into the SAA Foundation. We appreciate the work that you all do for and within SAA and we look forward to seeing the transformative work of the Foundation Board over the next few years. It has been a pleasure. Thank you.

**Bob Clark** 27:10

Thanks for having us.

**Nicole Milano** 27:13

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, Mary Caldera, Nicole Milano, Lolita Rowe, Anna Trammell, and JoyEllen Williams. Opinions expressed in this podcast are our own and are not reflective of a particular institution. Be sure to subscribe and rate us on iTunes if you enjoyed what you heard. And join us again next time.