

Society of American Archivists

Labor Archives Section: Annual Report (Prepared by: Conor Casey)

Year: 2024-2025

Current Rosters:

Co-Chair:

Conor Casey,
Head of the Labor Archives of Washington
cmcasey@uw.edu
July 1, 2024-June 30, 2026

Co-Chair:

Ben Blake,
Labor and Social Justice Collections Archivist
AFL-CIO Archives,
University of Maryland
Bblake709@gmail.com
July 1, 2025-June 30, 2027

Steering Committee Member:

Alan Weirdak
Project Archivist at the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum • of Maryland
awierdak@terpmail.umd.edu
July 1, 2024-June 30, 2026

Steering Committee Member:

Vakil Smallen
International Brotherhood of Teamsters Labor History Archivist
George Washington University
vakil67@gmail.com
July 1, 2025-June 30, 2027

Council Liaison:

Joyce Gabiola (outgoing)

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Completed:

- Developed a section logo and brand pack.

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- Created a branded section banner and table runner for tabling at annual conferences and community events.
- Updated Section posters for tabling advertising mission of Section.
 - Strategic plan goals met: **Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists, Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs**
- Created section YouTube channel, solicited contributions.
<https://www.youtube.com/@LaborArchivesSAA>
 - Strategic plan goals met: **Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists, Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth, Goal 3: Advancing the Field, Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs**

Ongoing:

- **Marketing/Outreach:** Creating a section flyer to promote member institutions and the section at stakeholder organization meetings like labor history conferences as well a recruiting members among fellow archivists who are stewards of labor and labor related , collections that may not be conceptually branded as “labor archives” per se.
- Developing a better web presence for the section (e.g. linktree, standard QR codes) that could be associated with the above-mentioned flyer.
Strategic plan goals met: **Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists Goal 3: Advancing the Field, Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs**

Outreach and Advocacy Activities:

- **North American Labor History Conference, October 2024**
 - Presented presented North American Labor History Conference. The proposal was accepted.:
<https://nalhc.wayne.edu/>
 - Separate from the section’s annual meeting, a labor archivists’ mini-retreat was held as part of NALHC
- **Labor and Working Class History Association Conference, June 2025**
 - Organized and presented a LAW-branded session at this core conference for labor historians and graduate students as well as community members.
 - Organized a table, created a branded LAS banner with new section logo and table runner. Several section members personed the table and fielded questions of the conference attendees and performed outreach.
- Strategic plan goals met by above activities: **Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists, Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth, Goal 3: Advancing the Field, Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs**
- **SAA Annual Meeting 2025 and LAS Business Meeting**
 - Created a session proposal for the SAA 2025 Annual Meeting. This proposal was not accepted.
 - Hosted LAS Section Annual business meeting at part of SAA 2025.
 - Strategic plan goals met by above activities: **Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth, Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs**
- **Newsletter/Blog**
 - Continued to add contributions to Labor Archives Section newsletter and blog:
<https://laborarchivessaa.blogspot.com/>

- Strategic plan goals met by above activities: **Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth, Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs**

- **Directory of Labor History Organizations**

- Maintained and updated Directory of Labor History Organizations:
<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/labor-archives-section/directory-of-labor-history-organizations>

- **Social Media**

- Continued social media engagement through Twitter and Facebook: [@LaborArchivists](#); [@LaborArchivesSAA](#)

- **Slack**

- Sustained a Slack channel for section members: lascomms-workspace.slack.com

SAA ANNUAL MEETING

Number of attendees: 11

Link to meeting minutes: N/A

Summary of meeting activities and highlights:

Welcome & Section Activities Report Back by leadership

SAA Council Liaison Update

Round Robin: Member Project Highlights and Sharing

Invitation to Section Leadership (recruitment of officer candidates)

Discussion of Future Projects

SELF-ASSESSMENT

How would you describe the health or energy of the group, and how engaged are the members?

The section is in a healthy, active, and engaged state, characterized by strong member dedication and a clear focus on documenting labor history. Our collaborative spirit is evident in successful joint projects, conference

presentations, and grant applications, supplemented by semi-regular social gatherings that strengthen our community.

Key Achievements & Evidence of Engagement:

- **Successful Programming:** We organized multiple well-attended conference sessions this past year, receiving positive feedback from participants.
- **National Conference Presence:**
 - At the NALHC (Oct 2024), we hosted a well-received mini-retreat where members valued the opportunity to connect and "talk shop."
 - At LAWCHA (June 2025), our section was active through tabling and presentations.
- **Robust Leadership & Governance:** The section maintains full compliance with bylaws through a steady slate of candidates for co-chair positions and a committed steering committee. We have also successfully recruited working groups to advance various sub-projects, and this year identified two volunteers for officer roles.

Candid Assessment & Challenges:

- **Recruitment Hurdles:** When approaching members for officer positions, some declined due to existing commitments, workload, and the current political climate. Despite these barriers, a dedicated cohort of half a dozen members presented at our major conferences.
- **Meeting Attendance Trends:** Attendance at our virtual section meeting was lighter than historic in-person gatherings, a common trend since shifting to an asynchronous online format. However, a core leadership group of 4-6 members remains consistently active in monthly meetings and sustains the section's projects. Section drop-in brown bag meetings were also attended this year by members and leaders.

Did the component group's leadership encounter any challenges in achieving its goals for the year?

Our interim section funding request was not considered by the SAA financial committee. This represented a barrier to the logo/branding project design. Members ended up paying the designer out of pocket without reimbursement. This proposal is being reconsidered during this funding cycle.

What suggestions do you have for the SAA Council and staff that might help address these challenges in the coming term?

- **Policy vs. Practice Gap:** There is a concerning disconnect between documented procedures and actual operations. A recent example involved our interim section funding request that, contrary to official policy on the SAA Governance website, was never reviewed by the finance committee. After not hearing back for several months, we were initially told by staff that the deadline had passed and it would be retained for the next funding round. It was only after pushing for more information that we discovered that it had never been considered by the committee.
- **Perception of Opacity:** Both my personal experience on council and feedback from other sections indicate that the internal operations of staff and council are often perceived as unclear and inaccessible in terms of practice and follow through—especially around section finding requests.
- **Impact:** This erodes member trust and creates a negative experience. Establishing consistent and transparent processes — and tracking and follow-through of stated practices—should be a key priority. Alternately, simply updating the policing language on the governance website to reflect actual practice would help manage expectations on the part of members.

What questions or concerns do you have for the SAA Council and staff?

Please see above. Thank you!

SAA STRATEGIC PLAN

SAA's Strategic Plan is the guiding document for the association. Please review the current Strategic Plan and indicate below how your section has contributed to each of the 4 main goals.

Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists

- Section members worked with associations of labor historians by to created sessions at labor history conferences. This allowed us to promote our collections and advocate for the importance of our work to a community that represents many actual and potential users of labor archives.
- Section members will continue to organize future conference sessions
- Section members completed work on a logo, creating a recognizable 'brand' for use in tabling and promotional events.
- Section members discussed other promotional materials that could be used to promote archives that collect labor history materials and the work of archivists in those institutions. This work is ongoing.

Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth

- Led by one of the section co-chairs, members submitted proposals to present at SAA, the North American Labor History Conference, and the Labor and Working Class History Association conferences. Invitations to join the presentation were shared widely, offering many labor archivists at various stages in their career—from recent grads to those with decades of experience—the chance to experience presenting at a conference.
- Led by a section member, proposals were made for SAA Annual meeting sessions for 2024 and 2025. Invitations to join the presentation were shared widely, offering many labor archivists the chance to experience presenting at a conference.

Goal 3: Advancing the Field

- Our presentations at LAWCHA and NALHC conferences shared a common theme: the critical importance of collaboration in advancing archival practice. We argued for proactive partnerships with faculty, community members, and students across all aspects of our work, from teaching to curation and outreach. This strategic, collective advocacy at key stakeholder forums represents a significant mode of professional advancement, demonstrating the indispensable value of archivists. Variations of these themes was part our our conference session proposals at SAA 2024 and 2025, but they were not accepted.

Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs

- The section developed a YouTube channel for the first time. Members were invited to submit stories about their institutions or any other content that they believe others should be aware of.
- The section has consistently provided opportunities for members to present and perform outreach among peer archivist as well as stakeholder communities.
- The section has continued to serve as an important networking and information sharing forum for labor archivists and those keeping labor related collections.