

## Sustainable Earned Revenue Strategies for Community-Based Archives

SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archive), the lead applicant, in partnership with the Texas After Violence Project, La Historia Society Museum, and The History Project, and researchers Neville Vakharia and Dr. Michelle Caswell, requests \$750,000 from IMLS to conduct a three-year, cohort-based applied research study to develop and evaluate earned revenue strategies for community-based archives (CBAs) and small to medium-sized libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs).<sup>1</sup> The project addresses IMLS NLG Program [Goal 5 / Objective 5.2](#) by leveraging the diverse missions and knowledge assets of CBAs to produce approaches that strengthen financial sustainability and are replicable by other organizations. The study will investigate three research questions:

**Research Question #1:** Which earned revenue generation strategies most effectively build on the strengths of community-based archives?

**Research Question #2:** How can community-based archives develop and implement earned revenue strategies that ethically use their knowledge assets?

**Research Question #3:** What, if any, interventions are needed in order for these strategies to be replicable by small and medium-sized independent libraries, archives, and museums?

A “how-to” monograph, series of webinars, and web portal will be produced and shared with CBAs, other LAMs, policymakers, and funders that support these institutions. By investigating paths toward financial sustainability, this study addresses one of the most urgent challenges facing these institutions today.

### Project Justification

#### **Statement of Need**

Community-based archives (CBAs) hold some of the most valuable materials documenting the lives of marginalized people, and mostly reside in spaces outside of traditional academic and government-run cultural heritage institutions. The Society of American Archivists uses the following definition:

Community archives are the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential ... [T]he impetus and direction should come from within the community itself.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their indispensable value to the marginalized communities they represent, it is a well-documented problem that CBAs face challenges in finding sustainable revenue models. In 2020, the Community Archives Collaborative conducted a survey of 28 community-based archives across the U.S., finding that only **two of the surveyed CBAs generated a quarter or more of their income from earned revenue**. The survey showed that the vast majority of revenue for CBAs comes from grants and donations, with a few CBAs supported by their hosting institutions. Yet in the overall nonprofit sector, **55%** of all funding comes from earned revenue, which is more than grants, donations, and government funding combined.<sup>3</sup> This is a striking disparity, prompting the question: if other nonprofits are able to diversify their funding between earned revenue, grants, and donations, can CBAs follow suit?

It is clear that dependence on grant funding restricts the growth and sustainability of CBAs. In 2018, SAADA participated in “Architecting Sustainable Futures,” a symposium organized by Shift Collective and supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that convened 24 CBAs, museums, and libraries to make recommendations toward acquiring sustainable funding. The [symposium report](#) concluded that “**grant funding is not a sustainable business model**” for CBAs, as grants are often restricted for specific projects and have administrative requirements beyond the capacity of most smaller organizations. Writing, managing, and reporting on grants requires additional staff labor that is beyond the capacity of smaller organizations. While partnerships with large, well-funded universities can provide funding and stability, many CBAs find that such arrangements result in a loss of autonomy and power imbalance favoring the larger

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<sup>1</sup> SMU DataArts categorizes small (non-art) museums as those with an annual budget under \$430,353, and medium-sized as those with a budget under \$3.7 million (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Flinn, Andrew. “Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges.” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 151–176.

<sup>3</sup> Kim Klein, *Fundraising for Social Change* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), p. 5.

institution.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, the symposium found that successful CBAs had to develop multiple income streams over time that included partnerships, grants, and earned revenue, in addition to broad-based community support in the form of individual giving.

Earned revenue is an effective and versatile source of income. Business models such as licensing, publishing, product sales, event sales, and fee-for-service (consulting, educational workshops, speaking fees, etc.) are successfully adopted by nonprofits of differing sizes and missions as sustaining forms of revenue. Implementing an earned revenue strategy could help many CBAs achieve financial sustainability, but given their relative newness, there is very little sector-wide knowledge about which earned revenue strategies are best suited to CBAs and their unique institutional strengths. To date, there have not been any systematic attempts to study the efficacy of different approaches. It is especially vital that CBAs approach revenue generation with as much foreknowledge, rigor, and insight as possible because a single failed venture could lead to the collapse of an organization—and with it, the loss of a community’s intangible cultural heritage.

Consider, for instance, the Mayme A. Clayton Library & Museum in Los Angeles. During her lifetime, Mayme Clayton (1923-2006) amassed the largest privately held collection of African American historical materials in the world: the Western States Black Research and Education Center. Unfortunately, the museum was forced to close in 2019 due to its inability to pay rent.<sup>5</sup> While the collection of over 3.5 million items has since found a home at a nearby university, it was not the solution that Clayton would have envisioned or hoped for. She had spent her lifetime collecting ephemera—much of it purchased on her own modest salary—that larger institutions had deemed unimportant and had not recognized as valuable until she had begun to receive acclaim later in life. A similar fate befell Dr. Jamie Lee’s Arizona Queer Archives, which were passed around several institutions before finding a home at the University of Arizona’s library.

It is a shared view among CBAs that operating independently of universities or large cultural institutions has many advantages: specificity of mission, flexibility of operations, agency around programmatic decisions, and the ability to maintain a singular focus on the community, to name a few. The main obstacle, of course, is the difficulty of being funded. But funding from grants or institutional partnerships can pose ethical dilemmas for CBAs. The misalignment of values that often arises when CBAs rely on funding from well-heeled donors was a key point of discussion at “Archiving Sustainable Futures.” CBA leaders recalled many situations in which “partnering with a university to gain access to resources or applying for certain kinds of funding would have put them in situations that betrayed their commitment to their community.”<sup>6</sup> Such quandaries of “financial integrity”—that is, whether to engage in such partnerships when the provided funding could be transformative for an organization—are common in the nonprofit sector, but are exacerbated for small and medium-sized LAMs.<sup>7</sup> For CBAs, remaining independent from external influences helps ensure that they do not compromise in their commitment to the marginalized communities they serve.

Our research project will be the first to investigate the topic of earned revenue for CBAs and other LAMs using a structured, analytical approach. The need for this work is urgent: many CBAs will have to decide this year whether they can continue to keep their doors open, maintain their collections, and provide public programs. By testing the efficacy of four earned revenue strategies, each individualized to the strengths of one organization from a diverse cohort, the proposed research study will generate knowledge that helps the growing number of CBAs serve their communities more effectively and for the long term. Ultimately, our work will empower these institutions to take informed steps toward creating and implementing their own sustainable earned revenue strategies.

### **Target Group and Beneficiaries**

Four groups will significantly benefit from our research: community-based archives; other small and medium-sized LAMs; funders, partners, and policymakers; and the marginalized populations served by these organizations.

#### *(1) Community-based archives*

The research study was conceived and designed with the intent of benefiting the field of CBAs and other community-based storytelling institutions in the United States. Because CBAs often begin as grassroots efforts

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<sup>4</sup> Jules, Bergis. “Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives.” *Shift Collective*, published February 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Martin-Straw, “The Clayton is Closed – MCLM Takes Steps to Chart a New Path.” *Culver City Crossroads*, August 1, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Rhode, Deborah L., and Amanda K. Packel. “Ethics and Nonprofits.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 7, no. 3 (2009): 29–35.

before formally incorporating, it is difficult to estimate how many CBAs exist, but the number is in the thousands and is growing each year. Dr. Michelle Caswell estimates that there are around 5,000 CBAs in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, research will yield benefits for the tens of thousands of practitioners who work with, volunteer for, or otherwise contribute time in various capacities to these organizations.

(2) *Small and medium-sized libraries, archives, and museums*

According to the 2016 National Arts Index Report, over 40,000 nonprofit organizations file annual returns as part of NTEE Major Group A, which consists of arts, culture, and humanities organizations.<sup>9</sup> Within this category are libraries and museums, art galleries, film festivals, folk arts alliances, performing arts organizations, museums, historical societies, and cultural centers. The same report found that even in 2013—a period of strong economic health in the U.S.—**42 percent of NTEE Group A organizations failed to generate positive net income**, further highlighting the need for this work. The COVID-19 pandemic and other periods of economic uncertainty have further demonstrated that it is vital for LAMs to have diverse, sustainable funding streams that include earned revenue.

(3) *Funders, institutional partners, and policymakers*

Another key target group of our work are the funders who support community archives: IMLS, NEH, CLIR, the Mellon Foundation, and others. While this funding has been crucial to many CBAs (including this cohort), many funders typically only support short-term initiatives, when what CBAs identify is most needed are investments that support sustainability: operational support, capacity building, and other funding practices that are more inclusive to smaller organizations. Our research will provide specific data about how funders can best support CBAs by investing in long-term solutions, which will help them carry out their missions and create maximal impact. Just as funders will benefit, so too will institutional partners. Universities and large cultural institutions will use our findings to better understand how to negotiate equitable partnerships with smaller institutions. Finally, policy researchers and legislators will benefit. Our work will help lawmakers and policymakers understand how to support CBAs for the long term while making efficient use of their own resources.

(4) *Service communities*

The ultimate beneficiaries of our work are the marginalized populations these archives serve. Because CBAs are collaborative undertakings that are based in communities whose stories are not proportionally represented in traditional repositories, African American, Latino, Asian American, LGBTQ+, and other minoritized groups will benefit from the strengthening of their community institutions. By helping CBAs and other LAMs take steps toward financial self-sufficiency, we are also providing them with the agency to decide which programs they choose to run, which stories they decide to document, and the organizational strategies they seek to pursue.

## **Project Work Plan**

### **Overview of Activities**

#### *Summary*

The applied research project will take place from **August 1, 2023, to July 31, 2026**, and will consist of three one-year phases. In Year 1, researchers will develop a field survey asking community-based institutions about their experience with earned revenue strategies. The four CBAs in the cohort will identify earned revenue strategies and work with business consultants to develop a strategic plan for generating revenue. To incorporate other perspectives and extend learnings beyond the cohort, in Year 2, each CBA will deploy their earned revenue strategy with continued support from business consultants. CBAs will record data with guidance from the researchers to inform the evaluation and dissemination process. In Year 3, cohort members will conduct a debrief of results. Researchers will conduct qualitative interviews with study participants and formally evaluate collected data. Research findings will be disseminated to the field through the publication of a “how to” monograph, a series of webinars and/or conference presentations that share results and learnings of each cohort organization at the end of each year, and an interactive web portal to make findings easily accessible.

#### *Research Themes*

Project Researchers will primarily interrogate three parallel research themes throughout the project, corresponding directly to the three research questions stated in the project introduction:

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Dr. Michelle Caswell, director of the UCLA Community Archives Lab, 22 February 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Roland J. Kushner and Randy Cohen, *National Arts Index 2016: An Annual Measure of the Vitality of Arts and Culture in the United States, 2002-2013*, Americans for the Arts, 2016.

- (1) the financial soundness and business sustainability of the earned revenue strategy,
- (2) the earned revenue strategy's advancement of the organization's mission and its ethical alignment with the organization's values,
- (3) replicability of project results by other CBAs and small/medium-size LAMs.

Neville Vakharia will primarily be responsible for investigating the first theme. Prof. Vakharia will conduct a literature review, field scan survey, and analysis of current revenue models in Year 1, as well as assess cohort strategies and produce an evaluative summary report in Year 3. Dr. Michelle Caswell will be responsible for investigating the second theme. Dr. Caswell will provide supplementary assistance to Prof. Vakharia with designing the field scan survey in Year 1. In Year 3, Dr. Caswell will conduct qualitative interviews with representatives from each organization (as further elaborated in **Year 3** below). The third research theme will be jointly investigated by Project Researchers and the cohort. We aim to determine whether, and how, results may be replicable through the revenue strategy questions asked by the field scan survey in Year 1, the webinar conversations at the ends of each year, and ongoing conversations held with other CBAs. Research themes will serve as signposts for the monograph and web portal to be developed and shared at the end of Year 3. Year 2 is primarily concerned with deployment of earned revenue strategies for each cohort member, so researcher involvement in that year is minimal (as is reflected on the project schedule) aside from attending virtual cohort meetings and providing guidance as needed about data collection.

### **Year 1: Strategy Development**

#### **August 2023 - July 2024**

The first year will begin with a two-day kickoff convening at SAADA's headquarters in Center City, Philadelphia in August 2023. Each cohort member will send two representatives: their Executive Director and one supporting staff member. Also present will be Project Researchers Neville Vakharia and Dr. Michelle Caswell, for a total of ten participants. Participants will gather for a workshop on financial literacy, a review of the project goals and timeline, and a conversation about each organization's revenue streams and knowledge assets.

In the first two months, Professor Neville Vakharia will conduct a literature review on revenue diversification in nonprofit cultural organizations in order to determine the state of the field. In addition, Prof. Vakharia will design a field scan survey of current revenue models to be distributed among CBAs and small/medium-sized LAMs, aiming to collect at least 50 responses. Dr. Michelle Caswell will provide support to Prof. Vakharia in designing and disseminating the survey, ensuring that questions involving ethics and mission alignment are included and that the survey reaches a diverse group of CBAs. Following the survey, Prof. Vakharia will analyze its results and summarize the findings in a report to the cohort in October. The results of the field scan survey will also be used in comparing the experiences of other CBAs with the experiences of the research cohort as captured in Year 3.

Based on results from the field scan, each CBA will identify an earned revenue strategy for their organization between October and December 2023. The cohort members will coordinate so that no two revenue strategies will be in the same category; if one cohort member selects merchandise sales, for example, no other member will select that strategy. Once each CBA identifies the strategy best suited to their organization, they will identify and hire a business consultant with specific expertise in that revenue strategy area, with the aim of having the revenue strategy and consultant in place by February 2024. (For more information, see **Business Consultants**.) SAADA will assist cohort members with the identification of business consultants as necessary. Starting in February and continuing through July 2024, CBAs will meet monthly with their business consultants, working together to create a one-year strategic business plan to implement their selected earned revenue strategy.

Every three months, the entire cohort and project researchers will have a virtual meeting to share learnings and discuss individual progress on identifying and developing a strategy. The Executive Director from each cohort organization is expected to be at each meeting; other staff members involved in developing or researching earned revenue strategies are encouraged to attend as well. The Program Manager will identify opportunities to share Year 1 learnings, such as conferences and other gatherings (e.g., the Community Archives Collaborative). Starting in May 2024, cohort members and/or researchers will share their findings from Year 1—the literature review and field scan results, earned revenue strategies for each organization, and business plans for the deployment phase—via webinars, conferences, CBA gatherings, or whichever venues are expected to have a high level of participation.

In the phase's final two months, the entire cohort will convene virtually to establish revenue targets and create evaluative metrics for each revenue strategy. During these convenings, the cohort will also be assisted in research planning, refining data collection processes, and defining evaluative metrics by the project's research methods advisors.

## **Year 2: Deployment**

### **August 2024 - July 2025**

In the research project's second year, community institutions will deploy their earned revenue strategies as outlined within their business plans. Due to capacity-related challenges around implementing a new business model while maintaining existing operations, grant funds will be allocated via subcontract toward the hiring and training of a dedicated revenue strategy implementation staff member for each organization within the research cohort. This process of hiring will have begun in May 2024, prior to the start of Year 2, and may continue until September. A cohort member that determines it already has staff well-suited to implementing its designated revenue strategy may use existing personnel; the organization may then use subcontract funding toward other expenses deemed necessary in implementing the strategy (e.g., additional consulting fees, manufacturing costs, equipment purchases).

Ongoing throughout the deployment phase, representatives from each CBA will continue to meet with business consultants on at least a monthly basis to discuss progress in implementing earned revenue strategies and make adjustments as recommended by the consultants. In addition, each cohort organization will collect revenue data as specified by the evaluative metrics established at the end of Year 1. Leaders from each CBA will continue to have quarterly meetings with the research methods advisors throughout Year 2 to ensure that data collection and research implementation are proceeding as planned. As in Year 1, cohort members will share findings through webinars, conferences, or other gatherings as deemed appropriate between May and July 2025.

## **Year 3: Evaluation and Dissemination**

### **August 2025 - July 2026**

#### *Evaluation*

Starting in August 2025, the cohort members will conduct a three-month internal debrief process evaluating the efficacy of the implemented earned revenue strategies. The debrief will kick off with a second in-person convening in August 2025 in Los Angeles, which is home to La Historia Society Museum and Dr. Caswell's Community Archives Lab at UCLA. UCLA will provide the venue for this convening, removing the need to rent space. Similarly to the first convening, there will be eleven participants: two each from TAVP, THP, and La Historia, three from SAADA, and Dr. Caswell and Prof. Vakharia, with the four Executive Directors leading the convening. At the convening, cohort members will recap the deployment phase as well as discuss outreach and evaluation plans for the upcoming year.

During the debrief process, Dr. Caswell will conduct a series of 40 qualitative interviews, composed of 10 interviews with representatives of each CBA in the cohort. Interviews will last 45 minutes and will be conducted with a variety of cohort leaders, CBA staff, community members who were involved in earned revenue strategies, and other partners or consultants. Following the completion of interviews, Dr. Caswell's team will spend three months transcribing and analyzing the interviews, completing this process around January 2026. During the same six-month period (August 2025 to January 2026), Prof. Vakharia will lead the assessment and evaluation of the deployment phase. Prof. Vakharia will analyze collected data within the context of the cohort's organizational needs and the field scan survey from Year 1. Prof. Vakharia will summarize these findings in an evaluative summary report, to be completed in January 2026, which will help cohort members with modifying earned revenue strategies as needed after the grant period. The summary report will also be shared with the field of CBAs and other LAMs, along with the three primary work products described in the next section. Finally, throughout the final year the researchers will organize and write about the research study, with the intention of submitting a paper on earned revenue in CBAs and other LAMs to several open-access, peer-reviewed academic journals, either in the final three months or following the grant period.

#### *Dissemination and Work Products*

The project's final six months (January to June 2026) will be focused on dissemination. The project team has decided to share the following work products in a free, digital format in order to maximize accessibility and promote equity.

- (1) **An instructional "how-to" monograph**, to be published in a digital format by the cohort, sharing the cohort's experiences with earned revenue and assessing each strategy's viability for different organization types. The monograph will provide guidance as to how CBAs and small/medium-sized LAMs can identify and implement an

earned revenue strategy most suited to their community and knowledge resources. The monograph will require an estimated six months (February to July 2026) to write, edit, and publish; SAADA will take the lead on this project and hire an editing consultant and graphic designer.

- (2) **A series of four webinars**, one led by each CBA in the research cohort, that assesses their earned revenue strategy (e.g., merchandising), shares challenges faced and lessons learned, and provides guidance to other organizations. Webinars will be recorded and distributed online via the research cohort's networks between May and July 2023.
- (3) **An interactive web portal** with links to the aforementioned monograph and webinars, as well as Professor Vakharia's evaluative summary report and other resources on earned revenue generation. SAADA will produce this web portal during the project's final four months, from March to July 2023.

In addition to a wide range of CBAs and small/medium LAMs, the research cohort will share the following work products with funders, policy experts, and state and local governments. Outreach methods include social media, mailing lists, conference presentations, and the Community Archives Collaborative's gatherings, all methods which will be used to ensure that this work is as widely read as possible.

There are many distinct channels through which project results and work products will be shared with a wide audience. First, each research cohort member will use its own communication channels (email listserv, social media, press releases, and coordinated promotion efforts through organizational partners) to publicize the webinars and web portal and promote distribution of the monograph. Second, our research methods advisors will share work products with the community-based organizations in their networks seeking information and resources about financial topics. Third, SAADA will share work products with the organizations that we connected with during the Year 1 field scan survey. Fourth, as co-leaders of the Community Archives Collaborative, SAADA and TAVP will share findings at the CAC's annual convening and other meetings. Finally, we plan to share project results with foundation, corporate, and government funders who work with community-based archives and other small and medium-sized LAMs. With his extensive experience working for arts and culture funding and research organizations, project advisor Neville Vakharia will use his networks in connecting us with grantmakers and policy experts. We hope that as a result of our work, funders will choose to invest more in earned revenue strategies for smaller organizations, which will create a more sustainable sector by decreasing reliance on external funding in the long term.

### **Cohort Involvement, Research Experience, Diversity, and Leadership**

"Sustainable Earned Revenue Strategies" is a major priority for each of the four community-based archives in the cohort. Representing the cohort in meetings will be each organization's Executive Director: Samip Mallick (SAADA, also Project Director), Gabriel Solis (TAVP), Joan Ilacqua (The History Project), and Rosa Peña (La Historia Society Museum). We believe it is important for there to be buy-in from each cohort member at the highest level in order to ensure that research results will be able to drive executive decisions. In addition, SAADA has carefully considered feedback and input from the other cohort members in developing a research methodology and work plan that takes into consideration the resources and goals of each of the participant organizations. Each cohort member belongs to the Community Archives Collaborative, a peer network started in 2019 for skill-sharing, discussion of best practices, and peer-to-peer mentoring in order to support the long-term sustainability and growth of community-based archives.

We are confident that this cohort of archives is well-suited to carry out this research study. This is due to three reasons:

- (1) our experience with qualitative participatory action research,
- (2) the differences between (and diversity within) the communities we serve, and
- (3) the fact that SAADA and TAVP are seen as leaders and standard-bearers in the field, often taking on the role of providing resources and mentorship to other CBAs so that they may learn from our experiences.

### *Research Experience*

Between SAADA, TAVP, and Project Researchers Dr. Michelle Caswell and Neville Vakharia, the project leadership has overseen over \$8 million combined as PD/PI of research grants. Project Director Samip Mallick, Gabe Solis, and Dr. Caswell have frequently collaborated on research projects involving CBAs, creating much of the recent body of public knowledge within the field. In 2021, SAADA, the Texas After Violence Project, and the UCLA Community Archives Lab received a three-year, \$750,000 grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to conduct empirical research and develop tools to assess the affective impact of digital technologies on the creation of records documenting minoritized communities by CBAs. This work has been fruitful: "Virtual Belonging: Assessing the Affective Impact of Digital Records Creation in Community Archives" and its previous research phase have already yielded three peer-

reviewed publications and the creation of a toolkit for CBAs to analyze the impact of their work on the communities they serve and represent. Neville Vakharia’s deep cultural sector knowledge is the ideal addition to the team’s expertise on CBAs: he has dedicated his career to studying how arts and culture organizations can be sustainable and resilient. Previously the Director of the Cultural Data Project (now SMU DataArts), who oversaw its expansion from a start-up enterprise to a multimillion-dollar organization, Vakharia also served as PI on the IMLS grant-funded project “Museums Count Research and Project Development” from 2014 to 2016. The current proposed research study would be a natural extension of the project leaders’ passion for and experience with carrying out research that has significantly raised the profile of CBAs among scholars, policy researchers, funders, and the general public.

### *Diversity*

The four organizations in the study cohort are diverse in size, age, geography, and population served. Four distinct regions of the U.S. (New England, Mid-Atlantic, Southwest, and Pacific) are represented; our budgets range from \$57,000 to \$1.2 million. In addition, each cohort member’s service community is defined in a different way—a microcosm of the diverse range of ethnic communities, geographic scopes, and social justice missions that CBAs serve.

<u>Archive</u>	<u>Est.</u>	<u>Service Community</u>	<u>Budget (FY2023)</u>	<u>Breakdown of FY2022 Revenue</u>
SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archive)	2008	Americans who trace their heritage to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Maldives, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe.	\$1.2MM	70% grants, 25% individual giving, 5% earned revenue
Texas After Violence Project	2007	People directly impacted by mass incarceration, death penalty, and other institutionalized violence in Texas.	\$1.1MM	90% grants, 5% earned revenue, 5% individual giving
La Historia Historical Society Museum	1998	Historical and present-day Mexican American communities in El Monte and South El Monte, California.	\$57,000	80% grants, 15% earned revenue, 5% individual giving
The History Project	1980	New England’s LGBTQ communities and organizations. The History Project is one of the largest independent LGBTQ archives in the United States.	\$270,000	50% grants, 30% individual giving, 20% earned revenue

Even when taking into consideration the diversity of the communities that our cohort members serve, we are aware that certain organization types, revenue strategies, and marginalized communities will lack representation during our study. The survey on earned revenue in the study’s first phase is intended to make sure that a range of diverse perspectives is represented in the study. To further ensure that the field of CBAs has input in helping to define the research process, the Program Manager will share interim reports with other CBAs and other LAMs during the first year, collecting feedback and inviting recommendations on our research process and revenue strategies from these institutions.

### *Leadership among CBAs*

SAADA and TAVP are two of the few community-based archives in the United States with annual budgets over \$1 million. Both organizations are widely recognized as leaders within the field by their peers, archival scholars, media outlets, and funders such as IMLS and Mellon. We believe that we have the opportunity to highlight not only the importance of the work other CBAs do, but also the common challenges that we face. Moreover, we are often sought after by other archives for advice, whether through informal conversations or mentoring through the CAC. As “standard-bearers” among CBAs, our research findings are likely to be multiplicative because other institutions in our field, academics, policymakers, and funders view us as guiding examples.

## **Research Methods**

### *Community-Based Participatory Research*

SAADA’s Project Researchers will employ the framework of **community-based participatory research (CBPR)**, an iterative process by which communities play leading roles in every aspect of research design and implementation, from

formulating research questions to analyzing data.<sup>10</sup> Community-led participatory action research has been used within archival studies by several teams of researchers who simultaneously design research inquiries and create or maintain archival projects alongside community members.<sup>11</sup> Working within the context of Indigenous communities in Australia, Shannon Faulkhead uses the term “negotiated methodologies,” to describe formulating a research design that meets the needs of marginalized communities and fully reflects their own autonomous epistemologies and research methodologies.<sup>12</sup> IRB approval for research will be obtained prior to the field scan survey in Year 1 and the interviews in Year 3. Both Prof. Vakharia and Dr. Caswell have consistently had success with obtaining IRB approval for their own research projects (as PI/PD), as well as projects that they have collaborated with SAADA on as researchers.

In line with the tenets of CBPR, our research cohort and other community-based archives and institutions have and will continue to inform the study’s research questions, design, and methods. In addition, several elements proposed in this research study—the field scan survey, the prioritization of multiple community perspectives in decision-making and research design, reporting of findings through conferences and webinars, and production of training materials intended for a broad audience—are based on the successful model used in SAADA’s, TAVP’s, and Dr. Caswell’s previous research work with CBAs. Finally, the design of this research strives to meet the nine principles for building mutually beneficial relationships between academic researchers and community archivists outlined by the Reciprocity in Researching Records Collaborative: relational consent, mutual benefit, investment, humility, accountability, transparency, equity, reparation, and amplification.<sup>13</sup>

### *Interview methods and analysis*

Dr. Caswell will conduct one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to collect data, following the seven stages of the interview process recommended by Alison Pickard: thematizing, designing, interviewing, recording, transcribing, analyzing, and verifying.<sup>14</sup> Below is a sketch of the interview protocol that Dr. Caswell may adapt for her ethnographic research in Year 3:

- Please introduce yourself.
- How long have you been involved in [CBA]? In what capacity?
- (If interviewee is a community member) Have you heard of [CBA’s] efforts to raise money through [earned revenue strategy]? If so, how and when did you hear about it? What were your reactions?
- Have you directly participated in [CBA’s] efforts to raise money through earned income? If so, can you say more about your experiences?
- Do you think [CBA’s] efforts to raise money through earned income are in line with the organization’s mission and values? Why or why not?
- What reputation do you think [CBA] has in the community?
- Do you think the earned income efforts have impacted this reputation? If so, how?
- Do you think there are other fundraising strategies [CBA] should use? If so, what?
- Have you been a donor to [CBA]? If so, how long have you been a donor?
- Are you likely to continue to be a donor? If so, why? If not, why not? Does the success of [CBA’s] earned income efforts impact this decision?
- Is there anything we haven’t asked you that you would like to discuss?

Dr. Caswell’s team will conduct analysis of background data and collected ethnographies using software for qualitative data analysis (NVivo). This software allows for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, and image data, making it

<sup>10</sup> J.M. Chevalier and D. Buckles, *Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Rolan, Joanne Evans, Rhiannon Abeling, Aedan Brittain, Elizabeth Constable, Matthew Kelemen, and Ella Roberts, “Voice, Agency, and Equity: Deep Community Collaboration in Record-Keeping Research,” *Information Research* 24: 3 (2019): 1-7.

<sup>12</sup> Shannon Faulkhead, “Negotiated Methodologies: Designing Research Respectful of Academic and Indigenous Traditions,” *Research in the Archival Multiverse* (Clayton, Australia: Monash University Press, 2016), p. 479-515.

<sup>13</sup> Reciprocity in Research Records Collaborative (Jennifer Douglas; June Chow, Rachael Bradshaw, Samip Mallick, Nivetha (Niv) Karthikeyan, Bergis Jules, Gabriel Daniel Solís, Jane Field, Morris (Dino) Robinson, Patrisia Gonzales, Kathryn (Kat) Rodriguez, Joel A. Saldaña Perez, Anna Robinson-Sweet, Michelle Caswell), “Come Correct or Don’t Come at All’: Building More Equitable Relationships Between Archival Studies Scholars and Community Archives,” White Paper, (December 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Alison Jane Pickard, *Research Methods in Information*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Neal-Schuman ALA, 2013).



ideal for analyzing interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Researchers will track themes within interview transcripts using manual comment ‘tagging’ and software analysis when appropriate.

### **Business Consultants**

While business consultants will not be identified until October 2023, each cohort organization will select a consultant based on the earned revenue strategy their leaders have selected; e.g., a CBA pursuing merchandise sales as a revenue strategy might seek a consultant with experience in product management or branding. In this sense, SAADA uses the term ‘business consultant’ to describe someone closer to a business coach (or skilled industry practitioner) than a research consultant. To provide a more illustrative example, to enhance its capacity for merchandising, SAADA recently worked with a volunteer who had formerly been a product manager at one of the largest retail corporations in the U.S. Due to her professional experience in the marketing field, she had several useful recommendations for SAADA in growing the reach of its small online store, using search engine optimization (SEO), influencer marketing, and other techniques.

### **Potential Earned Revenue Strategies**

The earned revenue strategies to be deployed by cohort members will be identified during the first phase. Here we provide a sampling of potential strategies. The following list is not exhaustive, as other strategies identified during the first year will be considered.

1. **Product sales:** One of the most versatile and scalable sources of business income, product sales include sales of merchandise, books or other educational publications, and the operation of retail storefronts such as cafés, gift shops, and bookstores.
2. **Ticket sales:** Ticket sales include admission to events, walking tours, art galleries, and other public history initiatives. Areas of inquiry involve pricing, outreach methods, and program design.
3. **Speaking fees/event participation:** Speaking fees at corporate events, conferences, and special occasions (for example, AAPI Heritage Month) have been a minor source of earned revenue for several of our cohort members. As community-based archival work continues to gain recognition for its social importance, communications and outreach may comprise a larger portion of organizational revenue, and should therefore be investigated further.
4. **Consulting:** Fees from consulting for other universities, corporations, and other cultural institutions have been a source of earned revenue for several CBAs. There is a need to systematize this approach for use by the field.
5. **Educational training:** Many CBAs provide course content and/or workshops for teachers, professors, and administrators. This and other fee-for-service models will be more deeply explored in our research.

Other earned revenue strategies we have identified include corporate partnerships; partnerships with government agencies, educational institutions, or other community-based organizations; licensing fees for archival content; and rental of facility space. With guidance from the Project Researchers, cohort members will critically assess the alignment of their approach with the organization’s mission and values. The study will investigate and share findings on the ethics of funding, institutional partnerships, and earned revenue approaches for CBAs and LAMs.

### **Project Leadership and Researchers**

As lead organization for the research study, SAADA will be in charge of planning the initial research cohort convening, coordinating cohort-wide meetings throughout the study, grant-related correspondence with IMLS, and leading the development and dissemination of knowledge products (instructional monograph, webinars, and interactive web portal) in the final year of the study.

Grant activities will be overseen by the **Project Director**, SAADA’s Executive Director **Samip Mallick**. Mallick co-founded SAADA in 2008 and has been its full-time Executive Director since 2012. A librarian by training, Mallick has overseen the growth of SAADA from its creation in 2008 as a volunteer-run organization with a budget of \$300, to a national leader among community-based archives. As Project Director, Mallick will provide strategic oversight of research activities, supervise the Program Manager, and guide the dissemination of research knowledge through the instructional monograph, interactive web portal, and webinars. The **Program Manager**, SAADA’s **Sreedevi Sripathy**, will coordinate research study activities. Sripathy will plan and coordinate the initial cohort convening, arrange meetings between cohort members and business consultants, ensure realization of the grant timeline and completion of deliverables, coordinate outreach activities, and oversee reporting of grant activities.

**Neville Vakharia** and **Dr. Michelle Caswell** will serve as **Project Researchers** for the study. An Associate Professor at Drexel University's graduate Arts Administration & Museum Leadership program, Vakharia has led several large-scale grant-funded research projects to build the capacity of the arts, creative, and cultural sector. Dr. Caswell is Professor of Archival Studies in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and is the author of *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (Routledge, 2021) and *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014). Dr. Caswell, Prof. Vakharia, and the Project Director have a long history of working with one another, having co-founded SAADA together in 2008. Currently, Dr. Caswell and Prof. Vakharia are researchers for a field study directed by Mallick and funded by the Wallace Foundation, which investigates the impact of archival representation on arts organizations rooted in communities of color.

### **Diversity Plan**

As with the 2018 "Architecting Sustainable Futures" symposium, which involved 24 community-based archives, libraries, and museums that serve African American, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, and LGBTQ+ communities, the cohort and field survey for this research study will involve and benefit a similarly diverse range of community-based institutions. Following established practices from community-based participatory research (CBPR), the research cohort will solicit decision-making input from the wider CBA community at regular intervals, ensuring their active participation in the research, evaluation, and dissemination processes.

Our research experience has also taught us about navigating the complex ethical dynamics inherent when organizations are embedded within marginalized communities. Given the trust that our communities place in SAADA and the other cohort members, we have the utmost responsibility to practice an ethics of care that centers the needs, agency, and dignity of the communities we work with. We are aware that certain earned revenue strategies may prompt ethical dilemmas or questions of misalignment within an organization's community. How can we honor a CBA's mission and vision while generating sustainable earned revenue that ensures that institution can serve its community for the long term? Through research conversations with other CBAs, we will address this and other similar questions. We have learned that in order to maintain trust, it is crucial that communities be able to make collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them and control the means through which stories about their past are constructed.

### **Project Results**

By advancing the know-how of CBAs and other small and medium-sized LAMs in forming effective and sustainable earned revenue strategies, our applied research project "Sustainable Earned Revenue Strategies for Community-Based Archives" makes a foundational investment in the long-term health of our sector. Funding partners, including IMLS and the Mellon Foundation (see attached letter of support from Dr. Patricia Hswe), have stated that despite their unequivocal belief in the vital importance of CBAs, the present situation in which CBAs are often reliant on recurring grants to continue ongoing projects and maintain basic operations is unsustainable in the long term. By enabling CBAs to become less reliant on grant funding, our research study will benefit not only these institutions and their service communities, but also their private and government funding partners, who will see fewer grant requests for recurring work. In addition, by sharing our research findings through a published monograph, the study's interactive web portal, and a series of webinars led by each cohort member, we will make our research findings easily accessible and readily implementable for other organizations.

SAADA's Executive Director Samip Mallick often begins his presentations by sharing a quote by scholar Jeannette Bastian that reflects on the fundamental importance for marginalized communities to have access to their stories: "A community without its records," she says, "is a community under siege, defending itself, its identity, and its version of history without a firm foundation on which to stand." By empowering CBAs to remain independent and promoting their financial sustainability, this research project is a vote of confidence in the importance of community-based archives and the people they serve, as well as a commitment to preserving their stories and identities for future generations.

**Schedule of Completion**

Year 1: Strategy Development	Assigned To	2023					2024						
		Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Two-day kickoff convening in Philadelphia	SAADA*, Cohort, Researchers												
Literature review on revenue diversification in cultural organizations	Researchers												
Design and deploy survey for field scan of current revenue models	Researchers												
Analyze field scan survey results and summarize findings	Researchers												
Identify earned revenue strategies	Cohort												
Identify business consultants	SAADA, Cohort												
Work with consultants to create 1-year business plan	Cohort, Business Consultants												
Attend virtual cohort meetings with Project Researchers	SAADA, Cohort, Researchers												
Outreach to other CBAs through webinar presentation and/or conferences	Cohort												
Identify/hire and train revenue strategy implementation staff	Cohort												
Cohort virtual convening to set targets and create evaluative metrics	SAADA, Cohort												

Year 2: Deployment and Testing	Assigned To	2024					2025						
		Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Identify/hire and train revenue strategy implementation staff (continued)	Cohort												
Deploy earned revenue strategies as outlined within business plans	Cohort, Business Consultants												
Collect revenue data as specified by Year 1 evaluative metrics	Cohort												
Meet with business consultants to discuss progress and make adjustments	Cohort, Business Consultants												
Virtual cohort meetings to share progress and provide feedback	SAADA, Cohort, Researchers												
Outreach to field through webinar presentation and/or conferences	Cohort												

Year 3: Evaluation and Dissemination	Assigned To	2025					2026						
		Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Two-day convening in Los Angeles to begin debrief and evaluation	Cohort, Researchers												
Conduct qualitative interviews with cohort staff, board, constituents	Cohort, Researchers												
Assess and evaluate deployment of earned revenue strategies	Researchers												
Transcribe and analyze interviews	Researchers												
Produce evaluative white paper on assessment and evaluation	Researchers												
Create "how to" monograph and make freely available digitally	SAADA, Cohort, Editorial Consultant												
Work with web developer to create interactive web portal sharing findings	SAADA												
Share work with field through various channels	Cohort												
Conduct series of webinars to share earned revenue insights with field	Cohort												
Researchers aim to publish work in open-access peer-reviewed journals	Researchers												

\* All tasks assigned to SAADA indicate planning responsibility for meeting, convening, etc.

## **Digital Products Plan**

### **Type**

The following digital products will be generated from this research study:

- *Literature review* of revenue diversification in cultural organizations
- *Survey results* from field scan of current revenue models
- *An evaluative report* summarizing the study's deployment phase
- **Forty (40) recorded qualitative interviews**, approximately 45 minutes long each, with CBA leaders, staff, board, and constituents about their experience with the earned revenue strategy
- **Webinar presentations** with research cohort members describing the past year's progress in determining, deploying, and/or evaluating an earned revenue strategy
- **An instructional ("how-to") monograph** to be published digitally
- **An interactive web portal** outlining the resources above

### **Availability**

The **bolded** products listed above are the primary "work products" of the study and are intended for widespread public consumption. They will be the subject of significant outreach through SAADA's digital channels: its website, email list, social media accounts, *Tides* magazine, and online forums for the widespread dissemination of topics around CBAs, LAMs, cultural institutions, or nonprofit earned revenue. Recorded interviews will be ingested in SAADA's archive or one of the other cohort archives, provided that permission is secured from the interview subject.

The products listed in *italics* are intended primarily for other CBAs, LAMs, and small cultural organizations, as well as other stakeholders in the field, such as policymakers, educators, and funders. They will also be made available to the public, but will mainly see use by those specializing in the field.

### **Access**

Access to all archival materials in SAADA's digital collections is free and will remain so forever. The research team wishes to ensure that all work products from the study are conveniently accessible and widely beneficial. All work products will be distributed and licensed under a Creative Commons license ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)). Researchers will seek to publish any academic papers written during the grant period in open-access journals. For collection navigability, SAADA adheres to best practices for encoding and metadata used by the Library of Congress, including the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set (DCMES) and MARC.

### **Sustainability**

SAADA prioritizes the long-term preservation of its digital collections. Our project partners are also committed to sustainability of all work products generated during the study. The archive is securely backed up according to LOCKSS principles, through servers hosted by Pantheon, Amazon Web Services, and Backblaze.

## **Data Management Plan**

### **DATA OVERVIEW**

Many types of data will be collected throughout “Sustainable Earned Revenue Strategies for Community-Based Archives.” Observational data will be collected at the following points:

- During conversations from CBAs and small libraries, archives, and museums outside the research cohort about their earned revenue experiences
- During discussions with the research cohort at convenings and regular meetings, and with our business consultants
- During the deployment phase, as qualitative feedback from our constituents,
- Ethnographic data as gathered by Dr. Caswell during the qualitative interviews with CBA staff, board members, and consultants in Year 3
- Feedback from the community as we share our choice of earned revenue strategy and interact with constituents, involving them in operations

Collecting experimental data will be the primary focus of Year 2. This will include monthly and/or weekly recording of evaluative metrics: amount of revenue, conversion rate, number of patrons, number of bookings, hours spent per revenue-generating activity, etc.

Methods of data collection include surveys (August to September 2023), transactional tracking (Year 2), interviews and/or focus groups (August to October 2025), informal discussions, and observation.

### **SENSITIVE INFORMATION**

Project researchers Dr. Caswell and Prof. Vakharia will obtain IRB approval immediately after funding and before the start of any data collection. Interviewees will be asked to sign a release form making it clear the specific nature of information that would be disclosed through dissemination and/or archival of materials. SAADA makes every effort to obtain written consent if there is the possibility that potentially sensitive information could be made available to the public through any researcher actions. We will honor all requests for anonymity or to protect proprietary information. As a post-custodial archive that believes records should belong, first and foremost, with the party who generated them, SAADA places great emphasis on intellectual property rights of any interviewees or study participants.

### **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

Interviews will be recorded using a portable recording device (e.g., Zoom H4N), processed using Audacity, and analyzed using nVivo software for qualitative research. This software allows for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, and image data, making it ideal for analyzing interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Researchers will track themes within interview transcripts using manual comment ‘tagging’ and software analysis when appropriate.

### **PRESERVATION AND DISSEMINATION OF DATA**

As with other archival items in SAADA, important data generated by the project will be securely backed up through servers hosted by Pantheon, Amazon Web Services, and Backblaze.

### **REVIEW OF PLAN**

The Data Management Plan will be reviewed, and refined if necessary, at the completion of each of the three (3) years of the study. The study’s Program Manager will be responsible for monitoring fulfillment of the plan’s components.

## Organizational Profile

### Mission

SAADA (the South Asian American Digital Archive) creates a more inclusive society by giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that represent their unique and diverse experiences.

[This mission statement was approved by SAADA's Board of Directors in 2013.]

### Governance Structure

SAADA is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors. The organization has five full-time staff members based in Philadelphia, led by the Executive Director (who also serves on the board *ex officio*). Decisions are made with the input of SAADA's community and over 200 volunteers based around the country. SAADA is advised by its Academic Council, a community of seven academic scholars committed to furthering the inclusive study of South Asian Americans through their active involvement with SAADA's initiatives.

### Service Area

SAADA serves the broader South Asian American community nationwide, which at over 5.4 million individuals, is the fastest growing immigrant group in the United States. We believe in a broad conception of South Asian America, centered on those in the U.S. who trace their heritage to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Maldives, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe. The community includes first-generation immigrants and their children, as well as those who have lived in America for many generations. Many South Asian Americans come from mixed-race families, which can additionally nuance their views on race and identity. We place particular emphasis on empowering those community members who are most marginalized, excluded, or vulnerable, such as those who are immigrants or refugees, LGBTQ+, Dalit, Muslim, Indo-Caribbean, or living with disabilities. SAADA also provides several programs and resources for its home city of Philadelphia, including our Revolution Remix walking tour and the Philadelphia Fellowship, which funds community members to conduct oral histories and design their own archival exhibits centering South Asian American communities in our city.

### History

Upon identifying the need to highlight South Asian American perspectives overlooked by traditional archives, Samip Mallick and Michelle Caswell founded SAADA in 2008 with a budget of \$300. Today, SAADA's over 4,800 items makes up the largest publicly accessible collection of South Asian American materials, enabling academics, artists, journalists, and students to write books, produce creative works, and shape public understanding about a community that has too often been marginalized in the American historical narrative.

To address the fact that established archival paradigms often do not meet the needs of minoritized communities, SAADA has pioneered a democratized, participatory approach to archival collecting. As a community-based archive with a post-custodial approach, SAADA's documents remain with the institutions or individuals from which they originate, with digital access copies available online. These original copies may be held by government repositories, academic institutions, or family members or other relations of the record creator. Due to this approach which preserves original custody of materials, SAADA is able to work closely with record holders and obtain valuable context that may otherwise be lost. All archival materials are made freely available online for personal, educational, and research use.

SAADA's programs engage the public while using the archive in imaginative ways. These include "Revolution Remix," a musical walking tour of South Asian American history in Philadelphia; the Archival Creators Fellowship Program, which has to date supported twenty-one fellows in documenting marginalized community narratives, from Ugandan Asian refugees in South Carolina to Bangladeshi women entrepreneurs in Detroit; and *Our Stories: An Introduction to South Asian America*, a first-of-its kind anthology for high school and college-aged readers which is poised to fill the nationwide need for curricular materials as states begin mandating the inclusion of Asian American history in classrooms. For its innovative programming, SAADA has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, and NPR, as well as recognized through grants and awards from the Mellon Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, American Historical Association, and IMLS. In July 2022, the Ford Foundation named SAADA a "Philadelphia Cultural Treasure" for "important and enduring contributions to Philadelphia and its residents."

In 2019, SAADA and three other organizations founded the Community Archives Collaborative (CAC) as a peer network of over twenty community-based archives, particularly those representing BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups. By facilitating conversations about mentorship, capacity building, sustainability, and other best practices, SAADA and the CAC have created a robust mentorship and support system for community-based archives.