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## A Push in the Right Direction: Expanding Models of Mentorship

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## **A Push in the Right Direction: Expanding Models of Mentorship**

Caitlin Birch, Michelle Chiles, Luciana Spracher, Lynette Stoudt, Darla White

### **Introduction**

Mentoring relationships have long been opportunities to gain insight into archivists' careers, aspirations, and daily lives from those who are more experienced. A mentor is someone who gives a push in the right direction when needed the most – or maybe when least expected. Traditionally, mentoring programs have focused on a one-to-one matching model, which pairs junior mentees with a more experienced mentor. This model, based on the Greek myth of Mentor and Telemachus, is popular and comfortable – we all have visions of the bearded elder bestowing wisdom to the younger generations – but has mixed success anecdotally; participants often feel that the match did not "work" and that they were unable to obtain the kind of experience or relationship that they sought.

This article highlights two programs that took the traditional model of mentoring relationships and expanded it to better fit the needs of their communities. The Society of Georgia Archivists Mentoring Program facilitates one-to-one relationships that are established on a self-serve model, ensuring that mentees are matched with mentors who really fit their needs and interests. With a high-touch level of involvement from the program coordinators, mentoring relationships remain on track through regular check-ins. In contrast, the New England Archivists Mentoring Program is a group model. A mentoring circle creates high impact for both mentors and mentees by bringing participants together for conversations in a group, either in person or virtually. Everyone brings something different to a circle, fostering conversations, sharing of professional lessons, and support from a number of perspectives.

In the rapidly changing archival profession and workplaces there are strengths in both of these approaches. Successful mentoring may take a variety of forms, but all types require the active participation of individuals to focus and nurture their aspirations toward tangible goals through mindful, reciprocal relationship-building. Expansive and nimble programs can foster relationships

that are driven by the changing needs and interests of participants, and an emphasis on individual commitment drives increased commitment to the mentoring relationship overall – what you get out of a relationship is what you put into it.

### **The Society of Georgia Archivists Mentoring Program: The First Five Years, 2009-2014**

The Society of Georgia Archivists (SGA) was founded in 1969. In 2014, membership in SGA was approximately 250 individuals. SGA encourages diversity in the profession and provides support, professional development, and educational opportunities to its members. SGA promotes the preservation and use of archival resources held in repositories around the state of Georgia.

#### **Origins of the Program**

At the November 2009 SGA annual meeting, the SGA Membership Committee submitted a proposal for the establishment of the SGA Mentoring Program. The stated purpose of the program was "to contribute to the success of SGA members by facilitating individual growth, fostering a sense of community within the profession, encouraging thoughtful and meaningful engagement with issues, and developing competencies that strengthen the position of individuals, organizations, and programs."

The proposal identified that participants in the program would be SGA members with at least three years of professional archival experience who would volunteer as mentors to SGA member mentees. The Membership Committee proposed that a new committee, the Mentoring Program Committee, be established to oversee the program by soliciting mentors and mentees through an application process, then pairing based on the information collected from both applications. The proposal provided that mentees have the ability to request a specific mentor, or once a match was made the option of waiving the match and waiting for another mentor if their preferred mentor was not available.

Once a match was made, the mentor and mentee would attend a training session at the SGA Annual Meeting to discuss their roles and possible mentoring activities, and then the pairs would sign a contract. The contract would provide for a twelve-month mentoring relationship with a "no fault" termination clause, providing that the

relationship could be ended at any time by either party without explanation or fault. Confidentiality of the mentoring relationship would also be stressed as essential to productive mentoring.

During the twelve-month relationship, the Mentoring Committee would maintain contact with both parties. Three-month, six-month, and twelve-month points of contact were identified. At the three-month mark, the Committee should contact the two about their match. At the six-month mark, the Committee would conduct a confidential survey of mentors and mentees addressing: perception of extent to which pair is engaging in relevant dialogues; perception of extent to which pair is pursuing appropriate issues, topics, and activities; perception of extent to which pair is moving at a reasonable rate through the learning experience; frequency and length of mentoring sessions; level of support from each individual's institution; types of issues, topics and activities pursued; outcomes of mentoring activities; personal opinion – positive and negative – about any aspects of the program; and suggestions for program improvement. The twelve-month mark, also the conclusion of the match, would result in a second confidential survey addressing: effectiveness of the match; degree to which specific goals were met; contribution of the program to personal and/or professional development; effectiveness of the Mentoring Committee; and suggestion for program improvement. The feedback provided through the evaluations/surveys would be used by the Mentoring Committee to evaluate the success of the program and as the basis for improving the program. A new cycle would begin at the next Annual Meeting.

The Membership Committee identified several benefits and challenges to the new program up front. Benefits included a better understanding of the archival profession; increased communication throughout SGA; greater employee motivation; quicker acclimation of new archivists into the archival community; accelerated leadership development; networking; and the possibility of receiving Academy of Certified Archivist (ACA) credits. Possible identified challenges included: geography; lack of training in mentoring; lack of available mentors; perceived lack of reward or benefit for mentors; and lack of institutional support.

The Membership Committee largely based the proposed

mentoring program on that of the Society of Northwest Archivists,<sup>1</sup> as well as several publications including Norman H. Cohen's *A Step-by-Step Guide to Starting An Effective Mentoring Program*, Amed Demirhan's "Developing Leadership through Mentoring," and W. Brad Johnson's *The Elements of Mentoring*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Developing the Program**

At the 2009 SGA Annual Meeting, the Membership Committee's proposal was accepted and a new Mentoring Committee established on an ad-hoc basis. The new committee, comprised of a Chair and five members, was tasked with implementing the proposal. The first initiative was to establish a list of tasks and goals with a work timeline for the year, finalize the applications and agreement forms that the Membership Committee had provided in the proposal, and start soliciting mentors and mentees. The timeline adopted called for us to solicit program participants in January, assess and match applicants in February, and confirm matches in March. The original goal of providing mentoring training and a face-to-face interaction before signing the contract was abandoned, mostly due to a desire to get the program and matches started. One of our identified challenges was then realized with a lack of training.

In January 2010, we created a program website, posted the mentor/mentee applications, and announced the program via the SGA website, listserv, newsletter, and blog. Personal emails were also sent to professors of regional archives and public history programs.

Mentees and mentors applied through the same process by submitting applications that included contact information and preferences, reasons for wanting a mentor or wanting to be a mentor, areas of interest and collecting areas they would like to focus on or have experience in, summary of work experience, geographic

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<sup>1</sup> The Society of Northwest Archivists is now known as Northwest Archivists, Inc. See current mentoring program website at <http://northwestarchivistsinc.wildapricot.org/mentoring>.

<sup>2</sup> Norman H. Cohen, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Starting an Effective Mentoring Program* (Amherst, MA: HRC Press, 2000); Amed Demirhan, "Developing Leadership through Mentoring," *Florida Libraries* 48, no. 1 (2005): 15-16; W. Brad Johnson, *The Elements of Mentoring* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

proximity preferences, minority group preferences, and a resume. Nine mentees applied, but only five mentors applied. We realized another identified challenge – lack of mentors. The Chair personally approached SGA members and solicited four more mentors to pair all nine mentees.

The Committee members received the applications and proposed matches based on the information and preferences provided. The Chair received a set of proposed matches from each Committee member, reconciled them, and made the final matches. Due to time constraints, the Committee did not see the final matches before they went out. The Chair contacted the mentees and gave them an opportunity to waive the match, but the mentors were not contacted. In hindsight, several Committee members believe that they could have alleviated bad matches by discussing the final matches before they were announced to the participants, and several mentors complained of not having the opportunity to waive the match. Once the pairings were determined, the Chair sent out a welcome packet to participants which contained the mentoring agreement or contract and general information about mentoring, including tip sheets for being an effective mentor/mentee. This replaced the training session originally proposed. All nine pairings were finalized and initiated in March 2010.

For the most part, this concluded the work of the Committee members for the remainder of the year. The Committee Chair made periodic contact with mentees and mentors via email throughout 2010. At the SGA Annual Meeting in November, mentees and mentors were encouraged to meet up with each other, and participants were recognized at the evening reception, but no formal event or session was held for them. A mid-year evaluation/survey was not distributed as originally proposed.

The work of the initial 2010 Committee concluded with drafting thank you letters, certificates, and participant surveys to go out at the end of the twelve-month period. In early 2011, the original Chair stepped down and a new Chair assumed the role. The outgoing Chair thought the kick-off of the relationships went well, but sustaining them and trying to make sure they remained active was difficult to handle and hard to gauge. The outgoing Chair believed that we could not force people to contact each other, it is hard to match personalities on top of skill sets and interests, and it is difficult

to manage mentee and mentor expectations. The incoming Chair's first task was to close out the initial cycle in March 2011 and collect the surveys with which to assess the program. We found that the contact information for some of our mentees was no longer current and had trouble contacting them to close out the cycle. Out of the nine original matches, eight survived with one mentor dropping out for personal reasons. Of the eight left, most did not maintain contact for the full twelve-month period. Three mentees and five mentors responded to the survey, about a 40 percent response rate. The reviews were mixed, but generally positive to neutral regarding whether the program was worthwhile. Most seemed disappointed in the results, but optimistic that the program was a good idea and should continue. The majority of the complaints centered around: poor matches; geographic proximity of mentees and mentors; and for mentors, a feeling that the mentee was not really interested in a relationship, thereby realizing the identified challenge of a lack of reward or benefit for the mentors.

In the end, the biggest obstacle was how to maintain interested mentees and mentors who have a vested interest in the success of the relationship. Without that, the benefits of mentoring, including increased communication and networking, leadership development and organizational strengthening, and personal and professional growth cannot be realized.

The idea of reformatting to an on-demand program began to circulate even before the end of the first cycle. The final participant evaluations included a question about annual/cyclical versus on-demand. The question of changing the format of the program greatly slowed down the work of the Committee in 2011, first waiting for the survey results and then getting Committee feedback, putting us behind the annual/cyclical timeline of matching in March. The Committee was mixed in its opinion of making the switch to an on-demand format or continuing another year on the annual/cyclical format to gather more data. With so few surveys returned, it was hard to tell if we even got a representative sample of the results. But perhaps the lack of response, especially from the mentees, was in itself telling. One of the biggest concerns was that an on-demand program would be more intensive on the administrative side for the Committee.

It was at this point that we transitioned leadership of the

Committee to a co-chair format. We began to investigate what needed to change about the program to achieve the end result everyone desired: successful, enduring, and productive mentoring relationships.

### **Implementing the Program: On-Demand Mentoring**

In 2011, we implemented an on-demand mentoring format. One of its unique features is that mentors and mentees may join the program at any time during the year. Rather than shoehorn the mentoring partnerships into SGA's annual operating year (January-December), the partnerships are allowed to form more organically and according to the needs and timeline of the mentee. Instead of limiting the formation of partnerships to a one-month period at the beginning of SGA's administrative year, mentees may initiate a partnership and mentors may join at any time. The program is publicized periodically through SGA's listserv, newsletter, and social media to remind members of this ongoing opportunity for professional growth and development.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the program is that mentees select mentors based on mentor biographies posted to the SGA website. Unlike many programs where a committee of outsiders assigns mentoring pairs, SGA's on-demand program facilitates self-selection of partners according to participant goals, knowledge, experience, and interests. The online mentor biographies are generated from information collected from registration forms, including: reason(s) for wanting to be a mentor, areas of interest or specialization, the collecting areas most familiar with, and whether geographical proximity to a mentee is preferred/required. We also ask what role they wish to fill for a mentee – whether it is expanding their core knowledge, building and navigating professional relationships, or providing assistance with a specific goal. Making this information about the mentor available ensures the participants have a shared understanding and realistic expectations going into their partnership, both essential to developing meaningful and lasting relationships. Mentors may opt to participate in more than one relationship at a time.

Mentees also complete an initial registration form and submit their resume. At the time of registration, mentees select their top two mentors. Before established, the mentor must agree to the mentoring

partnership after reviewing the mentee's registration form and resume. If the mentor agrees, both parties complete a partnership agreement form and begin their relationship within two weeks. If the mentor declines a partnership with that mentee, then the coordinators approach the mentee's second mentor choice in hopes of establishing a partnership. So far, no mentees have been turned away from the program. When the mentor is no longer available for partnering, a note is placed in their online biography that they are currently unavailable with the month and year they will become available for future matches.

We suggest that partners spend a minimum of two hours each month participating in the program, twenty-four hours in the twelve-month period. To ensure the partnerships stay on track, co-chairs check in quarterly with each pair (usually via email) to be sure the pair is still active and to pass along suggestions for partner activities. Activity suggestions include site visits between their institutions, reviewing the mentee's resume and giving recommendations for continuing education or ideas for increasing practical experience, or picking an archival skill or topic to discuss or practice. The check-ins also provide an opportunity to solicit feedback from the partners. We encourage partners to pass along suggestions, comments, or concerns about the program, and we often receive more feedback about the program in these quarterly replies than in the final evaluations. The quarterly check-ins are also important in identifying inactive pairs as intervention by a program coordinator in assessing and repairing the situation takes the burden off of the partner still invested.

All program participants must be SGA members, but participants are not required to reside in Georgia. The program has facilitated more than one successful partnership with an out-of-state mentor. The pairs are required to sign a mentoring contract that provides for a twelve-month mentoring relationship and includes a "no fault" termination clause. To acquaint new participants to the program and mentoring in general, we created a Mentoring Guidebook, which contains information about the program, tips for participants, and helpful articles about mentoring. We staff a booth at the SGA Annual Meeting with mentor profiles and other program information to inform members about this opportunity and if possible, hold a meet and greet at the Annual Meeting to give mentors and potential mentees a chance to meet in-person.

SGA is fortunate to have an amazing and dedicated group of mentors and we endeavor to recruit new ones into the program in order to offer a diverse pool in terms of gender, race, experience, and skill sets. From December 2011 to December 2014, the program administered 24 partnerships with only four pairs ending before 12 months. Three partnerships ended because the mentee either left the profession or lost their position. In most cases, mentors were immediately paired with new mentees. One partnership ended due to the loss of the mentor and once the inactive pair was identified during the first quarterly check-in, the mentee was placed in a new partnership that lasted twelve months. This underscores the importance of quarterly check-ins to the success of the partnerships and the program.

### **Assessment and Future of the Program**

During the transition to the on-demand format, it became clear that management of the program by a committee was cumbersome and inefficient. In 2012, we modified the leadership from a committee structure to two coordinators. By 2013, the program had proven successful and sustainable and the SGA membership voted to establish the Mentoring Program as a permanent program.

The on-demand model addresses several of the inadequacies identified in the previous program format, including allowing mentors the opportunity to decline a pairing if they believe it to be a poor match. Regular assessment of the program is essential in keeping the program relevant and meeting the needs of the SGA membership. At the conclusion of each twelve-month partnership, we solicit feedback from mentors and mentees via an evaluation form containing questions about the participant's experience in the program. Evaluations are analyzed and coordinators respond to feedback as necessary in order to fine-tune the program. Two suggested improvements to the program under consideration are offering a six-month option or project-based partnerships. Continual assessment also includes keeping current of new ideas and successes in similar professional programs around the country which might be incorporated as we continue to strive to meet the educational needs of our members.

The Society of Georgia Archivists' mission is to preserve the

past and the present for the future. The SGA Mentoring Program meets this need by sustaining a formal program to nurture and support new archivists while providing an important professional development opportunity for experienced members to reflect on their own knowledge and experience, and repackage this information in a meaningful way for mentees. The program encourages individual growth, community within the profession, engagement with issues, development of competencies, and is essential in strengthening our membership and the profession overall. For a list of the top five aspects of our program that work well and those that fell short, see Appendix A.

### **The New England Archivists Mentoring Circles Program**

New England Archivists (NEA) is a regional organization of people who organize, describe, preserve, and provide access to historical records in a variety of formats. Its focus is on educational and networking opportunities for its members, as well as advocacy and outreach on behalf of the archives profession. NEA's membership spans the six states of New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont), and as of March 5, 2015, included 619 active individual members and 34 active institutional members.

### **Origins of the Program**

The New England Archivists Mentoring Program was founded in the summer of 2013 by the leadership of NEA's Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students (REPS). At the time, REPS was less than a year old itself: we began our petition to form a roundtable in October 2012, immediately following NEA's launch of the roundtable initiative, and were formally recognized by the organization as one of eight original groups in January 2013.

From the outset, REPS was dedicated to the needs of early career archivists, with a particular emphasis on professional development within a positive, supportive, collaborative community. We organized around the following mission:

The Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students (REPS) provides a forum for discussion and professional growth among members of the New England Archivists (NEA) who

are in the early stages of their archival careers. These members include professionals, paraprofessionals, interns, and volunteers engaged in archival work; individuals who are transitioning into or are interested in pursuing archival careers; and students enrolled in archival courses of study. Any NEA member, regardless of experience level or years in the profession, who is interested in furthering the aims of this forum is welcome to join REPS.<sup>3</sup>

We expanded upon our mission statement with a set of guiding goals, two of which led toward a mentoring program: "To build bridges between beginning archivists and those already well-established in the field. To encourage stronger relationships with these two groups by creating a space to communicate with one another outside of the work environment."<sup>4</sup>

To achieve these goals, we needed to create opportunities for dialogue and mutual learning between beginning and experienced archivists. Mentoring seemed a natural course to chart, but NEA did not have a formally established program. We began exploring the programs that other libraries, archives, and professional organizations had created, and after several months of research, brainstorming, planning, and collaboration with allies among NEA's leadership, we decided to launch a pilot mentoring program for the growing membership of REPS.

### **Developing the Program**

Our conversations with NEA colleagues – several of whom had extensive mentoring experience – encouraged us to think broadly. Although the traditional model featured a one-to-one relationship between mentor and mentee, was there a model better suited to our purposes? The more we explored, the more convinced we became that group mentoring, and particularly circle mentoring, was the model for us.<sup>5</sup> Our program was born out of a desire to

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<sup>3</sup> "Mission," Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students, <https://repsnea.wordpress.com/reps/mission/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Goals and Objectives," Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students, <https://repsnea.wordpress.com/reps/goals-and-objectives/>.

<sup>5</sup> We looked at a variety of resources from within and outside the library and information science field. These included: "Mentoring Circles," Massachusetts

create collaborative learning opportunities, with their emphasis on multi-directional teaching – mentor to mentee, mentee to mentor, peer to peer – circle mentoring was a near perfect fit.

In the summer of 2014, we started developing the REPS Mentoring Circles Program, the pilot that grew into the NEA Mentoring Program the following year. We defined a mentoring circle as "a small group of individuals who meet on a regular basis for an agreed amount of time during the mentorship period."<sup>6</sup> We determined that our mentoring circles would consist of a pair of co-mentors working with five or six mentees, and that in each circle, one REPS leader would serve in a liaison role. The liaison would help mentors with the logistics of scheduling meetings, and would also help resolve any issues that might arise in the course of a mentoring relationship.

We aimed to launch three distinct circles during the pilot round of the program: a circle that would meet in-person in the Boston area and discuss topics of interest to the participants, a circle that would meet virtually via an online chat platform and again discuss topics of interest to the participants, and a third circle that would focus on researching and publishing interests, and would meet virtually or in-person depending on the location of participants.

In envisioning the program participants, we had some flexible ideas about both mentors and mentees. Within the mentoring pair, we would ideally look for one professional with many years of experience and one mid-career professional. The diversification of experience level among mentors was important to us, chiefly because we conceived of the mentoring circles as environments in which all participants, not just the mentees, would have an opportunity to grow and develop professionally. In order to achieve that, we wanted to ensure that the mentors brought differing backgrounds to their circle

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Association for Women in Science, <http://mass-awis.org/mentoring-circles/>; "Leadership in Mentoring: Multiple Mentoring," American College of Healthcare Executives, <http://www.ache.org/newclub/CAREER/MentorArticles/Multiple.cfm>; Ann Ritchie and Paul Genoni, "Group mentoring and professionalism: a programme evaluation," *Library Management* 23, no. 1/2 (2002): 68-78, doi: 10.1108/01435120210413869; and Abbott, "A Guide to Mentoring Circles" (slide presentation from 2008), <https://bgge3-web.sharepoint.com/Documents/Abbott-Mentoring-Circles-Guide.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> "Mentoring Program," New England Archivists, <http://newenglandarchivists.org/mentoring>.

and could engage in peer mentoring with each other.

The mentees were early career archivists – graduate students or individuals who had begun their professional work within the last five years. Our only hard and fast rule was that they had to be members of both NEA and REPS, but outside of membership affiliations and career stage, there were no strict requirements for participation.

### **Implementing the Program: Recruitment and Circle Matching**

When recruiting mentors, we opted to utilize personal networks and not conduct an open call, which could potentially produce more mentors than were needed for this pilot. By adhering to personal networks, we exercised more control over the recruitment process. We each developed a list of and began contacting potential mentors. By sticking to known colleagues and members of the profession, we also hoped to match mentors based on skills, interest, and the specific design of the circles (virtual or in-person). As an example, one mentor was specifically recruited to host the virtual mentoring circle because of her technical expertise and comfort with virtual teaching and learning.

An expected complication arose when many potential mentors voiced concerns about the potential time commitment. Additionally, as we recruited for circles to begin in the fall of 2013, we found that several archivists in academic positions were unable to commit because the start of the semester was already too busy. Those who eventually declined were invited to be on a list of guest-mentors. The idea was to pull from this list should any mentor need a substitute or in cases where a circle wanted to bring in an expert in a particular area.

Overall, recruiting mentors was not a quick or easy process. Though we began with a list of twenty possible mentors, we had to revisit and add to the list in order to fill the six mentor spaces (two for each of the three circles). For one circle in particular, we had identified one mentor and eventually asked her to assist in finding her co-mentor to complete the circle. This personalized method of recruitment was more time consuming than putting out an open call, but it yielded a more structured result for the program. We believed that by drawing upon known colleagues, we could then better match mentees to appropriate circles and mentors based on their

applications.

As this was a REPS-sponsored program, the mentee spaces were open to all NEA members who were also members of REPS. Again, this was a way to exercise greater control on the growth and size of the program during the pilot. We developed an online application for interested members and advertised through NEA and Simmons College listservs. The application included demographic questions (student/early professional, geographic location, etc.) as well as logistical questions about location and time commitment. Applicants were also asked to explain why they would like to participate in and what they would contribute to the circle.

Applicants ranked their interest in the three distinct circles. Because the program was open to all members of REPS, regardless of their geographic location in New England, it was important to reserve many of the virtual spaces for members living outside of the greater Boston area. Through this process we found that there was a lack of interest in the Research and Publications circle, so we opted to change this to a second Boston-area circle.<sup>7</sup> We matched almost all applicants to one of the three circles during this pilot. We declined to offer spots to several applicants who failed to complete the application by the stated deadline or who were not a strong fit for the program at that particular time. Factors that affected fit included location (applicants from outside the New England region), experience (applicants very early in their degree programs), and level of demonstrated interest in mentoring. In each case, we encouraged the applicants to apply in the next round and gave them information regarding other mentoring and professional development opportunities.

### **Assessment and Future of the Program**

With each circle formed, we planned the initial meetings and worked with the mentors to establish the co-mentoring relationships.

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<sup>7</sup> In December 2013, REPS held a workshop designed to help members with similar professional interests connect and form self-directed working groups. One of the working groups that originated decided to focus on research and publishing. While the workshop and the working groups were separate from the mentoring program, we felt that the formation of this particular group gave REPS members who expressed an interest in the failed Research and Publications mentoring circle a good outlet to pursue development in this area.

Each liaison met with the co-mentors of her assigned circle to discuss expectations, share mentee profiles, explain the role of the liaison, and address any lingering questions or concerns on the part of the mentors.

As the program progressed, each co-mentoring pair shaped and individualized their circle based on their professional backgrounds and past mentoring experiences. Mentees also provided input, sharing topics and areas of interest for their own professional growth. As a result, each circle took on its own personality. In-Person Circle A focused on job searching and career development, and also toured local repositories, meeting with fellow archivists. In-Person Circle B worked on specific job-related skills by conducting mock interviews and resume reviews, and discussed building professional networks. The Virtual Circle also discussed job-seeking strategies and professional networking, and dedicated time to goal setting and personal development. That all three circles had at least one common topic indicated the professional needs of those involved.

Throughout the course of the pilot program, the circle liaisons worked with mentors and mentees to address any concerns or logistical issues. The liaison was responsible for setting meeting times using a polling system and working with circle members to create schedules that met participant needs. The mentors found this to be extremely useful as they used their limited time to focus on the content of the meetings and building relationships in their circles rather than the logistics. As expected, scheduling meetings was the most difficult task for liaisons. With highly motivated and professional members in each circle, finding a time that worked for every member was not always possible. Members of each circle occasionally missed meetings, but overall attendance was good. The Virtual Mentoring Circle also took advantage of the guest-mentor option when one mentor was unable to attend the meeting.

At the end of the pilot round, each participant completed a survey designed to help shape the future of the program and make improvements necessary to develop it into a permanent fixture of NEA. The survey results provided important feedback from both mentors and mentees and became central to our work as we transitioned the mentoring initiative away from REPS and into the larger context of NEA programming.

In March 2014, the NEA Executive Board approved the formation of a task force to direct the second year of the program and develop recommendations for its future administration. In its second year, the NEA Mentoring Program was open to all NEA members – a departure from its previous restriction to REPS members only – with the official backing of the organization. We lobbied the Board for this change for several reasons. First, we believed the program would be more inclusive if offered to the entire NEA membership as opposed to a small subset. Second, folding the program into NEA would legitimize it in a way that roundtable sponsorship could not. And third, the backing of NEA would create a more sustainable program.

The NEA Mentoring Task Force consisted of seven individuals: the three former REPS leaders, one current REPS leader, one member of the NEA Membership Committee, one former mentor, and one former mentee. Using the feedback collected from the pilot round survey, we implemented a series of important changes and launched the program's second year in the fall of 2014.

We received numerous comments from the surveys suggesting that a set of guidelines would be beneficial to both mentors and mentees. Participants in both roles sought written parameters for meeting structure and a clearer sense of the expectations for what participation entailed. Building off of these and other suggestions, we wrote the NEA Mentoring Program Guidelines and shared them with all second-year participants prior to the program's start. The guidelines incorporate other recommendations from our pilot participants, including an attendance policy.

In addition to the guidelines, we incorporated several other suggestions from the pilot surveys. Mentors indicated that more guidance in the area of discussion topics would be useful, so we created a listserv in the second year through which mentors could share ideas. Feedback also suggested that more flexibility in the program's duration would be beneficial, so we allowed each circle in the second year to choose their own start and end dates, providing seven to nine months as a good target duration.

The NEA Mentoring Program has concluded its second year, and its first with the backing of the organization. Six circles – two in-person, two virtual, and two hybrid – spent the year forging connections and growing together as professionals. Based on survey

feedback from the pilot year, we elected not to assign any special topics (such as research and publishing) to the second-year circles. The lack of interest in the first year for such specifics as well as the desire to allow mentors and mentees to shape their circles drove this decision. The task force concluded its year of work after analyzing a new batch of survey results and developing recommendations for a permanent administrative structure. Particularly helpful were the mid-year surveys we conducted, a component included after presenting on a panel with the Society of Georgia Archivists and learning of their surveying practices.

The most recent surveys identified continuing challenges as well as successes. By opening the program to all NEA members, we doubled in size and experienced hurdles typical of such expansion: juggling the competing needs and interests of a large group of participants, managing an increasing workload as administrators, and seeking avenues to program sustainability. The broader scope of the program also yielded positive results: more participants meant a greater diversity of professional and lived experiences within each circle, resulting in dynamic conversations and stronger networking opportunities. We also improved our ability to match participants to circles to best meet their needs. Although plans for the third cycle of the NEA Mentoring Program are still in development, we anticipate that survey assessment will continue to prove illuminating as the program grows. In the future, it may be worthwhile to supplement this data – which revolves largely around individual participant satisfaction – with data on more concrete outcomes. As one example, administrators could ask participants to record their immediate professional goals at the start of the program cycle, revisiting participants several months after the cycle ends to collect data on goal achievement. The third year of the NEA Mentoring Program will provide ample opportunity to explore this and other improvements, and we look forward to the continued growth of the program as it takes its place among NEA's permanent offerings. For a list of the top five aspects of our program that work well and those that fell short and were improved upon, see Appendix A.

## **Conclusion**

Mentorship, as intimate and personal relations with a high degree of sharing and learning, tends to be bound by very high

expectations: the chemistry of the match, the relationship's growth and potential, and hopefulness for career development and advancement. While it is true that a great mentoring relationship can empower a mentee to believe in herself and realize her desired future, not all mentoring relationships foster a long-term sense of possibility and objectivity in their participants. For some, the match does not work, people do not share, or a bond is not established. Mentoring is not one-stop shopping: it is not a cure for career roadblocks or frustrations. However, formal mentorship programs provide a vehicle, through thoughtful and strategic relationship building, for individuals to open up to new perspectives, perhaps from those more experienced whom they might otherwise not have had an opportunity to meet. And ideally, from these matches, a mentee will have made a connection that may last long after a formal program has ended.

Both of the programs described here encourage the mentee to build authentic relationships, to learn from new perspectives, and to share their own. In the SGA program, mentees can choose from a variety of identified mentors, requesting someone whose strengths and interests align with what they are seeking at that particular moment in their career. The NEA program uses the mentoring circle to expand the conversation to allow for traditional, reverse, and peer mentoring opportunities. However, both programs fundamentally rely on individuals to identify and seek out the mentoring experiences that they need.

It is exciting to see that the traditional model of mentorship is changing, allowing for learning at all ages and ranges of experience within our profession. These new models encourage us to embrace the idea that mentoring is something you have to desire and foster for yourself, even when participating in a formal program. Mentoring is individually driven: no one will understand your goals and aspirations better than yourself, and a number of different mentoring relationships may be required as one progresses through a career and one's needs and interests evolve.

**Lynette Stoudt** is the Director of the Research Center at the Georgia Historical Society and is responsible for the management and operations of the division. Lynette has

participated in several professional organizations including the Society of Georgia Archivists, Society of American Archivists, Savannah Heritage Emergency Response, and the Regional Archival Associations Consortium. She has served in several board positions with the Society of Georgia Archivists, including as a Mentoring Program coordinator from 2011 until 2014. During this time, Mentoring Program coordinators planned and implemented the successful restructuring of the program. She holds a Master of Library and Information Science degree with a concentration in archival studies from San Jose State University.

**Caitlin Birch** co-founded the New England Archivists Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students (REPS). During her time as co-chair of REPS, she co-founded the REPS Mentoring Circles Program, later leading its expansion into the NEA Mentoring Program as co-chair of the NEA Mentoring Task Force. Caitlin is the Digital Collections and Oral History Archivist at Dartmouth College's Rauner Special Collections Library. She earned her MSLIS in Archives Management and MA in History from Simmons College. In April, she begins a two-year term as Secretary of NEA.

**Michelle Chiles** is the Robinson Research Center Coordinator for the Rhode Island Historical Society. She earned her MSLIS in Archives Management from Simmons College. An active member of the New England Archivists (NEA), Michelle co-founded the NEA Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students (REPS). As co-chair of REPS, she co-founded the REPS Mentoring Circles Program. Michelle currently serves on the NEA Education Committee as well as the Susan Von Salis Student Meeting and Travel Scholarship Committee.

**Luciana Spracher** is Director of the City of Savannah's Research Library & Municipal Archives, and prior to that served as the City's first Archivist. Before coming to the City, she was the owner and principal of Bricks & Bones Historical Research specializing in architectural and local history, and worked as a project archivist for the Georgia Historical Society, the Savannah Jewish Archives, and the Catholic Diocese of Savannah Archives. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Savannah College of Art and Design in

Historic Preservation and a Master's degree in Public History from Armstrong Atlantic State University. Spracher attended the Modern Archives Institute at the National Archives and Records Administration, and is a Certified Archivist. As a member of the Society of Georgia Archivists, she was one of the original members of the SGA Mentoring Committee and served as one of the first coordinators of the Mentoring Program.

**Darla White** has been involved in a number of mentoring initiatives, including the launch of the New England Archivists Mentoring Program, and programs for the Harvard Library and Harvard Medical School. She also teaches workshops on career goal setting and networking for archivists and librarians. Darla is the Associate Director of Information and Records Management at Sanofi, and received both her MLIS and MA in History at Simmons College.

## APPENDIX A

### Top Five Aspects of the Mentoring Programs that Worked and Didn't Work

#### What Worked Well

	SGA	NEA
1	Self-selection of pairs	Circle format as opposed to traditional one-on-one mentoring
2	Diverse mentor pool with online mentor bios	Restricting participation to NEA and REPS members
3	On-demand schedule	Questionnaire to match and pare down mentee applications
4	Quarterly check-ins with suggestions for partner activities	Personal networks to create a strong mentor pool
5	Coordinator management of program (rather than committee)	Liaisons to handle scheduling logistics

#### What Didn't Work

	SGA	NEA
1	Committee selection of pairs	Topic-specific circles
2	Inability of partners to decline pairing	Mentor pairs with senior and mid-career archivists
3	Strict January-December schedule	Operating on a fixed schedule
4	Program management by a committee	Non-specific directions, no official program guidelines
5	Face-to-face training for participants	Lack of attendance/participation policies