

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 12-13, 2020
Virtual Meeting**

**Native American Archives Section:
Proposal for Increasing Tribal Archivist Memberships
(Prepared by Stephen Curley)**

The Native American Archives Section (NAAS) is requesting that SAA Council approve a budget item to support outreach to and professional development for tribal archivists. Specifically, NAAS is requesting that Council provide up to \$5,000 a year for the next three years to cover: 1) travel scholarships (to include complimentary memberships and registration for the Annual Meeting, with funding for travel and hotel stay) for tribal archivists who apply and are accepted for the funds; and 2) incentive materials to increase tribal archivist membership in SAA.

Statement of Need:

SAA has previously offered complimentary registration to enable tribal archivists to attend the Annual Meeting. 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 30 individuals applied for the scholarships, and 15 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).

Fifteen years later, the need still exists to support tribal archivists in their professional development goals. 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, 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 2018 (the latest available) indicates that the median salary for archivists nationwide is \$52,240. 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 Archivist Salary (2018)	Difference from National Median Archivist Salary
Utah	\$29,210	-\$23,030
Oregon	\$39,750	-\$12,490
Arizona	\$40,700	-\$11,540
Oklahoma	\$41,080	-\$11,160
Colorado	\$42,500	-\$9,740
New Mexico	\$45,850	-\$6,390
Washington**	\$53,180	+\$940
Texas**	\$65,900	+\$13,660
California**	\$69,270	+\$17,030

*No BLS data on archivists’ median salary from 2018 was available for Alaska or Nevada, two additional states that ATALM identified as having high numbers of TALMs.

** The higher median salaries seen in Washington, Texas, and California might be explained in part by the fact that each of these states currently hosts one or more National Archives facilities. Archivists in the federal executive branch consistently earn some of the highest salaries in the profession. Although median salary data for federal archivists was not available for 2018, the

mean salary for federal archivists in 2017 was \$85,160.

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.

Benefits for Tribal Archivists:

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 TALM conferences as an important way to meet their professional development needs, if travel reimbursements or scholarships are available (ATALM, 2012, p. v).

With its extensive catalog of online education courses, as well as its wealth of publications and conference programs, SAA is in a unique position to support tribal archivists in their professional development. If granted complimentary memberships, tribal archivists would receive significant discounts on more than 80 continuing education workshops and webinars that SAA offers on all aspects of archival work, from selection, appraisal, and acquisition to arrangement and description to preservation, outreach, and advocacy (SAA, 2020a); these workshops can cost non-members \$200 to \$300 for face-to-face courses and \$100 to \$160 for online courses (SAA, 2020b). Tribal archivists would also gain access to the *American Archivist*, the nation's leading publication in the archives field, which is currently only available to SAA members or journal subscribers, and receive print copies of the bimonthly *Archival Outlook* magazine, which explores archival best practices and news from around the profession.

Access to these publications would enable tribal archivists to stay abreast of current events and important issues in the field, such as the latest developments surrounding data sovereignty and security, two areas that are intricately tied to Native nations' abilities to maintain their political and cultural sovereignty (Carroll, Rodriguez-Lonebear, & Martinez, 2019). Tribal archivists would also get discounts on publications offered through the SAA Bookstore, such as *The Lone Arranger: Succeeding in a Small Repository* or the Archival Fundamentals series, which offer practical advice for any stage and setting of an archivist's career. Moreover, providing complimentary memberships for tribal archivists for a three-year period would mean that they would be able to take full advantage of these educational opportunities; by SAA's own estimates, it takes between 24 and 36 months for individuals pursuing continuing education certificate programs (such as the Arrangement & Description Certificate Program or the Digital Archives Specialist Program) to complete their coursework (SAA, 2020c).

Just as important, complimentary SAA membership—along with complimentary conference registration and travel funding—would allow tribal archivists to connect with the 6,200 professional archivists that SAA represents. Tribal archivists would be able to participate in SAA's Mentoring Program, either as mentors or mentees, and thereby connect with colleagues at other stages of their careers who could offer advice or support in challenging times. Tribal archivists would also have the opportunity to join and lead SAA sections like NAAS and through their engagement help shape the direction of the organization and of the field. Finally, tribal

archivists would face fewer 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.

Benefits for SAA:

As much as complimentary membership and conference registration could benefit tribal archivists individually, it could also help SAA as an organization demonstrate that it is committed to its stated goals of diversity and inclusion. One of SAA's core organizational values is "ensuring the diversity of its membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record," and Goal 4.3 of its strategic plan is to "foster an inclusive association and profession through greater diversity of membership and expanded leadership opportunities" (SAA, 2017). Despite these well-meaning goals, SAA membership is still largely white and middle class. Providing complimentary membership, conference registration, and travel funding for tribal archivists would be a tangible program that SAA could highlight to show that the organization is actively working to diversify its membership.

Moreover, providing complimentary membership and conference registration for tribal archivists would support the call for reciprocal education and training between tribal archivists and archivists working at non-tribal institutions outlined in the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* (First Archivist Circle, 2007). Now that SAA has officially endorsed the *Protocols* as an external standard, SAA has an even greater responsibility to engage Native communities—and tribal archivists in particular—on salient issues in the field and seek out those communities' perspectives in turn.

Application Process

Applicants for the proposed scholarships will be asked to prepare a written statement (1–2 pages) in which they describe how joining SAA and attending the Annual Meeting would benefit them and/or their community and support their professional goals. Specifically, applicants will be posed the following questions:

- What information, knowledge, or experience do you hope to gain by attending the SAA Annual Meeting?
- How would your attendance benefit your institution and/or community?

Applicants will also be asked to provide the names and contact information for three references.

All applications will be reviewed and selected by a committee comprised of current and past NAAS Steering Committee members and leadership and tribal archivists.

Expectations and Opportunities for Award Recipients

Awardees will be mentored by NAAS Steering Committee members both at the Annual Meeting and throughout the year.

All awardees will be asked to meet with the NAAS Steering Committee mid-year and at the close of their award year to provide feedback on this program and shape its future support.

In addition, awardees will have the opportunity to participate in SAA and NAAS activities through avenues of their choice. The following options for participation are among those that will be available:

- Sit in on NAAS monthly meetings and contribute to discussions;
- Author guest posts for the NAAS blog;
- Participate in other NAAS and SAA activities (e.g., through panels, workshops, and presentations at the SAA Annual Meeting; outreach and engagement with community archives or other tribal archives to share best practices; participation in NAAS’s outreach initiatives, etc.); and/or
- Author and/or review submissions to NAAS’s case studies series.

Program Evaluation and Renewal

NAAS Steering Committee members and leadership will gather feedback from awardees at the close of their award year and meet to discuss accomplishments and ways to improve awardees’ experiences. NAAS will communicate this feedback to the SAA Council to use in evaluating future fund allocations.

Conclusion

The last 30 years has seen a tremendous growth in the number of TALMs and tribal archivists nationwide (ATALM, 2012, p. 2). SAA is currently missing its crucial opportunity to reach a burgeoning group of professionals who will influence the archival field and the future of Indigenous records stewardship. The proposed funding support will allow SAA to: 1) 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” (SAA, 2017).

Proposed Budget/Year:

Two Travel Scholarships

Conference registration x 2 = \$658

Estimated travel + hotel x 2 = \$2000

Complimentary SAA membership x 2 = \$500 (if based on highest median salaries above)

Promotion of NAAS/Tribal Archival Memberships

Recording giveaways = \$1,500

Publication giveaways = \$500

ATALM program = \$250

Total = \$5,408

References

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March 2, 2020

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Re: SAA NAAS Council Proposal for Increasing Tribal Archivist Memberships

Dear SAA Council:

I am writing this letter of support to show my enthusiasm for the presented proposal from the SAA Native American Archives Section (NAAS), and to demonstrate how meaningful this will be to those individuals who stand to benefit most.

I have been an active member of the NAAS since 2011. That year, I was fortunate to attend the last of three meetings held during SAA (2009-2011) where the discussion around the release of the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* continued. I witnessed a space that was open and respectful, notable considering the earlier backlash by some of my peers against this landmark document. I saw acceptance and a willingness to learn. I also saw a new crop of information professionals eager to see where this conversation was going, and heard them ask how they could help. However, I saw few faces of Indigenous people—the very ones at the center of the document—present in the room, remarkable considering how intertwined their narratives are to the work we were discussing. In my continuing work with the NAAS, including as Chair (2016-17), I have noticed an ongoing trend of seeing very few Indigenous people at SAA. Seemingly, the same one or two Indigenous individuals are doing much of the work of advocating for Indigenous representation in the archival record, and they must be exhausted. Thankfully, contemporaneously there is a growing number of non-Indigenous supporters and allies making significant strides to change policies and procedures at their respective institutions to help facilitate positive change. This significant movement, along with the advocacy work of a few notable individuals, helped considerably with SAA Council's endorsement of the *Protocols* in 2018.

I am an educated white male who has had several privileges in my life. I have two degrees from well-ranked Canadian universities; these have allowed me to secure employment at institutions

with deep enough pockets to send me to professional conferences. Mine is not the story of the average tribal representative tasked with managing their community's archival program. The invaluable work they perform comes with minimal (or no) funding; they often work alone and juggle several different responsibilities; and tribal governments seldom have large enough funding levels to send their staff to these types of meetings. The SAA NAAS Steering Committee has put together a thorough and thoughtful document that highlights some of these disparities.

I am supportive of any efforts that will help facilitate the ease in which we support our future Indigenous leaders in the archival profession, and see the significant costs for SAA membership and travel/registration to the annual meeting as notable barriers to this participation. Even if this funding only directly impacts one or two individuals, it will have been worthwhile in the form of indirect benefits for all those who engage and collaborate with these individuals. Furthermore, it will assist SAA with its goals to "foster an inclusive association and profession through greater diversity of membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record" (SAA strategic plan goal 4.3).

In closing, I live and work in New Mexico, a state that has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. I have had the opportunity to meet with several tribal archivists and librarians tasked with this important work here in the state. I have heard their stories regarding lack of realistic professional development opportunities, but nonetheless see their enthusiasm for their work they do. I would be proud of SAA for helping to support and promote these professionals, and to help give them a space during our necessarily collaborative conversations.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Pringle