

SAADA Summit: A national convening to amplify South Asian American voices in libraries and archives

Project Summary

SAADA (the South Asian American Digital Archive) seeks a one-year, \$150,000 forum grant from IMLS to plan and host the *SAADA Summit*, a three-day national conference that will bring together South Asian American librarians and archivists, students and young professionals interested in LAM careers, community historians, independent memory workers, and cultural storytellers to foster collaboration, mentorship, and career development within a community that has been consistently underrepresented in libraries and archives professions. In alignment with LB21's **Goal 1, Objective 1.1**, the *SAADA Summit* aims to diversify the libraries and information science workforce by showcasing to young South Asian Americans how these vital institutions can deeply impact and enrich our society. Participants will learn about library and archival practices; attend panel discussions and career discovery workshops; and receive 1-on-1 mentorship from professionals in the field. Following the inaugural *Summit*, we will explore how to scale the conference into a financially sustainable annual or biennial event.

Project Justification

Libraries and archives have been slow to reflect the demographics of an increasingly diverse America. Despite the fact that Asian Americans now make up **8%** of the U.S. population, they comprise only **3.5% of libraries and archives staff**.¹ The lack of South Asian American librarians and archivists, in particular, means that our community rarely has their information needs met. In May 2023, SAADA and the Edison Township Public Library in New Jersey jointly hosted an open discussion, highlighting the fact that despite serving a township of over 100,000 that is one-third South Asian,² the library has almost no staff with competency in South Asian languages and cultures. Though library director Allan Kleiman has tried to recruit more South Asian American staff librarians, the pool of eligible candidates is small. The *Summit* is our response to the question: "*How can we help younger South Asian Americans better understand the possibilities within libraries and archives careers?*"

Conferences specifically designed for professionals of color build community and create a sense of belonging. This is especially crucial in our field, as information professionals of color are less likely to remain in the field than their white colleagues.³ Through the *SAADA Summit*, we aim to create a space in which young South Asian Americans interested in libraries and archives careers can connect with each other, learn about the field from established professionals, and discuss cultural and community-specific issues. An in-person meeting has the advantage of fostering deeper relationships among attendees, which cannot be fully replicated in an online setting. The *Summit* offers a second major benefit: it empowers South Asian American libraries and archives professionals to become one-on-one mentors to emerging talent within their own community—a rare opportunity that will be deeply rewarding to the panelists. By expanding our list of panelists beyond archivists and librarians to include community historians, memory workers, folklorists, filmmakers, nonprofit leaders, and other cultural storytellers who use libraries and archives in their work, SAADA illustrates the profound and multifaceted impact our field has on creative and cultural expression. A third benefit for the *Summit* is that it provides an opportunity for SAADA to explore earned revenue strategies, such as tiered registration fees and corporate sponsorships. SAADA is the lead grantee on an applied research grant from IMLS, "Sustainable Earned Revenue Strategies for Community-Based Cultural Institutions" (LG-254940-OLS-23) with three other community archives, and the knowledge acquired from using the *Summit* as a potential earned revenue opportunity will benefit other institutions similar to ours.

Project Work Plan

Our one-year project will span from August 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025, and will consist of a research and planning phase, the *SAADA Summit* in June 2025, and an evaluation and debrief phase. SAADA's co-founder and Executive Director **Samip Mallick** will direct the project, and day-to-day activities will be carried out by SAADA's programs team, led by Program Manager **Sreedevi Sripathy**. Activities for each phase are described below:

1. Research and Planning (August 1, 2024, to June 5, 2025): SAADA will create an informational survey to gain insight on the number of potential *Summit* attendees and learn about their professional goals. We will share the survey through social media, our email newsletter, and university career centers. Starting in October, SAADA will invite library and archives professionals, community historians, memory workers, and cultural storytellers from its network to serve as

¹ Makala Skinner and Ioana Hulbert, "A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey Report," *Ithaka S+R*, 22 August 2022.

² Alton Wang, "Nearly Half of Residents in Edison Are Asian," *AAPIData*, published 2 November 2017.

³ Juleah Swanson, Azusa Tanaka, and Isabel Gonzalez-Smith, "Lived Experience of Academic Librarians of Color," *College & Research Libraries*, vol. 79, no. 7 (1 November 2018).

panelists for the *Summit*. We will publicize an open call for *Summit* participants seeking one of ten available travel and lodging scholarships. Applicants will be asked to submit a supplementary form by February 1, describing how the *Summit* will contribute to their educational and career objectives. SAADA will match each scholarship awardee with a panelist “mentor” based on their professional goals. Open registration will continue through May 2025.

2. SAADA Summit (June 6 to June 8, 2025):

Day 1: Participants will arrive in Philadelphia on the evening of Friday, June 6. A prominent library and archives professional (to be determined) will give a keynote address, followed by a screening and Q&A of the documentary film *In Search of Bengali Harlem* and Q&A with director Vivek Bald, who spent years conducting archival research to uncover the story of Bengali migrants in early 20th century New York City.

Day 2: Saturday, June 7 will open with an introductory activity and a presentation on SAADA’s collections and programs by Executive Director Samip Mallick, followed by three 90-minute panel discussions with librarians and archivists, community historians, and memory workers. Discussion themes will be finalized during the planning process based on the specific expertise of panelists, but will generally involve (1) libraries and archives careers and professional development; (2) community archives and collecting stories from marginalized communities; and (3) South Asian American history, as told through collections from SAADA and other archives. Throughout the day, scholarship awardees will meet 1-on-1 with their panelist mentors to discuss their interests and career aspirations. The evening will conclude with a concert featuring South Asian American performers, including those who composed songs for SAADA’s Pew Center for the Arts-funded walking tour of Philadelphia, “Revolution Remix.” [Note: SAADA will not use IMLS funds for the concert.]

Day 3: Sunday, June 8 will begin with a fourth panel discussion with community historians and memory workers, revolving around archival methods such as conducting oral histories, digitization, and transcription. Following lunch, participants will hear closing remarks from SAADA’s executive director before the conference adjourns in the afternoon. Those who wish may stay for an optional “Revolution Remix” tour on Sunday afternoon, which tells the story of Philadelphia through the eyes of South Asian Americans who lived here from the 1780s to the present day.

3. Evaluation and Future Planning (June 9, 2025, to July 31, 2025): Following the *Summit*, we will conduct exit interviews with the ten scholarship awardees. SAADA’s executive director and program staff will debrief and analyze feedback. In the final month, SAADA will discuss how to scale the *Summit* into a biennial or annual event. We will explore revenue-generating activities such as sponsorships, crowdfunding, and partnerships aimed at making the *Summit* self-sustaining in the future. SAADA will create a planning document that outlines the *Summit*’s outcomes, feedback and analysis, potential future sources of revenue, and recommendations about how to expand the conference in future years.

Project Results

Consider South by Southwest (SXSW), the annual celebration of film, music, media, and education that energizes Austin, Texas each year. Its educational conference, SXSW EDU, brings together over 4,000 diverse stakeholders—“educators, administrators, policymakers, students, entrepreneurs, industry leaders, [and] creatives”—to discuss how to build a better world for tomorrow’s students. SAADA’s aspiration for the *Summit* is to create a **South Asian American counterpart to SXSW EDU centered on libraries, archives, and community-led memory work**. Both the *SAADA Summit* and SXSW EDU invite diverse participants to discuss challenging ideas, foster mentorship and relationship-building, and most of all, create genuine excitement about their missions. With SAADA’s extensive network and consistent interest from our community in archival and memory work (our Archival Creators Fellowship Program receives between 70 and 120 applications each year), we expect **100 participants** at the inaugural iteration of the *SAADA Summit*. We aim to increase this number in the long term as we explore how the *Summit* model can serve as an earned revenue stream for SAADA and other similar organizations. Ultimately, we envision the *Summit* as a large-scale, recurring event that empowers libraries and archives to welcome a wider range of users, create new programming that reflects their service communities, and attract more young people of color into the field.

Budget Summary

The \$150,000 budget covers the following expenses: (1) **Personnel, \$67,750:** Project Director, 5% FTE; Program Manager, 25% FTE; Program Coordinator, 50% FTE; Communications Specialist, 25% FTE. (2) **Fringe Benefits, \$18,970:** Calculated at 28% of staff salaries. (3) **Travel, \$18,200:** Transportation and lodging for panelists. (4) **Supplies, Materials, and Equipment: \$0.** (5) **Subawards and Contracts, \$7,000:** Stipends for panelists and keynote speaker. (6) **Student Support Costs, \$14,000:** Stipends for participant travel. (7) **Other Costs, \$11,716:** Space rental in hotel conference center. (8) **Indirect costs are \$12,364** and are calculated at the *de minimis* rate of 10% of MTDC.