

ARCHIVES OUTSIDE THE

INSTITUTION

A Review of Archival Needs and Impact in Small Arts Organizations

- Intro
- Landscape
- Case Studies
- Possibilities
- Takeaways

STRUCTURE

Bright Archives is an independent archival production house based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania providing archival services alongside storytelling solutions for clients across the United States.

We understand that the value of archives is often beneath the surface, so we provide a unique combination of professional archival services and creative media solutions to bring those stories to life.

INTRO



KATHERINE BARBERA

Founding partner
Archivist and oral historian

DAVID BERNABO

Founding partner
Filmmaker and musician



**We created Bright Archives in 2023 to
make it easy for small to medium-sized
organizations to access archival services.**

Small organizations face a mountain.

Archives require funding, resources, and expertise that can feel out of reach. But the alternative is far worse—seeing their records discarded, their stories misrepresented, or their history lost entirely.

LANDSCAPE

Definitions

Small Organization

“an independently owned and operated business or non-profit that is not dominant in its field of operation.”

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Definitions

Small organizations interact with and depend on a variety of other entities for their archival needs.

Community-Based Archive	<p>“an independently run non-profit organization that...highlights the voices of communities that are not traditionally represented in archives.”</p> <p>Community Archives Collaborative: communityarchivescollab.org/tools-getting-started/</p>
Institution	<p>“an established organization or corporation (such as a bank or university) especially of a public character.”</p> <p>Merriam-Webster Dictionary</p>
Funder	<p>“a person or organization that provides money for a particular purpose.”</p> <p>Merriam-Webster Dictionary</p>



Pressure for programming is strong.

Small organizations feel pressure to focus on programming, since it is often tied to their core mission. Additionally, many funders expect programming activities, with some supporting operational costs.

If archives are not part of the core mission, they get deprioritized quickly.

For more information, specifically related to BIPOC-centered arts organizations, see *"No More Basements": A Qualitative Report on BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations' Archival Practices and Needs*. South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA). 2024.



We Want
Care, Not Control

Specific archives funding is scarce.

The funding landscape for archives is fractured and limited, and recent disruptions to federal programs have made it even more challenging. It's also not always clear where to find this type of funding, and competition is high.

**If specific funding is not available,
archives get deprioritized even more.**

For more information, specifically about funding for community archives, see *Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives*. Shift Collective. 2019.



Awareness of archives is limited.

Many small organizations have limited knowledge of archives. They're often viewed as burdensome with slow, long-term benefits. Short-term benefits (e.g., marketing and fundraising) are less well known.

Internal options aren't always available, consistent, or effective—resulting in history lost.

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Technology can be disruptive.

DIY records management and digital preservation are already challenging. While introducing new technologies can help, they can also be disruptive, especially when they're designed for another sector.



Institutional partnerships aren't always an option.

Large organizations with established archival programs—such as universities, libraries, and museums—face their own challenges. They can't collect everything and often have extensive backlogs.

What's more, power dynamics, appraisal decisions, and donation requirements can frustrate partnerships.



Small arts organizations are resilient, but in many cases they are losing their history.

The arts sector offers compelling case studies because of its ubiquity, growing interest in archives and memory-focused work, close ties to fields such as history that are traditionally associated with archives, the adoption of trust-based philanthropy, and its relatively flexible funding models.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study #1: Community-Based Arts Organization

Founded as an artist commune decades ago, this organization has grown into a steady non-profit with 2-3 full and part-time employees, offering a variety of arts and educational programming.

They have a thorough archive, dating back to the earliest years of the organization. It contains a wide variety of materials and includes sensitive intellectual property.

Due to reductions in funding and uncertainty about the future, they redirected funds originally set aside for their archive to support their core mission, including programming.



Case Study #2: Performance Art Duo

This is a small performing arts organization, founded nearly a decade ago, focusing on dance and sound. They offer live performances—touring nationally—and educational programming.

Their personal archive, which is largely digital, consists of live performance recordings, sound recordings, and ephemera.

They use programming funds to create performance documentation for their personal archive. And there is strong incentive—it's often required by grant funders and is essential for promotion in the age of social media, especially due to the ephemeral nature of live arts.



Case Study #3: Artist Gallery

This organization exists to promote the legacy of an influential artist. Their archive is preserved, in part, through a partnership with an institution, while additional material is preserved internally. The archive consists of works-in-progress, correspondence, personal materials, and supplies.

They partnered with an institution to preserve a portion of the materials, but some are outside of the collecting scope of the institution. They're seeking funding to preserve the remainder of the collection because it has value for their organization and audience, but they do not currently have support.



Current models do work, but not for everyone.

We need to create more pathways into them and expand the range of opportunities available.

POSSIBILITIES

Inspiration, Research, and Resources

Many groups are actively improving archival support for small organizations and community archives. Here are a few that inspire us.

South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)

Community Archives Collaborative

Shift Collective

UCLA Community Archives Lab

We want to help foster more resilient ecosystems of support.

The landscape of archival support for small organizations is fragile—and disruptions in federal funding programs, such as the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), have made it even more challenging.

Resilience is “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to change.”

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Awareness and Education

Diversified Funding Partnerships

Post and Non-Custodial Practices

Community-Based Archives

Consortia and Community Cooperation

Institutional Partnerships

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Awareness and Education

“Major effort should be put toward providing training for basic archival skills, including digital archival skills”

"No More Basements": A Qualitative Report on BIPOC-Centered Arts Organizations' Archival Practices and Needs. South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA). 2024.

Workshops and Training Sessions

Resource and Skill Sharing

Digital Archives Training and Support

Right-Sized Tools and Software

Diversified Funding Partnerships

“Small donations and one-time funding are available to community-based archives, but substantial and long-term sustainable funding remains elusive.”

Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives. Shift Collective. 2019.

Start-Up Support

Multi-Year Support

Low-Barrier Opportunities

Localized Funding Networks

Trust-Based Philanthropy



Archives for the Arts

Archives for the Arts

We're partnering with fiscal sponsor New Sun Rising to eliminate the primary hurdles —such as expertise and funding—and increase representation in the historical record of the greater Pittsburgh region.

www.brightarchives.com/afta

**Archives for the Arts seeks to
disrupt the burden of worthiness.**



Archives for the Arts awardees will receive free, customized archival services, including an assessment of their records, a detailed strategy for preserving and sharing their history, an oral history with a member of

their leadership, and a short film about their organization. The program also offers free community workshops focused on providing fundamental archives knowledge and skills.

1) The landscape of archival support for small organizations is fragile—**funding is precarious and many organizations are losing their history.**

2) **Current models do work, but not for everyone.** We need to create more pathways into them and expand the range of opportunities available through awareness activities, education, and diversified funding partnerships.

3) There's a need for more research and prototypes, fostering resilient ecosystems of support for small organizations across the landscape. **Contact local organizations and offer support—a little bit of effort can make a big impact.**

TAKEAWAYS

THANK YOU

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Questions?

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MARAC Caucus Conversation
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