



A More Complete Record: The Case for Archival Partnerships

The Radcliffe Workshop on Technology & Archival Processing

Summary and Takeaway

Friday, April 13
Knafel Center, Radcliffe Institute | *Invitational*

1:30-3:30 **Why Partner? | *Interactive Session***

Moderator: **Reginald Chapple**, Chief, Office of Partnerships and Philanthropy, National Parks Service

Collaboration: Perspectives from Library Directors

- **Monika Rhue**, Director of Library Services at Johnson C. Smith University; Board Chair, HBCU Library Alliance
- **Brenda Johnson**, Library Director & University Librarian, University of Chicago Library

A Pilot Collaboration between Spelman College Archives & Schlesinger Library

- **Amanda Strauss**, Manager for Special Projects & Digital Services, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University
- **Holly Smith**, College Archivist, Spelman College

Technology & Collaboration

- **Cecily Marcus**, Principal Investigator of Umbra Search, Givens Collection of African American Literature Curator, University of Minnesota Libraries
- **Trevor James Bond**, Plateau Peoples' Web Portal, Co-Director of the Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation and the Associate Dean for Digital Initiatives and Special Collections at the Washington State University Libraries

SUMMARY

The session opened with a group brainstorming exercise. Workshop attendees worked together to list reasons to partner and to define the skills or tools necessary for successful partnerships. Some of the key themes that emerged from this exercise were:

Reasons to partner:

- Resource sharing and economies of scale
- Deepening professional understanding
- Engage with a broader audience and a wider research community
- Aligning goals and purposes toward a shared outcome(s)
- Increase impact, stronger together; create community, which brings strength to all partners
- Capacity building, sharing expertise, and gaining new perspectives
- Increase access and make collections more discoverable
- Funders love partnerships
- Mission alignment
- New perspectives

Skills or tools to create a partnership:

- Open, frequent, clear communication and active listening
- Self-awareness
- Analysis/MOU writing
- Project management
- Transparency; relationship and trust-building
- Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills; diplomacy
- Cultural competence/contextual intelligence; community awareness
- Being able to meet people where they are
- Best practices and using a common language
- Subject area or language specialization
- Respect and empathy (patience)
- Clearly defined goals—mutually beneficial
- “Let go of ego”

The panelists presented in pairs, discussing themes of partnership and analyzing projects that have been successful because of partnerships.

Perspectives from Library Directors: Brenda Johnson & Monika Rhue

Johnson and Rhue emphasized that collaboration is not just about the end result, but rather is an opportunity to grow and develop skills and relationships. A successful collaboration must not solely be

based on a desire to partner with a specific individual or institution, but should be guided by an alignment of end-goals.

A Pilot Collaboration between Spelman College Archives & Schlesinger Library: Holly Smith and Amanda Strauss

Smith and Strauss discussed a digitization and photograph metadata project that Spelman and Schlesinger have started. They noted that harnessing archivists' passion for institutions can fuel partnerships. They also pointed to relationship building as a key component of facilitating collaborations and creating partnerships.

Technology & Collaboration: Cecily Marcus and Trevor James Bond

Marcus and Bond discussed their own experiences with collaborative digital projects, emphasizing the unique ability of archival partnerships to bring together a variety of perspectives. Both Marcus's Umbra Search aggregator for African-American history and Bond's Mukurtu software for narrating indigenous culture work to give voice to marginalized communities and histories. Cultivating trusting relationships with organizations and experts, including the DPLA and indigenous tribal leaders, produces accurate and respectful archival representations of marginalized cultures and materials. The digital nature of both projects allows scholars, activists, and the general public to access resources that may be unavailable elsewhere.

TAKEAWAY

The experiences shared by the panelists demonstrate that collaboration is possible, as long as the participating parties are engaged, respectful, and set clear goals from the beginning. Despite funding limitations, institutional commitments to learning, growth, and social responsibility can produce successful partnerships. When working with materials and narratives from underrepresented cultures or communities, institutions have a responsibility to collaborate with members of these cultures or experts on their histories in order to ensure that archival narratives include valuable perspectives that have traditionally been silenced or erased. Digital partnerships can be especially beneficial because they allow institutions to share their collaborative work with wider audiences.

3:30-4:00 Wrap-up & Closing Remarks

- **Julieanna Richardson**, Founder and Executive Director of The History Makers
- **Khalil Gibran Muhammad**, Professor of History, Race and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School

Richardson urged all participants to think about how they could solidify ideas for partnership generated by the workshop into firm commitments with specific timeframes, to ensure maximum accountability.

She asked a few participants to share further details about their existing partnerships and next steps, and encouraged everyone to complete “Partnership Commitment Cards” at each table. Please see the results of these commitment cards at <https://projects.ig.harvard.edu/radworkshop2018/partnership-ideas>.

Muhammad outlined his vision for a more diverse, respectful, and collaborative archival community. He proposed the creation of regional consortia in which member institutions can combine their resources in order to share knowledge and educate each other and the public. This mutual education is especially important in repairing and rewriting the relationships between HBCUs and PWIs, as the collaborative consortia will work to elevate oppressed voices, setting a racially inclusive example for public educational and political institutions.