

**Society of American Archivists
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**Native American Archives Section: Proposal for
Travel Funding for Tribal Scholarships**

(Prepared by: Diana Marsh, Selena Ortega-Chiolero, Melissa Stoner, Vina Begay, Rose Buchanan, Stephanie Rogers, Lotus Norton-Wisla, Mary Katherine Kearns, Kelley Klor, River Freemont)

BACKGROUND

Tribal organizations rarely have professional development money necessary to fund travel to these kinds of conferences, and salaries are not sufficient to cover travel to major metropolitan centers. Therefore, full funding for all participants is essential if we hope they will attend.

Complimentary travel to SAA would allow Tribal archivists to connect with the thousands of professional archivists that attend the meetings. Funding would remove financial barriers to attending SAA's Annual Meeting, which often serves as a melting pot of ideas and a spur to individual and collective action as colleagues from around the country and the world have the rare opportunity to meet face-to-face.

In 2020, with Council's support, NAAS was able to support additional scholarships for SAA membership and virtual conference registration. We had a very short turnaround that year (a matter of weeks), and yet received 14 applications. That year we were able to offer scholarships to five participants, and SAA kindly offered memberships to the rest. As a result of that program, we successfully recruited additional Native members to NAAS, including Selena Ortega-Chiolero, who has since moved into leadership with NAAS and with SAA.

SAA has supported similar initiatives in its deeper past as well. As described in the [September/October 2005 issue](#) of *Archival Outlook*, SAA pursued and was awarded a grant by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to provide scholarships to Native American and Tribal archivists to attend two consecutive SAA Annual Meetings: the 2005 conference held in New Orleans and the 2006 conference held in Washington, DC (Bob & Atkins, 2005). The purpose of these scholarships was to "enable the continued development of Native American tribal archivists' professional knowledge and access to a peer-assistance network in order to enhance the Native American archivists' effectiveness in preserving and managing records held in tribal archives" (Bob & Atkins, 2005, p. 21). More than thirty individuals

applied for the scholarships, and fifteen Native American archivists were ultimately selected as scholarship recipients. The Native American Records Roundtable, the forerunner to NAAS, was established during the 2005 conference as a direct outgrowth of the scholarship cohort's efforts (Bob & Atkins, 2005).

At the October 31-November 1 Council meeting, Council approved continued support for those meeting scholarships.

Now, the Native American Archives Section (NAAS) is requesting that SAA Council approve an additional line item in its annual budget to support the professional development of Tribal archivists. Specifically, in addition to supporting complimentary membership and annual conference registration, NAAS is requesting that Council provide up to \$9,125 a year for the next three years to cover funding for travel and hotel stay for Tribal archivists who apply and are accepted for the funds.

DISCUSSION

Surveys have shown that Tribal archivists, librarians, and curators are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to professional development and support. As the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) reported in a [2012 nationwide survey](#) of tribal archives, libraries, and museums (TALMs), TALMs often only have two full-time employees, though most only have one (ATALM, 2012, p. 5). These employees are typically executive directors or finance managers who may perform archival, library, or curatorial duties on the side; in fact, of the 102 institutions that ATALM surveyed, 34% identified archivists as one of their top five necessary but unfilled positions (ATALM, 2012, p. 5). Lack of funding is the foremost barrier that TALMs cite to hiring professionally trained staff, including archivists (ATALM, 2012, p. v).

Lack of funding also presents a significant challenge for TALM staff who do not have formal archival training, but who want to pursue continuing education and training opportunities in the field. In ATALM's survey, a plurality of respondents (38%) reported an annual training budget of \$1,000 or less, with 9% reporting that they had no budget for training at all (ATALM, 2012, p. 6). With training encompassing everything from attendance at professional conferences to subscriptions to academic journals to participation in continuing education courses and webinars, the financial barrier to training that Tribal archivists face means that they are frequently unable to participate in critical conversations with their professional colleagues or access and contribute to the latest scholarship in the field. Respondents to ATALM's survey specifically cited conference registration fees and distance, with its contingent travel expenses, as two of the main obstacles to employee training.

Even if Tribal archivists were willing to pay for professional development out of pocket, data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS) suggests that few likely earn a high enough salary to do so. While the BLS does not track the income of Tribal archivists specifically, the agency does track median pay for archivists as a whole. The data for 2022 (the latest available) indicates that the median salary for archivists nationwide is

\$58,640. However, the median salaries for archivists in states with the highest number of TALMs (as identified by ATALM in 2012) is typically much lower:

State*	State Median Salary (2022)	Difference from National Median Salary
Oregon	\$38,740	-\$19,900
Utah	\$42,930	-\$15,710
Colorado	\$46,780	-\$11,860
Oklahoma	\$46,950	-\$11,690
Texas	\$54,140	-\$4,500
Nevada	\$58,160	-\$480
New Mexico	\$58,170	-\$470
Arizona	\$60,740	+\$2,100
California**	\$64,670	+\$6,030
Washington**	\$69,260	+\$10,620

* No BLS data on archivists’ median salary from 2022 was available for Alaska, another state that ATALM identified as having high numbers of TALMs.

** The higher median salaries seen in Washington and California might be explained in part by the fact that these states currently host one or more National Archives facilities. Archivists in the federal executive branch consistently earn some of the highest salaries in the profession: their median annual salary as of May 2022 was \$98,960.

When taken together, BLS data on archivists’ salaries and ATALM’s nationwide survey of TALMs paints a clear picture of Tribal archivists’ need for financial support to pursue professional development opportunities like those that SAA provides.

When surveyed about their preferred training methods, staff at TALMs consistently state that they prefer “targeted, **hands-on**, how-to, short-course training programs that are culturally relevant and affordable” (ATALM, 2012, p. v). TALM staff also rate **national conferences** as an important way to meet their professional development needs, **if travel reimbursements or scholarships are available** (ATALM, 2012, p. v). SAA is in a unique position to support Tribal archivists in their professional development.

The last 30 years have seen tremendous growth in the number of TALMs and Tribal archivists nationwide (ATALM 2012, p. 2). SAA is currently missing a crucial opportunity to reach a burgeoning group of professionals who will influence the archival

field and the future of Indigenous records stewardship. These professionals will likely not be able to attend the SAA meetings without travel support.

Our overall momentum in NAAS has built the relevant networks and partnerships to leverage that opportunity. NAAS's success in bringing in new Native leadership over the past four years is due in part to our previous success with this pilot program, achieved virtually in the pandemic. We are now poised to launch this as a fully in-person program.

The huge outpouring of (80) applications for our pilot Mellon-funded [Indigenous Archival Training](#) (IAT) program (15 spots) has proven that the need still exists to support Tribal archivists in their professional development goals.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT SAA Council support this line item to support travel scholarships for Tribal archivists to the annual meetings for the next three years.

Support Statement:

Approving this funding to the Native American Archives Section will allow emerging Tribal professionals to engage in critical conversations, access and contribute to the latest discourses in the field, and to bring home key knowledge to support their communities' archives and memory practices; for SAA, approving this funding will encourage a new generation of Tribally-based professionals to diversify our conversations, SAA membership, and the wider archival field.

Impact on Strategic Priorities:

In its new [strategic plan](#), SAA has identified "ensuring the diversity of its membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record" as one of its core organizational values. Its [DEIA work plan](#), approved in November 2021, also seeks to build the BIPOC archival community and offer more educational programming and training for these communities.

The Native American Archives Section (NAAS) within SAA was founded in 2005 "to serve as a forum to educate archivists on the complexities and beauty of Native American archives of the Western Hemisphere and as a source of communication and inspiration for archivists working with Native American collections." Since then, NAAS has been dedicated to educating archivists about care and stewardship of Native and Indigenous archival collections; since the creation of the [Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#) in 2006, the section has been promoting the adoption of the *Protocols*, which were endorsed by SAA in 2018. In that endorsement, SAA should take seriously the *Protocols* section on "Reciprocal Education and Training" encourages Tribally-based professionals to "actively participate in regional and national professional organizations to represent and raise awareness of Native American concerns" and for organizations to

increase their representation as well as support training opportunities for emerging professionals.

We are confident that this funding support will allow the SAA 1) to engage its mission to “empower archivists to achieve professional excellence” and “ensure the identification, preservation, understanding, and use of records of enduring value” in Tribal communities, and 2) support its commitment to “ensuring the diversity of its membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record” and “fostering an open and inclusive culture.”

Fiscal Impact:

Five Travel Scholarships for 2024

Conference registration ($\$399 \times 5$) = $\$1995$ (based on last year’s rates)

Complimentary SAA membership ($\$325 \times 5$) = $\$1625$ (if based on highest median salaries above)

Current Total = \$3620

Requested Additional Travel Funds

Estimated travel return flight (est. $\$1000 \times 5$) = $\$5000$

Estimated hotel (3 nights x est. $\$275/\text{night} \times 5$) = $\$4125$

Requested Total = \$9125

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Do these benefits outweigh the costs?

What are the benefits of a one-off funding for this year versus a sustained funding commitment?