

Society of American Archivists
Component Group Funding Request
Fiscal Year 2025/26 and 2026/ 27
(July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)

**Committee on Public Awareness: Funding to Support
Storytelling workshop, Storytelling event (Finding Aid to My
Soul), and Storytelling event (SAA Annual Meeting 2026)**

Prepared by: Claudia Willett, Sidney Louie
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The Committee on Public Awareness (COPA) requests that funding be included in SAA's FY 2026 budget to support our annual Storytelling workshop, Storytelling event in Spring 2026 and an additional in-person Storytelling event at the SAA Annual Meeting in August 2026.

BACKGROUND [Should not exceed 3 paragraphs.]

Describe origin of project or program for which you are seeking funding from SAA.

In 2018, COPA organized and hosted the first-ever storytelling event at the Annual Conference in Washington D.C. that exceeded expectations with more than 100 attendees. There were 5 scheduled storytellers and 9 attendees who put their names in a hat for selection with 7 being picked to participate. Successful iterations of this event ran through 2021, transitioning from in-person to online in 2020. The program expanded to include a storytelling workshop component in collaboration with Micaela Blei who has continued to work with COPA to refine this experience and adapt it to new circumstances. Planning challenges limited the ability to host this event in 2022 and 2023 however in October 2024 and February 2025 the workshop and event were relaunched, thanks to the hard work of Chris Burns, with continued success and astounding engagement. In this spirit, COPA wants to offer the storytelling workshop and event again in Spring 2026. Further, inspired by the 90th anniversary of SAA, COPA would like to offer an in-person "Greatest Hits" storytelling event at the annual conference.

The storytelling workshop and event are in alignment with the mission of COPA to "develop programs that promote the value and role(s) of archivists and archives nationwide." This opportunity also supports priorities from the SAA Strategic Plan including tasks specifically assigned to COPA including developing resources to help craft messages internally and externally to advocate for archives and archivists. Storytelling as a tool for advocacy is evergreen but we are in a moment of political turmoil in which building confidence in our community to speak with passion and clarity about the value of our work and experiences is more important than ever. Building confidence within the field to share an effective story or raise critical awareness is at the core of what we work to do.

Anticipated scheduling for the workshop and subsequent event will be determined in coordination with the Committee on Education (COE) as the virtual components have been offered in a webinar format. In early communication, the COE indicated that late January 2026 appears to offer the most availability; however this will need to be scheduled with sufficient time for an announcement and registration for the workshop. Similarly, the storytelling event is typically scheduled several months after the workshop. We could expect the event to occur in March or April 2026. The in-person event will be dependent on the 2026 annual conference planning committee but previously was offered as a Special Event.

DISCUSSION [Should not exceed 1 to 2 pages.]

Describe the project or program more fully, providing a balanced discussion of the benefits to the profession and/or SAA resulting from the project or program. Be sure to indicate clearly the outcomes and/or products you expect from the activity.

Storytelling is one of the most effective communication tools for increasing public awareness of archives and archivists. A well-told story transforms abstract concepts—such as preservation, access, or historical significance—into relatable human experiences that resonate with broader audiences. For archivists, sharing their personal stories not only connects them viscerally to their work, it also inspires other archives professionals to tell their own stories. By framing archival materials within compelling narratives, we not only highlight the relevance of archives to contemporary issues but also foster empathy, understanding, and sustained engagement. Storytelling invites people to see themselves within the archival record—making archives more visible, meaningful, and essential to public memory.

This project advances COPA's goal of increasing public understanding of archives and archivists. By equipping participants with storytelling tools, it empowers SAA members to communicate the value of their work more effectively to the public, funders, and community partners. The workshop serves not only COPA but also other SAA sections—such as Reference, Access, and Outreach—by strengthening members' interpretive and public engagement skills. Externally, the storytelling format appeals to a broad audience through its entertaining, relatable, emotional, and even persuasive or transformative style with the narrator creating memorable content. Ultimately, the stories shared during the event—and with a selection posted on COPA's [ArchivesAware! blog](#)—enhance visibility for the archives and the collections.

Funding will support the consultant fees for [Micaela Blei, PHD](#), who has been leading the *Finding Aid to My Soul* workshops since 2019. Dr. Blei is a two-time Moth GrandSLAM winner and former founding Director of Education at The Moth. She's currently the resident professor of Storytelling at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies in Portland, Maine. She is also a senior story editor and writer for podcast network Wondery, most recently for *This Job is History*, hosted by Chris Parnell. Her stories can be heard on *This American Life*, *The Moth Radio Hour* and podcast, *Family Ghosts, Risk!* and many others. Her Audible Original memoir, *You Will Not Recognize Your Life*, was released in 2024

and hit #2 in the Memoir/Pop Culture Audible charts. Her memoir, *The Secret Life of Your Third Grade Teacher*, is coming in 2026 from Harper One.

The project's outcomes include:

- Strengthening members' capacity to communicate archival value through storytelling.
- Producing a curated public storytelling event that showcases archivists' voices and increases visibility for SAA.
- Building community and shared learning among participants across regions and institutions.

Budget

Within the Discussion section, provide an estimated budget for the project or program, including as much detail as possible. Provide background for your analysis and any alternatives that were considered. Are there other ways to accomplish this project that would reduce the budget?

The cost breakdown for the storytelling workshop and the virtual event hosted by Micaela Blei is based on real numbers for her consulting work:

Part I. Virtual workshop and storytelling event (Spring 2026): **\$3,750**

- Curriculum planning, storyteller communication and storyteller selection (approx. 3 hours, \$125/hr): \$375
- Individual Phone & Zoom story coaching for 5 storytellers (approx. 4 hours, \$150/hr): \$600
- Hosting Storytelling Show (flat rate): \$575
- 3-hour customized professional development workshop (flat rate): \$2,200

Part II. In-person "Greatest Hits" storytelling event (August 2026): **\$1,775**

The in-person storytelling show at the SAA Annual Conference 2026 would reflect the same cost for hosting the storytelling show but the estimated cost for travel and accommodation for Micaela is estimated:

- Hosting Storytelling Show (flat rate): \$575
- Travel and accommodation (estimate/tbd): \$1,200

Total budget Parts I and II: **\$5,525**

Costs can be offset partially by registration fees for the workshop collected through SAA's education course portal. Based on last year's numbers, we expect 40 attendees who will pay \$49 each for a total revenue of **\$1,960**. Following the workshop, five storytellers will be selected, and their work will culminate in a virtual public presentation that is free for SAA members. The in-person storytelling show will be offered at no extra charge for registrants of the SAA annual meeting.

FUNDING REQUEST

COPA requests that funding in the amount of \$5,525 be included in SAA's FY 2026/27 budget to support a Storytelling workshop and events.

Support Statement: *The support statement provides a very brief rationale for or summary of the recommendation. The naïve reader should be able to glean much of the intent of the request by reading the support statement, without having to read the background and discussion.*

This project advances COPA's goal of increasing public understanding of archives and archivists. By equipping participants with storytelling tools, it empowers SAA members to communicate the value of their work more effectively to the public, funders, and community partners. The workshop serves not only COPA but also other SAA sections—such as Reference, Access, and Outreach—by strengthening members' interpretive and public engagement skills. Externally, the storytelling format appeals to a broad audience through its entertaining, relatable, emotional, and even persuasive or transformative style with the narrator creating memorable content while renewing visibility for the archives and the collections.

Relation to SAA Strategic Plan: *Describe how the proposed project or program addresses one or more of SAA's strategic goals. Or indicate that it does not.*

These offerings are in alignment with COPA's strategic plan tasks while not specifically satisfying them. The workshop offers skills for internal advocacy and media training. The storytelling events offer skills for media training.

Fiscal Impact: *Restate the total dollar amount being requested. If staff or volunteer time will be required, please address that impact here as well.*

The total dollar amount for the whole request is: \$5,525

The total dollar amount for winter/spring FY25-26 workshop and virtual event: \$3,750

The total direct expenses for hiring a consultant and storytelling expert to assist with the development and implementation of the storytelling workshop and virtual event will be \$3,750.

The estimated staff time associated with this project/program is 1 staff member @ 5-10 hours. The estimated volunteer time of 2 COPA committee members @ 5-10 hours.

The total dollar amount for FY 26-27 SAA Annual Conference event: \$1,775

The total cost for hiring a consultant for the in-person storytelling event is \$575.

The estimated cost for the consultant to travel to and stay for the conference is approximately **\$1,200**.

The estimated staff time associated with this program is 1-2 staff @ 5-10 hours.
The estimated volunteer time of 2 COPA committee members @ 5-10 hours.