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Resources for Archives: Developing Collections, Constituents, Colleagues, and Capital

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The essential element for archival success is to be found in the quality of management decisions made and public services provided. Archivists can develop first-class archives operations through understanding the organizational context; planning; hiring, retaining, and developing staff; meeting archival standards for storage and access; and creating a professional environment that is also welcoming to patrons. Once a strong base is created, raising funds is easier. Effective techniques include private fund-raising and networking with friends and family of donors, not taking "no" for an answer or feeling guilty for asking, grant writing, and promotion of archives and collections.

KEYWORDS archival management, fund-raising, donor relations

While this article is ostensibly about financial resources and the promotion of college, university, and school archives, I have long been convinced that the essential element for archival success is to be found in the quality of management decisions we make and public services that we provide. Running a high-quality operation is how you garner support, regardless of whether you work alone or are a part of a much larger operation.

My thinking about this has been informed by the wonderful, if now dated, publication edited by Elsie Freeman Finch, *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists*, which I reviewed for the *American Archivist* more than a decade ago and have used in a series of workshops and talks over the years.[1] While Freeman's volume is nominally about public relations, it really is about how one can make an

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archives a success. She argues that outreach programs do not stand alone and encourages a holistic approach to understand what we are about as archivists. Central to her argument is this principle:

> To the extent that the public understand that archives exist to be used for reasons that affect their lives, property, civic well-being, and political influence, the public will be disposed to support and encourage archives. Use, it became clear, was the heart of the matter. Use is our reason for being. And, if archives are properly explained and made reasonably accessible, they will be used and likely be funded.[2]

Essentially our task is to encourage that use with a high level of intention. We must believe in what we do. If one buys into the concept that use is why archives exist, then we need to put our house in order. Our management decisions and service define us and shape the public attitude toward our institutions. One of my early mentors, Edward C. Papenfuse, longtime state archivist of Maryland, drilled into us the notion that we needed to understand that archives are a luxury but that our task was always to persuade those we served, especially those who allocated resources, that we were essential. We were constantly doing things for legislators and key state leaders. I vividly remember when Donald Schaefer was elected governor of Maryland and asked various large state departments to provide a summary of the organization of state government and how funds were spent. Everyone said it couldn't be done, but Papenfuse said the archives could do it, and sure enough, within weeks the document was in the governor's hands and every department in the state was begging us for copies. That's how you make certain no one perceives you to be a luxury.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Any good archival leader must first understand the organization that that person serves. Management or administration is the exercise of responsibility for the effective use of the human, financial, and other resources available to meet an organization's objectives. Even lone arrangers have this responsibility. Key to effective management is to understand the reporting structure in which you operate and what degree of freedom you will be allowed. You need to know the history of the organization. Who are the key people who can help you realize your objectives? How does the chain of command operate? Who is your boss's boss (not that I am an advocate of end runs) and how can you influence that person and make your supervisor look good? What is the formal and informal structure and who are the real leaders who have influence? Who can be of help in communications and development? Do you need an advisory board? Where would you want to

be in the organizational structure? The reality is that a position close to the top will be unlikely, so you want to be responsive, find ways to ingratiate yourself with key leaders and essentially keep plugging way.

One needs to plan if one is to be a good manager. Generally that includes a mission statement developed by all in the organization that defines your purpose, your priorities, and how these are communicated to staff. I personally am not a big fan of mission statements, largely because they tend to be obvious and it's better to remind staff of the priorities and mission in regular staff meetings. Moreover, there will constantly be change that brings on new missions, the waxing and waning of functions, changes in personnel, and the need to develop new skills. What one needs to do is embrace change and those who want to be a part of that change. When I took over the Mudd Library at Princeton in 1990, I produced an outline of where I thought we needed to go on my eighth day on the job. Soon thereafter, with the help of staff, I drafted a long range plan for the archives. Subsequently staff wrote a series of three-year plans for what we hoped to accomplish in the short run. Finally, I believe annual reports provide a wonderful opportunity both to highlight what you and your staff have accomplished in a single year. Often we think we are just running in place, but this is when one realizes what has been done. This is the place for statistics to highlight the quality and quantity of work being done.

MANAGING PEOPLE

Hiring, retaining, and developing staff is the most important thing any administrator does. Staff represent the largest part of any archival budget, so we ought to invest lots of time in making sure we do this well. It all begins with working hard on job descriptions and being willing to start over from scratch if the first effort doesn't attract what we need (and often one learns what is needed by the process of a first round of candidates that don't fill the bill). Then you must recruit good candidates, which involves spending a lot of time on the phone talking to peers and potential applicants. Never hire just because you need a body. It's always better to rethink and repost. I am a great believer in involving as many staff as possible in the hiring process; I'm always amazed at what support staff learns that I don't since candidates are usually trying to impress me but then may treat the people with whom they will one day work like dirt. My personal preference is to check references first and carefully to craft questions for those references. You save a lot of time if you can eliminate candidates before you bring them to campus. I spend time talking to and listening to references and schmoozing them for some time. You then can ask the key questions that almost always reveal some shortcoming of that person (and then you can decide if that shortcoming is fatal or not). If the person is to be a supervisor, I'd

always like to talk to someone who has worked for that person. Key are questions for references about whether the person is a self-starter or needs direction (and if a self-starter, knows when to ask key questions). There is no right or wrong answer, but management style that relies heavily on a lot of delegation makes working with people needing a lot of direction difficult. Similarly, I like to know whether references see candidates as working best independently or as part of a team. Again, there is no right answer, but I generally prefer people who work best in teams. Obviously other supervisors will relish people who want to be told what to do or who work best alone. Of course you want a set of questions to ask the candidates when they interview, and out of those questions may come a need to recheck references or ask the candidate to provide additional references. I usually want to ask candidates about any negatives that have come out of schmoozing the references.

We then need to provide training, encouragement, appreciation, resources, and honest performance evaluations for those we hire. A supervisor should have regular meetings (probably at least every two weeks with direct reports and monthly or quarterly meetings with all staff). Annual performance appraisals need to establish goals and objectives, set deadlines, establish priorities, and provide honest evaluations of successes and failure. This is not a place to pull punches, but by the same token, if you've done your job right, the person should not be surprised by the evaluation. I try throughout the year to document both the successes and failures of staff in e-mails or memoranda. I also pass along positive reports about my staff to my supervisor. Even the best staff makes mistakes and those need to be in the record so that if they become habitual or a pattern, you have more than a memory of the fact that the problem started three years earlier. I think it's good if staffs are permitted to provide a self-evaluation as part of the process, and I like 360 degree evaluations, even though Princeton has never used them. It's good to get feedback from staff. Finally, you want to reward staff, including parties, newsletters, events for student workers (we usually have pizza parties and an annual graduation ceremony), notes of thanks and appreciation, and recognition events. For years I have taken individual staff to lunch at my own expense. Finally, any good manager makes mistakes, and admitting that you made an error, are sorry for it, and owe staff an apology should be part of the tool kit of any good manager.

CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Essential to persuading donors that they want to support your archives is to create an environment that says that you are running a professional operation. The physical environment should meet basic standards for security, temperature, humidity, and fire suppression, and provide appropriate lighting,

physical access for the disabled, ergonomic work space, lockers, and computer access for researchers. There should be professionally written finding aids for all collections. You and your staff should dress in a professional manner. I think name tags are useful, and you need to train staff to make eye contact with patrons, listen in an active manner, and ask questions that will enable researchers to find what they need. Visitors should feel they are being welcomed into a place where they are the main focus.

Elsie Freeman Finch and Paul Conway encourage us to give up the notion of the archivist as servant or as gatekeeper in favor of the archivist as partner.[3] Teaching the researcher takes more time, but ultimately is the best approach in terms of public service. Similarly, we need to make sure we treat all researchers equally. Obviously when the president of the university asks for something, we respond quickly, but we should be just as thorough in our responses to genealogists, general researchers, and the increasing numbers of remote users who find something that interests them on the Internet. I can't tell you how often good service not only brings a letter of thanks, but also a generous donation for good service.

We also need to have a long-range preservation and processing plan since fragile or unorganized records limit access. I've always believed we need to provide a complete list of our holdings, even for materials that are closed for some reason, since in my view researchers should have access to that information and to materials that are unprocessed (the fact that people are willing to look at unprocessed materials often suggests what the next processing project should be and is evidence of the need for potential sources of funding). We should prepare descriptions of holdings relevant to frequent topics sought by researchers: women's history, family history, racial and ethnic minorities, photographs, economics, and wars. The bottom line is that everyday activities affect public relations and fund-raising. We must bring records and users together and thus, as Finch and Conway advocate, the reference room, not the loading dock, should be the hub of our operations.[4]

BRINGING HOME THE BACON

If in fact we have gotten the archival house in order, I'm persuaded the actual job of raising funds for our operations is relatively easy. While government grants and foundations can be sources of funds, I urge you to think about being attentive to the people who actually have a relationship to your institution. Private fund-raising is often very effective. It can begin with seeing that money comes your way as a part of any gift of records to your institution. The family or organization donating papers has a vested interest in the records and will often provide funds to preserve and organize the materials, but this will never happen if you fail to ask. The most effective fund-raising technique is one person asking another to give. Most of us are

very uncomfortable doing this, but in my experience, if you believe in what you are doing, it works extremely well. I frequently have turned to friends or family of donors for support, often with a promise to provide half of the funding from internal sources so that the donors know I am committing resources to the effort. And of course any funds that come in are more than I had in the first place. One should ask the family and friends for other people who might help, read biographical information that will provide leads, and many names can come right out of the correspondence files. Essentially one is networking to find people who will give.

I've also learned never to believe that "no" is the final answer from a potential donor. I asked a man to donate to process the papers of Adlai Stevenson. I got a very angry call from him saying he'd given to other Stevenson causes, but no one ever thanked him. I said to the processing archivist that we needed to be very attentive to this man since I was convinced he would give sooner or later since he wasn't angry at us but rather with the Stevenson family. I continued to provide him reports on the processing effort and our plans for celebration of the centennial of Stevenson's birth, just as I did for those who gave. Ultimately he began to send us Stevenson materials, and then money, and ultimately asked to help to raise additional funds.

Similarly I've learned not to feel guilty for asking for support. I once asked a widow to donate to process her husband's papers. She exercised due diligence checking up on me, including asking a United State Senator to talk to me. I felt some twinge of guilt in that I was asking for a significant sum of money and frankly her husband's papers weren't among the most important collections, but I also knew they'd never get processed in a timely manner without her help. The person we hired became good friends with her (including helping her on trips abroad). We did a small exhibition and published a modest booklet on her husband's life. She and a niece came down from New York in a limousine, and when I went out to help bring in some additional papers found in the New York apartment, the niece said to me that this project had given her aunt a new lease on life since she had essentially been waiting around to die after her husband's death. I never again had any qualms about asking for money. Similarly I had a donor visit about possibly placing his father papers about the American invasion of Siberia at the end of World War I. I spent much of a day with him and his wife, including taking them to lunch. He told me another institution had offered him a substantial sum of money for the collection. I told him I could not offer money and said if I were he, I'd take the money. Instead, he said I had treated him well and that he didn't need the money but wanted to know the materials would be properly cared for.

Once the funds come, you need to be a good steward, finding ways to say thanks, such as regular updates on progress (which is always an opportunity to subtly ask for more funding), binding the finding aid for all donors, including photographs with your EAD (Encoded Archival Description)

finding aids, and doing exhibitions or academic conferences. Continue to be in contact with donors years after their gifts since you may receive additional papers or funds. Look for items that might interest the donors, like publication of an article or books based on the processed collection.

Grant writing is in many ways an art, but after you've written your first one, you have a lot of boilerplate available for future grants. You need to spend time studying the agency to which you want to submit a grant. Determine their stated interests, guidelines, and recent awards given. Often you can ask a successful applicant for a copy of their grant proposal. You can always go talk to program officers either in person or on the phone. Why spend time on a proposal if you can learn there is probably little interest in it. Think about what is innovative in your idea, how it fits into the current interest of the funding agency, and remember that programs often like to see ideas that test new approaches or involve inter-institutional cooperation.

The three most important parts of any grant application are (1) the budget (which should be realistic, accurate, and demonstrate significant cost sharing on your part, including indirect costs); (2) the rationale for the proposal (you must demonstrate the research value of the records to be organized or preserved—this is not intuitive and may benefit from an outside scholar-consultant who can persuade the agency of the value of the records); and (3) the plan of work, which should include a time line of activities and examples of previous successful work. Make sure your proposal is well written, accurate, logical, free of typos, and reasonably brief. I would have as many people read the draft as possible. One way to learn about grant proposals is to express your willingness to do grant reviews. Finally, once you receive a grant, you need to make the funding agency look good with effective publicity that you send to the agency, timely progress and final reports, acknowledging the help in finding aids with links to the agency, letting that agency know when one of your finding aids wins an award, and submitting statistical reports on increased use thanks to the funding received.

There are of course a host of other methods you will use to promote your organization and thereby make it one people will want to fund. These include press releases on new accessions, opening newly processed collections, and announcing new staff, grant awards, exhibition openings, educational programs, and special events. If you have a communications office, you'll want to work with them. They can help you with your draft release. In general keep this simple with a catchy lead or headline, use present tense, and provide the who, what, when, where, why, and how. Essentially this should be no more than 250 words, one double-spaced typed page with links to photos online. I try to do press releases in August and late December, which always seem slow periods and almost anything I release will get picked up and printed. You will want to take advantage of anniversaries and make sure you have well-designed publications and newsletters. Taking your communications and development office staff and key reporters on tours of

your facilities is always a good idea. Provide photographs and information to communications and the press and development will also help your cause. Workshops on genealogy and workshops focused on your collections and on preservation will usually attract the general public.

Finally, one should try to develop a Friends organization. They can provide funds for acquisitions, equipment, fellowships, and often have contacts with the top of your organization. They can offer good advice, provide volunteers, and help get out the word-of-mouth buzz about your organization. You do need to make sure they understand that they are not responsible for policy, operations, management, and do not determine priorities regarding fund-raising, spending, special events, or programming. Friends organizations do create work for you, but in my view improving town-gown relations make this worth the candle.

There are many other ways to raise money, including microform/digital image sales; charging profit-making businesses for permission to publish images; sales of duplicates, picture post cards, stationery, and publications; the remaindering of old publications; rental of space; use fees; and preservation surcharges to underwrite additional preservation work.

In sum, if you will run a first-class archives, you can expect to find the means to fund what you are doing currently and to address some of those dreams you have for your operation.

NOTES

1. Elsie Freeman Finch, *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1994). The review is found in *American Archivist* 60, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 466–467. Variations of this paper were presented at three MARAC workshops: "Dilbert in the Stacks: Management Issues for Archivists," Wilmington, Delaware, November 1996; "Management Issues in College and University Archives," Wilmington, Delaware, November 1995; "Bringing Home the Bacon: Strategies and Sources for Funding the Archives," Hauppauge, New York, November 1999; at a workshop for the Archivist Round Table of Metropolitan New York: "So You Never Wanted an MBA: Management Issues for Archivists," November 2002; at two workshops sponsored by the New Jersey State Historical Records Advisory Board: "Grants, CAPES and Fundraising," June and November 2006; and by the presentation that provides the title for this paper at the New England Archivists Fall 2007 meeting at Storrs, Connecticut, "Dialogues: New Directions for College, University and Schools Archives."
2. Finch, *Advocating Archives*, 1.
3. Ibid., 10–11.
4. Ibid., 21.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

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