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DEVELOPING AN ARCHIVAL OUTREACH PROGRAM

Jane Meredith Pairo

During the past decade, increasing numbers of archivists have expressed an interest in promoting greater awareness of archives. Many have accepted the premise that professional archivists should not limit services to the elderly scholar seeking to unravel the mysteries of the past or the mink clad dowager determined to trace her ancestry to Adam. National and regional archival organizations have stressed the need for institutions to seek a new variety of clientele, and a superficial study of the usage statistics for most archival institutions would indicate that such outreach programs have been overwhelmingly successful.

Use of archival institutions has increased dramatically over the past ten years so that "the public, nonprofessional user is now the most frequent archives patron." However, has this increased usage by the "common man" been the result of archival outreach programs or the result of other forces in our society? The Roots phenomenon has produced a continuing flood of patrons, and many institutions, in self-defense, have been forced to develop educational programs in an effort to cope with their hordes of new users. As a result, activities that many archival administrators have characterized as "outreach" have been instituted as a response to public demands, rather than as attempts by the agency to attract new types of researchers.

Despite this dramatic increase in the use of archives, only a small percentage of the population either understands or appreciates the function of an archival institution.
Current proposals for severe cuts in the budgets of both the National Archives and Records Service and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission illustrate that archivists have not succeeded in educating the public to the vital role played by archival and records management programs. Perhaps these threats to the programs will change the attitudes of those in the profession who regard outreach activities as decorative frills set apart from the mainstream of archival work. The development of outreach programs must be given equal priority with acquisition, arrangement, description, conservation, and reference. Archivists must accept the concept of the educational archivist just as they have recently accepted the concept of documentary editor, administrator and computer analyst as comparable professionals. "If archives are going to grow and compete during a decade of scarcity, archivists must begin to foster a coherent policy for publicizing what archives are and why they are valuable." Few archivists have been trained to function as educational archivists. Thus, it may be necessary to pool the talents of several staff members to develop an effective outreach program or to seek outside professional assistance with the program. Although national as well as regional organizations are now devoting significant portions of their conferences to outreach topics, there remains a need for a detailed workshop which will address specific methods for planning and implementing a wide variety of outreach activities. The Council of the Society of American Archivists and the society's professional affinity group on reference, access and outreach should consider an outreach workshop similar to the existing workshops on security and conservation.

Despite budgetary restraints and the lack of trained educational archivists, an archives may develop an effective outreach program by applying several basic principles of management to its educational activities. Development of a sound outreach program includes an analysis of the outreach needs of the archives, a statement of objectives for the program, planning activities to meet those objectives,
implementing the plan, and evaluating the results of the objectives.

Too frequently, archivists become involved in a variety of unrelated outreach activities before analyzing the needs of their institution. A preliminary study should increase the effectiveness of these activities or indicate that a totally different emphasis should have priority. The following are several factors to consider when analyzing institutional needs:

What public is this agency to serve?

Who are current users? Who should be using these records but may not be aware of them?

What are the sources of funding? What could be done to convince the persons who control the budget that a valuable function is performed?

Who are current and potential donors?

What groups, organizations, or agencies have similar aims as this institution and, therefore, can be cultivated as allies in the political process?

What are the training needs of the current or potential users?

A study of outreach needs may indicate that some politically important constituents have been neglected. This is an error which may be particularly damaging during periods of budgetary cuts. Also a study may show that important potential donors of records or papers are unaware of this institution's existence or it may indicate that a need to develop new or more cost-effective ways of orienting new researchers.

After identifying the needs of an outreach program, establish priorities, since all the needs may not be addressed at once because of limitations in staff time or available funds. The next step is to formulate objectives to meet these needs. This will help identify exactly what is to be accomplished, will establish standards for evaluating the
program, and will define limitations on the amount of staff time and funds which can be devoted to the program. A good objective will meet certain criteria:

It starts with the word "to" followed by an action verb.
It denotes a specific result to be accomplished.
It targets a date for its completion.
It is as specific and quantitative (hence, measurable and verifiable) as possible.
It defines maximum cost factors.

The following are examples of some objectives for outreach programs:

To increase the number of new historical researchers registering in the archives by 10% by June 30, 1981 at a cost of $50.00 and forty staff hours.

To decrease the amount of staff time required to orient new genealogical researchers registering in the archives by 50% by June 30, 1982 at a cost of $100.00 and 120 staff hours.

To increase the awareness of the manuscript department among history students and faculty by 35% based on a random selection questionnaire completed by 100 persons in September and May, at a cost of $50.00 and forty staff hours.

Once objectives are formulated, a plan of action must be developed. Although this may be a time-consuming process, it will usually result in more efficient methods of accomplishing the objectives. Developing an action plan creates an opportunity to examine the nature and degree of reliance on other people in the organization for cooperation and support. The action plan will include:

A list of activities to support the objective.
Analysis of each.
Establishment of action steps.
Assignment of responsibility.
Target beginning and completion dates.

Selecting outreach activities to meet an objective is obviously an extremely important part of the planning process. Again, careful analysis of the activities will result in a more effective program. Consider the expected results of the activity: Which activity will best accomplish the results set forth in the objective? Another consideration involves the unique constraints of the institution: Are there funds available to support the activity; more importantly, is this activity consistent with the policies established by the institution? Few archivists are able to devote their full time to outreach programs. Therefore, it is important that the outreach activities selected be very flexible and reach as large and varied an audience as possible.

The 1976 outreach survey sponsored by the Society of American Archivists indicated that the most frequently used outreach activities were publications and exhibits.4 Publications include such varied items as reports of new acquisitions to journals and the National Union Catalog of Manuscripts, newsletters, annual reports of accessions, inventories, guides to collections, topical research guides, pamphlets, documentary publications and magazines which include articles based on materials included in the collections of the institution. Although most archivists are familiar with these types of publications, they may not have considered them as outreach tools.

The key to a publication's effectiveness in an outreach program is the way it is distributed. Frequently, reports of new accessions are only sent to journals which are read primarily by archivists and historians. To attract new varieties of users, these reports should be sent to other journals as well. Many institutions publish annual reports of accessions; again, distribution is the key to their success as a device for outreach. Although few institutions can afford to give large numbers of these reports away, it may be
worthwhile to send complimentary copies to the heads of the history departments of area colleges and universities and to area historical and genealogical societies. Furthermore, it may be worthwhile to prepare a simple press release indicating that the annual report has been published and is available for sale.

Many institutions publish monthly or quarterly newsletters which include notes on new accessions, announcements of finding aids, opening of exhibits or other special events. Since camera-ready copy is easily prepared and duplication costs are low, newsletters are an excellent outreach publication. Archival institutions may also obtain bulk mailing permits which reduce postal costs tremendously. Again, the mailing list should include current and potential researchers and donors as well as the persons who control the purse strings and administrative policies of the institution.

In addition to publications, exhibits are popular outreach activities. If the exhibit is housed within the building, there must be adequate publicity to attract persons who do not normally visit the facility. Many institutions have prepared traveling exhibits which may be placed in public libraries, shopping centers or airports. County and state fairs are events where many nonusers may have the opportunity to see exhibits of archival items. A simple display which can be carried to conferences and meetings may be very useful.

Tours of the facility are an important part of the outreach program in many institutions. These tours are usually designed to train persons who are already interested in using the facility rather than to attract new users. However, tours for students may be more general and serve to acquaint them with the nature and value of archives. Educational archivists may want to invite certain groups to tour the facility. Based on a needs assessment, it may be beneficial to invite state legislators, representatives from the media, presidents of local historical and genealogical societies, members of the board of visitors or trustees or

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other persons who represent the body which controls budgetary allocation or organizations with similar aims who can lobby for the agency.

Slide presentations are frequently used during tours and are a very effective outreach activity. They may be prepared simply, using one 35 mm slide projector and a script read by the speaker, or they may be highly complex presentations using two or more slide projectors, a dissolve unit and a two-tract tape recording. Of course, the more complex presentations require expensive projection equipment, but they also present a more professional appearance. The slide presentation itself can be very flexible. Depending upon the type of projection equipment used, it may be given to any size audience either in or outside the archives building. Once the slides are made, they can be arranged in various combinations for several illustrated talks designed for a variety of audiences.

Workshops, institutes, or conferences are examples of outreach activities which are being used by many archival institutions. Frequently, the emphasis of these activities is to teach researchers to use the institution's holdings. To obtain the best possible return on the large amount of staff time required to plan such activities, it is important that they be carefully evaluated and that successful lectures or materials be saved for use in future workshops. To help defray the cost of conducting workshops, many institutions charge registration fees.

After selecting and analyzing the types of activities to use, the next step in developing an action plan is to list the various steps needed to carry out each activity. For example, in making a slide-tape presentation, the action steps might include writing the script, identifying pictures to accompany the script, taking the photographs, selecting the best photographs, acquiring the projection equipment, selecting and recording appropriate music, recording the voice tape, and assembling the presentation. After identifying the action steps, delegate the responsibility for accomplishing each and set the beginning and completion
dates for each action. Then, execute the plan. The key to success at this stage is to ensure that each person involved is following his or her portion of the plan. At times, it may become necessary to revise target dates for completion of a segment of the plan or to develop contingency plans. Communication and coordination among all staff involved in the project are essential during this phase.

The final step in any project is evaluation. Since a good objective includes standards of measurement, this phase should not be difficult. Yet, evaluation is frequently ignored. The educational archivist should determine whether the project accomplished its goal within its stated time and within its budget. Furthermore, one should evaluate what caused the success or failure of the project. This data may become the basis for establishing further objectives and action plans.

The use of this model, or a similar planning process, will result in more efficient outreach efforts. It will assist the archivist in developing a more cost-effective program based on specific institutional needs rather than sponsoring a mere series of isolated events. By carefully planning outreach programs, the archivist will be able to choose the targets of outreach activities and the format which will provide the greatest flexibility and will increase the return on the investment of staff time and funds. "Such development removes outreach from its charity basket connotation and turns it into an administration device, one in which we make decisions about whom we serve and the ways we serve them."

When archivists develop outreach programs which demonstrate the nature and value of their programs for the constituencies they serve, they will find that those constituents may support the archival programs during periods of declining financial resources.

Notes

1. Richard Kesner, "The Historian, the Archivist, and


