

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
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Virtual**

SAA CORDA Research Agenda Implementation

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Executive Summary

The Society of American Archivists was awarded \$150,000 from the [Institute of Museum and Library Services Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant program](#) in July 2024 to develop a prioritized research agenda for the archival profession that builds upon SAA's [Research and Innovation Roadmap](#). The project team, consisting of members from the Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment (CORDA), SAA leadership and staff, and a professional facilitator, have accomplished the following:

- Hosted a professionally facilitated, two-day in-person forum to bring together a Research Agenda Advisory Collective of archival experts, practitioners, educators, community leaders, and stakeholders in Chicago in May 2025; and hosted follow-up virtual focus groups with Collective members in October 2025.
- Synthesized the Collective's input into a draft of the Research Agenda, along with an outreach and dissemination plan and a maintenance framework.
- Released the first draft for public comment and incorporated that feedback into the Research Agenda's final version.

Contextual Information

The SAA Research Agenda (2026-2031) is finalized (attached in full at the end of this report) and ready to be promoted and implemented. The project team that led the development of the agenda received repeated feedback indicating that the SAA community would like to know how SAA will support the implementation of the Research Agenda.

The SAA Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment (CORDA) led the development of the Research Agenda, and in alignment with its charge, CORDA commits to using the Agenda to guide its programming, including events such as the Research Forum, coffee chats, panel discussions, and educational offerings. CORDA is also committed to promoting and supporting

the SAA Dataverse and the Facts & Figures page as resources to preserve and share data and research about archives.

Beyond CORDA, SAA can play an impactful role in promoting and implementing the Research Agenda. The project team provides recommendations (listed below) for SAA Council to adopt as they see fit to support these efforts. The project team also welcomes additional or alternate statements of commitment from Council in support of the implementation of the Research Agenda.

SAA Council's commitments to specific actions in support of the SAA Research Agenda will help to support the robust implementation of the agenda, deepening its impact on both SAA and the profession.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities

The promotion and implementation of the SAA Research Agenda is in alignment with the following goals:

- GOAL 2: Enhancing Professional Growth
 - 2.2. Provide content via education and publications that reflects the latest thinking and best practices in the field.
- Goal 3: Advancing the Field
 - 3.1. Identify the need for new standards, guidelines, and best practices and lead or participate in their development.
 - 3.2. Foster and disseminate research in and about the field.

Fiscal Impact

CORDA is providing these recommendations with the awareness and understanding that SAA may have limited fiscal resources to adopt them. CORDA defers to SAA's and Council's knowledge of which recommendations are feasible and what their fiscal impact would be.

Potential Benefits

Supporting the promotion and implementation of the SAA Research Agenda strengthens SAA and the profession, and it supports SAA members in their efforts to conduct and share valuable research related to archives.

Potential Drawbacks

Research is an essential activity for a mature field like archives; however, CORDA recognizes that SAA has other competing priorities, including advocacy efforts related to archives and the health and governance of SAA itself.

Recommendation

A list of recommendations for potential ways to support the SAA Research Agenda is provided below. CODA asks Council to explore the feasibility of these recommendations and to work towards implementing those determined to be viable:

1. Promote the Research Agenda to the SAA community: membership, component groups, and stakeholders. Publish the Research Agenda on the SAA website in a prominent location.
2. Consider the implementation of the Research Agenda in strategic planning.
3. Strengthen SAA's data collection. Conduct A*CENSUS surveys on a regular timeline (every 5 or 10 years), and/or charge committees, sections, or SAA staff to conduct shorter, more focused surveys in regular, staggered cycles. All data should be deposited into the SAA Dataverse.
4. Use the Research Agenda to inform programming.
5. Use the Research Agenda to frame calls for proposals for future Annual Meetings.
6. Fund research related to the top priorities identified by the Research Agenda through Foundation grants and other funding opportunities.
7. Bestow award(s) for research. Existing SAA awards focus on service, advocacy, and writing and publishing. Revise the criteria for existing award(s) to clearly communicate that research that is shared in any venue (not just a published article) can be awarded, and/or create a new award specifically for impactful research.
8. Incorporate research more explicitly into the SAA Mentoring Program. Advertise and recruit participants for mentoring relationships explicitly focused on helping archivists to plan, conduct, and share their research.
9. Create a new discussion group in SAA Connect focused on research. According to SAA's Guidelines for SAA Sections on Merging, Transitioning to a Discussion Group, and Sunsetting," "A discussion group is an informal community of practice without the formality of elected leadership. Discussion groups have listservs on SAA Connect but are not bound by the SAA Governance Manual for holding section elections, having a steering committee, or holding annual business meetings and other programming." A discussion group focused on research would facilitate research by providing an informal venue for archivists to discuss and share their research, find collaborators, solicit feedback, and ask questions.
10. Share the Research Agenda with allied organizations (such as those listed below). Organize event(s) to facilitate discussion about the Research Agenda and to stimulate collaboration.
 - a. Regional Archival Associations Consortium (RAAC)

- b. Council of State Archivists (COSA)
- c. National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA)
- d. Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM)
- e. Community archives and organizations
- f. Journals such as *Comma* and *Archivaria*
- g. The international archives community: Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), International Council on Archives (ICA), United Nations allies, and international knowledge management organizations.

Society of American Archivists Research Agenda

Table of Contents

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Background](#)

[Definition of Research Agenda](#)

[Research Agenda](#)

[The Future of the Archives Profession: a Call to Action](#)

[Areas of Investigation](#)

[Rethinking Archival Training](#)

[Demonstrating the Value of Archives](#)

[Collaborating with Communities](#)

[Making Archives More Accessible](#)

[Engaging Ethically with Technology](#)

[Responding to the Climate Crisis](#)

[Next steps](#)

[Dissemination and implementation](#)

[Criteria Rubric](#)

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Background

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) was awarded \$150,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant program in July 2024 to develop a prioritized research agenda for the archival profession that builds upon SAA’s Research and Innovation Roadmap. The project team, consisting of members from SAA’s Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment (CORDA), SAA leadership (Jacqueline Price Osafo and Cherie Newell), and a professional facilitator, hosted a two-day in-person forum to bring together 35 archival experts, practitioners, educators, community leaders, and grantmakers to transform the Research and Innovation Roadmap into a concrete Research Agenda.

To select the forum participants, an open call application process that included a weighted rubric for participant selection criteria and protocols for the review process was designed. From November 2024 to December 2024, 84 applications were received, and in January 2025, 35 applicants were selected to join the Research Agenda Advisory Collective (Collective) and attend the two-day forum.

The two-day forum took place in Chicago, Illinois, from May 1-2, 2025. In attendance were 32 of the 35 Collective members, SAA President Derek Mosley, SAA Vice President Mario Ramirez, the CORDA-core team (Jane Fiegel, Jennifer King, Emily Lapworth, Chris Marino, and Dennis Meissner), and two professional facilitators from RMC. The participants worked collaboratively throughout the forum to identify the profession’s most pressing research needs.

Four outputs were produced:

- A definition of “research agenda”
- A criteria rubric for prioritizing research topics
- The six research themes of the Research Agenda

- A redefinition of the audience from the profession writ large to the Society of American Archivists

After the forum, the CORDA-core team re-engaged with the Collective via virtual focus groups to further refine the six research themes. The project team synthesized the forum's outputs and the Collective's feedback to create this Research Agenda.

A more detailed description of how the Research Agenda was developed (including information on how the criteria rubric was used and how the priority research themes and questions were identified) is detailed in [The Effort to Create a Research Agenda for SAA: A Report from the Project Team](#). A dataset documenting the creation of the Research Agenda (including survey results, notes from the forum, and drafts of the Agenda) is available in the [SAA Dataverse](#).

The Agenda reflects the current status of the profession with the intended audience being the Society of American Archivists and as such is US-centric.¹ CORDA's intent is that this document serves as a framework that encourages research, innovation, collaboration, and meaningful change.

The intended lifespan of this research agenda is 2026-2031.

Definition of Research Agenda

A guide to prioritize research on the profession's most pressing issues, outlining key questions, research areas, and ethical methodologies, to be used to help advocate for and influence research done in all areas of the profession by anyone involved in research on archives and the archival profession.

Research Agenda

The Future of the Archives Profession: a Call to Action

The archival profession is at an inflection point. In the 90 years since the founding of the Society of American Archivists, the nature of archival work has drastically changed. Archivists² are faced with consistent challenges, including but not limited to, term-based employment, sustainability, digital transformation, climate change, harmful or

¹ The Research Agenda Advisory Collective did include one international member. Future work could include engaging non-US partners for their thoughts over the next years to better understand how it represents international needs.

² Archivist, in the context of the Research Agenda, is defined as an individual responsible for records of enduring value. Definition taken from Society of American Archivists, Dictionary of Archives Terminology, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/archivist.html>.

inadequate description, and ever-growing backlogs.³ Archives are also contending with decreased funding and support for cultural heritage, threats to institutional independence, and the struggle to steward authentic and trustworthy records in an era of disinformation, generative AI, and declining information literacy.

The next several years are critical to enact change. Building on the profession's strengths in the form of shared ethics, belief in the importance and power of archival work, existing research, and best practices and standards, archivists must advocate for the resources needed and adapt their practices to ensure that the cultural heritage of today continues to exist and is accessible well into the future.⁴ Advocacy and the evolution of archival work to adapt to the challenges and opportunities of the world today can best be accomplished by archivists when they are in full possession of the data to substantiate and drive change.⁵

This data to drive change requires targeted research in several key areas:

- Rethinking Archival Training
- Demonstrating the Value of Archives
- Collaborating with Communities
- Making Archives More Accessible
- Engaging Ethically with Technology
- Responding to the Climate Crisis

Areas of Investigation

Rethinking Archival Training

Since the founding of the Society of American Archivists in 1936, archival work has evolved into a distinct profession supported by formal education, credentialing programs, and training opportunities. These include accredited Master of Library and Information Science programs (LIS), doctoral programs in information science, certificate programs like the Academy of Certified Archivists, continuing education, and mentorship programs.

There exist fundamental questions about the affordability of educational programs, limited employment prospects, and market saturation—saturation exacerbated by LIS

³ For a full discussion of the challenges archivists currently face, see the SWOT analyses conducted by the Research Agenda Advisory Collective in the SAA Research Agenda Dataset, <https://doi.org/10.15139/S3/MUSVYN>.

⁴ Tansey, Eira. *Research Project on Climate Change and Archives Final Report for Mellon Foundation, Public Knowledge program*, October 2024, <https://memoryrising.net/research-project-on-climate-change-and-archives-reports-on-people-infrastructure-and-collections/>, 4.

⁵ This agenda seeks to identify the top priorities for *research* related to archives. Ideally this research will support advocacy efforts, but this agenda does not attempt to prioritize advocacy areas and actions (that is beyond the scope of this project).

enrollment strategies. The field today can be viewed as facing an existential crisis when archival work is seen as unsustainable, underfunded, underutilized, and undervalued. To navigate archival work today, archivists must possess a range of skills and a depth of knowledge in many disparate areas—spanning records management, digital technology, intellectual property and copyright law, accessibility, management, finance, and community-engaged frameworks.

As a relatively young profession facing these contemporary challenges, such as funding shortages, shifting practitioner roles, and rapid technological changes, we must reconsider the framing and delivery of archival education.

Key research questions:

- What factors in archival education effectively prepare professionals, not only for initial entry, but also for ongoing development throughout their careers amid a changing informational landscape?
- What are the core competencies archivists need to be successful now and in the future? Are graduate degrees and continuing education programs aligned with these competencies? How is the effectiveness of archival training defined, and how are training programs evaluated against emerging industry standards in the future? How can admissions criteria be reshaped to reflect the competencies needed for successful practice?
- Who gets trained, and what does ongoing support look like? Who currently receives archival training, and who finances this education? Given limited societal resources for archives, how can training investments be optimized to broaden access while maintaining quality?
- Which educational platforms and models prove most effective when considered individually and in combination? How might archival education offer greater diversity in instructional styles, structural models, content coverage, credentials, and educational outcomes to meet evolving needs? What is the optimal mix of training in information science and training in the humanities?
- What constitutes sustainable growth for field-specific graduate programs (MLS, LIS, MLIS, MA/MS/MFA) programs throughout North America, and are credentialing programs calibrated to match employment prospects?

Demonstrating the Value of Archives

Archivists recognize an urgent need to calculate and communicate the value of their work, their institutions, and their holdings. Yet a major challenge persists: a lack of common understanding regarding what exactly needs to be demonstrated and the best approaches to achieve this. Successful advocacy is critical in garnering the financial support to sustain archives and reach a larger universe of users. Therefore achieving a

clear understanding on what data needs to be collected and how the data is packaged and communicated to both internal and external audiences is key. Because advocacy, itself, is contextual and arguments made to one group of stakeholders may not resonate with another, the data archivists collect must satisfy varying advocacy needs.

Internal advocacy efforts must convince distinct segments comprising the archival community⁶ to routinely collect and share a common set of data points that can evidence the compelling stories that archivists share with resource allocators, their users, and the general public. External advocacy requires archivists to share convincing stories about their work. Archivists need to showcase the economic and social value archivists and archives add to their institutions and communities. Those stories may prove highly effective, but they must be grounded in accurate, revelatory, and uniform data. Significant work has been accomplished on identifying and defining important data points that can measure archival performance.⁷ How do archivists proceed from this point to drive better data collection and analysis across archives? Which tactics and tools will produce the best results? After archivists agree on data points to be routinely collected, they still lack a consistent strategy to systematically harvest, integrate, analyze, share, and store the data.⁸

Key research questions:

- How do archivists determine a lean and effective set of core data points and then convince repositories to routinely collect and communicate them?
- How can archivists achieve higher levels of data and financial literacy?
- How can archivists become more comfortable talking about the costs and risks of stewardship and building those considerations into their values?
- How can archivists better estimate the true cost of preserving and sharing archives?
- How can the value added through direct services to the users of archives be measured? What economic value is added by researcher visits to repositories? Museum and library professional associations have pioneered the way in

⁶ For example, archivists working in university libraries and those in government archives may not automatically perceive a common set of data points as being relevant to their particular situations.

⁷ See, for example, *Standardized Statistical Measures and Metrics for Public Services in Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries*. SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on Public Services Metrics. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, October 2017. PDF accessible at: https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Standardized%20Statistical%20Measures%20and%20Metrics%20for%20Public%20Services%20in%20Archival%20Repositories%20and%20Special%20Collections%20Libraries_011718_0.pdf.

⁸ Much technical research is needed in this area. Certainly CORDA has a continuing role to play in this work. To date it has developed and maintains the [SAA Dataverse](#) to preserve and share archival datasets, as well as the SAA Facts & Figures resources to share at-a-glance facts and findings.

demonstrating both economic and social value⁹; how can archivists adapt their work to create their own models?

- What strategies can help repositories grow the population of users? Which public engagement tactics are most effective? How can archivists leverage fundamental values like *authenticity* and *trustworthiness*?
- What strategies for collaboration (both inside and outside the profession) could produce the greatest value for archives and their users? While some relationships are enduring, many collaborations are situational. How can discrete strategies be developed to suit diverse objectives and partners? How can the archives community develop more robust partnerships with grantmakers? What existing models can be drawn on for effective political advocacy?

Collaborating with Communities

Historically, archival institutions have privileged institutional and colonial perspectives while excluding or marginalizing the voices and knowledge systems of the communities often closely related to, and involved with, the records. Archivists must move beyond mindsets and actions that emphasize providing expertise to and for communities toward authentic collaboration and co-creation that deemphasizes control—practices that shift from extractive collecting models to collaborative, reparative approaches that prioritize ethical co-creation, shared stewardship, ethical return, human rights, and community sovereignty and autonomy. By embedding reciprocity and accountability, incorporating an ethics of care, and building right relationships, this research area seeks to center and expand upon the process and purpose of archiving toward equity and inclusion.

There are many different examples of what archives and communities can collaborate on, such as collecting, description, stewardship, access, outreach, and education, as well as many different possibilities for how that collaboration can take place.¹⁰ Every community is different and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to community-archives collaboration. Research related to one community may not be applicable to any other communities, but comparing models for collaboration can help identify when specific

⁹ For example, the American Library Association has its Office for Research and Statistics (<https://www.ala.org/template.cfm?Section=ors>), whose mission is to “provide leadership and expert advice to ALA staff, members and public on all matters related to research and statistics about libraries, librarians and other library staff.” Similarly, the Alliance of American Museums has its central Research Program (<https://www.aam-us.org/category/research-and-reports/>) whose goal is to “provide sound and current data to support the Alliance, its members and the museum field.” They both conduct and commission original research about America's libraries and museums, collect and synthesize benchmarking data, monitor external research, and collaborate with other organizations on research projects of interest to their members and their professions.

¹⁰ In the spirit of this theme, building a right relationship with a community can also include not actively collaborating on any “work,” but sometimes just listening.

strategies and approaches are effective in multiple contexts, leading toward the creation of frameworks (such as the “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials”).¹¹

While there is value in archivists examining themselves and their own work, the slogan “nothing about us without us” is an important reminder for this research area—research about or affecting a community should involve participants and representatives from that community, or if possible, come from the community itself. Archivists must also keep in mind that one person cannot represent an entire community—thoughtfully acknowledging the nuances of the definition and representation of a specific “community” is also an important consideration in this research area.

Key research questions:

- How can archival practices be reshaped to amplify unheard voices?
- How can archives and communities benefit from collaborating?
- What harms have come to communities from past experiences with archives that must be acknowledged and addressed?
- How can practicing archivists reduce barriers between archives and communities?
- What are effective models for building and maintaining relationships, sustaining collaboration, and succession-planning?
- How can communities be empowered in the creation, description, and stewardship of the historical record?
- How can archives embrace and support Indigenous and non-Eurocentric cultural norms and knowledge practices?
- How can archives promote participatory access and human rights through collaboration?
- How can archives use technology to enhance collaboration?
- What are the knowledge and training gaps in the archival profession that affect community archives and community collaboration?

Making Archives More Accessible

Improving access to archival materials is a central tenet of the profession, and a commitment to increasing the availability and use of materials is expressed in multiple codes of ethics and statements of core values for the field.¹² Despite the continued

¹¹ First Archivist Circle, “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials” (2007), <https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>.

¹²“SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics,” Society of American Archivists, revised August 2020, <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>. “ACRL Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians,” Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, revised 2020, https://rbms.info/standards/code_of_ethics/. “ACRL/RBMS-SAA Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries (2020),” Society of American Archivists, revised September 2020,

importance placed on accessible archives, there remains an insufficient understanding of how to effectively support the use of, and access to, archival materials and services. This lack of foundational knowledge about archival users hinders efforts made to strengthen people's ability to access repositories and their collections. In a politically fraught time where it is increasingly vital for archives to demonstrate their value to the public, improving users' access to archival resources is imperative for the field's survival.

Making archives more accessible requires research into practices that encompass all aspects of archival accessibility. As noted by the *Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities*, accessibility can refer to the "discoverability and ease of use of archival collections," but it can also refer to the reduction or removal of barriers that prevent "equal or equivalent access to archival facilities, resources, and services for people with disabilities."¹³ This topical area encourages investigations that explore both definitions of accessibility: improving access for people with disabilities, as well as discoverability, user experience, and use as it pertains to archival repositories, services, and materials. Access is a core and pressing issue in this field, and all applications of the term must be embraced in order for the field to achieve equitable improvements.

So much of this profession is impacted by access, which is why there is an urgent need to make archives more accessible. A great deal of archival labor is connected to access, in one way or another; fielding reference questions, digitizing items, implementing reparative description practices, staffing reading rooms, creating multilingual finding aids, providing assistive technology, and processing collection backlogs all affect how users discover, access, and use archival holdings and services. Advancing accessibility will require a deeper understanding of users, their needs, and to what degree archivists are meeting those needs. Accessibility is multi-faceted, as are the needs, behaviors, and desires of archival users themselves; there are numerous dimensions of archival access that would benefit from new or continuing research.¹⁴

<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/saa-council/acrl-rbms-saa-guidelines-on-access-to-research-materials-in-archives-and-special-collections-libraries>.

¹³ "Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities," Society of American Archivists, revised 2024, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/2.0%20SAA%20Guidelines%20for%20Accessible%20Archives%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities.pdf>

¹⁴ Usability testing of existing tools, platforms, and services can be performed to evaluate their effectiveness with users and would also provide insights into user behaviors and information needs. Reference and demographic information about archival users can be gathered to give institutions clear data about who their users are, how their materials are being used, and where the gaps lie in the communities and groups they serve. Examinations of potential access barriers could be made into reading room policies and hours, online resources about visiting and using archives, availability of public transportation and parking around archival facilities, communities' perceptions of archives, and facilities' compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act's (ADA) rules and standards on physical spaces. Research on archives' overall compliance with ADA's rules and regulations would also offer valuable data about the field's current ability to provide users with disabilities access to archival services.

Key research questions:

- Who are the current users of archives? What are their information needs? What are their expectations for accessing archival resources, and how do users actually access them? What services and records do they use and why?
- What do users identify as the barriers that prevent or hinder their access to archives? What are the factors that impact users' abilities to access materials and services? What makes it easier for users to access archival resources?
- What accessibility measures are needed to ensure that people with disabilities have equitable access to archives? What accommodations are currently being made available to archival users and archival workers with disabilities? Are accessibility measures being incorporated into archives' policies and procedures?
- How have reparative description practices impacted archival access? Are the communities represented in archival collections able to find and use those materials, and if not, what is preventing or discouraging access?
- What are archivists' feelings and attitudes towards copyright, intellectual property rights, and similar legal protections in regard to providing access to materials? What are the specific laws that impact access, use, and discoverability in archives? Are access restrictions created to adhere to legal protections generally more or less restrictive than legally required?
- How do the policies and practices of repositories affect the way users are able to access and utilize archives? What role do archivists' personal levels of risk-aversion have on their repositories' official policies and procedures? Are new judicial rulings and federal mandates increasing risk-aversion in archives?

Engaging Ethically with Technology

Digital technology advances continue to transform archival practice, whether archivists are prepared for them or not. Archivists must prioritize research into the opportunities and challenges of new and “disruptive” technologies in order evaluate their impacts on recordkeeping and their potential applications to streamline institutional workflows, strengthen existing infrastructure, and enhance access and use. Archivists should use their specialized expertise to conduct research and to educate stakeholders, policymakers, and the general public about important issues related to technology, data, intellectual property, and artificial intelligence (AI). This research area emphasizes ethical and strategic engagement with technology, balancing archivists' commitment to preserve and provide open and equitable access to trustworthy digital records with their responsibility to protect privacy, respect the people and cultures represented in archival

collections, mitigate harm, employ environmentally sustainable methods, and root the work of archivists in an ethic of care.¹⁵

Emerging technologies such as AI, specifically generative AI, raise concerns about archival integrity and ethics and complicate notions of appraisal, authenticity, and trust. Research is crucial to address key issues such as data scraping, data sovereignty, surveillance, bias, environmental costs, and policies that protect the rights of donors, users, and records subjects alike. Technological advances have also increased the quantity and complexity of archival records, and archivists must leverage technology and develop new approaches to effectively appraise, accession, process, preserve, and provide access to this digital deluge.

Secure, efficient, scalable, and sustainable digital infrastructure is essential, yet a digital divide remains between well-resourced institutions on the cutting edge of new technologies, and small, under-resourced archives struggling to keep their doors open (including solo archivists and community archives). Exploratory and rigorous deep-dive research is essential in evaluating and applying new technology, but equally as important are quick-start, beginner-level resources, and research to identify training needs, resources, and strategies that can help narrow this digital divide.

Key research questions:

- As the quantity of digital records and the complexity of digital formats increases, how can archivists adapt local and best practices, especially those related to appraisal, storage, and discoverability, to achieve sustainable and effective outcomes?
- How can the profession shrink the digital divide to ensure that digital records are safely preserved and accessible, even in the most under-resourced archives?
- How can archival practice (e.g. processing, description, preservation, access, discoverability) be improved through the ethical use of AI and digital technology? What are the current and potential use cases?
- How can archivists leverage technology for shared stewardship and digital repatriation?
- What labor implications arise from applying AI and automation to archival work?
- How can archivists protect their collections, users, donors, and records subjects from unethical exploitation or harm by AI, while also balancing professional commitment to open and equitable access?
- In the era of generative AI, how do we ensure authenticity? What appraisal strategies are successful? How can archives remain trustworthy sources?

¹⁵ "SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics," Society of American Archivists, revised August 2020, <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>.

- How can archivists successfully collaborate with technologists and commercial entities to inform product design, development, and policies?
- How can archives negotiate relationships with commercial entities that adhere to archival core values and ethics?¹⁶
- What are the characteristics of technology projects that created successful systems purpose-built for archives? What is replicable or adaptable to other projects?

Responding to the Climate Crisis

The next decade is critical for climate planning.¹⁷ “Given the existing resource constraints that archives already face, the profession needs to begin work now to secure the staffing, funding support, and national policymaking to ensure that the cultural heritage of today exists in the future.”¹⁸ This advocacy work and subsequent changes to the way we steward archival collections and treat the archivists that preserve and make them accessible can only be accomplished with the data to substantiate and drive change.

Natural disasters and unpredictable weather patterns negatively affect archives and their users by placing holdings, physical facilities, and the workers therein in increasing jeopardy. Archival practices, especially those relating to preserving and providing physical access (e.g. HVAC systems for storage climate management), but also in the digital environment (e.g. cloud storage for preservation), contribute to the increased use of fossil fuels and water resources, thus exacerbating the problem.

Given the projected growth of archival energy use and the impact of increasingly erratic weather patterns, natural disasters, and precarious employment, research must focus on climate adaptation—“preparing and responding to the climate change reality already here and in the future.”¹⁹ The field, however, lacks longitudinal nationwide baseline data (storage location/s, facility type and use, collection size, storage conditions, and/or level

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Lee, Hoesung, Katherine Calvin, Dipak Dasgupta, Gerhard Krinner, Aditi Mukherji, Peter W. Thorne, Christopher Trisos, et al. “Summary for Policymakers, Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.” Geneva, Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), July 25, 2023. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf.

¹⁸ Tansey, Eira. *Research Project on Climate Change and Archives Final Report for Mellon Foundation, Public Knowledge program*, October 2024, <https://memoryrising.net/research-project-on-climate-change-and-archives-reports-on-people-infrastructure-and-collections/>, 4.

¹⁹ Ibid, 6.

of emergency preparedness) and a centralized reporting mechanism for disasters, which is critical to illustrate how American archives and archivists are impacted.²⁰

Key research questions:

- How can archival practice (collecting, appraisal, deaccessioning, digital infrastructure, use of emerging technologies, among others) evolve to reflect environmental ethics and responsible resource stewardship?
- What models support low-energy and climate-adaptive archival storage and operations, and how can they be applied?
- How can archivists conceptualize and quantify acceptable loss? What can society reconcile losing, and how can archivists communicate this?
- What archival practices can help communities impacted by climate change? For example, how can archives assist migrating or displaced communities in safeguarding their records?
- How does climate change affect labor practices and staff retention in archives?

Next steps

Dissemination and implementation

SAA is committed to stewarding this document which will guide its efforts to support and foster research for the next five years (2026-2031). It will be shared with SAA members via standard SAA communications channels (Announcements, *In The Loop*, *Archival Outlook*, social media) and with the public via a press release. CORDA provided recommendations to SAA Council outlining ways the larger organization could support the implementation of the Research Agenda, including integrating it into strategic planning efforts, programming (including the annual meeting), and research funding opportunities with its Foundation.²¹

The Research Agenda's themes will frame future Research Forum calls for submissions, encouraging presentations and research in areas outlined by the Agenda. The Research Forum, organized by CORDA, is a yearly event that gives researchers, practitioners, educators, and students the opportunity to learn about and share research initiatives that are relevant to archival and records management practice through a series of presentations.²² With hundreds of attendees, this is a wide-reaching venue to showcase and bring awareness to the Agenda.

²⁰ Ibid, 4.

²¹ Currently, the SAA Foundation Board awards grants that meet the [mission and goals](#) of the Foundation and/or the [strategic planning](#) priorities of the Society of American Archivists.

²² <https://www2.archivists.org/am2026/research-forum-2026>

CORDA will use the SAA Research Agenda to guide its programming efforts over the course of the agenda's lifetime. In addition to providing educational offerings on developing research skills, the committee will host panel discussions and webinars centered around the Agenda's themes. The committee will plan virtual coffee chats dedicated to the Agenda's different themes, providing a space for SAA members to discuss these topics in depth and connect with peers who share similar research interests. CORDA will continue to use the Agenda to inform the development of new research-focused resources and initiatives in the upcoming years.

Maintenance

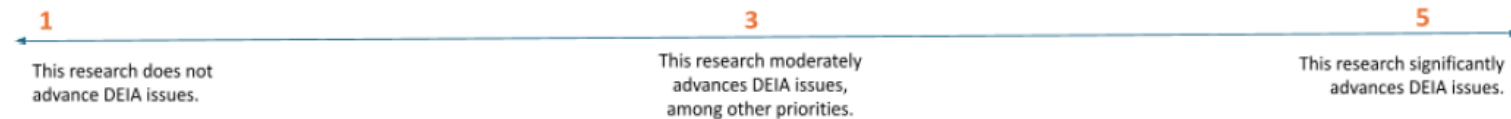
In September 2030, CORDA will convene a task force to assess the Agenda's implementation, adoption, and impact and to propose a plan for creating the next version. The task force's findings and proposal will be submitted to the SAA Council for consideration and approval during the SAA Council convening at the annual meeting in 2031.

Criteria Rubric

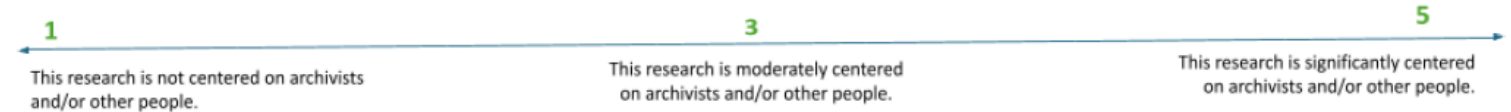
The Criteria Rubric was created during the planning of the two-day forum and later refined by the Research Agenda Advisory Collective. The project team recognized a need for an agreed-upon set of criteria to evaluate research priorities; this ensured that every item in the final SAA Research Agenda met a specific set of essential standards. During the forum, it became clear that the rubric's value extended beyond the event—it is a versatile tool that archivists can use indefinitely to assess the potential of any research topic. For a detailed look at its development and application, see [The Effort to Create a Research Agenda for SAA: A Report from the Project Team](#).

PRIORITIZING RESEARCH TOPICS CRITERIA

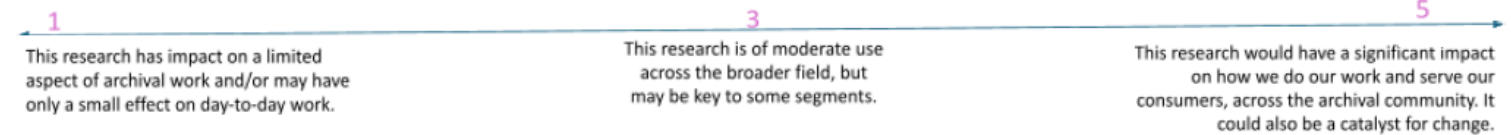
CRITERION 1: ADVANCES DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, OR ACCESSIBILITY



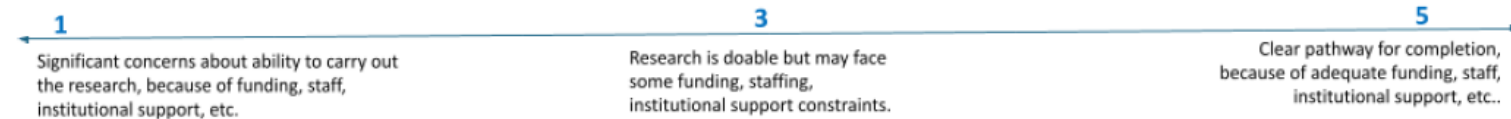
CRITERION 2: HUMAN-CENTERED



CRITERION 3: IMPACT



CRITERION 4: FEASIBILITY



CRITERION 5: URGENCY

