

Archives Working Across Remote Environments: Understanding the needs of territorial archives

EIRA TANSEY AND HELEN WONG SMITH

Abstract

The territorial archives of Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa steward records that reflect diverse cultures as well as a complex relationship with the United States government. Due to their distance from the lower 48 states, these territorial archives face additional challenges when it comes to emergency preparedness as well as supply procurement. The AWARE project (Archives Working Across Remote Environments) is sponsored by the Council of State Archivists (CoSA), which represents state and territorial government archivists. The AWARE project is a two-year endeavor to investigate and articulate the needs of territorial and non-contiguous state archives. Year over year, a range of needs are expressed by the territorial archivists, spanning lack of funding, failing physical infrastructure, attracting and retaining diverse talent, increasing costs, supply chain issues, and impending and realized environmental disaster due to climate crisis. In the last several years, these issues have been amplified by pandemic-related closures, inflation, social unrest, and increasing frequency in emergencies (for example, hardware failure, building deterioration, and storms). Project consultants Eira Tansey and Helen Wong Smith will discuss the major findings from their research project, which used surveys, interviews, and site visits to the partner archives. These findings have potential application to under-resourced cultural organizations nationwide; local, rural, and Indigenous communities; and other membership organizations.

About the authors:

Eira Tansey is an archivist, researcher, and consultant based in her hometown of Cincinnati/the Ohio River watershed. She is the founder of [Memory Rising](#), which provides research, consulting, and archival services with expertise in climate change, environmental and labor movements, and Ohio Valley regional history. Memory Rising's clients have included the Council of State Archivists, METRO, the Digital Preservation Outreach & Education Network, the Digital Preservation Coalition, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. She previously worked as an archivist in academic libraries for fifteen years, at the University of Cincinnati and Tulane University. Eira's research on archives and climate change has been profiled by [Yale Climate Connections](#), [VICE](#), and [Pacific Standard](#), and has been [honored](#) by the Society of American Archivists. Her most recent publication is [A Green New Deal for Archives](#), which received the 2024 [Waldo Gifford Leland Award](#) for writing of superior excellence and usefulness in the fields of archival history, theory, and practice. She is an elected Council member of the Society of American Archivists, the governing body for North America's largest professional association of archivists. Eira is also the researcher and host of [NO TIME FOR FEAR](#), a podcast about the history of the New Deal.

Archivist for University Records at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, ***Helen Wong Smith*** has 35 years’ experience in historical repositories in Hawai‘i. With BA in Hawaiian Studies and MLIS from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, where she is a doctoral candidate in Communication & Information Sciences. A Certified Archivist since 2001 her positions include Librarian/Archivist for the State Historic Preservation Division, Executive Director of the Kaua‘i Historical Society, Lead Archivist for the Pacific Island Network of the National Park Service, Hawaiian Collection Librarian at University of Hawai‘i Hilo, and Historical/Cultural Specialist for the Land Assets Division, Endowment, Kamehameha Schools. Named a [Distinguished Fellow of the Society of American Archivists](#) in 2016 and elected their [78th President](#) she previously served as President of Hawaiian Library Association, the Hawaiian Historical Society and twice of the Association of Hawai‘i Archivists. Since delivering a plenary address “[Adopting Cultural Diversity Competence](#)” at SAA’s 2015 Annual Meeting Helen has been sharing how cultural competency can advance cultural heritage professions training organizations i.e. SAA, [Hawai‘i Museum Association](#), Museum Study, Black Metropolis Research Consortium (Chicago), and the Council of State Archives, who awarded her the CoSA President’s Award for Excellence in 2022.