



# The **Archivists Round Table** of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

## Call For Proposals: New York Archives Week Symposium

The Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York is accepting proposals for our forthcoming annual New York Archives Week Symposium, which will take place online on Thursday, October 22nd, 2020. This year's symposium will address urgent topics surrounding the interplay between the increasing technological complexity of the born-digital historical record and remote work, issues of precarity in archival labor, and the necessity of addressing structural racism in our institutions and individual practices.

We invite presentations from archivists, records managers, curators, historians, special collections librarians, and allied professionals that highlight the value that archival collections and archivist expertise have in this unprecedented moment of uncertainty and global solidarity (details below).

Interested candidates are encouraged to submit a 1-2 paragraph abstract (500 words, max) via this form by midnight Monday, August 17, 2020: <https://nycarchivists.wufoo.com/forms/x2p0qma0co9ye2/>

### **Panel Discussion: Re-Centering Embedded Knowledge in the Archival Technosphere**

*"Working with a multitude of digital tools is now a core part of an archivist's skillset."*  
- Gregory Wiedeman, University at Albany, State University of New York

The role of archivists has become inseparable from digital stewardship as rapidly evolving technologies permeate all realms of social activity. As the diversity and quantity of digital records and media proliferate, archival interventions to prevent the loss of important historical materials becomes ever more important. The work of archivists provides a backstop against the ephemerality of digital content and its attendant cultural amnesia. To keep pace with the scale and heterogeneity of digital materials to be preserved, archivists have adopted an ever-growing suite of proprietary and open source digital tools.

Yet, even as archivists prove themselves to be nimble at augmenting their workflows to account for new forms of digital records and media, they risk having their labor elided by the sophistication of the technology itself. Much effort has been devoted to access and seamless user experience in digital collections, often at the cost of erasing interaction with collection stewards with subject expertise. Likewise, the ubiquity of the term "archive" in a burgeoning array of consumer technologies continues to shade the general understanding of archival practice into that of an IT service with a software solution, rendering the historically and ethically rooted work of archivists invisible to general users and institutional administrators alike.

This tension between the advantages of harnessing technologies to expand services and the disadvantage that these very technologies pose in contributing to the erasure of archival labor has

long-term consequences for how this labor is valued and how collections care is resourced. *How do these competing tendencies productively complement rather than displace each other? How does technology interface with archival concerns of institutional memory and transparency, intellectual property, historical research, or restorative justice? How do we design systems that make archival labor visible, and that reinforce the value of embedded knowledge and archival expertise? How has the shift to remote/virtual work due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the visibility of this labor? And, importantly, how can we re-center memory work of historically marginalized groups within this sphere?*

This session seeks case studies that showcase innovative approaches to designing workflows that harness technology to optimize archival practice and how adaptive uses of digital tools dove-tail with embedded knowledge and archival expertise. We invite case studies ranging from enterprise-level infrastructure, to bespoke Python scripts, to issues surrounding remote work and virtual reference, especially those with an eye towards how cultural and contextual differences come into play.

### **Community Roundtable: Collectivity, Allyship, and Mutual Support: Cultivating Collaboration and Solidarity in the Workplace**

The role of archivist is often characterized as the solitary work of tending to history in its recorded form, conducted away from the whirlwind of other institutional activities. Even as access has moved outward from the stacks to the public sphere online, demanding teams of digitization, cataloging and curatorial workers to bring hidden collections to the fore, archival work often remains siloed from other institutional activities. In many cases, we more regularly interface with scholars and answer press inquiries than communicate with our co-workers.

The independence and autonomy that archivists embrace as part of their calling can have its drawbacks. Archivists regularly contend with inadequate resources to address a widening array of responsibilities and urgencies to protect ephemeral media. While the technical and educational demands of the field have increased, compensation and job security have remained uneven, particularly for emerging professionals. This precarity places both collections and their stewards at risk, and has a negative impact on the diversity of the profession.

The COVID-19 pandemic is taking place against the backdrop of a resurgence of organizing activity in the cultural sector and renewed calls to dismantle structural racism within our institutions, with serious implications for archivists in a variety of institutional contexts. *How do we balance the benefits of collectivity with the vulnerability of our outlier status? What other forms of allyship can we be cultivating to support underrepresented groups in our institutions and foster more sustainable workplace practices in the field more generally? What specific strategies and policies can we look towards when the needs of archival workers and archival collections are not being acknowledged and met? In what ways can cross-disciplinary collaboration shed light on disparities or offer opportunities for mutual support?*

This roundtable session seeks participants to share experiences and insights in working towards equity within their institutions. We invite proposals for short presentations from a variety of professional contexts that illustrate the mosaic of individual and collaborative activities that collectively contribute to sustainability and workplace justice. Following the presentations, we will open the floor for discussion. ***In order to foster candid dialogue between colleagues, this session will only be open to registered attendees and will not be recorded.***