

Community Connections: Inreach and Outreach as Archival Advocacy Activities

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Advocacy activities articulating the value of archives can be an important component of inreach and outreach activities. Effective advocacy requires that archivists make consistent and explicit arguments for the value of our collections. This article employs the case example of the Labor Archives of Washington (LAW) at the University of Washington Libraries Special Collections and draws from my experience as the founding archivist and director of LAW to demonstrate how archivists can use inreach and outreach opportunities to advocate for the social value of archives, the usefulness of the professional skills of archivists and librarians, and promote use of topical collections beyond their core user groups. In my experience, the results of such advocacy activities include securing institutional and external resources, help with marketing, community assistance and buy-in, political capital to accomplish projects, and the broader use of archival collections.

Inreach and outreach are central parts of the archival domain. By “inreach,” I mean promoting collections within a department or institution; by “outreach,” I mean promoting collections in broader communities of interest. However, these activities *alone* are not advocacy, though there is an implicit message in most of our inreach and outreach activities that is arguing “these things are valuable.” Inreach and outreach only take on an aspect of advocacy when archivists make explicit arguments about the value of their collections. These are more effective when we also ask for resources to preserve and promote the collections.

- Archivists have been writing about the necessity of this sort of direct advocacy for some time; David Gracy contends that advocacy is a constant process that involves arguing for the value of archives to those “above” us; resource providers, managers, and politicians, and characterizes this as “issue oriented—**talking up**. [An] act of persuasion, demonstrating the value of archives.” [Emphasis added]
- In his book *Many Happy Returns*, Larry Hackman argues that advocacy is “an

investment that we make when we intentionally and strategically educate and engage individuals and organizations so that they in turn will support our archival work.” Similarly, David Gracy reasons that advocacy is “the work done (by archivists individually, by associations of archivists, and/or by others) to cultivate the environment for accomplishing the archival mission.” Gracy further elaborates on the value of inreach in relation to advocacy, arguing that inreach advocacy is “reaching out for resources to the person a level or two above you.”

I, too, believe that outreach and inreach activities offer a constant opportunity to demonstrate the value of our collections and (more broadly) the value of archives to our organizations and to society, and represent a chance to explain the value of primary source materials to researchers of all levels. These activities represent an opportunity to present records associated with our particular scholarly or topical domain to researchers with different perspectives or from different disciplines than our typical users, or introduce collections to audiences unfamiliar with archives.

WHY ARE LABOR COLLECTIONS IMPORTANT?

Labor History Is State History

LAW's collections tell the story of the men and women who built Washington and document the economic and political development of the state. Collections reveal the social history and working conditions of Washington's workers.



Labor History Is Civil Rights History

Labor unions have long been on the forefront of demanding equal access to employment. Collections record the progress towards equality by women, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and workers of various other minority groups who advocated fair working conditions as a civil right.



Labor History Is Urban History

Working people built Washington State. LAW's collections reveal the economic and political development of Washington's cities. Collections document the lives of labor leaders who served in elected office or on appointed commissions. As well, dramatic events in urban history are contained in the collections, charting the story of Washington's growth over time.



Labor History Is Ethnic History

Workers from around the world have been drawn to Washington by the promise of economic opportunity. Our collections reveal the stories of various ethnic and immigrant communities as they worked to create better lives for themselves and their children. Collections reveal the struggles of these workers against discrimination and for social justice and record their contributions to our state's economy and culture.



Labor History Is Women's History

Women's lives and personal freedoms are intertwined with economic opportunity. Our collections record the lives of women workers, union officers, and activists as they articulated equality in employment as a human right. The records tell the story of working conditions that women workers experienced and the struggle of female workers to fight sex and gender-based discrimination.



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<http://laborarchives.org>

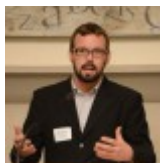
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