

Some examples of Queer Community Archives Projects

Lesbian Herstory Archives (Brooklyn, NY)
Pittsburgh Queer History Project (Pittsburgh, PA)
GLBT Historical Society (San Francisco, CA)
Digital Transgender Archives (Online)
Transgender Archives at U. Victoria
Arizona Queer Archives at U. Arizona
Tetter Collection at U. Minnesota
One Archives at UC-Los Angeles
John J. Wilcox Jr. Archives (Philadelphia, PA)
National LGBT History Archives (New York City)
GLBTQ Special Collections at U. Washington
Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum
Project (Seattle, WA)

Why do you want to create an archives?

Are you working with a pre-existing body of records or will you continue to seek out materials to be donated?
What is your scope?
Consider what time periods, geographic regions, and economies are important to the project.
Try to decide early on if you are starting an ongoing collecting mission, or are gathering materials to give to another memory institution. If you plan to donate them to another institution, try to get in contact to gauge their interest and seek support for the work.
Keep in mind that starting a community archive will change the way you a community sees you. Always respect what people choose to tell you or withhold as part of your new role.

Community Archives in Context

We've shared some templates for archiving, but they work better in the abstract than in reality. Start with a template but ultimately do what makes sense for your location and your community.

No archive is fail-proof. All archives have degrading materials, materials with lost provenance, materials they can't explain, materials that are scary, confusing, and controversial.

Traditional archives are not well suited to community histories; great for how to resources and partnerships, but not a yardstick against which to measure yourself.

You will learn, make mistakes, and embarrass yourself along the way. Community archiving means the archivist is always a part of the equation and accountable to community criticism. Think of the archive as made up of human relationships. The goal is to think carefully, rather than become a rigid system.

Queer Archives, Right Now
TUFFEST 2018 Workshop
From the Pittsburgh Queer History Project



What Makes a Record?

Records document memories and events associated with them. They take many forms ranging from the physical to the digital.

4 Quick Questions to Ask Before Collecting

1. What does the record mean to the donor/community member?
2. What can you say about the record's history?
3. What role has the donor had in creating and preserving these records?
4. Have you clarified the donor's expectations for preservation and access?

You've Got Records, What Now?

Keep stories with the records.

Talk extensively with donors to clarify the history of the materials, who made them, why, and why have they kept them. This could take the form of an oral history interview, or a text document, but you'll want to keep documentation for your own use down the road.

Take care of the records.

Keep a working document that preserves the donor's descriptions of items, along with when you received them, and where they are stored. Make a note about when donors have contributed more than one lot of materials, and if you want to keep them organized by donor, or if you will arrange materials by theme and content.

Share your records.

Sharing records can be a challenge if you don't have a physical space to yourself. However there are plenty of ways to get your records out in the public. Consider informal visits to others' homes, pop-up displays and small exhibits at other institutions, and public screenings of audio visual material. For digital collections, consider using wordpress or similar website formats, along with social media accounts to spark interest.

You don't have to wait until the whole archive is finished to share it, you'll always have a backlog of some kind, and sharing is how you get people interested in visiting you later on.

CMS & Online Sharing

Wordpress - Easy to use, fast to set up, very user-friendly. Can be difficult for managing physical locations and large collections. (Used by the Split Britches Archive).

Omeka - Set-up takes some technical knowledge. Online community users building plugins/tools. Great for small/medium projects. (PQHP recommends!).

CollectiveAccess - Technical knowledge must. Popular with museums. Better for projects with advanced collection management needs. (See the Mattress Factory Gallery website for an example).

Murkutu - Designed for indigenous digital heritage materials. Great for restricting access to particular groups / providing detailed community context. (Check out the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal!).

Four Quick Tips for conservation:

Store objects off the floor, away from windows (sunlight), plumbing, heating/cooling vents, in a cool space with consistent somewhat low humidity.

Place acid free paper between documents and photographs if they are turning yellow or becoming brittle.

Rewind all magnetic tape media to the beginning after viewing and before storage.

Store backup of digital materials on separate drives - ideally in two different physical locations, as well as cloud storage.

Tips for Scanning Documents

For standard documents printed at home on an inkjet printer scan at 300 dpi.

If a set of documents was printed after 1970s and seems physically stable (no tears or fibres falling off), you can scan them using a document feeder. Never put thin typewriter paper or torn paper through a document feeder.

Scan documents, especially photographs, in .TIFF format.

When all else fails, there are free and highly functional scanning apps for smartphones that compensate for the distortion of photographs that are not found in flatbed scanning.