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## **Archival Donor Relations and Development: Keeping a Balance**

**Carla M. Summers**

One of the central pleasures of archival work is developing relationships with donors of materials. These people are extraordinary and their activities have changed society. Donors of materials in the author's experience have included an artist whose journals capture the development of a creative vision for his work and his teaching, a famous broadcaster lively only when the microphone was on, politicians who have made great sacrifices to be of service but found great rewards, a famous writer who regards his manuscripts as a bank account he can draw on in his old age, farmers working to preserve the family farm in the face of the onslaught of agribusiness, and landscape architects who balance the natural environment and population growth in Florida. Because archivists are so adept at building relationships, one would assume that fundraising would come naturally. But archivists may shy away from asking for money because doing so might alienate donors and discourage them from donating their papers.

Despite these concerns and an understandable uneasiness about asking for money, the possibility of a strain on relationships with donors pales in significance beside the other chal-

lenges facing archival repositories. These challenges include the expense of processing voluminous twentieth-century collections and the paucity of funding available for that purpose. Archivists have little choice but to embrace the art of development. This article addresses three of the significant challenges facing archivists who wish to develop outside funding for their programs.

- How to understand the work of development in order to influence its outcome, to become what has been called “donor literate.”<sup>1</sup>
- How to find revenue sources to fund processing the abundance of late twentieth-century collections.
- How to stop entrepreneurial collecting by university administrators and faculty that benefits other areas of the university at the expense of the archives.

#### BECOMING DONOR-LITERATE

Several publications provide helpful guidance on becoming “donor literate.”<sup>2</sup> A good place to start is *Managing Archival and Manuscripts Repositories*, a part of the Society of American Archivists’ Archival Fundamental Series, which has a chapter called “Fund Raising and Development” by Thomas Wilstead and William Nolte.<sup>3</sup> Wilstead and Nolte point out that archivists have a natural affinity for working with donors because the professional work of selecting, appraising, and accessioning manuscript materials is very similar to the work of development. Both identify potential donors through friends and faculty. The

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<sup>1</sup> Charlene Clark, “Donor and Donor Relations,” in *Raising Money for Academic and Research Libraries: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Libraries*, ed. Barbara I. Dewey (New York: Neal-Schuman Publications, Inc., 1991), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Many sources can be found at the web site of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, <http://www.case.org/default.cfm>. Victoria Steele’s “The Role of Special Collections in Library Development,” in *Library Fundraising, Models for Success* (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1995), 72-84, is considered a seminal article in library development.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Wilsted and William Nolte, “Fundraising and Development,” in *Managing Archival and Manuscript Repositories* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1991), 69-78.

difference, of course, is that in development the focus is on the donor's ability to contribute rather than on the significance of his or her contribution. Once someone is identified as a possible donor, the approach for both development and archives collecting is carefully planned. In *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, Gerald Ham talks about finding "the proper gauge armament to bring down the quarry" when going after collections.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in development it makes sense to ask the university president, deans, or wealthy friends of the university to approach wealthy potential donors of money. Negotiations leading to the donation of funds cover the same ground as conversations leading to the donation of personal papers—affirming the importance of the donation, creating a lasting legacy, and matching the individual's interests to the interests of the university and the scholarly community.

At the heart of these negotiations is a contract that archivists call the deed of gift and development officers call the gift agreement.<sup>5</sup> Successful negotiations match the institution's needs to the donor's abilities and wishes. When archivists negotiate a deed of gift, they stand in for all the generations to come who will use the materials. When development officers negotiate a gift agreement, they stand in for all the generations who will benefit from sponsored scholarship. Both archivists and development officers work to limit restrictions and recognize ownership, and both see the fulfillment of the requirements of these contracts as good stewardship to the donor and their constituents.

The university setting offers many opportunities to learn more about development. Archivists can become donor-literate by becoming active in the ubiquitous library friends group or by getting involved with United Way-type community campaigns. Such participation provides necessary experience in planning events and asking for donations. The best way to become more donor-literate, however, is to work with a library development officer. Like archivists, development officers are professionals,

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<sup>4</sup> F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Marovich, "Securing a Wise Agreement," *Currents*, Council for Advancement and Support of Education (November/December 2000): 36.



and working with a good one can be the best training.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most important things development officers can teach archivists are the mechanisms of moving a financial donor to the stage of actually giving money. Initially, development officers concentrate on determining whether an individual might be a potential donor. To do this they will talk to peers of the prospect and do research to determine if there is a capability to give. If there is, they will arrange an opportunity to visit with the prospect to gauge her or his interest and to get to know the prospect better. The development officer might also ask the potential donor to help in the development of a proposal. After the initial visit, an invitation is extended for the prospective donor to visit the repository for a tour, exhibit, or activity. The relationship with the financial donor is seen as an ongoing conversation, and throughout this process the donor should regard the development officer or archivist as a peer.

Part of becoming donor-literate is understanding that university libraries are “constituency-challenged.”<sup>7</sup> Libraries and archives in university settings are without a ready pool of potential financial donors because universities manage competition for funding by controlling who is allowed to approach individuals. Administrators determine within which unit of the university a potential financial donor has been most closely affiliated, and contact with that donor is then limited to that unit. Unfortunately, former students are not identified as being affiliated with the library, and therefore the library is denied the opportunity to request funds from most alumni.

Becoming donor-literate also means recognizing all the levels of competition for the private dollar—among institutions, between units within the university, and between competing needs within units. Many types of not-for-profits court the same funding sources as universities. Within the university, the library is competing with sponsored research that can be com-

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<sup>6</sup> A recent article in *Library Trends* reported that for every \$3-5 million to be raised, organizations need one professional director of development. To make money in development an institution has to spend money on specialized staff, travel, and other expenses. Susan K. Martin, “Academic Library Fund-Raising: Organization, Process and Politics,” *Library Trends* 48, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 567-568.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

mercially profitable and with university athletics that can offer tremendous advertising opportunities for sponsors. While the archives can be a focal point, a “jewel in the crown,” it does not tend to be the focus of development efforts. Within the library there are also many competing needs. The named-book endowment is one of the most common fundraising strategies, and it is often a challenge to convince administrators that manuscript processing could have similar appeal to financial donors. Only two library directors of the ninety-nine who responded to an Association of Research Libraries’ Research Collections Committee survey evaluating special collections programs reported development officers devoted exclusively to special collections.<sup>8</sup>

To make money in development, the archives must spend money on gifts and event costs. Because university libraries lack a constituency and face fierce competition for funding, they must create a constituency among the next generation of alumni through programs such as open houses, gifts such as sport bottles with archives and library logos, and archives’ sponsorship of concerts or other high-profile student events. This kind of development is “casting bread upon the water,” and its generosity should yield results for the next generation of archivists.

Archives also need to draw upon their relationships with other areas of the university. For example, academic units could be asked to “tithe” a few good prospects in recognition of the value of the archives to the scholarly life of the community. Libraries could approach successful fundraisers, such as athletic associations, about receiving a percentage of the money raised through televised games or other windfalls, or ask academic units to take the step of earmarking a percentage of funds raised to support the archives.

#### **BUILDING A CASE FOR FUNDING**

For many archives and manuscript repositories, the great expense of processing abundant and voluminous late

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<sup>8</sup> Judith M. Panitch, *Special Collections in ARL Libraries, Results of the 1998 Survey Sponsored by the ARL Research Collections Committee* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2001), 53.



twentieth-century collections drives the need for increased development.<sup>9</sup> Archives function in the market economy and are not above its constraints, but they are not for profit. Repositories purchase goods and services in the market place, have seen the expansion of costs, and struggle to maintain their productivity; but they still do not collect a fee at the reading-room door or design cost-recovery mechanisms for collections delivered by the Internet. Donors of collections are unaware of the expenses associated with processing manuscript collections and providing for their preservation needs. Administrators balance the needs of the archives with other pressing concerns. Indeed, one of the greatest things to come from the evaluation of the need for private money may be an increase in support from our own institutions. One way to communicate our needs is to articulate clearly the nature of the difficulties we face.

The federal government creates some of the fastest growing collections, and within the last decade some universities holding political collections have started endowments to support them. There is a long history of governments' turning their functions over to universities, including basic research and acculturating our young. The government subsidies received by most universities, however, are not sufficient to support these assigned functions. Collections of members of Congress are poster children for the information explosion. They are a classic example of mandates legislated but not funded. The huge volume of the collections hides the significant records, and the collections continue to grow.

By designating the papers of its members as private, Congress delegates a tremendous responsibility to individual members and to diverse public and private repositories, yet there is no government granting agency that will provide money to help process them.<sup>10</sup> Because responsibility for caring for congress-

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<sup>9</sup> Libraries' greatest need is funding to cover the cost of processing, but it is difficult to raise money for this kind of nuts-and-bolts work. As a result, funds not earmarked for any specific purpose are the most likely to go to manuscript processing.

<sup>10</sup> The few government agencies that fund archives are narrowing the foci of their programs. It is far easier to get funding for preservation projects or electronic records projects than for basic, but essential, processing, and it is extremely difficult to get funding for processing congressional collections.

sional papers is distributed, there are no collection strategies for state delegations, regions, or the nation as a whole. There are no electronic records consortia for congressional papers and no support for activism to save these records of the great issues of the century.

The political collections held by two southern universities illustrate the fundraising challenge these archives face. The two institutions hold a total of nine collections from the United States Senate, twenty-one from the United States House, and nine gubernatorial collections. These collections comprise a total of 6,402 cubic feet. They have processed 1,590 cubic feet, or 25 percent, leaving 4,812 cubic feet unprocessed. If they set a goal of processing this backlog over a ten-year period, they would need to process 481 cubic feet per year. Using Paul Ericksen and Robert Shuster's estimate that it requires 15.1 hours to process one cubic foot, this rate of processing equates to 7,266 hours of staff time.<sup>11</sup> If the repositories were able to hire graduate students at a rate of \$10 per hour, the labor cost alone would be \$72,661 per year. If endowments were yielding 5 percent a year, the universities would have to raise a total of \$1.5 million in order to generate a sufficient yearly income to cover the student labor.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the repositories would need to purchase supplies and provide supervision.

Dedicated effort is required for this level of fundraising. Archivists should consider enlisting previous donors or high-profile users for assistance in asking new donors to fund the processing of their collections. Repositories might establish friends groups and set high, tax-deductible membership fees or organize \$500-per-plate dinners featuring dignitaries and celebrities. Part of the battle is increasing the notice and profile of the repository. Archives sponsorship of the activities of other high profile not-for-profits (e.g., presses or public radio) and glossy publications highlighting collections in areas of special interest

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Ericksen and Robert Shuster, "Beneficial Shocks: The Place of Processing Cost Analysis in Archival Administration," *American Archivist* 58 (Winter 1995): 32-52.

<sup>12</sup> The author thanks Herbert Hartsook, University of South Carolina, and Katherine I. Mainardis, University of Wyoming, for sharing information about their repositories. The University of South Carolina and the University of Florida provided the numbers cited in this section.



(e.g., gardening, design, or other disciplines documented in the collections) can help to attract attention. Naming opportunities for symposiums, buildings, and publications satisfy a donor's desire for recognition, while supporting the work and goals of the repository.

In addition, development activities should include attention to a special area in development known as stewardship. Stewardship is the relationship after the gift. Most archives stay in touch with the people and organizations donating collections. They recognize the gift publicly, thank the donor formally, and keep him or her informed about significant events related to the collection. In the development arena, stewardship can be enhanced by promoting sponsored projects through web sites tracking their progress or through advertisements in a local paper thanking all types of donors for their support.

#### **ENTREPRENEURIAL COLLECTING**

Not only are archives without a constituency, but administrators at all levels of the university use the archives as an incentive to raise money for other parts of the institution. From faculty members, to library development officers, all the way up to the university president, representatives of the university are leaning across the dinner table and saying: "Give us your money and the archives will take your papers." University development officers and administrators do not understand the impact of these promises on their special collections departments. Their focus is on finding money for scholarships or curing pediatric AIDS.

To stem entrepreneurial collecting by the university, the library must educate the university community about the importance of building archival and manuscript collections in focused areas to support the institution's strengths and academic programs and about the inherent costs in accepting new collections. Development activities, like preservation, the systems office, the digital library, and the archives, should serve the broader vision of the collection development policy. Clear-cut policies circulated throughout the university can support setting boundaries with prospective donors. Archivists should be able to describe and explain their expenses and make clear how the archives contributes to the rest of the community. The library director plays a crucial role in fund-raising for the academic library, and her or his support of collection development goals

and ability to define boundaries for the library will do much to stop entrepreneurial collecting.

When entrepreneurial collecting cannot be avoided, archivists can make the best of the situation. They can practice rigid appraisal standards in the face of charming and powerful donors and write proactive deeds of gifts that allow for destruction and reformatting as needed. Archivists can take advantage of the new relationship occasioned by the donation of papers and ask these donors for money to help support their collection.

In the beginning, archives development may feel like a faith-based initiative. In his article, "Donor Relations as Public Relations: Toward a Philosophy of Fund-Raising," Robert Wedgeworth notes: "[T]he process of creating and maintaining relationships is at the heart of any successful fund-raising campaign."<sup>13</sup> It is archivists' ability to maintain relationships with donors, an ability developed through collection-solicitation programs, that makes them great fund-raisers. Archivists' most immediate and basic imperative is to collect objectively and soundly. In the face of the increasing size of twentieth-century collections and decreasing sources of public funding, archivists must also become experts in development. Through development, we enhance our curatorial stewardship by fostering new partnerships for managing our cultural heritage.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Wedgeworth, "Donor Relations as Public Relations: Towards a Philosophy of Fund-Raising," *Library Trends* 48, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 536.