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‘Small & Diverse Archival Organization Needs Assessment Project’ Survey Report

PREPARED BY:
Thomas F. Clareson,
Sr. Preservation Services Consultant
LYRASIS

Leigh A. Grinstead
Sr. Digital Services Consultant
LYRASIS

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"Our archives' greatest challenges are funding, staffing, storage and workspace limitations."
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Landscape

LYRASIS received a National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) Records Cooperative Agreement beginning on October 1, 2019, for a “Small and Diverse Archival Organization Needs Assessment Project.” The goal of the project was to assess small and diverse archival organizations and repositories to outline the barriers to their long-term sustainability, growth, and public access. Project activities included a detailed survey of small archives and follow-up focus groups to explore results.

The consultants began planning this project in mid-2019, prior to the global pandemic. Had we known, however, we would not have structured the survey questions differently. The arrival of COVID-19 in the United States in early 2020 nonetheless informs the way that we interpret the results from both the survey and focus groups.

In addition to the survey, the consultants initially planned to configure, moderate, and document two live and two virtual focus groups. Live sessions in 2020 were planned for the Western Archivists meeting in San Francisco, California, scheduled in April and the Midwest Archivists meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, in May. As conferences were cancelled, the consultants switched over and scheduled four virtual focus groups instead, the results of which will be analyzed and reported separately.

Separate from the grant work, but complementary, the Research and Innovation Division of LYRASIS engaged in a small, independent survey of archival organizations focused specifically on how the pandemic has affected archival work and collecting.

This survey will close on June 26th. Results will be available in summer 2020 and published on the LYRASIS website.

Summary of Findings

One of the more surprising results to the survey was received when respondents were asked what they see as the greatest barriers to the long-term sustainability of collections. In past surveys sponsored by many organizations, lack of staff and lack of funding were the top concerns to this type of questions. However, in this survey, there were other important issues mentioned, including strong interest and concerns related to building/facility infrastructure issues, such as space planning/usage, building environment, fire safety, water safety, and security. These are all areas that can be researched and planned for through local preservation surveys. These are also areas where grantmakers (such as the National Endowment for the Humanities in their Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grants) can continue, and expand, their funding to support building improvements.

Public inquiries and collection usage statistics were distressingly low. Only 4% of institutions reported 100 inquiries or more per month. By far, the vast majority reported less than one inquiry per day, 34% reporting only 1-5 inquiries and an additional 26% reporting only 6-15 inquiries per month. Only 14% reported an average of 16-30 per month, or one inquiry per day.

When we crosstabulated the number of hours that an institution was open with the number of inquiries they received per month and the question “what do you see as your archives’ greatest strengths,” we found responses that reflect a serious disconnect between the value that many archivists place on their collections and the perceived value within their communities based on the number of public inquiries. See the section “Options” for a chart that combines data from open hours, inquiries per month and strength of the collection to see a cross section of replies.

A majority of those who are creating “electronic finding aids,” are, in fact, creating flat Word or PDF documents, which are not interoperable, unlikely to be standardized in any way, and cannot be searched unless the user has opened the overlooked within the field. These “finding aids” are not being widely shared in statewide, regional, or national finding aid repositories. There is no coherent training need that emerged among survey respondents. Through analysis, the consultants believe

Demographics

Just shy of 230 institutions responded to the needs assessment survey from 39 states and the District of Columbia, and 71% of those institutions have annual operating budgets of less than $100,000.
there is a need for training in three areas:

- Raising the profile of many small institutions, with an emphasis on collaboration, including
  - Advocacy for small archives,
  - Creating and designing useful websites, and
  - Using social media effectively.
- Preservation of materials, also with collaboration, including
  - Deaccessioning policies and practice,
  - Oversized materials, and
  - AV materials.
- Digital preservation of collections, including collaboration around
  - Digitization basics,
  - Digital preservation policies and advocacy with administration, and
  - Digital preservation best practices.

There was a particularly strong interest in and desire for collaborative preservation services. Sixty-two percent of respondents said no formal preservation/conservation survey on the condition of their collection had been done, and 7% did not know if one had been done. The consultants recommend working with smaller archives to illustrate the benefits of survey findings, alerting them to grant programs which fund preservation survey activities, and suggesting tools where they can complete an initial self-survey are important steps for the NHPRC to follow up on the findings of this project.

One area that the consultants decided to pull out and further examine was to see which institutions answered in the negative, or did not have, a deaccessioning policy and compare that with those who said they had issues associated with storage space. There is a strong and direct correlation between those that do not have a deaccessioning policy and those that identified collections storage space as “your archives' greatest concern.” From this, the consultants agree that there is a need for:

- Training and/or sample deaccessioning policy documents to be shared widely within the community,
- White papers, Discussion boards, or
- Case studies with small archives that have deaccessioned successfully.

The number of organizations with disaster plans, still hovering below 40%, reflects the findings of the 2004 Heritage Health Index and the 2014 Heritage Health Information survey. As a community we must move the needle on emergency planning. Particularly when the number and breadth of natural, manmade, and now pandemic disasters are increasing, it is incumbent upon leadership to develop strategic initiatives to fund and support institutions so that they may take action and put plans and practices in place to make sure more organizations have basic emergency preparedness and disaster recovery guidelines—-institutions are simply running out of time.

Looking Ahead

It is the consultants’ belief that the organizations that will thrive will be those that cooperate, collaborate, and band together. In a post pandemic environment, we may see collections moving across county and state lines to be centered in new regions or areas. Staff may continue to work remotely in their local communities acting, as always, as local resources for information and expertise. If institutions are willing to explore joint storage opportunities, shared operating agreements, shared policies and procedures, shared staff, joint operating systems, and collaborative infrastructure—all of which offer economies of scale in environmental monitoring, security, fire suppression, safety and access—small archives, their collections, and the communities they serve could be in better shape in 2030 than they are now.
Principal investigators Thomas Clareson, Senior Consultant for Digital & Preservation Services, and Leigh Grinstead, Senior Digital Services Consultant, prepared a survey methodology to collect information on the sustainability needs of smaller archival organizations.

As they were developing the NHPRC Survey Tool, the two consultants reviewed past archival survey efforts including:

- Connecting to Collections Statewide Surveys from 2008-2012,
- The Society of American Archivist's A-CENSUS Project,
- Pennsylvania Hidden Collections Project, and
- Preservation and Archives Survey Instruments from LYRASIS and NEDCC

Grinstead developed an initial draft of the survey, which is an amalgam of successful past instruments and new targeted questions. While the survey approach, which focused on open-ended questions to capture data, was time-intensive in its analysis, it provided a much wider set of data about practices and resources within the community of small archival institutions.

Another key step in the development of the survey was to have a number of reviewers look at both the survey instructions and the instrument itself. The consultants felt that their colleagues a LYRASIS working on projects such as ArchivesSpace and those with assessment and preservation/archives experience would be excellent reviewers of the tool. The internal LYRASIS reviewers went above and beyond what was asked of them, commenting on content, mechanics/structure, and introductory messaging on the survey. The level of detailed review was the best the consultants have seen in working on projects such as this during the past 20 years. After a test period in late February, the survey was ready for launch.

While instrument testing was happening, the consultants defined and documented target audiences for the survey project and developed a dissemination strategy. Clareson and Grinstead determined that one of the best ways to ensure distribution of the survey to an audience of small and diverse archives was to target distribution to diverse geographic areas of the U.S. and a variety of different types of archives. With the help of LYRASIS Digital & Preservation Services Department Administrative Assistant Alicia Johnson, the consultants reached out to the State Archivists of all U.S. States and Territories, to national, regional, and state associations, and to former clients and personal contacts within the archives field.

The results of this outreach during February 2020 were excellent. A total of 18 states and 7 archival organizations agreed to distribute the survey to their constituents and/or members. Those organizations that partnered with LYRASIS on the project included:

**States**
- Alaska State Archives
- Arizona State Library Archives and Public Records
- Calisphere/California Digital Library
- Colorado State Archives
- University of Guam
- State Archives of Iowa
- Kansas Historical Society
- Louisiana State Archives
- Maryland State Archives/Maryland History and Culture Collaborative
- Minnesota Historical Society
- Montana State Historical Records and Advisory Board
The survey was launched from the LYRASIS SurveyMonkey instance on March 4, 2020, with an initial deadline of March 25. Following the suggestions of the State Archives and Archival Association partners, the survey was distributed to those organizations, who then customized a cover message provided by the consultants and distributed it to their constituents. The organizations listed above sent out messages, and a number of them featured an article about the survey, with a link, in their state or association newsletters. By March 22, the survey had received a good number of responses (approximately 180), but due to the unprecedented situation caused in the work environment by COVID-19, the consultants decided to offer a deadline extension until March 30 to increase the number and diversity of the respondents. As of March 30, 229 responses were received. These responses came from a variety of states, archives types, and sizes of archives.
By the March 30 extended deadline, responses had been received from 39 states and the District of Columbia, with respondent distribution aided by the work of the project partners. Leading states for responses were North Carolina (35), Pennsylvania (33), New York State (16), California and Maryland (10 each), Ohio (9), Tennessee and Colorado (8 each), and Vermont, Georgia, and Virginia (6 responses each). The other responding states had between one and five institutions complete the survey.

The survey was focused on reaching small archives. As part of their definition, the consultants established that “small archives” are generally defined as those repositories with budgets of $100,000 or less and/or holdings of 1,000 cubic feet or less. However, the consultants emphasized that these are not absolute figures, and repositories should not skip the survey if they have slightly larger budgets or holdings. Seventy-one percent of those who responded to the survey had budgets less than $100,000, institutions were not asked to report the size of their collections.

Another variable to determine if smaller organizations had been reached was to look at the staff distribution at the responding organizations.

Overall responses to the staffing question indicate in summary that 5% have five full-time paid staff members, 9% have four, 21% have two, 7% have one-and-a-half, and 40% have only one; 12% reported no full-time paid staff and 4% said that they only had half of one full-time paid staff person.

The following questions captured numbers of full-time and part-time paid staff.

- 177 responding institutions listed paid full-time staff. There were 62 organizations listing one full-time paid staff member, 35 listing two, 25 with zero, 21 with three, and 11 with four.
- 157 organizations reported having part-time paid staff members. The largest response categories were 55 organizations that said one part-time staff person, 32 said zero, 16 said three, and 7 said four.
- 73 institutions answered the question on unpaid/volunteer full-time staff. Most of the respondents (62) said they had no unpaid/volunteer full-time staff, and seven organizations had one such staff member.
- When asked about unpaid/volunteer part-time staff, 141 organizations responded, with 25 having none, 21 had one, 15 had four, and 14 had two.

The survey also looked at public hours open per week at the responding institutions. A majority of the respondents (35 organizations are open 40 hours per week; 17 institutions have hours by appointment; 23 responded that they did not have public open hours; and seven listed only eight open hours a week. There were a small number of answers receiving only six responses, including 6, 23, 30 and 37.5 open hours.

In addition to widely varying staffing scenarios and public open hours, the respondents to the survey represented a spectrum of institution types. Among the organizational categories describing the institutions, 199 responses showed these groupings:

- Academic library/archives: 24.7% of total
- Historical society: 17.5%
- Independent non-profit archives: 12.1%
- Government archives: 9%
- Historical house/site: 7.2%
- Public library: 5.4%
- Religious organization/church archives: 4%, taken from “Other” responses
ORGANIZATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

- General museum (2 or more disciplines): 4%
- Art museum: 3.1%
- Special library: 2.2%

On a related question, respondents noted the categories which best described their organization's type of affiliation. Of the 222 organizations answering, the largest response groups were:

- Private non-profit (non-government) organizations: 48% of total
- College, university, or other academic entity: 26.1%
- Local, municipal or county government: 11.2%
- Library systems: 4%

No other category received more than four responses.

Finally, in the demographics area, the 211 respondents self-selected the level of their operating budget. While 29% had annual operating budgets of $100,001 and above, 71% had smaller budgets. Twenty-five percent had budgets from $0-$10,000, 9% had budgets between $10,001-$25,000, 14% were between $25,001-$50,000, and 23% indicated budgets between $50,001-$100,000.
When looking at the small archives’ environment, the consultants believe one of the most important areas to learn about is the type of collections these organizations hold. Knowing the makeup of collections may help the NHPRC and others in providing information and potential services which could support the processing, cataloging, and care of these collections. Survey questions were developed in order to understand the types of materials and formats held in order to get a broad view of collections. Respondents were asked to select all answers in the overarching categories, indicating what types of materials, not content, were held in their collections. The survey also asked archivists to include collections for which they have accepted preservation responsibility, and which are permanent parts of institutional holdings.

The initial collection area surveyed dealt with Books and Bound volumes. Of the 216 organizations responding to the question, the leading types of materials held were:

- Bound manuscript materials (including ledger books, minute books, and scrapbooks): 92.6% hold these items
- Books/Monographs: 91.7%
- Newspapers: 73.6%
- Serials/periodicals: 70.8%

Additional material types listed in “Other” responses included letters and correspondence (4%) and sheet music and scores (2%).

Even wider varieties of materials were discovered when 217 respondents detailed the types of unbound sheet materials among their holdings:

- Archival records and manuscripts: 95.8%
- Ephemera and broadsides: 81.6%
- Architectural drawings and blueprints: 74.2%
- Maps: 71.9%
- Oral history transcripts: 66.8%

Other holdings in this category included county-filed documents (28%), and philatelic/stamp collections (12%).

Among the largest and most varied types of materials in the surveyed archives were photographic collections. The survey was constructed to capture the variety of prints and processes among historical photographs. Top types reported by 214 respondents to this question included:

- Black-and-white prints (all processes): 94.9%
- Color prints, negatives, positives (including transparencies and slides): 89.2%
- Black-and-white film negatives after 1950 (acetate): 69.6%
- Microfilm and microfiche: 54.2%
- Glass-plate negatives: 47.7%
- Cased objects (ambrotypes, daguerreotypes, tintypes): 46.3%
- Black-and-white film negatives prior to 1950 (cellulose nitrate-): 44.4%
- Inkjet prints: 43%
Other prints and processes mentioned in these results include lantern slides or glass lantern slides, sometimes hand-tinted (26%) and born-digital/digital-only photographic images (9%).

Leading moving image collection types that were reported among 193 responses were discs, made up of laser, CD, and DVDs (82.4%), magnetic tape which includes Beta, VHS, and digital (79.3%), and motion picture film which could be either reels or cans (62.2%).

"If I was to identify the materials we are least equipped to handle properly, this would be portions of our collections of nitrate film and photo negatives, which, due to their composition have experienced a gradual degree of decay and decomposition. Our long-term goal has been to digitize these materials and preserve this visual information, but the cost, scope, and logistical challenge of doing so has limited our efforts thus far."

Recorded sound collections were another area with a high response. These materials were held at 190 organizations, and three formats were among the top holdings:

- Magnetic media (cassettes, open-reel tapes, and DAT) with 77.9% reporting
- Optical media (CDs and DVDs) at 77.4%
- Digital media (MP3s, etc.) with 62.1%

Far fewer organizations held grooved media such as cylinders and phonodiscs (34%) or wire recordings (5%).

A final question in this section asked respondents to list other types of collections not previously addressed in the survey. Four collection types had ten or more responses: clothing/textiles/apparel/garments/costumes, with 24 organizations responding; artifacts (17); paintings (12); and other fine arts/artworks (10).
When asked “Which of your holdings do you consider to be the most significant,” 191 respondents offered the most varied list of responses to any question in the survey. There were 46 different categories mentioned among answers to this question.

Top response categories included photographic collections 22%, organizational records and correspondence 17%, manuscript collections 11%, handwritten books/diaries/journals and county records 9%. Respondents added thoughts on why these holdings were most important, and mentioned uniqueness, completeness of collections, and interest by their public/users as the key reasons for the selected collections’ significance.

In a related question, survey participants were asked, of the collections mentioned in the previous question, which types of materials they felt they are the least equipped to handle properly. Again, a wide variety of formats were named by respondents (29), but several rose to the top of the list as difficult to deal with:

- Audiovisual recordings and materials: 45 responses
- Digital media/files: 31 responses
- Motion picture-moving image/film materials: 28
- Photographs: 21
- Negatives: 10
- Paper items: 8
- Textiles: 8
- Architectural drawings and blueprints: 7
- Maps: 7
- Paintings: 7

Of interest to the survey consultants were the close relation of some of the top items. Audiovisual, motion picture, photograph, and negative materials are all visual or media-based and account for the majority of the formats named most troublesome. Additionally, the need for playback equipment for many of these formats and the need to digitize and provide metadata for them was noted time and again by respondents. Digital files were not mentioned, and respondents noted inability to manage these materials due to equipment, knowledge, and storage resources. Many of the final items in the list (textiles, architectural drawings, blueprints, maps, and paintings) are larger-format items which are difficult to store.

“Moving images and sound recordings (we lack the necessary equipment to reformat these items). We are also rapidly running out of space to store maps and other oversize items. Born digital materials also present a problem, as we do not currently have a workflow for ingesting these materials.”

[We are] “concerned that all digital files, especially born-digital, are at risk because we are not prepared to periodically upgrade/migrate them to be accessed by current software.”
Looking at overall policies, the survey asked if institutional collections have been evaluated to determine that everything in the collection is of long-term value to the institution. Of 197 responding organizations, 50.8% said No, 40.6% said Yes, and 8.6% did not know.

While the results of a question on preservation funding were somewhat better, a relationship can be drawn with the results of the next question. Survey participants were asked if their institution has made a grant application, whether successful or unsuccessful, for conservation/preservation funding from public or private sources in the past five years. Of the 200 responses to the question, 55% said no, 42% said yes, and 3% did not know. A direct follow-up question for those that answered no asked which of the following factors influenced the decision not to apply for a grant. Top factors included:

- Lack of staff time to complete an application: 61.7%
- Need more information about funding sources: 38.3%
- Lack of expertise to complete application: 29.6%
- Conservation/preservation is not an institutional priority: 17.4%
- Unsuccessful applying for grants in the past: 11.3%

Ten organizations reported having sufficient funding without grants and five noted a lack of staff time to apply for grants.

Services exist in some areas to help move good archival and preservation practices forward. The survey asked respondents, if available in their area, to indicate all of the services they currently use. Nine service categories are used by more than 25 of the 165 organizations answering this question:

- State sponsored preservation workshops: 43.3%
- Place to contact for preservation professional assistance: 38.4%
- Collection storage – including print materials, photographic collections, moving image collections, recorded sound collections, art objects, historic and ethnographic objects, archaeological collections, and natural science specimens: 36.6%
- Electronic data storage: 31.7%
- Assistance with disaster planning and recovery: 26.8%
- Preservation/disaster response supplies: 24.4%
- Onsite visits by a preservation professional: 23.8%
- Help with general conservation/preservation surveys: 19.5%
- Ongoing state support for preservation grants to individual institutions: 16.5%

Survey respondents were also asked, if services are not currently available in their area and a collaborative approach was available, what preservation services would their institution use. A number of findings about this question are interesting. First, 188 organizations answered the question, which represents 23 more responses than the question about the use of existing services (above). Secondly, the number of users responding positively to the choices was much higher in each answer category:
When asked whether their institution’s senior administrators and trustees were aware of preservation needs and committed to the protection of the collections, the response was refreshingly positive. Of 197 responses, 67% said yes, 20.3% did not know, and only 12.7% said no. This showed the consultants that preservation and archival improvements at many organizations may be able to gain traction.

However, a need was shown for preservation education for administration and trustees. Surveyed institutions were asked whether there is currently a program of preservation education for trustees, administrators, staff, and/or the public. A majority of the organizations (108) said that such a program is not currently offered. Fourteen organizations said staff and board members gain training at seminars, conferences, and online. And eight organization said library and archival staff offer training programs for internal and external groups.

- Ongoing state support for preservation grants to individual institutions: 54.8%
- Onsite visits by a preservation professional: 50%
- Collection storage – including print materials, photographic collections, moving image collections, recorded sound collections, art objects, historic and ethnographic objects, archaeological collections, and natural science specimens: 44.7%
- State sponsored preservation workshops: 42%
- Assistance with disaster planning and recovery: 41.5%
- Help with general conservation/preservation surveys: 41%
- Place to contact for preservation professional assistance: 39.9%
- Disaster recovery (vacuum freeze drying and onsite cleanup): 39.4%
- Electronic data storage: 37.2%
- Preservation/disaster response supplies: 34.6%
- Microfilm reformatting: 28.7%
- Loan of environmental monitoring equipment: 25.5%
Probably the most interesting and surprising results to any question in the survey were received when respondents were asked what they see as the greatest barriers to the long-term sustainability of collections. In past surveys sponsored by many organizations, the consultants have seen lack of staff and lack of funding as the top concerns by far to this type of question. However, in this survey, of 185 participants, there were other important issues mentioned:

- Lack of storage space/overcrowding: 72 responses
- Lack of appropriate environmental control: 43
- Lack of funding: 25
- Fire Risk: 21
- Lack of Staff: 18
- Water damage threat: 17
- Lack of Security: 16
- Lack of administrative interest/understanding/support: 12

These answers have all been analyzed from open-ended question responses. What they show is a strong interest and concern related to building/facility infrastructure issues, such as space planning/usage, environment, fire safety, water safety, and security.

In the last question in this section of the survey, 192 organizations answered a question related to having written policies and procedures in the following areas:

- Mission statement: 94.3%
- Collections policy: 84.8%
- Deaccessioning policy: 54.7%
- Processing procedures (for collection sorting and evaluation): 54.7%
- Disaster plan: 39%
- Preservation plan: 19.8%

The consultants were pleased to see the number of positive responses to small archives having cornerstone policies such as mission statements and collections policies. The results regarding the number of organizations with deaccessioning and processing guidelines can also be considered positive. In another good statistic related to this question, 15 organizations indicated in the “Other” section of the question that they are working to develop these types of collection-related policies. However, the number of organizations with disaster plans, hovering below 40%, still reflects the findings of the 2004 Heritage Health Index and the 2014 Heritage Health Information survey. This is an area, particularly when the number and breadth of natural, manmade, and pandemic disasters are increasing, that concerted effort must be made to make sure more organizations have basic emergency preparedness and disaster recovery guidelines.
Questions in this section dealt specifically with issues of access and use of archival collections. First, respondents were asked how frequently the collections are used by staff members and the public. The consultants analyzed this open-ended data and used the top figure from each response.

Statistics on usage by staff per month (184 of responses) were highest in these categories:

- 100-plus uses per month: 4.8%
- 31-50 uses per month: 4.8%
- 31-50 uses per month: 4.8%
- 16-30 uses per month: 21%
- 6-15 uses per month: 29%
- 1-5 uses per month: 31.5%
- 0 uses per month: 3.2%
- No other usage category received over five responses

Statistics on public uses by month (185 of responses):

- 100-plus uses per month: 4.3%
- 31-50 uses per month: 4.3%
- 16-30 uses per month: 14%
- 6-15 uses per month: 26.4%
- 1-5 uses per month: 34.5%
- 0 uses per month: 7.5%
- No other usage category received over five responses

Following these questions on the amount of use per month, the next area studied was the type of people utilizing the collections in these small archives. Another open-ended question, this query, answered by 188 respondents, attracted a wide range of user categories:

- Staff: 103 responses
- Genealogists: 69 responses
- Students: 64 responses
- Historians: 60 responses
- Community/general public/non-organizational users: 28 responses
- Researchers: 19 responses
- Faculty: 14 responses
- Local history researchers: 11 responses
- None of the other 37 categories listed for this question attracted more than 10 responses

When asked if their archives has intellectual control over their collections, 42.8% of 194 respondents said they had control "somewhat," 42.3% said yes, 10.8% did not know, and 4.1% said no.

Next, survey participants were asked what percentage of their collection is inventoried. Of 192 responses to this query, the inventoried percentage was reported as:
Another question in the engagement and access section dealt with the documentation of where materials have come from. When asked what percentage of their collection’s provenance has been documented, 189 respondents reported:

- 100% of the collection’s provenance is documented: 4.2%
- 76-90% documented: 30.7%
- 61-75% documented: 14.8%
- 41-60% documented: 16.4%
- 21-40% documented: 13.2%
- 10-20% documented: 20.6%

To help with inventory, cataloging, and documentation of provenance, 160 organizations responded to a question about their use of a Collection Management System. The two top systems used were PastPerfect by 29.4% and ArchivesSpace by 17.5%. In the “Other” category, an additional 41 other systems were listed as being used by one or more respondents, the highest among these were 11 users listing Excel spreadsheets. Twenty organizations said that they did not use a CMS at all.

Additionally, respondents were asked if their archives create electronic finding aids. Of the 190 organizations responding to this question, 67.7% said yes; 30.5% said no, and 4.7% did not know. Following on this question, respondents were asked more specifically if their archives create finding aids using EAD. In this case, 195 organizations answered the question, with 71.8% saying no; 20% responding yes; and 8.2% did not know.

The final question in this series asked those who responded “yes” to creating electronic finding aids whether their finding aids are shared in a statewide, regional, or national finding aid repository such as the Rocky Mountain Online Archive or ArchiveGrid. Of the repositories listed, ArchiveGrid was utilized by 16% of respondents and the Online Archive of California by 8%. Seven percent of the respondents replied that they were “in process” of setting up a method to share their finding aids, and no other shared repository received more than four responses.
Finally, in the engagement and access section, a focused question on the greatest barrier to engagement and access with the collections received 177 responses. This was another question where open-ended answers were analyzed into broad categories and themes. The top engagement and access barriers identified include:

- Lack of awareness about the archives and their value: 20%
- Lack of staff: 14%
- Lack of staff time: 11%
- Physical space limitations/lack of space for storage and use: 11%
- Lack of funding: 7%
- Processing backlog: 7%
- Lack of finding aids: 6%
- Lack of CMS/access to collections online: 6%
- Lack of inventory: 5%
- No other categories received more than 9 responses

[Our greatest challenge is] “attracting professional staff to our rural area…”
Shifting into education issues for small archival organizations, the survey looked at the kind of education or training organizations have participated in over the past three years. Another open-ended question, the answers from 182 institutions on this query provided a wide variety of data:

- Twenty organizations each indicated taking face-to-face workshops by local and regional organizations and webinars, and 17 had received education at conferences, indicating the different methods of training delivery they had taken.
- There were also 17 respondents who listed taking no training.
- Eleven organizations mentioned specific training providers or settings, including the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and 10 organizations mentioned graduate school courses (most in conjunction with pursuing a Master of Library and Information Science, Master of Archival Studies, or a similar degree). Eight survey participants had taken American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) training workshops or webinars. Another specific provider and course type mentioned was the SAA Digital Archives Specialist (DAS) training, in which six respondents had participated.
- The only specific training topic desired by the group and getting more than five votes was disaster preparedness and recovery training, with eight requests.
- While there were a total of 50 types, topics, and providers of training mentioned in response to this question, no other category of training received more than five mentions.

Moving on to the types of training the survey respondents would like to take, the questionnaire asked if there is a particular archival topic that respondents feel would be most valuable for a workshop or seminar focused around the needs of small archives. Even with a smaller number of respondents than most of the survey queries (149) this question attracted the widest range of answers, with 65 different topics mentioned. The leading topics listed were:

- Grantwriting and fundraising: 8%
- Digital preservation (systems, etc.): 6%
- Photograph preservation/organizing photograph collections: 5%
- Inventory/finding aid creation: 5%
- Providing access to digital collections on a shoestring/small budget: 5%
- Archival management basics: 5%
- Basic conservation needs: 3%
- Gaining administrative buy-in: 3%
- Project management: 3%

While no other training topic received more than 4 responses, the wide range of topics above and the overall number of discrete topics show that this is a population interested in a wide variety of training.

In a question on training logistics, respondents were asked to rank how they prefer training to be delivered. Answers closely reflected the findings in the more general training question above. The top-ranked delivery methods among 187 respondents were:

- Webinars ranked #1 by 33.9% of respondents
- Workshops ranked #2 by 28.3% of respondents
- Onsite assistance (e.g., consultant or site visit) ranked #3 by 20.6% of respondents
- Local/regional training ranked #4 by 17.9% of respondents
In considering other logistical questions, surveyed organizations were asked if it is easier to travel to pre-conference workshops held in conjunction with regional archives meetings rather than taking time to travel to standalone training. A total of 191 people responded to the question, and a clear preference was shown: 52.4% said yes that preconference workshops were easier; 28.3% said no, and 19.4% did not know.

In a question focused on learning methodology preferences, 192 respondents indicated the easiest way for them to learn content. For 38% of them, face-to-face learning was easiest, another 38% said it depends on the subject, 12.5% preferred online training, and 11.5% indicated no preference.

Finally, in looking at training logistics, respondents were asked to indicate (in an open-ended response) their annual budget for training, including online and in-person workshops. Organizations indicated that the training figures provided included travel and accommodations.

The largest group among the 181 total respondents indicated that they had no specific training budget (27%). The training budget at 12% of institutions was provided as needed or by request, and was part of the main organizational budget at 3% organizations. Where respondents indicated a specific dollar amount, answers included:

- $1-250: 5.5%
- $251-500: 10.4%
- $501-1,000: 10%
- $1,001-1,500: 6%
- $2,000+: 7.7%
- Don’t know/not sure: 4.9%
A brief but important section of the survey asked respondents, in open-ended questions, to do three-quarters of a “SWOT” analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) on their organizations, asking their greatest strengths, challenges, and opportunities. In all of the questions, more than 170 survey participants provided insights into their organizations.

While some of the answers on their organization’s greatest strengths were to be expected, a number gave excellent insight into why they believe their archives are important to their user community.

- Uniqueness of collections: 22%
- “The content of our archives”
- “Unique local/regional collection”
- “The wide variety of topics covered by the collection, drawing on an extensive audience”
- “Unique and highly sought-after collections”
- Community engagement/relevance of collections/meeting local needs: 12.9%
- Focused collections (on specific themes and topics): 8.8%
- Diversity of collections (both types and topics): 7%
- Dedication of staff: 7%
- Customer service: 6.4%
- No other answer category received more than 6 responses

“Expertise on the content/scope of our holdings”

“The variety and historical richness of these collections, as well as the uniqueness of the curators -- there is something new to discover every day.”

“Diversity of artifact and text types.”

“1) We are totally approachable -- free, casual, plenty of volunteers willing to help or just listen to stories. 2) We are independent -- we answer only to ourselves (our members) -- so we can make decisions about projects and accessions very quickly and spend our money (what there is) as we please. 3) We have terrific volunteers who move mountains with teaspoons.”

"...the scrappy nature of our staff”

“The passion of the staff (me) for the material, the knowledge of the staff and volunteers about the local area, and for a public library we have a very extensive collection.”

“The support of our board”
When asked “what do you see as your archives’ greatest challenges,” 178 respondents reflected some of the previous data in this survey, but also expanded definitions of their current concerns:

- Lack of storage space: 18.5%
- Lack of funding: 16.8%
- Lack of staff: 12%
- Lack of understanding from administration: 8%
- Lack of staff time and capacity: 7%
- Need for intellectual control: 5%
- Climate control needs: 4%
- No other answer category received more than 6 responses

The answers to the question on opportunities was quite expansive. Respondents were asked: “For small archival organizations such as yours, what do you see as the greatest opportunities for expansion, collaboration, inspiration, and engagement with the public.” This question resulted in by far the most discrete coded answer categories, with 77 categories suggested among 170 respondents. Due to this wide variety of answers, totals in certain categories were not as large as for many of the other questions in this survey. Ten organizations said they did not know about their greatest opportunities. But among those providing specific answers, shared themes included:

- Collaboration on online exhibits: 6%
- Engagement and use of social media: 4%
- Networking with other organizations: 4%
- Educating the public about their collection: 3%
- Digital collaboration with other organizations: 2.9%
- Outreach to K-12 schools: 2%
- Developing public exhibits onsite: 2%
- No other answer category received more than 3 responses

"attracting professional staff to our rural area, digital process changes, digital storage, long term software/hardware issues."

"Environmental controls related to funding"
The survey concluded by studying the professional associations which small archives belong to and depend on for various levels of support.

This section of the questionnaire began by asking respondents if they are a member of any of the following organizations. A total of 186 respondents answered, and were able to select all types of organizations of which they were a member. Three categories attracted by far the most replies:

- A professional association serving archivists: 58.6%
- A professional association serving another field (e.g., records/information management, library/information science, history, museums, conservation/preservation, government): 51.6%
- I do not belong to any professional association: 19.9%

This portion of the survey continued by asking to which national or international archival associations responding institutions belonged. The largest group of responses, 44.6% among the 177 organizations answering the question, said they did not belong to any of the associations listed. But among organizations with which the respondents were associated, the leading associations were:

- Society of American Archivists (SAA): 44%
- Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA): 10.7%
- National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA): 3.9%
- Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association (RBMS/ACRL/ALA): 3.9%
- American Association for State and Local History (AASLH): 3% (in "other" listings)
- Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR): 2.8%
- Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists (ACDA): 2.8%
- None of the other associations listed received more than 3 responses

Regional archival organizations can often be important resources in providing education and information for smaller archival repositories. Survey participants were asked to which of the following regional archival associations they belonged. While 97, or 58.4%, said they did not belong to any of the listed regional groups, the top responses for specific associations included:

- Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC): 16.3%
- Midwest Archives Conference (MAC): 10.8%
- Northwest Archivists, Inc. (NWA): 4.8%
- Society of Southwest Archivists (SSA): 3.6%
- New England Archivists (NEA): 3.6%
- Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists (SRMA): 2.4%
- No other regional associations received more than 3 responses

The survey looked at membership in state archival associations as well. Of the 153 organizations answering the question, by far the largest group, 68%, said that they did not belong to any of the associations listed. Among the associations with the most members responding to the survey were:
The final question looking specifically at archival association membership asked to which local archival association the participants belonged. This was an open-ended question, and of the 92 organizations answering, very few belonged to the same local organizations. The largest number of respondents, 47.7%, said they did not belong to a local archival association, or that the question was not applicable (4%). Specific local organizations with the top number of mentions included Chicago Area Archivists (3%), LA As Subject (3%), and the Cleveland Archival Roundtable (3%). Additionally, another 3% of organizations listed membership in programs of the Western New York Library Resource Council (WNYLRC), whether it was to their Chautauqua County Historians or the organization’s Preservation Committee.

Moving on to look at the other types of organizations to which the small archival organizations belong, the first area was records and information management associations. While 166 archivists answered the question, 94.6% did not belong to any such organization. Those indicating membership noted ARMA International at 4.2%; AIIM International represented 1.8%; or the International Association for Social Science Information Services and Technology (I-ASSIST), with 1 response represented 0.6%.

Membership in government associations followed the same trends. Of 161 respondents, 96.9% did not belong to a government association. The only organization receiving more than one response was the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, with a 1.2% membership rate.

There were a larger number of responding organizations that belonged to a library and information science organization. By far the largest group among the 70 respondents to this question belonged, on a national level, to the American Library Association (ALA) with 32.9%. Thirty percent belonged to a state library association. Other library-focused organizations where survey participants indicated membership included:

- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL): 17.1%
- Special Libraries Association (SLA): 7.1%
- Public Library Association (PLA): 5.7%
- An additional 8.6% belonged to other ALA divisions
- No other association received more than 3 responses

Finally, among institution-type organizations, the survey looked at which museum associations the respondents belonged to. There were 163 respondents to this question (more than any other non-archival association type), and while 63.8% did not belong to any of the named associations, leaders in the poll included State Museum Associations 20.9%; American Alliance of Museums (AAM) 15.3%, and Regional Museum Associations 10.4%. American Association for State and Local History received 7.9% of the responses in the “Other” category.
In looking at the overall importance of the associations to the survey respondents, 135 archivists shared what they considered to be their top two professional associations.

When answers were combined, the top associations were:

- Society of American Archivists: 36%
- Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC): 11.8%
- American Association for State and Local History: 10%
- American Alliance of Museums: 6.6%
- Midwest Archives Conference: 6.6%
- No other association received more than 8 responses

Associations used primarily for information and resources were identified across five ranking categories by 131 archivists and include:

- Society of American Archivists: 54%
- American Association for State and Local History: 12%
- American Alliance of Museums: 7%
- Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC): 5%
- Midwest Archives Conference: 4.5%

The top associations primarily used by the 127 respondents for advice on best practices across five ranking categories include:

- Society of American Archivists: 51%
- American Alliance of Museums: 11.8%
- American Association for State and Local History: 11%

The final question of the section on associations, and of the Small Archives survey, looked at the associations primarily used for education and training. A total of 126 respondents provided answers to the question across five ranking categories, and the top resources were:

- Society of American Archivists: 45%
- American Association for State and Local History: 8.7%
- Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC): 4.7%
- Midwest Archives Conference: 3.9%
- American Alliance of Museums: 3.9%
To identify and begin addressing problems with various formats in archives, one step can be a site survey. When asked in a formal preservation/conservation survey on the condition of their collection had been done, with 201 responses, 62.2% said no, 30.8% said yes, and 7% did not know. The consultants believe working with smaller archives to illustrate the benefit of survey findings, alerting them to grant programs which fund preservation survey activities, and suggesting tools where they can complete an initial self-survey, are important steps for the NHPRC to follow up on the findings of this project.

Probably the most interesting and surprising results to any question in the survey were received when respondents were asked what they see as the greatest barriers to the long-term sustainability of collections. In past surveys sponsored by many organizations, the consultants have seen lack of staff and lack of funding as the top concerns by far to this type of question.

Answers from this survey show a strong interest and concern related to building/facility infrastructure issues, such as space planning/usage, building environment, fire safety, water safety, and security.

These are all areas that can be researched and planned for via preservation surveys, and areas where grantmakers (such as the National Endowment for the Humanities in their Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grants) can continue, and expand, their funding to support building improvements.

One area that the consultants decided to examine was to see which institutions answered in the negative, or did not have, a deaccessioning policy compared to those that said they had issues associated with storage space. There is a strong, and direct correlation between those that do not have a deaccessioning policy and those that identified collections storage space as "your archives' greatest concern." The consultants agree that there is a need for:

- Training and/or sample deaccessioning policy documents to be shared widely within the community.
- White papers.
- Discussion boards.
- Case studies with small archives that have deaccessioned successfully.

The number of organizations with disaster plans, still hovering below 40%, reflects the findings of the 2004 Heritage Health Index and the 2014 Heritage Health Information surveys. As a community we must move the needle on this. In this area, particularly when the number and breadth of natural, manmade, and now pandemic disasters are increasing, it is incumbent upon leadership to develop strategic initiatives that will fund and support institutions so that they may take action and put plans and practices in place to make sure more organizations have basic emergency preparedness and disaster recovery guidelines— institutions are simply running out of time.
I believe our County Historical Societies need to recognize a significant amount of the historical materials in their regions are held by small societies that do not have the capability, the resources, to properly store their archives and make them available to the public. For example, the purchase and sharing of an archive management system and training on using it, the design and linking of websites at the county level would aid researchers as well as small societies such as ours. Without a coordinated effort, important materials are being compromised and lost as a result.

“Regional digital storage solutions such as shared costs of Preservica, etc., Online exhibits, making available digitized copies of key documents; management support of sharing digitized material.”

“I would love to work with other organizations in this area to reveal the histories of this area using the materials within my archives. I would love this material to be used in a documentary or a digital exhibit, so that more people can access it from far away. So far from what I've seen, so many people in the region take pride in their history but don't actually know how to share it with others due to lack of resources and lack of participation. I see [cities] doing this more and more and I'd like to see [us] do it as well. Getting people to come out for an event is great, but I think a push in learning how to create interactive and innovative online exhibits where people can peruse the resources, photographs, film, is an area where we can grow and get more engagement with the public.”

“Continuing expansion of digital surrogate collections is like ‘bread and butter’ -- as they used to say when the internet was young, ‘Content is King!’ However, in addition to that we have seen really wonderful engagement with our collections through things like hosted talks and exhibits. Many people are actually VERY interested in hearing engaging lectures about local historical topics, especially when they have a connection to issues of social justice. Making time/space for scholarship to happen so that those stories can be told is really important!”
POSSIBLE FUTURE SCENARIOS - THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

The consultants began planning this survey project in mid-2019 and the response would have been interesting without a global pandemic turning the world on its head. But with COVID-19 reaching the United States in early 2020, we believe that the results of this survey need to be read and understood in an entirely new light.

With nearly 25% of the small archives responding to the survey based on academic campuses or in an academic library environment, it can be expected that these archival institutions will almost certainly be impacted by budget cuts to higher education.

“Many institutions refunded at least a portion of room and board in the spring term that was disrupted. Where a summer session is being contemplated, enrollments reportedly are lagging behind patterns in previous years.

Looking ahead, tuition revenues are at risk. Most of US public higher education receives direct government support principally from the states. In the aggregate, US higher education secures 12% of its revenue from the direct state support, with public institutions securing 22% of their revenues in this way, though this varies greatly between states and among institutions in the same state.

State budgets are funded by a variety of different tax regimes (income, sales, and property taxes, for example), and all of them are under tremendous pressure in any economic downturn. In the aggregate, however, it is fair to anticipate that the longer and deeper the downturn, the more likely that the states will reduce their funding for public higher education.

Private gifts and investments represent an especially important source of revenue for private institutions. Both rely on wealth creation and maintenance and therefore ultimately to some degree on the health of the financial markets... Although losses in the current fiscal year will typically not yield required spending cuts until the 2021/22 fiscal year, many institutions will ask departments to smooth even further than the rule, in anticipation of the following year’s cuts. The picture that is emerging for the US higher education sector is fairly grim. Most institutions anticipate substantial losses in revenue from tuition, although its magnitude remains highly uncertain for the time being. Many institutions will also expect to see reductions in revenues from endowment spending, spendable gifts, and state support. And, while the federal government has provided some emergency aid to the higher education sector, it only scratches the surface.

For the time being, many institutions are taking a cautionary approach. Many are eliminating discretionary spending and are implementing hiring freezes and beginning furloughs or layoffs. In the absence of any real forecasts for the fall, however, many institutions are undertaking scenario planning to model a number of possibilities without yet re-forecasting their budgets for the upcoming fiscal year, pending more information.

Even with this uncertainty, it is not impossible to begin to predict the implications for academic library budgets. It is clear that most academic libraries will see a substantial budget reduction in the upcoming academic year. Estimates of budget reductions in the 10% to 20% range, beyond the hiring freezes and other personnel moves are already underway.”
An additional 14% of institutions responding to the LYRASIS NHPRC-funded survey are either supported by government agencies, or are within public libraries, both of which draw their revenue from tax-based sources and can expect what we believe to be quite serious cuts to their support over the coming years. Combined, this will affect 39% of the small archives that were surveyed immediately.

Looking briefly at three different states that represent three varying approaches to the pandemic, we might begin to envision how the economy overall could be shifting at the state level, and therefore we may be able to think about how that may impact small archives reliant upon a tax base.

For example, we know that “Colorado’s government faces a $3.3 billion shortfall for the fiscal year that begins in July, according to a new state economic forecast. That means the state’s discretionary spending may have to shrink by 25 percent in the coming year, according to legislative staff.” The economy in the state is extremely diverse with a mix of higher education, ranching, IT, agriculture, aerospace, tourism, forestry and manufacturing, it is both urban and rural. Colorado was within the second wave of states that issued Stay-at-Home orders but had issued a State of Emergency weeks prior.

“The economic collapse brought on by the novel coronavirus will lead to a $41.2 billion drop in tax revenue for California, the finance department of the nation's most populous state said Thursday. In a briefing, the California Department of Finance predicted a calamitous outcome for the state with a projected $54.3 billion budget deficit through fiscal 2021, which begins July 1, and ends June 30, 2021. California started the calendar year with a record $21 billion in reserve.” As the most populous state in the nation, California has the largest economy in the United States and was one of the first to close down.

Nebraska, a much smaller state, is primarily rural and never did issue formal stay-at-home orders, but instead relied on medical directives and a series of county by county mandates that were enforced in different ways. Even there, the state has felt the pinch. “An updated report shows the state’s economy is taking a severe hit from the coronavirus pandemic. New estimates from economists Ernie Goss and Scott Strain show that Nebraska has so far lost more than $834 million in economic activity as a result of COVID-19. The figures, published in the new Platte Institute report, ‘The Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Nebraska’s Economy: Second Cut’, are based only on data through April 4. A version of the report released last week had estimated a $63 million loss in March. The Platt Institute said total losses are expected to keep climbing and it will continue to release updated figures as new data become available.”

The remaining archives that are part of historical societies, independent non-profits, historic houses/sites, and art museums make up almost 40% of the remaining respondents to the survey. These archives may have visitor restrictions because of ongoing museum closures. Support for these archives may be limited due to decreased visitors and gate revenues.
Foundation giving may also be limited moving ahead. “Individuals, along with other sources of philanthropy including foundations, typically are making less income and have reduced wealth available, and so they decrease their giving accordingly. The Great Recession was an extreme example. Total giving dropped by 7.2% in 2008, and then decreased by another 8% in 2009.”

So, with every sector impacted, and all institutions, regardless of their organizational structure, facing serious financial hardships ahead—perhaps tempered in the coming year, but with ongoing cuts in years to come—what can small archives do to not only survive, but thrive?

We are clear about the challenges. We are clear that things are not going to go back to operating as normal for a long, long time—which, in many instances, may not have been healthy for collection materials over the long run. The consultants believe we need to start “business as unusual,” looking for opportunities that play to the advantages that small archives have.

Those advantages include:

- **Their size.** Smaller institutions can be more nimble, flexible and experimental.
  - Experiments, and risk taking will need to be encouraged, supported, and held up as models whenever possible by NHPRC and other leaders in a field that is generally seen as fairly risk averse.
- **Their subject.** With a majority of small archives focusing on local history, collaborative solutions not only can be, but must be pursued in order for many of these collection materials to survive the coming decade.
  - Without collaborative action, there is a serious risk that budgets will contract enough that institutions will close, and collection materials will be at risk of loss.
- **Their staff.** Most sites have only one full-time paid staff person and about 19% have two-full-time paid staff people. Part-timers and volunteers are more common.
  - This means that these individuals are used to doing many tasks within a given day, week, or month in many different areas of the archives, both behind the scenes and in providing access. Again, this indicates flexibility as well as a deep knowledge and local expertise about individual collections and materials.
- **Their facilities.** Individually, we hear that facilities are short on space, or that environmental conditions are strained, but there are a lot of these facilities, and we believe that not all of them may need to be used in the way that they are being used today.
  - Space redeployment, reallocation and the potential for combining collections is high.
- **Their communities.** At one time, and presumably still currently, there was an ongoing commitment to create an official repository of the area, or to preserve the institution’s records of continuing value, and provide information about a place or group/s of people.
  - With financial pressure mounting, this support may erode.
When we crossed the number of hours that an institution was open with the number of inquiries they received per month and the question “what do you see as your archives’ greatest strengths,” we found some fascinating responses that reflect a fairly serious disconnect between the value that many archivists place on their collections and the value perceived within their communities if the number of public inquiries is an indicator. Examples from among the survey responses include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Hours</th>
<th>Inquiries per month</th>
<th>Strength of the Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>About one per month</td>
<td>Fantastic and unique collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Collections are used by the public at least once per month on average. Occasionally, we have long-term researchers, as well.</td>
<td>Diversity of material types and areas of the community represented; longevity (we celebrate our 50th anniversary in 2021 and have been actively collecting since our inception); continuing to add to what is available online and overall improve public access to our treasure trove.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Very difficult to say since visitors are not tracked according to the resources they might use. Ten per month?</td>
<td>Broad, diverse and well-preserved collections of significant archives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 per month</td>
<td>The scope of our physical collections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not accessible and not publicized</td>
<td>Original audio and video recordings unavailable anywhere else. Unique historic record of environmental activism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By appointment</td>
<td>10 times per year</td>
<td>The uniqueness of the collection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Certainly not all small archives who answered these questions answered in this way, but enough did, that it stood out as a concern for the consultants. Are the number of inquiries limited due to the limited number of hours that the archives are open, and is that related to staff limitations? Or is it due to the fact that the profile of these collections needs to be raised?

We know that more and more information is being sought online. Archives can be at a disadvantage in a digital world in that it will never be possible to have all the millions of documents available online. However, there are MANY strategies that can be employed and will need to be employed in the coming months and years to raise the profile of these materials.

“Having a more accessible/usable website that can contain more information that's engaging and not just there for the sake of needing to be there. Putting thought into social media and website design that seeks to attract and engage users based on our collection strengths rather than being trendy and trying to appeal to “the youth.” Having a stronger digital presence and creating a solid online identity that reinforces the public perception of departmental expertise in these historical figures, movements, and collected objects.”
Issues and Advocacy section of the Society of American Archivists is committed to outreach and advocacy efforts to support archivists and archives. They have developed a toolkit, presentation materials, and a website that can be used by archivists to help promote their own institutions and collections at https://issuesandadvocacy.wordpress.com/
- Advocate for the Issues and Advocacy sections materials.
- Survey respondents were asked if their archives create electronic finding aids. Of the 190 organizations responding to this question, 67.7% said yes and 30.5% said no. However, when they were asked more specifically if their archives created finding aids using EAD, 195 organizations or 71.8% said no, which likely means that a majority of those who are creating “electronic finding aids” are in fact creating flat Word or PDF documents which are not interoperable, unlikely to be standardized in any way, and cannot be searched unless the user has opened the individual document—a point that is frequently overlooked within the field.
- Finding aids are not being widely shared in statewide, regional, or national finding aid repositories either.
  - This may an area ripe for collaborative training on standards.
  - EAD can be a complex and intimidating structure. However, in 2005, the Rocky Mountain Online Archive produced a template so that users could plug in their text and it could be published as EAD. This can be done on a collaborative level.
  - Joint tool/DTD development for EAD for small archives.
- There is a grant project titled “Toward a National Finding Aid Network” https://confluence.ucop.edu/display/NAFAN that is looking at the national scene of archival description aggregators and trying to transform the current landscape. If small archives can begin to describe their collections in even a basic, more standardized way, and increase the number of descriptions available in coming years, and if this initiative takes off, they will be poised to take advantage of a large national network that may be building.
  - Finding aids are clearly not as popular with the public as digital objects, but some information, and even a single digital object with a finding aid used to represent the collection, is still better than nothing.
  - Finding aids tend to be elaborate and are, of course, highly structured data sources, but again, even collection-level finding aids meant to drive traffic will help users understand what small archives may hold in their institutions.

Such as:

- Advocate for the Issues and Advocacy sections materials.
- This may an area ripe for collaborative training on standards.
- Joint tool/DTD development for EAD for small archives.
- There is a grant project titled “Toward a National Finding Aid Network” https://confluence.ucop.edu/display/NAFAN that is looking at the national scene of archival description aggregators and trying to transform the current landscape. If small archives can begin to describe their collections in even a basic, more standardized way, and increase the number of descriptions available in coming years, and if this initiative takes off, they will be poised to take advantage of a large national network that may be building.
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**digitization**

Digitization on a large scale will need to start—we will not use the term mass digitization because of its negative and historical connotations—but indeed that is what we are thinking about. Small archives should consider banding together and creating digitization initiatives. Other opportunities include pooling resources, such as staff expertise that can be used for virtual reference and to help with cataloging, converting or re-purposing buildings to be used to jointly house and store physical collections, or creating digitization centers that could provide space for socially distanced working conditions.

This may start as a few local institutions banding together and collaborating on a joint project. The NHPRC-funded Athens of the South Nashville Archives Collaborative is an example of three small institutions coming together to address issues that affect them all and to provide collaborative solutions.

**online presence**

More than 25 years after the appearance of the first public library websites, research published in early 2018 indicates that public libraries across the United States still struggle with the design and ongoing maintenance of their “electronic branches.” We can assume, that small archives will struggle with the same issue.

LYRASIS is currently considering a project to support a User Experience Boot Camp to teach librarians, archivists and museum personnel user design principles and processes that would ultimately help them improve their websites. Again, this is a key piece in raising the profile of many small institutions.
opportunities - facilities

Many institutions mentioned issues of environmental concerns and, reading between the lines, it sounds as though aging buildings and infrastructure are a serious concern for many. Again, thinking about what is happening today, our landscape is changing, and our institutions may need to change as well. “When workers around the world eventually return to their desks, they’ll find many changes due to the pandemic. For a start, fewer people will go back to their offices as the coronavirus crisis makes working from home more accepted, health concerns linger, and companies weigh up rent savings and productivity benefits. For the rest, changes will begin with the commute as workers arrive in staggered shifts to avoid rush hour crowds. Staff might take turns working alternate days in the office to reduce crowding... Other firms have realized they don’t even need an office.”

These changes may provide archives and other cultural and collections-holding institutions with options for collections storage in newer buildings; larger and more modern commercial real estate options in downtowns that might have more sealed environments may become available for long-term lease at highly reduced rates.

Historic buildings whose windows open, and buildings that “breathe” may become more appealing again and those more hermetically sealed spaces that we can control for collections care purposes may sit empty. This could be an advantage for archives that might want to take advantage of joint storage options, shared operating agreements, shared policies and procedures, shared staff, joint operating systems, and shared infrastructure, all of which offer economies of scale in environmental monitoring, security, fire suppression, safety and access.
It is the consultants’ belief that those who will thrive will be those that cooperate, collaborate, and band together. Collections may move across county and state lines to be centered in new regions or areas while staff work remotely in their local communities acting, as always, as local resources for information and expertise.

Master gardeners, historians, and genealogy organizations already do this, organizing at the local or county level, then the state, and often regionally or nationally. Networks may become virtual and those small archives that not only thrive, but even just survive, may be the ones that embrace this “business as unusual.”
This list does not reflect all states, organizations, individuals, associations, and networks that were solicited by the consultants to help distribute the survey. Every attempt was made to make sure that survey distribution was inclusive and would reach the greatest number and variety of small archives possible. It should be noted that NHRPC had also funded another grant project meant to identify records collections documenting America’s diverse culture and history that are difficult for people to discover, access, and use that is taking place simultaneously but is not being carried out by LYRASIS staff.

As a photographic support, nitrate film has serious disadvantages. The film is highly flammable and it releases hazardous gases as it deteriorates. Large quantities of nitrate film have caused several disastrous fires. A photographic collection that contains any flexible, transparent film negatives from the time period of 1890-1950 is very likely to contain at least some nitrate film. Since these negatives need special attention, they should immediately be separated from other negatives. See https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/5.-photographs/5.1-a-short-guide-to-film-base-photographic-materials-identification,-care,-and-duplication

These findings are similar to earlier surveys, including the Heritage Health Information Survey of 2014, and issues persist. See especially information on Digital Collections of Institute of Museum and Library Services, Protecting America’s Collections Results from the Heritage Health Information Survey (February 2019), page 36. Retrieved from https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/imls-hhis-report.pdf.


Ibid


xi Following their study of over 1,500 websites of public libraries in the US, Australia, and Canada, researchers Velasquez and Evans at the University of South Australia discovered that some public library websites still do not have the desired elements that promote easy access to information and services for their library customers. Since nearly a third of adults in the US visit public library websites at least once annually (Pew Research Center, 2016), thousands of public library customers may be thwarted in their goal to find information and services as they interact with poorly designed library websites.

In their study’s report, Velasquez and Evans recommend that libraries employ an “intuitive approach and user-centered design” to provide library customers with “the experience they expect when visiting the site.” Library practitioners in the field, including Amanda L. Goodman, Michael Schofield, and Aaron Schmidt, have similarly suggested that library website design should be informed by the User Experience (UX) standard of creating an easy, efficient, relevant, and pleasant experience for users of a service or product. New Jersey State Library Increasing Staff Confidence to Implement User Experience & Design Principles in Website Creation: “Building A Better Library Website” Online Boot Camp. Catalyst Fund Proposal.