

**Society of American Archivists Foundation
Board of Directors Meeting**
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Virtual Meeting

Archival Workers Emergency Fund Review Committee Report

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The Archival Workers Emergency Fund (AWEF) Review Committee began meeting weekly in April 2020 to review applications for the Archival Workers Emergency Fund. The members of the AWEF Review Committee during the period covered in this report are Jessica Chapel (chair), Sharmila Bhatia, Steven Booth (through August 2020), Anna Clutterbuck-Cook, Amy Fitch, Carli Lowe, Bridget Malley, and Lydia Tang.

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, archival repositories across the U.S. closed temporarily in response to the escalating COVID-19 pandemic, displacing a significant number of workers through furloughs and layoffs. An *ad hoc* group of concerned archivists organized via the SAA Leaders email listserv in mid-March with the goal of providing aid to archival workers experiencing acute financial distress as a result of the crisis.

In its first week of work, the organizing group met with SAA staff, including Executive Director Nancy Beaumont, Director of Finance Peter Carlson, and Governance Program Manager Felicia Owens, and SAA Foundation Treasurer Amy Fitch to discuss the SAA Foundation providing structural support to an emergency fund grounded in the principle of mutual aid. With the strong backing of SAA, the organizing group drafted a proposal¹ for such an emergency fund for presentation to the SAA Foundation Board.

Following discussion and revisions to the proposal, the Archival Workers Emergency Fund (AWEF) was approved by the SAA Foundation Board in early April. Supported by a \$15,000 seed grant from the Foundation Board, the AWEF began accepting applications for aid on April 15, 2020.

As anticipated, the fund received a rush of applications when it launched. More than 60 applications were submitted in the fund's first two weeks, many requesting the maximum one-time award amount of \$1,000. To date, the AWEF has distributed nearly \$140,000 to more than 160 archival workers, and brought in 98 new members to SAA through the complimentary one-year memberships that are offered to AWEF recipients.

¹ 0820-SAAF-I-D-BoardInterimActions, Appendix A: <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0820-SAAF-I-D-BoardInterimActions.pdf>.

As the pandemic reaches another peak in the United States, there is no resolution to the crisis in the foreseeable future without an effective vaccine. Although many employers have adapted to remote work and some repositories have partially reopened, many institutions are experiencing budget shortfalls and implementing hiring freezes, furloughs, and other measures that affect archival workers. While the number of applications to the AWEF have slowed to approximately one to four per week, the need remains.

Additionally, the reality of multiple concurrent disasters—such as the wildfires on the West Coast affecting people already coping with the pandemic—suggest it is time to consider expanding the scope of the fund beyond the COVID-19 crisis to address the needs of archival workers facing multiple concurrent crises.

The *ad hoc* organizing group—dubbed the Archival Workers Emergency Fund Organizing Committee—continues to meet every two weeks. The Organizing Committee, with a core of approximately two dozen active members, effectively serves as a sounding board and auxiliary support for members of the group who also are part of the Review Committee (Jessica Chapel, Anna Clutterbuck-Cook, Carli Lowe, Bridget Malley, and Lydia Tang). During these meetings, the organizing group develops plans for fundraising initiatives and community outreach.

DISCUSSION

The fund has achieved its goal of supporting members in acute financial distress and cultivating professional unity and support. The AWEF not only provides material support to archivists in need, it also shines a spotlight on labor issues in the archival field. As SAA works to advocate for archivists, AWEF emphasizes the need for this advocacy.

Narratives offered in applications to the fund have revealed the broad range of circumstances that can unexpectedly exacerbate the financial precarity of many archival workers, whether connected to or beyond COVID-19. This is an argument for expanding the scope of the fund, which would reflect the evolution of other funds such as the National Disaster Recovery Fund for Archives, which expanded beyond its initial scope of responding to Hurricane Katrina. Expanding the scope of the AWEF to be inclusive of significant crises resulting in severe unanticipated financial loss aligns with the spirit of mutual aid to assist colleagues in need in which the AWEF is grounded.

Through mid-October, we were fortunate to be able to keep ahead of need, thanks to the generosity of the SAA Foundation, motivated individual donors, support from regional professional organizations, and creative grassroots fundraising by the Organizing Committee through craft auctions, virtual educational events, and other fundraising initiatives. The fund has been remarkably better equipped and managed greater capacity than related aid funds for library and museum workers.

Like many aid organizations, we unfortunately experienced two suspected instances of fraud, losing \$2,000 to bad actors, an amount equal to approximately 1.4% of the total funds distributed. This was a learning experience for the Review Committee and led the committee to

review the evaluation rubric and procedures, resulting in revised protocols for seeking additional information from applicants presenting incomplete or unverifiable employment information in their applications. This extra step requires additional time from both the review committee members and staff. Ultimately, we are gratified to know that most applicants are truly in need of assistance and are qualifying archival workers.

Although the long-term impacts of both the AWEF and the COVID-19 pandemic are yet to be known, the support the AWEF provides may allow some archivists to remain in the field who would otherwise have to leave. It also cultivates a sense of goodwill among the community of archival workers, which will have immeasurable positive impacts on the field going forward.

Fundraising

The amount of funds raised for the AWEF, in addition to the number of individuals who donated, evidence the broad support the fund has across the archival profession. Building on the seed money (\$15,000) and travel award reallocation (\$6,000) generously granted by the SAA Foundation, and in addition to the fundraising messages disseminated through SAA channels, the Organizing Committee has utilized numerous avenues to continue to raise funds for and awareness of the AWEF, including:

- **Regional organization outreach.** Members of the Organizing Committee developed a list of archives-affiliated regional organizations to reach out to, asking them to notify their members of the existence of the AWEF, but also to donate to the fund if possible. Since the beginning of these direct outreach efforts, regional organizations have given approximately \$20,220 to the AWEF.
- **Persistent Stitches Auction4AWEfund (July 1–4, 2020).** This volunteer-run online silent auction event featured 62 items donated by 24 crafters, and raised a total of \$2,165.50 for the fund from 34 winning bidders. This auction may become a biannual or annual event if the AWEF is continued.
- **Coffee for Colleagues (Tea on Me) GoFundMe (September 1, 2020–Present).** This volunteer-run grassroots campaign was established to capture small, recurring donations. The initial goal is to establish an income stream of \$1,000 per month in \$5 increments — the price of a latte. As of October 26, 2020, we have 21 recurring donors who have committed to \$255 per month in recurring donations. Efforts to increase recurring donations are currently in the planning stages.
- **“Donations Gratefully Accepted” at Virtual Events.** The AWE Fund Organizing Committee has hosted three virtual events in July, August, and October. These events were free to attendees with donations gratefully accepted through Eventbrite at registration. Total funds generated for the AWEF from the first three events were \$730 (total proceeds were split with partner organizations).
- **Social Media Awareness.** The AWE Fund Organizing Committee runs a Twitter account

(@awefund2020²) through which the committee promotes specific fundraisers and events as well as raising awareness of the fund more generally. The account has 209 followers; since it was established it has had an average of 19,780 impressions (people viewing a Tweet) and 126 link clicks per month.³

Source	Amount
SAA Foundation “Seed Money”	\$15,000
SAA Foundation Travel Award Reallocation	\$6,000
SAA Section Funding Donations	\$6,100
Donations - Organizations (18)	\$30,520
Donations - Individuals (831)* <i>Virtual Events⁴ — \$730</i> <i>Persistent Stitches Auction4AWEfund⁵ — \$2,165.50</i>	\$83,177
Coffee for Colleagues (Tea on Me) GoFundMe ^{6**}	\$1,535
TOTAL	\$142,962

* This count of individual donations includes the amounts from the virtual events and the Persistent Stitches Auction.

**The Coffee for Colleagues campaign funds have not yet been transferred from GoFundMe to the SAA Foundation. Amount listed is amount raised by October 26, 2020.

Administration

The Review Committee is grateful for the labor that enables the AWEF to exist, particularly the dedicated efforts of Peter Carlson, Felicia Owens, and Carlos Salgado, as well as the volunteers serving on the Review Committee and in the Organizing Committee. Recognizing that the fiscal impact and labor involved isn’t insignificant, we believe that the fund remains necessary to support the archival community.

SAA staff provide an average of 13 hours per week of support to administer AWEF logistics. Relevant tasks include managing the evaluation process in Smarter Select with the Review Committee, preparing evaluation summary spreadsheets and staffing Review Committee calls, contacting applicants with final decisions, initiating payments through Zelle or by check,

² <https://twitter.com/awefund2020>.

³ These metrics were pulled for the report using Twitter Analytics on 22 October 2020.

⁴ <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/awe-fund-organizing-committee-30528328812>

⁵ <https://www.32auctions.com/auction4awefund> (Individuals donated over their winning bids so the total donated is slightly higher than the auction total reflected on the website).

⁶ <https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/coffee-for-colleagues-tea-on-me>

contacting recipients by phone or email as needed, creating membership accounts for recipients, sending acknowledgment letters to all donors, drafting press releases and social media outreach, and general finance/administration for both donations and payouts to recipients.

Initial set up of the fund required significant staff time to set up various systems and procedures for applications, evaluations, accounting, and more. This time was highly concentrated within the first month, but was reduced once the fund was fully established.

Testimonials

The existence of the fund is meaningful across the profession, even for those who are not accessing it. Many applicants have expressed gratitude for the fund's existence within their applications, even before being approved for funds. The following quotes are from thank you notes we received from grant recipients:

"Thank you so much for the generous emergency funding for archival workers. This award has helped my family and I bridge the gap with funds this month and has given us some peace in this chaotic time. I am greatly appreciative."

"I wanted to let you know that the SAA grant I received for \$1000 hit my account yesterday. I cannot express my thanks enough to you and SAA. This is the only assistance I have received thus far and is an enormous help to myself and my family as we quarantine at home. It's a testament to SAA that you all were able to reach out to members and help them in such a crucial and tangible way."

Looking Forward

The ongoing sustainability of the AWEF will depend in part on the ability to continue to raise funds in amounts keeping pace with applications. These efforts must be coordinated with the SAA Foundation such that the AWEF is not competing with other fundraising efforts. It will also depend on the availability of SAA staff resources.

The Organizing Committee members remain committed to the work of grassroots fundraising, continuing with the efforts that have proven successful such as online auction events and monthly panels with "pass the hat" donations, as well as developing new fundraising strategies including the Coffee for Colleagues (Tea on Me) GoFundMe Campaign and a Zazzle online store with AWEF branded items for sale.