

**Society of American Archivists Foundation  
Board of Directors Meeting  
November 2 – 3, 2023  
Chicago, IL (Hybrid)**

**1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Report: Annual Meeting Award Committee**  
(Prepared by: Jessica Chapel, Chair, Elizabeth Myers, Immediate Past Chair & Astoria Edwards, Foundation Assistant Director)

Summary Report for the Annual Meeting Award Committee Initiatives for FY23

## Report

The Annual Meeting Award Committee for FY23 has selected and awarded 12 individuals to attend the ARCHIVES\*RECORDS 2023 conference. A combined sum of over 10K was granted to support the attendance of 12 individuals at the ARCHIVES\*RECORDS 2023 conference, either virtually or in person; it's noteworthy that 11 out of the 12 awardees were student members. In addition, in the previous cycle, recipients had to submit a written report or a short video detailing their three takeaways from the conference.

These recipients include:

- Ia Kholan Gregory Bull
- Alaina Smith
- Ayah Elkossei
- Esther Park
- Savannah Etzler
- Katie Kerekes
- Whitney Gaines (Please note: Takeaways not received)
- Katy Jones-Gulsy
- Amanda Hardt Sorensen
- Laura Kathryn Nicole Jones
- Madison Zehmer (Please note: Takeaways not received)
- LaShaunda Croussore (Please note: Takeaways not received)

However, as indicated in the list above, takeaways from the 2023 conference have not been received by some of the awardees. It is recommended that efforts be made to collect this valuable feedback to assess the impact of the conference on the recipients and to share their insights with the broader community.

## Takeaways from Awardees

- Attending ARCHIVES \* RECORDS 2023 has greatly enriched my understanding of the latest developments in archival practices and records management.
- The conference offered an exceptional platform for networking with professionals and peers from across the field.
- The presentations and keynote speeches have inspired me with new perspectives on the role of archives and records in shaping historical narratives and informing decision-making.

(Ayah Elkossei)

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- Records management and archiving are inherently political.  
Records management and archiving are not neutral. It shapes public knowledge and some of that work can support oppressive systems through perpetuating harm, but can also be used to hold those culpable of violence accountable. All records management is political and all politics are local. What is destroyed or maintained are important, ethical decisions to make. The fundamental institutional move is making claims to neutrality.
- Programming can support digital cataloging work and increase access to records.  
Working with a software developer can support programs that automate metadata schemes and data entry, saving staff time and energy. This in turn can support access to records through public interface systems.
- Seeing people's actions as roles and not as people.  
Institutional frameworks are important to recognize in advocacy and organizing work. Approaching this work with collective action and solidarity skills can help push back against institutional oppression.

(Amanda Sorensen)

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- Partnerships and collaboration increase our chances for success.  
Whether it's working together to unionize, collaborating on events, or partnering with other professionals to ensure that both a historic site and its records are preserved, our profession is made stronger by developing and maintaining relationships within and outside of the archival community.
- You don't need to have all the answers, but you have to ask the right questions.  
I've often wondered about how we can facilitate more reciprocal relationships between archives and the communities we serve. Rather than focusing on our own priorities, asking "How can we support you?" and offering creative solutions can deepen relationships and open up even more opportunities. Archives do not have a long history of serving all communities equally, so it's on us to step up and lay the initial groundwork for reciprocal relationships.
- Neutrality is not an option.  
Resistance is hard and scary and uncomfortable, and it's easy to feel like positive change is impossible, but I am encouraged by all of the personal stories and the examples of radical work that were shared during the conference. As an online student, it can be difficult to believe in the collective power of a faceless profession, much less how I might

make an impact as a future archivist, so it is heartening to know that I will be joining a community of professionals who believe that access to information is a human right and who, day after day, continue to believe that together we can make a difference.

**(Savannah Etzler)**

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- Strengthening Indigenous Representation
- One of my key takeaways from ARCHIVES \* RECORDS 2023 is the importance of promoting transparency in institutions for Indigenous and Tribal stakeholders and potential stakeholders in archival and information studies. In particular, the Q&A during our presentation “IndigenizeSNAC: Informing Discovery and Access of Indigenous Materials,” revealed a great need to make transparent institutional and project stances towards the complex issues of Indigenous and Tribal identities. This is required to build trust with Indigenous communities, of which I am positively motivated to see (at least increasingly) considered best practices in archives, as this conference was any indication.
- Archival Sciences continues to Innovate  
ARCHIVES \* RECORDS 2023 highlighted the need for me to stay aware of current trends in many spheres that affect our field, including “Crip” Disability studies, Science and Technology Studies (as the “AI” language-learning model explosion has revealed), Queer Studies, and even Ludology or the study of games and game theory. It may seem silly but getting these diverse and often intersectional points of view will help bridge the gap between non-community/non-Tribal information institutions and Indigenous Tribal communities. My experiences with archival research and language revitalization projects demonstrate that creative ways to engage archival materials can increase discovery through motivating factors, facilitating these connections.
- Collaborative Potential  
The conference underscored the collaborative potential in Indigenous archives and information studies, not just with Tribal and non-tribal institutions but intertribal collaborations. Attendance at this conference has greatly benefited my future work in these spaces, enabling me to contribute more effectively to these collaborative efforts.

**(Ia Kholan Gregory Bull)**

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- Collaboration and networks are important components of getting work done in chronically understaffed and under resourced work environments. What collaboration actually means and requires is not often clearly defined, therefore, providing more concrete examples and plans for collaborative work is essential.
- It can feel impossible to change larger systems of structure, power, and corruption. Changing institutions and policies from within your own institution or work place is a way to begin.
- Advocating for all aspects of the profession, from living wages to the archival standards of practice and ethics, is ever important.

**(Alaina Smith)**

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- My first take away is the challenges that archivists face in providing equitable access to materials. The panel in the session, “Searching for the Commons: Reflecting on Access Realities Surfaced Through User Research”, shared from their findings of some of the difficulties with providing access to materials that is inclusive to all. Some of the difficulties mentioned were having descriptive challenges, complex workflow, legacy descriptions, and financial resources/staffing. I learned through the sharing of expertise and methodologies to help address these issues and to provide a better user experience for those who are marginalized.
- My second takeaway is how digitizing audio/visual materials in archives as it is continuously growing and expanding as we look to conserve and preserve audio/visual materials where the materials are becoming or have been discontinued. When I attended the Smithsonian audio/visual preservation initiative tour, it was interesting to see the “behind-the-scenes” of how the digitization is done. I learned about how they are dealing with digitizing various types of materials, (i.e., different species – animals, engine parts from spaceships, airplanes, etc.) as they are looking into digitizing 9 out of the 22 Smithsonian museums. The importance of collaboration and communication between the various departments as well as with the different museums.
- My third and final takeaway is how emotional intelligence is needed by archivists when interacting with donors. In the session, “She Wasn’t Difficult, She Was Grieving: Emotional Intelligence in Archival Interactions”, the panel members shared the importance of focusing on the person and looking beyond the material. They provided helpful tips/suggestions – letting the donors determine the timeline, making sure there is ample time scheduled when meeting with a donor, taking care of yourself after the meeting as sometimes it can be physically/emotionally draining for the archivist.

**(Esther Park)**

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- As a current graduate student, it was very useful to connect with archivists with established careers and learn about the different kinds of career pathways available to archivists, especially with nontraditional pathways.
- I also enjoyed seeing what other graduate students are working on through the poster presentations. It was helpful to talk with fellow grad students at other institutions and discuss the differences and commonalities between our experiences.
- One theme of many sessions I attended was that regardless of the kind of institution you’re working at, there are always opportunities to orient your work and workplace to have a stronger emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusion and access. It was very valuable to see examples of this kind of work in a variety of settings.

**(Katie Kerekes)**

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- Attending the SAA Annual Meeting allowed me to take part in extremely valuable networking experiences. Being able to meet so many people within the industry, from a diverse range of institutions was incredible. I was especially interested in chatting with archivists from a wide variety of institution types.

- The quality of the education sessions was impressive. There was a good amount of variety to choose from, which made the decision of what sessions to attend very hard! A diverse range of viewpoints, institutions, and skillsets were represented and I've enjoyed being able to go back after the conference to watch the hybrid and digital sessions I wasn't able to attend.
- The importance of marginalized groups in an archival context. So many education sessions focused on doing the work to center marginalized groups within their community archives and I was fascinated to learn more about the reparative work being done. I was also struck by just how important it is that archivists come from these communities and lead the way toward a more inclusive practice.

**(Katy Jones-Gulsby)**

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- Networking is useful even when you aren't job hunting, because you never know who you might meet that can be a resource at a later time. This is especially important for lone arrangers and new professionals.
- The Creating Exhibits that Showcase Archival and Special Collections session helped me expand my exhibition creation skills since I only had training with museum objects. I now feel more confident combining the two to create improved exhibits.
- I got some advice on managing my museum's backlogs as a lone arranger from the Are We Ready to Talk about It? session; as a lone arranger, any tips or tricks on streamlining workflows are processes are incredibly valuable to me.

**(Laura Kathryn Nicole Jones)**

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#### **2022-2023 Member Committee Members:**

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Michele Pacifico, Member

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