Staff, Style Guides, Support, and No More Reading Groups: Surveying Current Reparative Work

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Research question:

“The purpose of this exploratory study is to determine the perceived and experienced barriers that archivists are encountering when conducting or thinking about adopting reparative archival practices. We are also seeking to understand why and why not archivists are undertaking reparative initiatives in archives and special collections repositories.”
METHODOLOGY

● Anonymous survey conducted January–February 2023
  ○ Quantitative and qualitative questions
  ○ Approved by multiple university IRBs

● Two track survey logic for the question:
  ○ Are you currently undertaking reparative archival work?

● 375 responses
  ○ 207 were complete responses
    ■ 165 yes currently undertaking reparative archival work
    ■ 42 no not currently undertaking reparative archival work
  ○ 168 incomplete responses were removed
Findings: demographics

Q2 - What type of repository do you work in? - Selected Choice

Q4 - How many employees work at your repository (archives or special collections unit only)?

- Academic institution (e.g. public, private, or for-profit university)
- For-profit organization (e.g. corporate or business archives)
- Government agency (e.g. city, state, federal, or tribal organization)
- Non-profit organization (e.g. community-based archives)
- Religious organization
- Other
**Findings: What work is/is not being done**

Q17 - How are you undertaking reparative work? [Select all that apply] - Selected Choice

- **Case-by-case**: 80%
- **Community advisory board or group**: 4%
- **Community partnerships**: 19%
- **Grant-based**: 12%
- **Integrated into policies and procedures**: 69%
- **Strategic planning**: 33%
- **Targeted long-term project**: 41%
- **Task force or working group**: 50%
- **Other**: 4%

*Percentage of Responses*
Findings: what Archivists think reparative work IS?

Reparative archival work is...

“...changing outdated language.”

“...redescribing, repatriating, and otherwise restoring voice/agency to groups that have been silenced by biased or bigoted archival/historiographical practices.”

“...rethink[ing] collecting and access practices that center source communities and individuals.”

“...[a] transient political trend.”
**Findings: Major Barriers to Reparative Work**

Q19/Q36: What types of barriers to reparative and/or inclusive work [are you/do you believe that you will encounter] within your repository?

Q20/Q37: - What types of barriers to reparative and/or inclusive work [are you encountering/do you believe that you will encounter] external to your repository?
**Findings: Needs and Resources**

Q26/Q43 - What fiscal resources would help you adopt reparative practices, initiatives, policies, or projects?

- Compensation for community advisory groups/legends: 45% Yes, 50% No
- Funding for contingent labor (i.e., grant funding): 43% Yes, 47% No
- Funding for non-contingent labor (i.e., permanent staff): 48% Yes, 70% No
- Funding geared towards hiring and retaining academics from marginalized backgrounds: 57% Yes, 61% No

Q27/Q44 - What types of non-fiscal resources would help you adopt reparative practices, initiatives, policies, or projects?

- Advocacy and community engagement: 38% Yes, 39% No
- Alternative assessment and grading standards: 52% Yes, 72% No
- Collaborative community standards: 55% Yes, 61% No
- Communities of practice among support groups: 48% Yes, 44% No
- Culturally responsive and community-based pedagogy: 45% Yes, 58% No
- Engaging groups: 14% Yes, 19% No
- Racial and ethnic educational disparities: 71% Yes, 72% No
- Style, values, and beliefs: 79% Yes, 82% No
Findings: Needs and Resources

Top Needs

- Non-contingent staffing
- Guidelines & training: alternative thesauri, cultural competency training, style guides, toolkits, collaborative community-driven standards
- Funding to support training, recruiting, and retaining archivists from diverse backgrounds
Takeaways

- Reparative work IS redescription [at least right now...]
- Biggest constraint: STAFF & TIME
  - Side finding: The archival profession is facing a capacities cliff
- A lot of energy around reparative practice, but archivists are unsure where or how to start.
  - Desire for clear guidance.
- Survey data captured a moment in time.
  - After surge of interest & activity following 2020
  - Before the widespread attacks on DEIA initiatives in Spring 2023