

Research Project on Climate Change and Archives
Phase 1 Report: People
for Mellon Foundation, Public Knowledge program

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Executive Summary

The state of the archivist workforce will determine the capacity of archives to remain resilient in the face of climate change. This public report is adapted from the comprehensive Phase 1 (People) report prepared for the Public Knowledge program of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as part of a larger eighteen-month research project on archives and climate change. Sections of this report have been edited from the original for length and to preserve confidentiality of insights from individual subject matter experts. Additional reports from Phase 2 (Infrastructure) and Phase 3 (Collections) will be released at a later date. The three phases of research culminated in a final report that is available to the public.¹

Between May and August 2023, I conducted research related to archivists, archives workers, managers of archives, and professional association leaders. I sought to understand and contextualize the current workforce concerns in the American archival profession and what the state of the archivist workforce means for archives' capacity for climate change adaptation. This research explored questions related to institutional and professional capacity, staffing differences across different archives and regions, how the responsibilities of the archivist workforce intersect with or inhibit engagement with climate change, and examples of collective action with potential to integrate climate change concerns into the archivist workforce.

This report draws on thirty-five studies published in peer-reviewed sources or by professional associations, interviews with subject matter experts, and additional data analysis from the A*CENSUS II surveys. The focus on publications and data since the 2008 Great Recession shows that many of the issues in this report have become increasingly entrenched in the last fifteen years.

Major questions that guided this phase of research included:

- Are there institutional variations in staffing?
- What are likely staffing trends over the next 5-10 years?
- Are there any geographic variations or concerns in staffing?
- What best practices exist for appropriate staffing levels?
- How does staffing impact disaster preparedness?
- Are there any emerging staffing models/workforce strategies that address workforce precarity or resource issues?

The key findings of this report include:

- **Most archivists do not yet make the connection between climate change and workforce issues.** Climate change did not surface in any of the published research reviewed for this phase of research, and subject matter experts only occasionally recognized its impact on the workforce. This suggests the American archives profession has not yet prioritized climate change with significant engagement and leadership. For archivists to meaningfully work on the inherently destabilizing issue of climate change,

¹ Tansey, "Research Project on Climate Change and Archives."

they need to have enough resources and stability to build relationships across their communities and develop a sophisticated understanding of local environmental challenges.

- **Term positions are widespread across the profession and unevenly distributed.** Term positions have increased across the profession since the 2008 recession. Numerous studies point to the negative impacts of term positions on individuals and institutions. Term positions are least commonly found in government archives, and more commonly found in academic, for-profit, and other types of archives. BIPOC archivists are slightly more likely to hold term positions than White archivists. Almost half of archivists under 25 have a term position, and over half of recently advertised job postings are term positions.
- **Institutional turnover is difficult to measure but may be accelerating.** Most archives have a small workforce and operating budgets, and are vulnerable to budget cuts. When staff leave due to retirement or resignation, these positions are vulnerable to elimination or consolidation.
- **Professional attrition poses risks to institutions, professional associations, and archives' capacity to prepare for and adapt to climate change.** Recent reports indicate nearly half of the profession is considering leaving or ambivalent about staying. When these numbers are adjusted to remove those who will likely leave for retirement, those between 35-44 are more likely than other age groups to consider leaving, raising concerns about mid-career attrition.
- **Archivists' responsibilities have significantly increased without a corresponding increase in resources.** There is enormous variability in archives' operating budgets, and professional development funding is especially vulnerable to cuts.
- **Workplace morale issues are widespread.** Studies indicate concerning levels of mental health risks and burnout. Institutional leaders and archives administrators often underestimate morale and resourcing issues.
- **Roving archivist programs help meet the needs of small archives.** Several states have roving archivists who travel to small archives to provide support. Demand for this support exceeds the current capacity of roving archivist programs.
- **Professional interest in unions is growing and new unions have won improvements for archivists.** Recently formed unions have made many gains in increasing salaries and working conditions for archivists. Almost half of archivists between 25-34 are interested in joining a union. Term position archivists and BIPOC archivists also show more interest in unions.
- **Archivists view the role of professional associations as important in setting standards and want to see the Society of American Archivists and other associations play a more proactive role on behalf of workforce concerns.** Professional associations are increasing attention to workforce issues such as requiring salary transparency in job postings and adopting standards related to term positions.

Introduction

Climate change is already impacting archives. On the surface such concerns might revolve around building damage, like major events such as major hurricanes or wildfires that dominate the news, or increasingly frequent “minor” events, like burst pipes that are more likely to occur during drought or cold snaps. However, climate change is not just a facilities concern; it affects the people who steward and use archives, and it affects the archival record itself with shifts in professional practice and the documentation of a changing climate.

This 18-month research project for the Public Knowledge program of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation looks at three major areas of concern for climate change adaptation and archives: people, infrastructure, and collections. This report concerns the first phase: **people**. At the same time climate change is impacting archives, the archivist workforce is undergoing profound changes that are ominous for the continued preservation and accessibility of vulnerable archives within a changed and transforming climate.

Between May and August 2023, I conducted research related to archivists, archives workers, managers of archives, and professional association leaders. I sought to understand and contextualize the current workforce concerns in the American archival profession and what the state of the archivist workforce means for archives’ capacity for climate change adaptation. This research explored questions related to institutional and professional capacity, staffing differences across different archives and regions, how the responsibilities of the archivist workforce intersect with or inhibit engagement with climate change, and examples of collective action with potential to integrate climate change concerns into the archivist workforce.

The American archives profession is decentralized, which is both a strength and a weakness. The oldest and largest professional association for American archivists is the Society of American Archivists (SAA), founded in 1936. Dozens of new archival organizations have emerged since SAA's founding, including organizations with a focus on specific practitioners (e.g., the Association of Moving Image Archivists or the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators), or geographic area (e.g., the Society of Southwestern Archivists or Chicago Area Archivists). Archivists have created a wide array of smaller-scale organizational efforts that meet their professional development needs. However, due to this decentralization, the American archives profession has faced difficulties in creating a unified agenda and allocating resources for significant professional matters such as institutional accreditation, education, or data collection.

Since there is no singular regulatory authority for American archives, many of the issues articulated in this research cannot be solved in a top-down or centralized manner. Although virtually all archives share similar struggles related to resource allocation, workforce issues, and climate change preparedness, the means to resolving these issues will often have to take local considerations into account. Despite these challenges, the American archivist profession has a long tradition of learning from each other and working across institutional boundaries to solve

problems. Collective action and bolstering of networks will be essential to ensure archives and archivists are prepared to address climate change.

Methodology and Data Sources

The primary methodology for this phase was extensive review and analysis of published and informal research on the American archivist workforce. Most sources were from the last 15 years (i.e. 2008 Great Recession through current day). Sources were selected for their primary focus on archives workers as a distinct occupational group and sector. I supplemented this review with subject matter expert interviews. In addition, I conducted data analysis from the A*CENSUS II survey data.² I held monthly meetings with Patricia Hswe, program director for Public Knowledge to discuss research progress, and contacted Julia Marden, Mohamed Haian Abdirahman, and Susanne Pichler for additional support as needed.

Major Workforce Issues

The American archives profession has not yet prioritized climate change with significant engagement and leadership. Although the profession is increasingly discussing climate change within published research, among professional associations, and at conferences, climate change is often framed as a facility management issue—either through the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions from building energy use, or through the fortification of buildings to minimize the impacts of disasters to buildings and collections. Archivists rarely connect the dots between climate change and workforce issues.

Climate change did not surface in any of the published research reviewed for this phase of research, implying it remains marginalized within the literature as a facilities or collection preservation issue, as opposed to an issue with major workforce implications. Since there remains a gap in the profession between basic understanding of climate change and recognition of how it impacts the work of archivists, I deliberately did not ask subject matter experts explicitly about climate change as part of my scripted questions, though I did ask questions related to disaster response and organizational continuity. Some respondents brought up climate change on their own during the course of our interview, however most did not.

Since my introduction email to subject matter experts mentioned this phase of research concerned “the intersection of workforce issues with climate change preparedness and adaptation in archives,” some subject matter experts commented with confusion about the links between the two issues. However, once I explained the connection, they often made the connection and provided many additional observations about how they thought climate change could impact archives.

² Society of American Archivists and Ithaka S+R, “A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey, 2022”; Society of American Archivists and Ithaka S+R, “A*CENSUS II Archives Administrators Survey, 2022.”

Three major areas of concern surfaced from the research related to the current state of the archivist workforce, and each has climate change implications. The three areas include the following:

Retention and recruitment of archivists

Without a robust and stable workforce, archives are especially vulnerable to the disruptions caused by increasingly severe and unpredictable disasters associated with climate change. To address disasters most effectively, archivists need extensive institutional knowledge, a strong commitment to professional development, and deep ties to the local community. A destabilized workforce has resulted in erosion of all three characteristics among the archivist workforce, making archives more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Responsibilities, resourcing, and morale

There is a shortage of jobs in the archives profession, but there is an excessive amount of work expected of the archivist jobs that exist across America's archives. This dynamic reflects the profound and entrenched constraints of limited funding for archives. Across the research, it became clear archivists are shouldering an ever-increasing set of responsibilities and expectations. While many of these expanding responsibilities are important, without clear leadership and resourcing these issues can lead to demoralization and burnout across the profession. Archivists have always struggled with resourcing issues, but many of the issues identified as potential problems around the 2008 recession have since become a virtually permanent state of being for archives.

Collective action problems

There is an increasing awareness across the profession of the challenges faced by small and large archives alike. Models that emphasize collective action and networks to address these challenges are the types of solutions that hold the most promise for climate change adaptation. Some states are experimenting with roving archivist programs to meet the needs of small archives. Some archivists at institutions are pursuing unionization to ensure their workplace needs are met. Finally, archival associations have much to contribute to ensuring the overall health of the profession.

The remainder of this report is an in-depth analysis of these three areas of concern and their implications for climate change.

Retention and Recruitment of Archivists

Some of the earliest studies in this phase contained warning signs about destabilization within the archivist workforce. Destabilization involves both the loss of archives jobs in their entirety, as well as the deterioration in the working conditions of those jobs that remain, and destabilizing trends are found across different types of archives and archivist demographics. This section on retention and recruitment of archivists focuses on term employment, institutional turnover, and professional attrition.

Archives constantly in triage mode due to staffing issues cannot make adequate proactive preparations for climate change. Archivists that are constantly churning through an organization cannot build relationships with emergency management officials or carry out long-term collection management or facility management projects. Archival associations that are weakening because archivists no longer have the capacity for volunteering cannot provide support to archives in their area when a disaster hits. Climate preparedness in archives begins with the health of the archives workforce.

Many areas of the country where the impacts of climate change are already felt most acutely have severe cost of living issues. As wildfires and hurricanes continue to impact the real estate market, archivists may be priced out of living in increasingly expensive parts of the country. Other areas with severe climate change impacts—such as the Gulf South—also have increasingly reactionary political environments unwelcoming for many archivists, especially those from underrepresented groups. As Americans begin to incorporate climate change impacts and the impact of local and state politics into potential relocation decisions, this could mean those archives most immediately vulnerable to climate change may also eventually face greater difficulties in recruitment and retention of archivists.

Term Employment

The most prominent workforce issue that has gained attention in the American archivist profession in recent years is the reliance on term positions (also known as contingent, temporary, contract, and project archivist positions). These positions are typically hired for three years or less, and may or may not receive the same benefits as permanent positions. SAA recently approved the *Best Practices for Archival Term Positions* as an External Standard.³ This Standard discusses the impacts of term positions on individuals, institutions, and diversity, and concludes with guidelines related to designing, recruiting, and managing term positions.⁴

I primarily use the phrase “term employment” to reinforce the supposed basis for these positions as a predefined limited term of temporary work. In reality, many term employees are anything but temporary, having had their terms renewed several times. I also do not use “contract” since many employees do not actually enjoy the protections of a contract, in contrast to unionized employees or self-employed independent contractors. Many “project” archivists are often engaged in ongoing operational work, not just well-defined projects with a clear end date. Finally, “contingent employee” has specific Department of Labor definitions, which may or may not correspond with the working conditions of a term archivist.⁵

While term positions are not new and have existed within the field for many decades, the first A*CENSUS conducted in 2004 did not ask respondents about whether their position was permanent or temporary.⁶ However, with growing concern that archives are increasingly reliant

³ Dietz, “Recommendation to Approve Best Practices for Archival Term Positions as an SAA External Standard.”

⁴ Clemens et al., “Best Practices for Archival Term Positions.”

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/cps/contingent-and-alternative-arrangements-faqs.htm#contingent>

⁶ Irons Walch et al., “A*CENSUS (Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States).”

on term positions, questions about their use have increasingly shown up in the literature, particularly in studies centering the working experiences of early career and young archivists.

The earliest study selected for this research phase referencing term positions is Amber Cushing's 2010 article "Career Satisfaction of Young Archivists: A Survey of Professional Working Archivists, Age 35 and Under." Cushing's study surveyed 262 working archivists in July 2008 concerning their career satisfaction and potential retention in the profession. Cushing's study was spurred by the original A*CENSUS findings concerning the availability of jobs for younger archivists and generational leadership transitions. Among the respondents, 69% were in full-time permanent positions and 21% were full-time term, with the remainder in part-time positions. This 2010 survey foreshadowed findings increasingly common in later surveys. Cushing writes: "Of the 66.1% (43) who replied they were dissatisfied with their temporary position, 100% (43) provided an open-ended response to the question. Over half of the open-ended responses reported that the most dissatisfying aspect of a temporary position is the lack of job security. Many of these respondents explained how the temporary nature of their work bled over into other aspects of their lives."⁷

Several years later, Matt Francis surveyed 258 graduates of 2013 archival studies programs entering the job market. Francis found that of those who obtained a job related to their degree, less than half (49.2%) of respondents obtained full-time permanent positions.⁸ Given the similarities between the Francis and Cushing study in terms of population size and targeting of early career archivists, the most notable difference is the decline in those who found full-time permanent jobs (from 69% to 49.2%). Such a shift in less than a decade is remarkable, and indicates it had become increasingly difficult for new graduates to obtain permanent employment several years after the 2008 recession.

A handful of studies reviewed for this project solely focus on precarious employment within archives. These include a pair of surveys from the New England Archivists (NEA), published in 2017 and 2022, and a survey from the SAA Issues and Advocacy (SAA I&A) section in 2019. Both studies, which targeted term archivists, revealed significant information about the economic, professional, and personal toll of term positions.

A common finding across these three studies is the degree to which term archivists consider leaving the profession due to the stress associated with term positions. This issue appears to be growing worse over time. The 2017 NEA survey found 26% of respondents were searching for jobs outside the field.⁹ The 2019 SAA I&A survey found 48.5% respondents had considered leaving the profession either sometimes or regularly.¹⁰ Major reasons cited were precarity and financial insecurity. The 2022 NEA survey found nearly 37% of respondents had considered leaving due to issues with term labor, and the number rose to 40% for those in the field less than

⁷ Cushing, "Career Satisfaction of Young Archivists," 610.

⁸ Francis, "2013 Archival Program Graduates and the Entry-Level Job Market," 522.

⁹ Broadnax et al., "New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study," 17.

¹⁰ Society of American Archivists Issues and Advocacy Section, "Survey on Temporary Labor," 8.

four years.¹¹ Both the 2019 and 2022 studies found the most frequent sector for term positions was in higher education.

Both the SAA I&A study and the NEA studies underlined that term positions do not provide financial or professional stability for term workers, and the situation is often worse than many realize. The SAA I&A survey found nearly a quarter of respondents took a second job, and more than 20% relied on a partner's income.¹² The 2017 NEA survey found "almost half of all respondents had held a position outside the field since beginning their professional education."¹³ The 2022 NEA survey found 54% of respondents experienced delays or barriers to major life commitments such as buying a house or starting a family, 45% experienced financial distress, 22% experienced isolation from support networks and 20% were forced to move when they would not have otherwise done so.¹⁴

These destabilizing effects have implications for the ability of archivists to meaningfully engage with climate change mitigation and adaptation. For archivists to make progress on the potentially traumatic changes wrought by climate change, they need to have enough stability to put down community roots, build relationships with emergency planning officials, and understand the local seasonal weather patterns and how this impacts the locations in which they work. Archivists who have worked in one location for a long period of time get to know a facility's weak points, and can anticipate that leaks may increase during a particular time of year. If there is frequent turnover within an organization due to reliance on term positions, this may mean collections become more vulnerable as the institutional knowledge about facility issues is lost.

The SAA I&A and NEA studies also provide evidence contesting the widely held professional myth that most early career archivists who hold a term position early on use them as a "stepping stone" to a stable permanent position. The I&A Survey found of those who left their term position early, 42% took another term position.¹⁵ The 2022 NEA survey authors observed:

We discovered a significant difference in the experiences of new professionals compared to mid-career and late-career respondents. Of people who had been in the field for over eleven years, 61% had one or two contingent positions over the course of their career, and 38% had had only one contingent position. This is a sharp contrast to newer professionals. Of those who have been in the field between four and six years, 50% have already had at least three contingent positions, and 23% have already had four. And among new professionals who have been in the field for less than four years, around 20% have already had three or more contingent positions. This is a stunning statistic that demonstrates a few things. Firstly, it suggests that contingent

¹¹ Bredbenner et al., "Nothing About It Was Better Than a Permanent Job": Report of the New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Task Force," 26.

¹² Society of American Archivists Issues and Advocacy Section, "Survey on Temporary Labor," 12.

¹³ Broadnax et al., "New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study," 6.

¹⁴ Bredbenner et al., "Nothing About It Was Better Than a Permanent Job": Report of the New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Task Force," 27.

¹⁵ Society of American Archivists Issues and Advocacy Section, "Survey on Temporary Labor," 16.

*employment has become worse in our field over time, not better. Secondly, the first few years of their career are incredibly unstable for many new professionals.*¹⁶

The 2022 NEA study also analyzed jobs posted between August 2020 and September 2021, and found over half of the more than 200 positions analyzed met the NEA’s definition of contingent employment. Studies of job postings are essential research complements to self-reported data on the archivist profession because this kind of content analysis can substantiate the trends found within self-reported survey data. It is possible that surveys relying on self-reported data may undercount term archivists since term positions often face cost and time barriers to involvement in professional associations.

The largest survey of self-reported archivist workforce data is the Society of American Archivists and Ithaca S+R A*CENSUS II survey. In contrast with the first A*CENSUS, A*CENSUS II asked about permanent vs term positions, including length of term positions. A*CENSUS II reported 88.51% of respondents are currently employed in permanent positions, and 11.48% are in term positions.¹⁷ Although term positions have been the focus of immense professional attention and advocacy, the published version of the A*CENSUS II report did not break out demographics of those working in term positions.

Term positions are not equally distributed across the profession. By conducting further analysis of A*CENSUS II data by age group, time in profession, race, and institutional sector, this illustrates where term positions may have a disproportionate impact. Note that the grand totals for some tables below may vary due to removal of blank responses.

Younger archivists are more likely to hold term positions in the A*CENSUS II survey population. Of archivists under 25, 47.1% hold a term position, and 18.5% of those between 25-34 hold a term position.

Age	Permanent	Term
Under 25	52.9%	47.1%
25-34	81.5%	18.5%
35-44	90.1%	9.9%
45-54	92.4%	7.6%
55-64	94.2%	5.8%
65 and older	88.2%	11.8%
Prefer not to answer	90.1%	9.9%
Grand Total	88.6%	11.4%

Early career archivists are also more likely to hold term positions—24.6% of those who have been in the field 5 years or less have term positions.

¹⁶ Bredbenner et al., “Nothing About It Was Better Than a Permanent Job’: Report of the New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Task Force,” 25.

¹⁷ Skinner and Hulbert, “A*CENSUS II, All Archivists Survey Report,” 81.

<i>Years in the Profession</i>	Permanent	Term
0-5 years	75.4%	24.6%
6-10 years	88.3%	11.7%
11-15 years	91.4%	8.6%
16-20 years	94.1%	5.9%
21-25 years	94.4%	5.6%
26-30 years	96.8%	3.2%
31-35 years	95.3%	4.7%
36 years or more	90.4%	9.6%
Grand Total	88.4%	11.6%

BIPOC archivists are more likely to hold term positions (15.5%) than White archivists (10.8%).

<i>Race</i>	Permanent	Term
BIPOC	84.5%	15.5%
White	89.2%	10.8%
Prefer Not To Answer	89.4%	10.6%
Grand Total	88.5%	11.5%

Term positions are more often associated with academic, for-profit, and “other” archives, and are less frequent in government archives.

<i>Current employer</i>	Permanent	Term
Academic	86.3%	13.7%
For-profit	84.0%	16.0%
Government	94.6%	5.4%
Nonprofit	89.2%	10.8%
Other	76.5%	23.5%
Grand Total	88.5%	11.5%

The finding above that BIPOC archivists are more likely to hold term positions may reflect the presence of diversity residencies and project positions that focus on archives of underrepresented groups. The 2022 NEA survey found a link between diversity-centered positions and precarious employment: “Over 3% of respondents had held a diversity position. Although this is a very small sample size, it is significant to note that 100% of these diversity positions were contingent positions.”¹⁸ These types of positions have come under increasing criticism in recent years, especially as large academic libraries rely on these positions to give the

¹⁸ Bredbenner et al., “Nothing About It Was Better Than a Permanent Job’: Report of the New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Task Force,” 42.

impression of increasing diversity among their collections and workforce without committing permanent funding towards this work.¹⁹

Term positions do not just impact those who are in the position, they have serious consequences for the continuous loss of institutional knowledge, organizational effectiveness, and overall workplace morale. *Best Practices for Archival Term Positions* describes the reverberating negative impacts of term positions:

*Due to the nature of their work, archivists develop a singular familiarity with the collections under their purview, often including both a knowledge of minute detail and an intangible understanding of a collection's contents and structure which far exceed what can be captured in a finding aid. As such, archivists are positioned to offer in-depth reference and user assistance years after processing activity is finished. To rely on project staff to process marquee collections is to guarantee that deep institutional knowledge will vanish from the institution once the project archivist departs. This loss ultimately does a disservice to the collection, to donors and potential donors, to the institution, and to the end users the institution aims to serve. The primary disservice, however, is still to the term worker, who is unable to put their specialized knowledge to use, and whose newly-acquired skills and in-depth research begin to become obsolete when they leave the position.*²⁰

Recognizing these challenges, the newly formed union of librarians, archivists, and curators at the University of Michigan (LEO-GLAM) recently bargained over term positions in their newest contract, specifying working conditions for term positions and placing a cap on the number of term positions within the bargaining unit. LEO-GLAM's bargaining unit includes both regular and term appointments.²¹

The University of Michigan LEO-GLAM contract is notable because it is the only example I have found of an instrument that functionally regulates term positions. While the newly adopted SAA standard is important, it is a voluntary standard. SAA does not perform any kind of regulatory or accreditation role within American archives. Reliance on voluntary standards means many institutions will likely continue to rely on term positions since there is no countervailing force. Indeed, data from the A*CENSUS II Administrators Survey reinforces the concern that voluntary standards on their own are insufficient. Only 38% of administrators expected to add full-time permanent staff in the next five years, and 61% reported they rarely or never extend permanent job offers to staff in non-permanent positions.²²

Institutional Turnover

Institutional turnover refers to the number of archivists who have left their positions within a given organization. This data is relatively difficult to track within the profession, because there is

¹⁹ Hathcock, "Why Don't You Want to Keep Us?"; Alaniz, "Reflections on Temporary Appointments and Innovation/Diversity Culture in Libraries and Archives"; Gorecki and Petrovich, *Residencies Revisited*.

²⁰ Clemens et al., "Best Practices for Archival Term Positions," 5.

²¹ Regents of the University of Michigan and University of Michigan Lecturers' Employee Organization, Librarians, Archivists, and Curators Bargaining Unit (LEO-GLAM), "Agreement, July 28, 2022-April 20, 2025," 32-34.

²² Skinner, "A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey," 45-48.

no centralized reporting of longitudinal workforce data from all US archival institutions. Anecdotally, conference presentations, social media, and self-reported surveys of archives workers suggest there is accelerating institutional turnover, particularly since the pandemic.

According to the Archival Workers Collective survey conducted in summer 2022, 23.1% of respondents had changed jobs, but only 1.9% had left the archives profession. However, the survey also found a much larger number, 51.3% of respondents, were considering leaving their jobs. The reasons cited for considering leaving included low pay, workload/understaffing, and negative working environments.²³

Archives across all sectors are highly vulnerable to budget cuts. Archives are typically part of larger organizations in which non-archivists control budgets and resources, and since archives are not typically revenue generators, they are vulnerable to cuts and stagnant budgets. Institutional turnover represents a particular danger to many archives, because once positions become vacant, those position lines become targets for elimination (or multiple empty lines may merge into one position). This is why many archives' workforces have shrunk over time, especially as the "do more with less" ethos became widely internalized in the wake of the 2008 recession.

The lack of consistent workplace data means it is difficult to determine what constitutes a "baseline" staffing level across a variety of archives (with the notable exception of state archives, discussed later in this section). Some workforce studies occasionally surface information about the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees, and these provide glimpses of staffing levels at different kinds of archives across time.

Small institutions have the fewest archivists on staff, and many archives do not even have a paid archivist. LyraSIS conducted a study of small archives and found 40% of responding institutions had only one FTE, and 12% of responding institutions had no paid archives staff.²⁴ In contrast to small institutions, OCLC surveyed larger research libraries with dedicated special collections/archives units and found special collections/archives had an average of thirteen permanent FTE (eight professional and five paraprofessional) and two temporary FTE (one professional and one paraprofessional).²⁵

According to the A*CENSUS II Administrators survey, the majority of archives administrators reported leading a department of three or fewer FTE.²⁶ Although A*CENSUS II used the term "departments," it surveyed the top leader of an archive. Therefore, the numbers likely reflect the entire archivist workforce of an institution. Breaking out this data by type of archive demonstrates one-person archives are common, accounting for nearly a quarter of academic and government respondents, and over half of nonprofit and "other" respondents. Government archives are the group most likely to have more than twenty FTE.

²³ Dean et al., "Archival Workers Collective 2022 Survey Summary," 11–12.

²⁴ Clareson and Grinstead, "Small & Diverse Archival Organization Needs Assessment Project' Summary Report," 8.

²⁵ Dooley and Luce, "Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives," 63.

²⁶ Skinner, "A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey," 13–14.

Sector	1 FTE	2-3 FTE	4-5 FTE	6-10 FTE	11-20 FTE	More than 20 FTE
Academic	26.19%	30.95%	13.10%	19.44%	6.35%	3.97%
Government	29.32%	19.55%	12.03%	15.79%	7.52%	15.79%
Nonprofit	53.31%	25.21%	12.40%	4.96%	2.89%	1.24%
Other	52.00%	20.00%	13.33%	9.33%	2.67%	2.67%
Grand Total	38.89%	25.64%	12.68%	12.68%	4.99%	5.13%

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in layoffs that affected many archivists. The Archival Workers Collective (formerly known as the Archival Workers Emergency Fund) conducted three surveys of archival workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in summer 2020. In December 2020, 9.1% of respondents reported being laid off.²⁷ Union members reported they were less likely to have experienced negative impacts to their jobs such as layoffs, furloughs, or reduction in pay. These numbers were almost identical to what was reported in the A*CENSUS II Administrators Survey, when 9% of administrators reported eliminating currently filled positions in 2020.²⁸

Although there is no centralized system to track institutional workforce data, there is a notable exception that regularly tracks institutional workforce data and makes it publicly available. Since 2007, the Council of State Archivists has published a biennial report known as the State of State Records. This report provides data on the 56 state and territorial archives and records management programs. The reports are important for several reasons. First, they provide an excellent template for what a comprehensive longitudinal data gathering effort looks like. Second, they provide data that functions as a benchmark for other state archives to use in their resource advocacy efforts. Finally, they provide evidence for long-term shifts in institutional workforces.

While state archives data should not necessarily be extrapolated to other archives, CoSA's reports provide consistent evidence of a declining state archives workforce. Even the 2007 report noted the 1990s were a major time of reductions in state archives and records management staffing. CoSA reported in 2013 that 18% of state archives staff positions had been lost since 2006.²⁹ The reduction of staffing that started in the 1990s accelerated during the Great Recession:

Georgia and South Carolina once were among the largest archives and records management programs in the nation in terms of personnel and were considered innovative leaders in many areas of professional practice. Each has undergone a gradual decline in staffing numbers over the last few decades, with an especially precipitous drop in the last 2-3 years. South Carolina's staffing peaked at 124.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs) in the early 1990s, dropped to 37 in 2006, and is now down to 13. Georgia had 90 FTEs in the mid-1980s, 47 in 2006, and reported 15 in the

²⁷ Dean et al., "AWE Fund Winter 2020 Survey Summary," 6.

²⁸ Skinner, "A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey," 44.

²⁹ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," June 2013.

as of June 30, 2012, in CoSA's FY2012 survey. Catastrophic budget cuts imposed in the second half of 2012 forced the Georgia Secretary of State to lay off all but three staff members.³⁰

In 2015, CoSA reported state archives staffing headcount had declined another 18% since 2012.³¹ In 2017 staffing numbers had slightly increased.³² By the time of the 2019 survey, 44% of respondents reported a staffing decrease compared with the prior survey. One-third of responding state archives had between ten and nineteen FTE, and 20% of responding state archives had less than nine FTE.³³ The most recent report, published in 2021, reflected a mixed picture on staffing issues. Thirty-nine respondents reported no major staffing changes from the prior survey, three reported a major increase, and eight reported a major decrease.³⁴

Virtually every subject matter expert shared their own turnover related concerns and how disruptive this is to an archive's operations. Many shared their perspectives on recruitment and retention challenges within specific institutional or regional contexts. Subject matter experts with experience in government archives emphasized their sector has a long tradition of listing salaries when positions are posted, and were glad to see the rest of the profession starting to catch up with disclosing salary ranges in job postings. However, government archivists noted one of their recruitment challenges is that these positions are often classified into specific civil service job classifications that make it difficult to increase salaries for highly-specialized positions such as digital archivists. One interviewee shared that archivists are usually some of the lowest-paid employees in state government agencies. If the state archives is already in an underfunded agency, this can have a cascading effect down to the lowest ranked workers.

Several subject matter experts shared mixed feelings about the educational requirements and qualifications necessary for archivist positions. Many expressed ambivalence about MLIS requirements, and a couple expressed interest or support for alternative certification programs, whether this is adapting an existing certification program like the Academy of Certified Archivists, or developing new certification programs for specific groups of archivists.

Archives in rural locations or in states passing regressive legislation often have difficulty recruiting qualified candidates. For archives with large analog holdings, only a partial amount of archival work can be performed remotely since the security of archival collections generally requires on-site work. In contrast, archives in more desirable locations like large cities or in states with progressive reputations have a high cost of living. Early career archivists hold a significant amount of student loan debt, and subject matter experts expressed concern that employers are asking job candidates for high levels of education and experience without being equally willing to raise salaries to recruit and retain qualified candidates.

³⁰ Council of State Archivists, 13–14.

³¹ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," September 2015, 15.

³² Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," April 2017, 13.

³³ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," September 2019, 5.

³⁴ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," July 2021, 4.

Several subject matter experts expressed concern that institutional turnover makes it difficult for archivists to develop the critical interpersonal work of institutional knowledge and relationships with local communities. Institutional knowledge accumulates for all types of archivists, whether a term archivist leaves with all the knowledge they have accrued working on a dedicated processing project or when a long-tenured employee retires.

The issue of institutional turnover is likely to continue for some time. Administrators responding to the A*CENSUS II Administrators Survey reported staffing was tied with collection storage space as their most significant challenge (71% of respondents).³⁵ However, when administrators were asked about anticipated growth in staffing, the findings do not bode well:

*The higher anticipated increase of free (e.g. volunteers, unpaid interns) or inexpensive staff (e.g. students, paid interns) roles compared with full- and part-time permanent paid positions speaks to the financial constraints many archives are weathering, part of which is explained by the pandemic and its financial impact. As discussed earlier, of archives that experienced staffing budget cuts due to the pandemic, 43 percent report that their budget has not recovered (i.e., that their budget is the same amount today as it was when it was initially decreased). This financial pressure exacerbates staffing challenges.*³⁶

Professional Attrition

It is important to distinguish between institutional turnover and professional attrition. In the case of institutional turnover, staff departures may be highly destabilizing at the local level. However if archivists remain within the profession it does not necessarily present a “net loss” to the profession. Professional attrition represents those who have left the profession entirely, and can indicate more serious retention issues within the profession.

One of the major findings of A*CENSUS II was nearly half of archivists are considering leaving the profession:

*One in five respondents are considering leaving the archives profession within the next five years and an additional one in four are not sure if they will leave or stay, leaving just 55 percent of respondents who are confident they will stay in the archives profession in the next five years. It is important to contextualize these findings. The All Archivists Survey was fielded in late fall 2021, arguably at the height of the Great Resignation or the Great Reshuffle, which saw staff departing employers at a rapid rate. Further, without being able to directly compare these numbers with other professions, it is difficult to say whether the archives profession is facing higher or lower rates of potential attrition.*³⁷

One of the major reasons archivists provided in the A*CENSUS survey for leaving the field is retirement. Those 55 and over are most likely to indicate retirement as their reason for leaving the field. To better understand potential attrition trends among archivists under 55 (i.e.,

³⁵ Skinner, “A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey,” 40.

³⁶ Skinner, 48.

³⁷ Skinner and Hulbert, “A*CENSUS II, All Archivists Survey Report,” 57.

mid-career and early-career attrition), I removed the responses from archivists over 55 (along with any blank answers) and analyzed the responses of those considering leaving the profession by age, income, permanent vs. term status, race, and archives sector.

Once those over 55 are removed, those planning to leave the field drops to 14.8%, and the number who are ambivalent about staying remains roughly the same at 25.8%. Those who are between 35-44 show more interest in leaving the profession than other age groups, and among those who disclosed their age, show the least commitment to remaining in the field.

<i>Considering Leaving Profession Within 5 Years</i>	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	Prefer not to answer	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	23.2%	26.7%	26.7%	21.3%	43.0%	25.8%
No	66.7%	60.5%	56.7%	63.7%	43.8%	59.4%
Yes	10.1%	12.8%	16.6%	15.0%	13.2%	14.8%

Those with permanent positions vs term positions are equally likely to consider leaving the profession at 14.7%. Term positions express slightly more ambivalence about remaining in the profession.

<i>Considering Leaving Profession Within 5 Years</i>	Permanent	Term	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	24.8%	29.7%	25.4%
No	60.5%	55.6%	59.9%
Yes	14.7%	14.7%	14.7%

BIPOC and White archivists are almost equally likely to consider leaving the profession. More White archivists expressed certainty about remaining in the field (61%) compared with BIPOC archivists (56.6%).

<i>Considering Leaving Profession Within 5 Years</i>	BIPOC	White	Prefer Not To Answer	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	29.2%	24.5%	37.9%	25.9%
No	56.6%	61.0%	42.9%	59.4%
Yes	14.2%	14.5%	19.2%	14.7%

Broken out by sector, academic archivists expressed the most interest in leaving the profession. Government archivists expressed the most commitment to remaining in the profession.

<i>Considering Leaving Profession Within 5 Years</i>	Academic	For-profit	Government	Nonprofit	Other	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	26.6%	29.0%	22.9%	24.9%	29.5%	25.6%
No	57.0%	61.5%	63.5%	60.0%	59.4%	59.8%
Yes	16.3%	9.5%	13.5%	15.1%	11.2%	14.6%

Professional attrition has cascading effects with serious implications for future leadership of archives and archival organizations. While the profession has not extensively studied professional attrition rates by demographics, I believe there are underreported attrition risks for mid-career archivists. This presents issues for the health of the profession overall, because these are the same individuals one would expect to see increasingly recruited for leadership roles as directors and heads of archives, as well as major governance roles in professional associations.

Evidence can be seen from the A*CENSUS II data, in which respondents age 35-44 expressed the most interest in leaving the field. Assuming archives as a first career for most of these individuals, this group began their careers in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008. Those who started their careers during this period experienced greater student loan debt, income setbacks, and lower rates of household formation.³⁸ This group had barely made up the losses during that time period when the COVID-19 pandemic triggered yet another time of economic uncertainty. Pandemic era hiring freezes may have limited the number of open jobs attractive to mid-career professionals. This may account for why this age range expresses more willingness to leave the field than other age groups.

A*CENSUS II noted BIPOC respondents doubled since the first A*CENSUS survey, although the overall numbers of BIPOC respondents remain relatively low compared with the US population. If there are slightly more BIPOC archivists under 55 who are ambivalent about remaining in the field as illustrated in the figure above, this could potentially lead to backsliding in retaining the gains made over the last several years to diversify the archivist workforce. A*CENSUS II also found almost half of White archivists felt included within the profession compared to a quarter of BIPOC archivists.³⁹ These findings signal the profession still has far more work to do to ensure retention of BIPOC archivists remains a high priority.

Many subject matter experts expressed appreciation for the increasing diversity of the archives profession in recent years and the growing awareness of labor issues. Several also expressed a strong sense that archival associations need to do more to support archival workers. Some noted the ability to participate in service work such as leadership roles within local, state, regional, or

³⁸ Kent, Emmons, and Ricketts, "Are Millennials a Lost Generation Financially?"

³⁹ Skinner and Hulbert, "A*CENSUS II, All Archivists Survey Report," 48.

national archival associations is highly influenced by employment security and working conditions. Term employees are rarely given work time for involvement with professional associations, even though such activities are critical to developing professional networks that can lead to better jobs. Archivists who have previously played active roles in professional associations who take on additional duties as their colleagues retire or resign may have less time available for professional service work. One interviewee observed that due to high levels of senior leadership turnover in their sector of archival work, there was a loss of institutional knowledge within their professional association.

Responsibilities, Resourcing, and Morale

While archivist jobs are in short supply relative to the total population of archivists, existing jobs are prone to burnout and demoralization due to increasing responsibilities and decreasing resources. The previously discussed issues of understaffing and reliance on term positions impact everyone in a workplace by creating more disruptive working conditions. In addition, the increasing responsibilities archivists have taken on with collection digitization, managing born-digital archives, digital preservation, and managing increasing reference workloads have not been matched with subsequent resourcing, and have exceeded most archives' capacity to keep up.

As a result, archivists are reporting enormous levels of negative impacts to their working experience. Even if archivists do not leave their institution or the profession, the damage to workplace morale and capacity will have serious consequences for the resilience of archives given the disruptive impacts of climate change. Dealing with building leaks, mold outbreaks and floods, commutes affected by increasingly weird weather, and potential evacuation during natural disasters are all enormously stressful events in archives work. Disasters can take years to recover from, and consume archivists' attention and resources. If demoralized archivists are already facing widespread levels of burnout and disengagement, the increasing impacts of climate change-related disasters may be a tipping point in exhausting resources and creating insurmountable sets of responsibilities.

Responsibilities

Archivists carry out a wide array of responsibilities. Archives with a small staff require archivists to be generalists who carry out more tasks, while archives with a larger staff typically have more specialization among staff. Archives in different sectors may emphasize certain functions more depending on their constituencies. For example, college and university archives may carry out teaching and instruction sessions for their institution's students, but teaching and instruction sessions are less commonly found in government or corporate archives. Corporate archivists may spend much more time on reference questions than their counterparts in publicly-accessible archives, since internal research is critical for business operations.

Archivists develop their functional skills through a mixture of graduate education, professional development, and on the job training. According to the most recent A*CENSUS II survey, most

respondents (60%) now have an MLIS.⁴⁰ Recent studies have looked at conformance between graduate archival education programs and the Society of American Archivists' *Graduate Program in Archival Studies* (GPAS). SAA does not perform program accreditation like the American Library Association, so GPAS standards are entirely voluntary. Ed Benoit and Donald Force found fewer than half of archival education program directors thought the GPAS standards reflected the skills or knowledge needed by future archivists.⁴¹ Jane Zhang and Alex Poole found almost three-quarters of graduate archival education programs were located within Library and Information Science programs, and important archival functions such as appraisal and access/outreach are not consistently offered.⁴²

There is not a publicly available database of courses offered by graduate archival education programs, and therefore it is difficult to assess the current extent of climate change education within graduate archival education. Some professional development offerings address climate change within cultural heritage, but fewer resources are specifically designed for archivists. As a result, there remains a major gap with integrating climate change planning into both graduate education and ongoing professional development for archivists.

Of the many functions archivists perform, arrangement and description (also known as processing) is the function that has been most studied, analyzed, discussed, debated, and researched in recent decades. With the confluence of encoded archival finding aids, network technology, and growing concern over backlogs, funders and archival leaders began to emphasize the use of metrics and minimal processing approaches in an attempt to eliminate backlogs. In the nearly twenty years since Greene and Meissner's landmark article *More Product Less Process* was published,⁴³ few archives have managed to eliminate backlogs—and indeed the problem is likely getting worse as archives acquire significant born-digital content without capacity to quickly process it.⁴⁴ However, years of using minimal processing approaches, metrics, and documentation has resulted in an exceptionally strong body of literature and practice related to archival labor and collection processing. In many archives, especially within higher education, permanent archivists may only carry out specialized processing work (such as work with born-digital archives) and temporary labor (such as term positions or student workers) may carry out the rest of the processing.

OCLC's *Total Cost of Stewardship* illustrates the intrinsic link between workforce capacity and archival processing. This toolkit assists archivists in quantifying the amount of labor necessary for processing a potential collection.⁴⁵ While *Total Cost of Stewardship* is an important step forward in making the typically invisible costs of processing large collections more visible, it also presents collection processing as a finite process. However, collections have ongoing needs that go long past their initial processing, and are not easily solved with term labor, whether it is for ongoing preservation costs, reference needs, and other collection management concerns.

⁴⁰ Skinner and Hulbert, 39–40.

⁴¹ Benoit and Force, "One Size Does Not Fit All."

⁴² Zhang and Poole, "Exploring the Current State of North American Graduate Archival Education."

⁴³ Greene and Meissner, "More Product, Less Process."

⁴⁴ Skinner, "A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey."

⁴⁵ Weber et al., "Total Cost of Stewardship."

In contrast to processing, there is far less literature concerning the minimum labor necessary to ensure the ongoing operational work of archives, such as collection management, physical and digital preservation, disaster preparedness, reference, and advocacy/outreach. Without the same level of content, best practices, and metrics available for processing, many archivists are challenged to make internal assessments of how much labor is needed to support these functions, and to advocate to their leaders for additional support for these essential functions. Unlike processing a single collection, most archival functions are not easily or quickly solved with temporary labor. If archives are increasingly vulnerable to unpredictable funding models that rely on temporary labor, this means the key operational work critical to their functioning may become even more compromised.

Several workforce studies specifically focused on digital preservation responsibilities. The National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA) conducted three staffing surveys between 2013 and 2022 to assess institutions' volume of digital content, staffing levels, and organizational structure. While the survey design has changed over time (shifting from institutional respondents to individual respondents), the surveys consistently demonstrate most institutions do not feel they have sufficient staffing. The 2022 report found 69% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed they had sufficient staffing for digital preservation. Only 15% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had sufficient staffing for digital preservation.⁴⁶

Two recent studies examined the challenges in providing archival reference services. Reference services are often time intensive due to the non-standard nature of archival material and the inexperience of most users with archives. Aaron Preston's 2020 study focused on reference services in archives with one FTE archivist, and found "nearly half of survey participants noted that between 21% and 40% of their time during the day was dedicated specifically to fulfilling their patron's reference needs."⁴⁷

Amanda Hawk conducted a larger survey of reference staffing and scheduling models of over 150 archives. Hawk found similar challenges, even among institutions with more staff members. Larger institutions are more likely to have reading rooms, sometimes with multiple staff on duty at one time, which can require complicated scheduling logistics. Respondents reported the biggest challenges in reference work include scheduling (45.6%), staffing (36%), and workload (31.2%).⁴⁸

If reference loads are high, an archive may allocate fewer resources to other activities, like processing. This challenge is illustrated in the Council of State Archivists' first State of State Records report:

Despite the wide range of activity associated with automated access, the biggest impediment to full use of these tools may be a lag in traditional archival activities. The process of preparing descriptions of records held in archival repositories remains a labor-intensive activity. When resources are tight, ongoing descriptive work often suffers as the workload shifts to reference demands. As a result, the unprocessed,

⁴⁶ Work et al., "2021 Staffing Survey," 39.

⁴⁷ Preston, "Challenges in Providing Reference Services In Small Archival Institutions," 5.

⁴⁸ Hawk, "Reference Staffing and Scheduling Models in Archives and Special Collections," 495.

*undescribed backlog grows as more and more archival records are accessioned but cannot be made available for research due to the lack of access tools.*⁴⁹

Few archivist workforce studies have specifically looked at workforce capacity for emergency preparedness and disaster response. Dedicated preservation staff or facilities management may serve these functions in large archives. Small archives may lack the dedicated personnel for emergency preparedness. CoSA's State of State Records includes emergency preparedness as a standard reporting section in its surveys. Most state and territorial archives and records programs maintain emergency preparedness plans. However, fewer states and territories have up to date plans, drills, or integration with state emergency management operations. CoSA has emphasized and assessed emergency management for years, and the most recent report has shown improvement across emergency preparedness in state archives.⁵⁰

All subject matter experts interviewed for this phase were asked whether they knew of any disaster-related events in which staffing impacted disaster response. Several relayed second hand knowledge of archives that experienced floods, burst pipes, and other water-related events. In some cases, understaffing or vacant staff lines impacted response time or approach.

Resources

Institutional budgets exhibit an enormous degree of variability across archives. The A*CENSUS II Administrators Survey found 61% of administrators manage an archive with an operating budget of less than \$100,000 (excluding staff salaries). A plurality (44%) of respondents reported an operating budget of less than \$20,000.⁵¹ The Lyrasis study of small archives conducted shortly before A*CENSUS II found similar results: 71% had operating budgets of \$100,000 or less, and 25% had budgets of less than \$10,000.⁵² Presumably these figures were inclusive of staff compensation since it was not otherwise specified as in the A*CENSUS II survey.

The 2008 recession reduced archives' budgets, but without longitudinal data across all archives, it is difficult to say if/how those budgets ever recovered prior to the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. OCLC's 2010 study of archives and special collections in research libraries found 75% of institutions saw budget decreases in response to the 2008 recession, and 26% saw their budgets decrease by more than 10%.⁵³ State archives also suffered major budget cuts that were still seen years after the recession. In 2013, the Council of State Archivists reported:

*The total spent by all states on archives and records management has dropped from \$182 million in 2006 to \$112 million in 2012, a reduction of nearly 40% nationwide. In 2006, 13 states allocated less than one one-hundredth of 1 percent specifically to records. That number has now risen to at least 21 states.*⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records: A Status Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs in the United States," 33.

⁵⁰ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," July 2021, 16.

⁵¹ Skinner, "A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey," 17–18.

⁵² Clareson and Grinstead, "Small & Diverse Archival Organization Needs Assessment Project' Summary Report," 9.

⁵³ Dooley and Luce, "Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives," 23.

⁵⁴ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," June 2013, 13.

Archivists take on enormous student loan debt for their graduate education. Many continue to shoulder significant personal expenses for professional development. Archivists face significant financial and time barriers to professional development training opportunities like workshops and conferences. This problem is especially pronounced in smaller archives with limited budgets and staff coverage issues. The Lyrasis study of small archives found 27% of archives had no training budget, and almost 20% of respondents indicated they maintained no membership in a professional association.⁵⁵

According to the A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey, around 58% of respondents receive professional development funding from their employers.⁵⁶ However this obscures major differences among archivists in terms of who has access to professional development funding. If large groups of archivists do not have access to professional development funding, this can inhibit their uptake of professional standards and impact their individual career development and mobility in a competitive job market.

Academic archivists are the most likely group of archivists to receive professional development funding—less than 10% of academic archivists receive no professional development funding at all. In contrast, at least a quarter of for-profit and government archivists receive no professional development funding at all.

<i>Employer Supported Professional Development</i>	Academic	For-profit	Government	Nonprofit	Other	Grand Total
None	9.92%	25.56%	26.45%	18.15%	30.00%	18.38%
Less than \$500	19.89%	17.41%	30.64%	30.96%	22.00%	25.28%
\$500 to \$999	22.01%	16.30%	13.12%	16.28%	15.00%	17.55%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	19.48%	12.59%	7.82%	12.07%	10.33%	13.69%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	10.78%	6.67%	3.91%	4.86%	3.33%	6.91%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	6.63%	3.33%	1.95%	3.84%	4.00%	4.38%
\$2,500 or more	4.45%	5.19%	2.37%	4.86%	3.00%	3.90%
Don't know/not sure	6.83%	12.96%	13.75%	8.98%	12.33%	9.90%

Those in term positions face enormous disadvantages in professional development funding. Term positions are more than twice as likely as permanent positions to lack access to professional development funding.

⁵⁵ Clareson and Grinstead, “Small & Diverse Archival Organization Needs Assessment Project’ Summary Report,” 20–23.

⁵⁶ Skinner and Hulbert, “A*CENSUS II, All Archivists Survey Report,” 119.

<i>Employer Supported Professional Development</i>	Permanent	Term	Grand Total
None	15.66%	39.58%	18.36%
Less than \$500	26.27%	17.51%	25.28%
\$500 to \$999	18.22%	11.91%	17.51%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	14.32%	8.58%	13.67%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	7.18%	4.73%	6.90%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	4.48%	3.50%	4.37%
\$2,500 or more	4.04%	3.33%	3.96%
Don't know/not sure	9.83%	10.86%	9.95%

The A*CENSUS II Administrators survey indicated this issue may continue to deteriorate. Around one-third of respondents indicated pandemic budget cuts caused them to reduce or eliminate staff professional development funding in 2020 and 2021. While fewer reported cuts to professional development funding in 2022, it is unclear if previous cuts have been restored.⁵⁷ Fewer than 20% of respondents indicated they would increase professional development funds for staff if they had a budget increase.⁵⁸

Subject matter experts were asked about the types of professional development they thought were most needed in the field. Nearly half stressed the importance of technical skills, especially digital preservation. The same number also emphasized various aspects of culturally-informed archival practices and/or meeting underserved communities' needs. Several respondents also emphasized the need for labor organizing training for archivists. Subject matter experts also saw a need for management training. Interestingly, some of the labor union subject matter experts cited the need for better training for archives managers. Perhaps they had been sensitized by organizing conversations and contract negotiations to the shortcomings of poor management and thus viewed it as an unmet professional development need. Finally, while a few experts mentioned disaster response training, these individuals emphasized the need to think more holistically about disasters, such as disaster response with community-based or trauma-informed approaches.

Workplace Morale

Like the other issues explored above, workplace morale concerns existed long before the pandemic. The pandemic intensified existing issues as workers sought to renegotiate the terms of their working life, whether through changing jobs, leaving the profession, or engaging in collective action such as forming a union. If resourcing and staffing issues are not prioritized within an organization, issues related to turnover, burnout, and overall workplace morale are likely to continue to decline.

⁵⁷ Skinner, "A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey," 44.

⁵⁸ Skinner, 124.

Kristen Chinery and Rita Casey carried out a major study of archivists' workplace morale. The 2017 survey of over 1,300 archivists was adapted from existing assessment models, such as the Teacher Stress Inventory. Chinery and Casey reported their findings across gender and role (archivist or archives administrator). They found that, "Archival work was generally characterized as being intense, which could be linked to the study's most concerning finding: a substantial number of archivists reported negative mood, rising to levels that could indicate many archivists are at risk for, or are already suffering from, clinical depression."⁵⁹ Women exhibited more negative mood than men, but both groups exceeded the general United States population's risk for depression.

The pandemic likely worsened pre-existing morale issues. The Archival Workers Collective third pandemic-era study found most respondents reported initial strong organizational responses, but most also felt these measures were removed prematurely:

*Respondents noted that lack of institutional support for COVID prevention policies—whether such policies were never implemented, implemented but not adequately enforced, or prematurely removed without consultation with staff—endangered workers and family members due to COVID-19 workplace exposure. Combined with perennial staffing shortages and lack of promotion or raise opportunities, the degree of institutional disengagement with pandemic prevention appears to have contributed to the perception among some workers that their institution didn't care about them, thus worsening morale.*⁶⁰

Archivists have highly specialized skill sets and often report to managers without those same skills. Sometimes this can lead to frustration for archivists who feel they must constantly operate in "advocacy mode." Robert Perret's study of archivists who also carry out librarianship duties demonstrated many feel their archives work is misunderstood, exploited, and not prioritized when they report to leaders with a librarianship background who may not understand archives.⁶¹ Karl-Rainer Blumenthal et al found a similar dynamic in their study of digital preservation practitioners:

*The stewards that we spoke with understood digital stewardship unanimously as an inherently long-term and open-ended pursuit. In practice though, their work is often governed by short-term objectives that begin and end with a grant-funded period, a delimited project timeline, or a fiscal year. A contingent support model fundamentally undermines and distracts from the ongoing maintenance that responsible digital stewardship requires, and the dearth of top-down support means that stewards must routinely campaign for material resources and decision-making authority. Constant advocacy takes a toll on practitioners. The cost is burnout and frustration, which disproportionately affect those lower in the organizational hierarchy and who fall outside the entrenched systems of privilege that information and memory institutions uphold and maintain.*⁶²

⁵⁹ Chinery and Casey, "Archivists at Work," 459–61.

⁶⁰ Dean et al., "Archival Workers Collective 2022 Survey Summary," 22.

⁶¹ Perret, "Candles Burning at Both Ends."

⁶² Blumenthal et al., "What's Wrong with Digital Stewardship," 2.

Some studies have attempted to measure the disparities between archivist and management perception of workplace challenges. The most recent NDSA Staffing Survey found senior-level roles were more likely to state that digital preservation was a high priority in their organization compared with junior-level positions. Junior-level positions who did not share this perspective cited too many competing priorities, lack of senior leadership support and understanding, and budget constraints.⁶³

A*CENSUS II found archives administrators generally underestimated the role of burnout and discrimination in staff departures, since both the All-Archivist Survey and the Administrators Survey asked about departures:

Comparing the data between the two surveys suggests that archives administrators underestimate the role of burnout in staff departures. Thirty-five percent of all archivists who are considering leaving the profession within the next five years attribute it to burnout; in fact, burnout ranked second among factors leading to departure among all archivists. Conversely, only 10 percent of administrators selected burnout as a reason for staff leaving their department, and it ranked as the 10th most prevalent reason. In a similar vein, administrators are more likely to report reasons outside of an archives' control for staff departures such as relocating for a spouse or partner's career (18 percent) or going back to school (12 percent), compared with archivists (4 percent and 2 percent respectively).

Another important disconnect between the survey responses of archives administrators and all archivists responses is related to experiences of discrimination. While 9 percent of all archivists considering leaving the profession indicate experiencing ageism and 7 percent report experiencing sexism, just 1 percent of administrators included these types of discrimination as reasons for staff departures. These gaps become more pronounced when we look at discrimination as a whole and examine experiences of racism, sexism, ageism, or another form of discrimination together. Seventeen percent of all archivists are considering leaving the archives profession due to some form of discrimination, while only 3 percent of archives administrators report this as a reason for voluntary staff departures.⁶⁴

Collective Action Problems

Despite the widespread and entrenched challenges above, there are a few positive examples of workforce issues that warrant increased attention. These include roving archivist programs, the increasing wave of unionization, and the growing role of professional archival associations in addressing workforce issues.

⁶³ Work et al., "2021 Staffing Survey," 20–21.

⁶⁴ Skinner, "A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey," 53.

Roving Archivist Programs

State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs), are currently active in twenty-three states. The authorizing legislation for the National Archives' National Historical Publications & Records Commission (NHPRC) requires states to establish State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs) to receive grant funding. Although the American archives field is quite decentralized, SHRABs serve an important infrastructure goal in directing regrants that benefit archives around the state, especially smaller archives.

State archives typically administer SHRABs. SHRAB membership varies, but typically includes those with practitioner expertise. Appointments to SHRABs are often delayed by causes outside the control of state archives, especially when a governor, secretary of state, or other non-archives government official is responsible for finalizing committee membership. SHRABs are inactive in many states due to these membership appointment delays and the limited resources of state archives.

Since SHRABs are intended to serve the needs of archives across the state, several developed a program of hiring an archivist dedicated to the needs of small archives that may not have their own professional archivist. These programs are frequently known as roving/traveling/visiting archivist programs, and are typically supported with a dedicated NHPRC grant, and sometimes supplemented by state funding. At least eight states currently or recently have had roving archivist programs, including Alaska, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Vermont, and Wyoming.

SHRABs with roving archivists often have excellent information and knowledge about the current condition of small archives across the state. This kind of information is vital in the context of climate change, as climate change impacts are highly localized. States with this kind of information may be better positioned to assess where the greatest needs exist compared to states with inactive SHRABs. Likewise, a state with a strong SHRAB and a roving archivist who has developed strong relationships across the state is invaluable in assessing the extent of damage during a major disaster.

In recent CoSA reports, state archives express significant interest in roving archivist programs:

When asked what activities SHRABs would like to undertake if they had additional funding, many respondents indicated that they would start or enhance field/traveling/roving archivist programs. Closely related, many SHRABs would also like to expand or reinvigorate regrant programs. These answers speak strongly to the need for hands-on assistance and training for institutions at the local level.⁶⁵

The roving archivist programs serve an important need, and it appears most of the limitations to these programs primarily arise from limited funding. Given the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events and natural disasters, roving archivist programs provide an important framework that can be expanded to direct support towards small organizations that do not currently have sufficient professional archivists on staff.

⁶⁵ Council of State Archivists, "The State of State Records," July 2021, 15.

Unionization

The growing interest in unionization within archives and the cultural heritage sector reflects the renewed interest across the country in the labor movement. Public support for unions is at its highest levels in 50 years. Unions play an important role in reducing economic inequality and narrowing the wage gap between various groups of workers.⁶⁶

Although unions cannot necessarily create new jobs, they serve a vital function in ensuring existing jobs have good working conditions, clear criteria for promotion and disciplinary measures, and a voice in workplace matters. There is not currently significant published data on unionized archivists, but the data on unionized librarians is instructive. The AFL-CIO reports 25% of librarians are unionized, and union librarians have higher salaries: “In 2022, librarians who were union members earned 37 percent more per week than their non-union counterparts. Union library professionals are more likely than their non-union counterparts to be covered by a retirement plan, health insurance, and paid sick leave.”⁶⁷

Unions played an important role in workplace safety early in the COVID-19 pandemic by giving workers the means to ensure workplace safety standards were being followed. It is easy to imagine unions playing a similar role as heatwaves, torrential rainstorms, unusual weather, and disasters begin to accumulate with climate change. These events will impact many aspects of archivists’ working lives, such as commutes or occupational safety hazards (for example, from a broken water main or mold outbreak). If unions can help reduce the amount of institutional turnover by improving working conditions, this is an important contribution unions can make towards preparing a climate resilient archivist workforce.

The subject matter experts interviewed in this research phase who were involved with organizing new unions shared information about the gains won at the bargaining table. Many emphasized how much they felt labor organizing and union work was part of holding institutions accountable, especially for mitigating the effects of hostile management and ensuring administrative follow through on diversity, equity and inclusion commitments. Organizers of a newer union I interviewed noted their frustrations that their institution had many committees, statements, and programs, but the institution had not demonstrated a commitment to improving working conditions that disproportionately impacted BIPOC employees until the union began negotiations. These subject matter experts pointed out that leaving workplace policy decisions to the interpretation and discretion of individual managers leads to unequal working conditions, and a collective bargaining agreement creates a level playing field with clear rules for both management and employees.

The A*CENSUS II All Archivists survey found 17% of respondents were part of unions. Another one-third expressed interest in joining a union.⁶⁸ While there is not publicly available data to further analyze who is currently in a union, this data is available for those who have expressed interest in joining a union.

⁶⁶ Feiveson, “Labor Unions and the U.S. Economy.”

⁶⁷ Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, “Library Professionals.”

⁶⁸ Skinner and Hulbert, “A*CENSUS II, All Archivists Survey Report,” 17.

Union interest is strongly associated with archivists under 45. Almost half of archivists between 25-34 are interested in joining a union.

<i>Union Interest</i>	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and older	Prefer not to answer	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	43.75%	35.31%	32.86%	35.52%	28.44%	15.02%	28.57%	31.57%
No	14.58%	16.34%	23.66%	38.94%	55.94%	76.53%	49.45%	35.06%
Yes	41.67%	48.36%	43.47%	25.54%	15.63%	8.45%	21.98%	33.37%

While permanent positions are almost evenly split around union interest or ambivalence, term positions show much more interest in unionization.

<i>Union Interest</i>	Permanent	Term	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	31.53%	34.07%	31.85%
No	37.15%	18.89%	34.86%
Yes	31.32%	47.04%	33.29%

BIPOC archivists show slightly more interest in joining a union compared to White archivists. White archivists are almost 10% more uninterested in joining a union than BIPOC archivists.

<i>Union Interest</i>	BIPOC	White	Prefer Not To Answer	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	34.80%	31.47%	23.53%	31.55%
No	26.32%	35.12%	56.86%	34.94%
Yes	38.88%	33.41%	19.61%	33.50%

More than a third of each income range of less than \$90,000 is interested in joining a union.

<i>2021 salary and Union Interest</i>	Don't know/not sure	No	Yes
\$40,000 or less	32.91%	29.62%	37.47%
\$40,000-\$49,999	36.36%	23.64%	40.00%
\$50,000-\$59,999	33.77%	24.64%	41.59%
\$60,000-\$69,999	33.71%	27.52%	38.76%
\$70,000-\$79,999	32.89%	31.78%	35.33%
\$80,000-\$89,999	28.36%	34.18%	37.45%

\$90,000-\$99,999	31.00%	46.00%	23.00%
\$100,000-\$109,999	29.38%	48.13%	22.50%
\$110,000 or more	21.74%	61.96%	16.30%
Prefer not to answer	34.29%	58.10%	7.62%
Grand Total	32.33%	32.95%	34.72%

Academic archivists are more interested in joining a union than those from other sectors.

<i>Union Interest</i>	Academic	For-profit	Government	Nonprofit	Other	Grand Total
Don't know/not sure	32.32%	38.69%	31.26%	31.18%	27.05%	31.75%
No	27.42%	35.40%	45.35%	35.07%	39.07%	34.99%
Yes	40.25%	25.91%	23.39%	33.74%	33.88%	33.26%

As more archivists join unions and share their organizing strategies and contracts, this will likely influence other archivists to try the same at their institution. Currently it appears unionization is more likely to happen in larger institutions. Since most archives have small workforces, it remains to be seen whether unions at larger institutions will act as a “rising tide” that increases salaries across the profession, resulting in the widely observed “union spillover effect” that exists across many industries.⁶⁹

Professional Archival Associations

Archival associations are vitally important to the archives profession. Given the decentralization of archives and the isolation many archivists working in small organizations face, archival associations of all sizes and kinds play a vital role in developing professional standards, delivering continuing education, and providing communities of support for archivists based on identity groups and/or professional areas of practice.

SAA and many regional organizations are experiencing increasingly difficult challenges in finding volunteers to take on the enormous amount of service work to keep these associations running. With the potential of increasing professional attrition, this means an ever-smaller pool of candidates who can run for elected office within these organizations, work on new standards, and create the kinds of professional communities that help archivists feel connected—and therefore hopefully retained—within the overall profession.

Associations like SAA, CoSA, and NAGARA are exceptions in having paid staff, and even these organizations still rely on volunteers to carry out most of their activities. Almost all other regional, state, and local archival associations have no paid staff and are wholly dependent on volunteers. As the profession grows dependent on precarious labor, this threatens the pipeline of

⁶⁹ Mishel, “The Enormous Impact of Eroded Collective Bargaining on Wages.”

potential volunteers to ensure the continuity of archival associations. The NEA 2022 survey found 30% of term archivists felt they could not participate in professional service due to various barriers, including uncertainty over whether they would remain in a specific location or the profession long enough to fill out a term.⁷⁰ SAA is in the process of merging and transitioning some of its sections due to limited resources for supporting dozens of sections. Even though SAA has over 40 sections, 65% of members are not an active member of any section.⁷¹

Even with these challenges, subject matter experts repeatedly referenced both the influence of professional associations like SAA or regional archives associations, and their desire to see these organizations play a more proactive role in advocating for archivists and archives. Several subject matter experts brought up the example of the Society of Southwest Archivists', and later the Society of American Archivists', requirement of salary information in job postings as a major turning point for the profession. When organizations set standards like these, this helps archivists persuade their employers to include such information to fulfill recruiting requirements.

In addition to long established professional associations, several new organizations have formed across libraries, archives, and museums with a focus on workforce issues and underrepresented groups. These include groups like We Here, the DLF Working Group on Labor in Digital Libraries, Archives, and Museums, and the Archival Workers Collective. These new organizations have generated an enormous number of resources, including public forums, private support groups, publications, workshops, and mutual aid funds. Such organizations provide a necessary force to continue to push larger and older organizations towards supporting the needs of their most vulnerable members.

⁷⁰ Bredbenner et al., “Nothing About It Was Better Than a Permanent Job’: Report of the New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Task Force,” 27.

⁷¹ “Help SAA Assess the Health of Its Sections.”

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Appendix 2: Chronological List of Workforce Studies

This is a chronological list of the thirty-five archivist workforce studies published identified as relevant to this research phase.

2007:

Council of State Archivists. "The State of State Records: A Status Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs in the United States," 2007.

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2010:

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2017:

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2019:

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2020:

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Appendix 3: List of Subject Matter Experts

- Anonymous
- Terry Baxter, former President of Society of American Archivists
- Stephanie Bredbenner, chair of New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Task Force
- Sara Davis, Wyoming State Archivist and SHRAB Coordinator
- Elizabeth England, National Archives and Records Administration, speaking as co-chair of the NDSA 2021 staffing survey
- Cynthia Ghering, Government Records Manager at the Archives of Michigan
- Aly Jabrocki, Colorado State Archivist
- Aprille McKay, Lead Archivist for University Archives at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (Field Archivist position), and LEO-GLAM union member (chapter of American Federation of Teachers)
- Allee Monheim, Organizing Committee, Contract Action Team, Bylaws Committee, University of Washington Libraries Union (affiliated with SEIU 925)
- Crystal Rodgers, Archivist, Boston Public Library, current communications chair for the BPL Professional Staff Association, Massachusetts Library Staff Association/AFT Local 4928; former member and organizing committee member of the University of Washington Libraries Union
- Amy Wickner, Archival Workers Collective member