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# "NOTHING ABOUT IT WAS BETTER THAN A PERMANENT JOB"

REPORT OF THE NEW ENGLAND ARCHIVISTS  
CONTINGENT EMPLOYMENT STUDY TASK FORCE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New England Archivists conducted the first Contingent Employment Study (CES-I) in 2016. The 2021 study (CES-II) conducted a survey with 83 respondents, 15 interviews, and analyzed over 250 job postings.

## IN BRIEF

The study found that little has changed in New England since 2016. If anything, contingent employment has become more pervasive and working conditions have grown worse.

Continual overreliance on contingent employment negatively affects workers, employers, and the archival profession. It also threatens the sustainability of our field by preventing the recruitment and retention of new professionals, particularly people from diverse backgrounds and marginalized communities.

However, we are stronger together. There are opportunities for individuals and organizations to support our contingently employed colleagues and advocate for widespread change.



# BY THE NUMBERS

## CONTINGENT EMPLOYMENT ISN'T JUST A "STEPPING STONE."

18% of survey respondents have been contingently employed for 5-7 years over the course of their career. For nearly 17%, it was more than 8 years.



# 50%

of respondents who had been in the field for 4-6 years have already had three or more contingent jobs.

**NEARLY 63% SAID THAT CONTINGENT EMPLOYMENT NEGATIVELY AFFECTED THEIR PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH.**

# 40%

of new professionals have considered leaving the field because of contingent employment.

## STABILITY IS A MASSIVE CONCERN

Of respondents who had landed a permanent gig at some point in their career, nearly 40% still ended up contingently employed afterwards.

## SO IS UNEMPLOYMENT

36% have experienced a period of unemployment. Over 50% have taken a job outside the archival field to make ends meet.



# THE JOB MARKET IS TOUGH



**HALF OF JOB POSTINGS**

**WERE FOR  
CONTINGENT JOBS**

**1/3 OF JOB POSTINGS**

**HAD NO SALARY RANGE  
LISTED**

**ONLY 20% OF JOB  
POSTINGS**

**MENTIONED HEALTH  
INSURANCE BENEFITS**

**INTERNAL  
PROMOTIONS**

**HAVE DECREASED BY  
HALF SINCE THE 2016  
SURVEY**

**25% OF RESPONDENTS**

**DID NOT RECEIVE ANY  
JOB OFFERS DURING  
THEIR MOST RECENT  
JOB SEARCH**

## I. Introduction

In 2020, the New England Archivists Inclusion and Diversity Committee charged the Contingent Employment Study Task Force with conducting a second study to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data about contingent employment in the region. This report contains our methodology, results, analysis, and recommendations for how NEA can support contingent workers and promote the growth of a diverse, inclusive, thriving, and innovative archival profession.

The first New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study was conducted in 2016, with 70 survey responses and 23 interviews. The research team, consisting of Micha Broadnax, Elizabeth Carron, Anna J. Clutterbuck-Cook, Katie Fortier, and Allyson Glazier, submitted their findings to the New England Archivists Executive Board in January 2017. The 2016 study found that contingent employment was very prominent in our region, particularly for new professionals. The report said that “especially among those emerging professionals who are in the early years of their careers, extended periods of employment precarity seem to be the new norm.”<sup>1</sup> Study participants reported that contingent employment had several negative impacts on their careers and personal lives, including financial instability, lack of access to health insurance, stress, and difficulty planning for the future, professionally and personally. They cited several benefits to NEA membership and NEA programs and resources that were helpful to them as contingent workers, but noted that NEA could be doing more, particularly by taking a more active advocacy role.

The second Contingent Employment Study, which we called CES-II, built upon the foundations of the 2016 study. Taken together, the two studies provide a unique set of longitudinal data about contingent employment in the archival field in New England over the past 15 years. On the whole, the results of the second study indicate that not much has changed since 2016. Contingent employment is still an immensely influential force in our field, and many respondents felt that their contingent employment was a necessity rather than a choice. Furthermore, the study found that contrary to popular belief, contingent employment is not limited to new professionals starting their careers in archives. Long periods of contingent employment are the norm for many of our mid-career and late-career colleagues.

Every single respondent reported at least one aspect of contingent employment that they disliked or that negatively affected them in some way. Out of 83 respondents, only one person said that they would choose to be contingently employed if given the choice. We believe that these results indicate that the chronic overreliance on contingent employment has created a profound and immediate crisis in our field. If conditions continue in this vein, our profession will only shrink, because we will not be able to recruit new professionals, much less retain more experienced professionals to train and mentor them. The field will

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<sup>1</sup> Broadnax et al., “New England Archivists Contingent Employment Study Report to the Executive Board, January 2017,” accessed January 13, 2022, [https://newenglandarchivists.org/resources/Documents/Inclusion\\_Diversity/NEA%20Contingent%20Employment%20Study%20Final%20Report%202018-08.pdf](https://newenglandarchivists.org/resources/Documents/Inclusion_Diversity/NEA%20Contingent%20Employment%20Study%20Final%20Report%202018-08.pdf).

also become less diverse and more entrenched in a culture based on scarcity and siloes rather than abundance and collaboration. It is our hope that this study will spark conversation and change within NEA and in the broader professional community.

## Background and Methodology

The first Contingent Employment Study arose amidst concerns that “‘adjunctification,’ or the ‘gig economy’ ha[d] arrived for the archives profession.”<sup>2</sup> At the time of the first study, there had already been some data collection and scholarship about contingent employment in the archival field.<sup>3</sup> When the time came for the 2021 study, the topic had become even more prominent in our profession. The prevalence and impact of contingent employment have been discussed extensively at professional conferences since 2016.<sup>4</sup> There has also been increased advocacy concerning best practices for contingent positions, including the Digital Library Federation Working Group on Labor in Digital Libraries resources<sup>5</sup> and the ongoing work of the Best Practices in Term Positions Working Group.<sup>6</sup> In 2019, the Society of American Archivists Issues and Advocacy Section also conducted a survey about temporary labor.<sup>7</sup>

The Contingent Employment Task Force, which consisted of Alison Fulmer, Kimberly Barzola, Meghan Rinn, Rose Oliveira, and chair Stephanie Bredbenner, met for the first time in late 2020. We reviewed the survey, interview questions, and final report from the 2016 study and brainstormed about how to scope CES-II. We devised the following research questions to guide our work:

- What is the extent of contingent employment in New England?
- What are the qualities of contingent employment in New England (length of contingent employment, salary, benefits, etc.)?
- What is the impact of contingent employment on archival workers in New England?

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cushing, “Career Satisfaction of Young Archivists: A Survey of Professional Working Archivists, Age 35 and Under,” 600-625; Francis, “2013 Archival Program Graduates and the Entry-Level Job Market,” 514-547.

<sup>4</sup> Suiter et al., “Respecting Our Resources: Striving for More Inclusive Labor Practices,” New England Archivists Spring Meeting, 2021; Berry et al., Manuscript Repositories Section and Students and New Archives Professionals Section Joint Section Meeting Panel, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 2018; Sayles et al., “Short-Term Jobs for Long-Term Careers: Designing Ethical Project/Contract Positions,” Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 2019; Rodriguez and Tillman, “Collective Responsibility: Outcomes and Developments,” Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 2019; Michels et al., “Looking Back to Move Forward: Evaluating the Hidden Collections Era in Archives and Special Collections,” Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 2020; Vo et al., “A Profession for Us: Creating and Sustaining an Equitable, Inclusive, and Diverse Archives Field,” Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Arnold et al., “‘Do Better’ -Love(,) Us: Guidelines for Developing and Supporting Grant-Funded Positions in Digital Libraries, Archives, and Museums,” accessed January 13, 2022, <https://dobetterlabor.com/>; Tillman et al., Collective Responsibility Labor Advocacy Toolkit, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://toolkit.dobetterlabor.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> Sayles and Tessler, “Best Practices in Term Positions,” Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting Diversity Forum, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Dean et al., “Survey on Temporary Labor: A Quick Look,” Issues and Advocacy Section Meeting, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 2019, accessed January 12, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wF78rJ3LJtf-vmhzyRBWJsIQNuiNb5U7>.

- Are people of color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people more impacted by contingent employment? On average, do they have more contingent positions or longer periods of contingent employment?
- What has changed or stayed the same since the last study?

The task force had several discussions about how to scope our eligibility criteria to ensure that we were collecting data that would best support our goals and research questions. The first question that arose was how to define “contingent employment” and “archival worker” in ways that were clear and concise without being too prescriptive and exclusionary.

The 2016 study used an expansive definition of contingent employment: “involuntary unemployment/job-seeking, temporary/term-limited positions, grant-funded positions, part-time positions, multiple part-time positions simultaneously, employment without benefits colleagues at the same institution enjoy (e.g. vacation time, health insurance, retirement contributions), paraprofessional work you were hired for *after* obtaining [a] degree, and paraprofessional work you remained in after earning professional qualifications due to lack of professional opportunities.”

The CES-II task force decided that since 2016, the popular consensus about what constitutes contingent employment in the profession had evolved and narrowed significantly, and that many people who technically fell within the parameters of the first study would not consider themselves contingently employed and would therefore be unlikely to take the 2021 survey. For the purposes of the 2021 study, contingent employment was defined as “temporary and term positions, grant-funded positions, part-time positions, positions without timely or reliable renewal of contract, and any employment without benefits colleagues at the same institution enjoy (e.g. vacation time, health insurance, retirement contributions).”

Similarly, an archival worker was defined as “a professional, paraprofessional, or other employee who spends at least 25% of their time on archival work regardless of their job title, educational background, or the type of institution where they work.”

Student jobs and internships, both paid and unpaid, were deliberately excluded from both of these definitions. Although the prominence of unpaid internships is a pressing labor issue in our profession, their inclusion would have skewed the data in several key areas, including term length, average number of contingent positions, and reporting about benefits. The compromise was to add a few questions about internships and volunteer positions and to allow survey respondents to report data about student jobs and internships in the job history section, but to omit them from the rest of the survey.

The final scoping issue was whether or how to add a geographic element to the eligibility criteria. NEA is a regional organization, but contingent employment is a national problem. Our field is also a particularly mobile one, largely because of contingent employment, so many archival workers move between regions frequently. There were many archival workers who had been contingently employed in New England but no longer lived in the



region. Conversely, there were likely archival workers in New England with contingent employment experience that happened to fall outside the region, and they had valuable insights and suggestions for NEA regardless of where their contingent employment took place.

Therefore, the study was open to any archival worker or former archival worker who had been contingently employed in New England in the last ten years (2011-2021) *or* who had been contingently employed anywhere in the United States in the last ten years (2011-2021) *and* was living or working in New England at the time of participating in the study.

The 2021 survey retained most of the questions from the first survey, although we converted many of the free-text questions to multiple choice or multiple select to make analyzing the data simpler. Some questions remained free-text to give respondents the opportunity to tell their stories in their own words. The task force added additional questions to elicit more detailed data and to account for the guiding research questions. In particular, we added questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and whether participants thought any aspects of their identity (such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, age, or disability) impacted their experience as a contingent worker. We also wrote several new questions for the interviews. The study's survey and interview questions are available in [the appendices](#) at the end of this report.

The research team selected Google Forms to host the survey because it allowed multiple people to easily access the results and did not have a question limit. Interviews were conducted over Zoom due to its widespread popularity and because it had native recording, captioning, and transcription features.

A test group of twelve archival workers from a variety of professional backgrounds reviewed an initial draft of the survey. The survey was revised in accordance with the test group's feedback before going live in March 2021, to coincide with the New England Archivists spring 2021 virtual meeting. In collaboration with the NEA Communications Committee, we promoted the survey on Twitter, Facebook, and a variety of professional listservs. The survey was open through the end of June 2021 and received eighty-three valid responses. There was one invalid response that was an exact duplicate of a previous set of responses.

The task force spent several months cleaning and analyzing the survey data, utilizing cross-tabulation to identify trends and relationships between different subsets of the data. We analyzed and compared several subsets of the data on the basis of specific data points, particularly years in the archival field and demographic categories such as race and disability. Data from the 2016 survey also allowed for longitudinal analysis, although this was somewhat limited by differences between the surveys and the higher proportion of free-text questions in the first survey.

Interviews were transcribed, anonymized, and analyzed for qualitative trends and specific quotations. Coding the interviews would have enabled more quantitative analysis, but was ultimately too time consuming.

Finally, the task force collected and analyzed postings for over 250 jobs and internships in New England and fully-remote positions. Positions were collected from a variety of job boards and listservs between August 2020 and mid-September 2021, with the most consistent data collection occurring from December 2020 to September 2021. For more information about the methodology and findings of the job postings survey, see the [Job Postings Survey](#) section of this report.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Contingent Employment Study Task Force would like to express our deep gratitude to the eighty-three people who participated in the study. Our work would not have been possible without your generosity and willingness to share your experiences, observations, suggestions, and ideas. We also thank the members of the test group who reviewed and provided feedback on the survey: Jessica Chapel, Alison Clemens, Patrick M. Crowley, Rosemary K. J. Davis, Gabriela Margarita De Jesús, Sarah Funke Donovan, Ashley Gray, Rebecca Parmer, Elizabeth M. Peters, Jessica Tai, Kate Vular, and one person who wished to remain anonymous. Finally, we thank the New England Archivists Executive Board and NEA Inclusion and Diversity Committee for their support of this study.

## II. Recommendations for New England Archivists

Questions in both the survey and interviews asked study participants about their experiences with professional organizations in general and NEA in particular. On the whole, most thought that NEA provides crucial educational resources and networking opportunities, and that our affordable membership and registration rates make our offerings more accessible for contingent workers. However, gatekeeping, cost, and time commitments were all concerns that came up frequently. Additionally, many study participants felt that NEA can play a bigger role in advocating for contingent workers and partnering with other organizations to increase our collective power in effecting widespread change.

One of the study's core goals was to make actionable recommendations to the New England Archivists Executive Board for programs, initiatives, and strategies for supporting and advocating for contingent workers. Study participants had many ideas, some relatively simple and others much more complex. This section contains the most popular suggestions, regardless of their current feasibility. The task force understands that NEA is an entirely volunteer-run organization, and that many of these ideas would take considerable time and resources to implement. However, we believe that these recommendations reflect the current needs of our membership and can be used to build a long-term roadmap for NEA. There are also significant opportunities for collaboration with other local, regional, and national organizations in achieving some of these goals across the field at large.

Although the Executive Board is the primary audience of this report, the spirit of these recommendations can be applied outside of the bounds and structures of professional organizations and institutions. Informal networking groups, mutual aid networks, and other ad hoc initiatives can have the benefits of developing more quickly and responding more agilely to specific needs on the ground. As the Best Practices in Term Positions Working Group and the Archival Workers Emergency Fund demonstrate, excellent, impactful work can be accomplished without the sponsorship of any particular group or organization. More general recommendations and opportunities for advocacy for individuals and employers are in the [Improving Contingent Employment Experiences](#) section.

### The Role of Professional Organizations

Most respondents said that professional organizations are an important source of networking, education, and professional development. Many thought that professional organizations have a responsibility to be leaders in the profession by enacting policies and creating standards and recommendations about contingent employment.

“[Belonging to professional organizations] helps me not feel isolated.”

"I enjoy being able to serve the professional organization in leadership capacities, helping me gain experiences that I would not have had in my contingent positions. Membership in professional organizations also helps me learn continually so that I can prepare for the 'next' job."

"[Professional organizations] can advocate for the needs of contingent workers."

"It's useful to speak to others in the field with similar experiences. I received a lot of valuable advice from others about how to secure a non-contingent position."

"Yes, networking and professional development are both tools to help folks move into non-contingent positions. Also, having your experience heard and validated by others in the profession can help and may prevent some people from choosing to leave the profession."

However, many also said that there were barriers to their participation in professional organizations, including cost, time, and gatekeeping.

"It allows for networking etc. IF you can convince your job to let you go or you can burn the money and days you're not getting paid."

"I didn't join any professional organizations because I always felt like I wasn't fully integrated and without an MLIS I wouldn't be taken seriously."

"Networking and some of the resume review and mentoring programs seem like they're really helpful. But to be honest I was just constantly operating in crisis mode, so didn't really have the time, support from my employer, money, or energy to seek out any of those things."

"I think the memberships and conference fees are a barrier. I'm shy to admit it, but I felt like professional organizations or any kind of training was a luxury because my income was going to basics like paying overdue bills because I had been financially insecure for so long."

"Personally I have not felt the benefit of professional organization membership. It can be an intimidating or condescending place."

## **The Role of NEA**

Many participants reflected that regional professional organizations like NEA are more accessible and affordable than national organizations, and our affordable membership and conference rates were mentioned many times in survey responses and interviews. Others appreciated the move to virtual conferences during the pandemic, because it is easier for them to receive supervisory approval to attend virtual events. Some highlighted the

listserv, mentoring program, and the Contingent Employment Study as important initiatives.

"NEA's mentoring program has been a very helpful thing to me, and it is a shame that it doesn't appear to be active anymore."

"I am encouraged to see NEA included a COVID-19 rate for the 2021 spring meeting, but it would be good if there was a contingently employed membership tier with the same benefits but cheaper dues, etc."

"I think the fact you do this survey and keep abreast of the status of contingent workers is huge. It says NEA cares. Continuing to offer support and providing career mentorship opportunities and networking opportunities is very helpful as well."

"I have found membership beneficial when I am able to take advantage of networking opportunities, view job boards, and/or gain professional development."

"And I mean now that [NEA conferences] are online, it would have been so much easier because I could have only paid the student rate and done it."

## Recommendations

### **Commit to conducting the Contingent Employment Study every five years on an ongoing basis**

Gathering longitudinal data is an important way to understand long-term trends in the profession. It provides crucial insights into labor practices and working conditions for archival workers. Committing to the study would also ensure that this topic remains visible in our region. Perhaps most importantly, it provides a way for contingent workers to make their voices heard by sharing their experiences and telling NEA how we can best support them.

"Continue conducting regular surveys like this one."

"More data collection."

### **Continue to advocate for contingent workers and ethical labor practices**

Many study participants appreciated NEA's previous advocacy around contingent employment and salary transparency, including the Contingent Employment Study, 2018 statement on contingent employment, and salary transparency policy. When asked what



NEA could do to support contingent workers, the most common response was to continue that advocacy.

|"Continued support for contingent workers in public statements/advocacy."

|"Sustained advocacy for funded and supported non-contingent positions."

### **Continue to offer affordable membership and conference fees, including a lower rate for contingent, underemployed, and unemployed workers.**

Respondents appreciated NEA's affordable membership and conference rates, including the COVID-19 hardship rate. This is a simple, tangible way NEA can show support for our contingent colleagues, who often have to pay for their own professional development expenses out of pocket. Continuing to offer a "give back" rate, which allows attendees to pay extra to subsidize the hardship rate for others, would also offset the cost to NEA.

|"NEA does a great job of keeping membership and conference registration fees affordable. These costs and travel costs associated with attending in person professional development programs, are often prohibitive. I urge NEA to continue to be mindful of this when planning for maximum inclusivity."

### **Continue to offer virtual and hybrid options for conferences and educational offerings**

Registration, travel, and hotel costs are often prohibitively expensive for contingent workers. Even with comparatively affordable rates like NEA's, many contingent workers struggle to get supervisory approval to attend conferences and workshops. Respondents said that networking and professional development were two of the biggest advantages of NEA membership, but many are not able to take advantage of our offerings. When planning in-person conferences and events, consider how to make them more affordable and accessible to contingent workers, including hybrid or virtual options.

|"Offer free or asynchronous professional development opportunities."

|"Minimizing the need for hotel costs (one versus two nights), making conferences central/easy to access, having some socializing opportunities mid-day so that day-tripper conference attendees don't miss out on the networking."

## **Provide scholarships for contingent workers to attend conferences and educational offerings**

A few respondents suggested establishing scholarships for contingent workers to attend NEA conferences and educational programs.

“Some kind of funding or scholarship available to contingently-employed folks.”

“Scholarship/funding opportunities for professional development specifically for contingent workers.”

## **Offer workshops and educational resources for contingent workers**

Several respondents suggested that NEA offer workshops and resources on practical subjects for contingent workers, including navigating taxes as a contractor, buying health insurance in the marketplace, and job searching.

“Provide resources for how to navigate life decisions while contingently employed.”

“Workshops or resources on what these positions are like (I didn't really know what I was getting into) and on how to work towards full-time, non-contingent employment.”

“Put together resources on navigating life without PTO or benefits (finding healthcare, working vacation time into your schedule when it's unpaid).”

## **Provide mentoring groups for contingent workers**

Mentorship was consistently one of the biggest concerns for contingent workers, and one of the biggest advantages of NEA membership. Many respondents said that they would like to see mentoring groups specifically for contingent workers, where they can speak frankly about their experiences, share advice, and support one another.

“Have mentoring/support groups specifically for people who are contingently or underemployed.”

“Support groups, how to's, sharing expectations within the field.”

“Networking specifically for contingently-employed workers.”

## **Make committee service and other professional service more accessible for contingent workers**

30% of respondents said that they did not feel able to participate in professional service activities because of the uncertainty of their contingent employment. One respondent suggested designing shorter one-year terms of service for committees, because many contingent workers are not certain if they will still be in the region in two or three years. The Inclusion and Diversity Committee already has one-year committee positions, and the Education Committee also has a designated committee member who is a student or new professional. This model could be expanded and applied across the organization.

“Maybe shorter one-year terms of service on committees for new professionals and contingently employed people?”

## **Create, endorse, and/or promote best practices and resources about contingent employment**

Study participants expressed a need for best practices and other resources about contingent employment. Although some suggested that NEA create these resources, there are already several existing initiatives, including the Collective Responsibility Labor Advocacy Toolkit<sup>8</sup> and the Best Practices in Term Positions Working Group.<sup>9</sup> Rather than reinvent the wheel, NEA should consider officially endorsing and promoting these resources among our membership, peer organizations, and the wider cultural heritage sector.

“Create guidelines/best practices. Base pay and benefits, what employees should expect, and what employers can do to minimize the burdens (professional development, mentoring opportunities, active recruitment).”

“Create shared standards and principles for contingent positions. Continue to host conversations about the use of contingent labor in the profession. Create some kind of labor scorecard that institutions can use to grade themselves on their practices.”

## **Create, endorse, and/or promote resources and educational programming about contingent employment for managers and administrators**

Many contingent workers said they felt unsupported and undervalued by managers and administrators. Some said that their managers did not have the skills, time, institutional support, or resources to manage and mentor contingent workers. Other respondents,

<sup>8</sup> Tillman et al., Collective Responsibility Labor Advocacy Toolkit.

<sup>9</sup> Sayles and Tessler, “Best Practices in Term Positions,” Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting Diversity Forum, 2021.

including some who were managers, thought managers and administrators need tools and resources for advocating for non-contingent positions and more ethical contingent positions.

“Pressure employers for better conditions and treatment of workers.”

“Increase awareness among hiring managers that work experience in other fields should be valued - recognizing people can’t quit a full time job in a different field to take a part time or term positions.”

“Encourage employers not to rely on this type of employment.”

## **Support and advocate for unionization and collective bargaining for archival workers**

31% of survey respondents said that belonging to a union or collective bargaining unit would have improved their experience as a contingent worker. Many respondents, even managers, expressed feeling a sense of powerlessness, even though they wanted to improve working conditions for contingent workers in their workplaces. They faced difficulties advocating for themselves and others for several reasons, including the risk of retaliation, the isolation of being the only archival worker (or “lone arranger”) in their workplace, and their employers’ opaque and hierarchical decision making processes. Collective bargaining can surmount all of these issues. Unions tend to have more success advocating for the creation and long-term security of non-contingent positions. Additionally, union contingent positions often have higher salaries, better benefits, and longer term lengths, which are all important factors for creating ethical, positive contingent employment experiences. Some respondents thought that NEA has a role to play in advocating for unionization and collective bargaining for archival workers.

“Support unionization efforts on a national and regional level.”

“Advocate for higher wages, collective bargaining.”

## **Collaborate with other organizations to create sustained, systemic change**

Many of the issues in our field are chronic and systemic, and contingent employment is no exception. However, there are opportunities for NEA to collaborate with other professional organizations and cultural heritage institutions to implement many of these recommendations at a larger scale. One person suggested rallying our colleagues at other regional professional organizations and lobbying the Society of American Archivists about contingent employment and salary transparency. Another suggestion was to petition

grant-making institutions to reduce the number of grants that fully fund contingent positions, or enact requirements that contingent positions funded by grants have liveable wages, benefits, and longer term lengths. We are stronger together, and we believe that NEA can be a leader in this area by fostering a collaborative approach with other organizations.

"It's very difficult for archival professionals to advocate for themselves. Salary guides for archival roles/activities would be so helpful. I know there have been salary studies, but could NEA and other regional professional organizations put some published weight behind what the jobs are worth?"

"A lot of these terms positions are often for processing. And frankly I don't think grant money should be going to processing positions because you have all that institutional knowledge walking out the door, and all these little things that you know aren't going to get fixed within that time period."

"Cooperation between regional organizations could help support contingent workers who have to move frequently (things like transferable memberships, co-promoting virtual events and education opportunities)."



### III. Demographic Information

55% of respondents lived in Massachusetts and 52% said they worked there. The second most represented state was Connecticut, with 19% of respondents living there and 18% working there. The 2021 survey saw much more geographic diversity than the 2016 study, which had 71% of respondents living in Massachusetts and 74% living there.

*Table 1. States where respondents live and work*

	CT	ME	MA	NH	RI	VT	Outside of New England	No data
Live in	19%	6%	55%	4%	2%	5%	8%	0
Work in	18%	6%	52%	4%	2%	6%	8%	4%

60% were members of New England Archivists at the time of taking the survey. Given that only 8% of respondents did not live or work in New England, this suggests that there are many archival workers in New England who are not members of NEA. This group presents an opportunity for further outreach and recruitment for the organization.

Over 90% of respondents were white. 3% were Asian and 2% were Black or African American. 2% were Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish in origin. 83% of respondents were female. A further 4% identified as both female and nonbinary. 1% were nonbinary and 8% were male.

The average survey taker was in their thirties, and nearly 88% said they were younger than 50. 24% were LGBTQ+. 33% stated they had a disability or chronic mental or physical health concerns.

These results reflect the broad lack of diversity in our field, particularly racial diversity. The demographic makeup of responses made it difficult for us to approach some of our research questions, such as: "Are people of color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people more impacted by contingent employment? On average, do they have more contingent positions or longer periods of contingent employment?" We did not find any statistically significant differences in the average length of contingent employment or average number of contingent positions based on any demographic categories.<sup>10</sup> However, this could be caused by the small number of responses for several demographic categories, particularly race. We did find some differences in the average amount of time spent job seeking and number of job offers received for people of color and people with disabilities and chronic health concerns, which are analyzed in more detail in the [Job Seeking Experiences](#) section.

<sup>10</sup> This matches the findings of the Society of American Archivists Issues and Advocacy Section survey on temporary labor. See Dean et al., "Survey on Temporary Labor: A Quick Look," Issues and Advocacy Section Meeting, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 2019.

The survey results represent a diverse range of professional perspectives, including new professionals, mid-career and late-career archival workers, paraprofessionals, professionals, and students. The vast majority of respondents were employed at the time of taking the survey. 65% had one full-time job, but a significant portion, just over 30%, worked part-time. Nearly 17% had more than one part-time job, while 13% had one part-time job. Almost 88% identified as professionals, and 10% were paraprofessionals. A few also said they were students and pre-professionals.

91% were employed in the archival field at the time of taking the survey, though 12% also worked in another field. 6% were not currently employed in the archival field, but were seeking work in the field. 1% had left the archival field entirely.

24% of respondents said they had been in the field for less than four years. 31% had been in the field between four and six years, and for nearly 29% it was between seven and ten years. 6% had been in the field between eleven and thirteen years, and 9% for fourteen years or more.

Financial data was also captured, painting a picture of the current lives and responsibilities of respondents. We asked respondents currently employed in the archival field for their net salary after taxes. The most common answer was \$30,000-\$39,999, followed by \$40,000-\$49,999. A little more than 10% made over \$70,000 after taxes.

These salaries are concerning, given that New England is generally considered to have an above average cost of living.<sup>11</sup> 57% of survey takers indicated that they were not the sole income earner in their household, and 45% said they were at least partially financially responsible for partners, spouses, children, and other dependents. One of the most common concerns raised in the survey and interviews was the scarcity of jobs which pay a living wage.

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<sup>11</sup> World Population Review, "Cost of Living Index by State, 2021," accessed January 13, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/cost-of-living-index-by-state>.

## IV. Education

All respondents had an undergraduate degree. 87% of respondents said that their highest level of education was a master's degree. For 6% it was a bachelor's degree, 6% had some graduate education or were currently enrolled in a graduate program, and 1% had a PhD. Of the seventy-two respondents with a master's degree, sixty-eight held a degree in library science, library and information science, archival science, or information science, which accounts for almost 82% of all respondents.

Only 6% of survey takers were currently enrolled in a degree program or non-degree certification program. As noted in the introduction of this report, our definition of contingent employment purposefully did not include internships (paid, unpaid, or for academic credit), which may have resulted in the low percentage of respondents currently enrolled in degree programs. The survey was also primarily promoted through professional networks, in which students may be less likely to participate until after graduation.

### Paying for Education

In this section, we asked respondents ten questions about how they paid for their education, including whether they worked while working towards their degree, student loan debt, and whether they thought their education was worth the cost.

Nearly 80% of respondents worked during their undergraduate studies, with 73% working part-time and 6% working full-time. 61% took out loans for their undergraduate degree. Of the respondents who took out undergraduate student loans, 84% took out less than \$40,000, nearly 8% took out between \$40,000 and \$59,999, and a little less than 8% took out more than \$80,000.

Of the seventy-eight respondents who had attended graduate school or were enrolled in a graduate program at the time of taking the survey, nearly 94% said that they worked during graduate school, with 70% working part-time and 24% working full-time. Only 6% of respondents who attended graduate school did not work during their graduate studies.

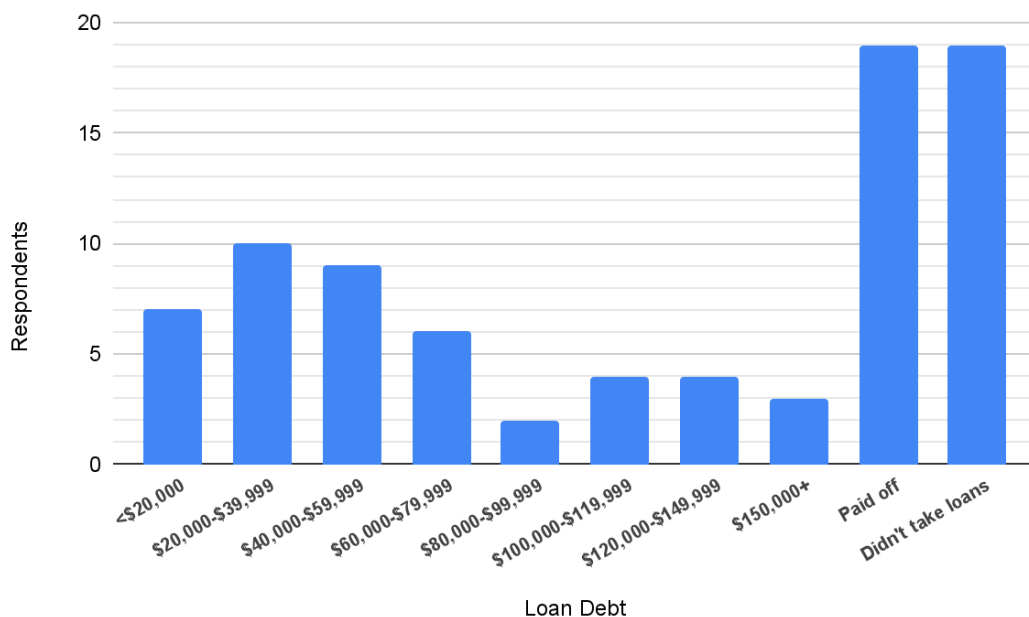
Many study participants told us that the cost of graduate school, particularly MLIS programs, was a heavy financial burden. At time of writing this report, the current tuition for the Simmons University Master's of Library and Information Science program is around \$48,000 per year. Similarly, Pratt's program currently runs between \$48,000 and \$50,000 per year. State schools can be more affordable for in-state students, usually around \$30,000 for programs on the East Coast like Rutgers University and University of Maryland. However, out-of-state tuition for these schools is even higher, sometimes between \$50,000 and \$60,000 per year.

70% of people who went to graduate school took out loans to fund their graduate education. The amount of debt for graduate school varied more widely than for

undergraduate debt, but was generally higher. Of those who took out loans for graduate school, 54% took out between \$20,000 and \$59,999, 13% took out between \$60,000 and \$79,999, and 19% took out over \$80,000. Only 12% took out less than \$20,000 in graduate student loans.

When asked if they had outstanding student loan debt at the time of taking the survey, 54% said yes. 23% had already paid off their student loans and 23% had never had student loan debt to begin with. This means that of respondents who took out student loans, 70% had not paid them off at the time of taking the survey. Of the forty-five respondents with outstanding student loan debt at the time of taking the survey, 16% had a remaining balance of less than \$20,000, 42% owed between \$20,000 and \$59,999, 13% owed between \$60,000 and \$79,999, and 29% had outstanding debt in excess of \$80,000.

*Figure 1. Outstanding Student Loan Debt*



50% of respondents with outstanding student loan debt were paying less than \$300 per month, while 25% paid between \$300 and \$499 per month and 11% paid between \$500 and \$799 per month. An astonishing 13% of people with outstanding student loan debt paid more than \$900 per month, which accounts for 7% of all respondents. It is important to note that several respondents told us they were on income-based repayment plans or were temporarily not required to make payments due to COVID-19 relief. Therefore, the monthly payments for some respondents would otherwise have been higher.

*Figure 2. Monthly Student Loan Payments*



Considering the salaries reported elsewhere in the survey, student loan debt is a significant financial burden for many archival workers. A \$400 monthly student loan payment is 16% of a \$30,000 net salary. With this in mind, the survey asked respondents approximately how much of their household's net monthly income went to repayment of student loans, including other student loan debt for which they were fully or partially responsible, such as for a spouse, partner, or child. Of respondents with outstanding student loan debt in their household, 52% were paying less than 10% of their income, 31% were paying between 10% and 19%, and 17% were paying between 20% and 39% of their net household income.

The last question asked respondents if they felt that their education in library science, archival science, or information science was worth the overall cost. Of respondents with formal education in library science, archival science, or information science, 39% said that they felt their education was worth the overall cost, 6% said it was not worth it, and the remaining 55% felt it was only somewhat worth the cost.

Fifty respondents shared additional free-text comments about their education and student loans. Common themes in these responses included concern or regret over the impact of student loans on their financial future, inadequate information or guidance about the true commitment and consequences of student loans, dissatisfaction with their degree program and the structure or culture of MLIS programs in general, and concerns about the cost of education relative to salaries and the current job market for archival workers.

"Becoming an archivist should require a certificate program at best. A master's degree is more or less required to get into the field today, and it is simply a waste of



money. Everything I learned that matters in my day-to-day job I could have learned in a semester. My internship experience was most important, not the time in class reading theory.”

“At the time I went to graduate school I didn't fully grasp just how poorly I'd be paid after and how most things were learned on the job and not in the classroom. I absolutely REGRET taking loans for grad school which will hang over my head for the next thirty years.”

“I was extremely lucky and received a fellowship that covered my MLS tuition. I would not have gone to Library school without it. As a career changer, it would have not made sense for me financially to incur that debt with the prospect of obtaining a low-paying job after graduation.”

Over a third of free-text responses mentioned receiving financial assistance other than student loans, most commonly support from family. Several respondents also expressed gratitude for grants, scholarships, and tuition remission from their employers, which were essential in helping them pay for their education. A few respondents also mentioned seeking out more affordable educational opportunities:

“I chose not to get a library science degree in part because of the cost. I got a partially-funded MA in History instead. I think it was a wise decision.”

“I chose to attend library school in Canada because it was significantly cheaper than US schools.”

“I chose an unconventional program (technically an MA rather than an MLIS) because it was much, much cheaper. I think if I had gone to a traditional library school and not been able to get grants or scholarships, it would not have been worth it. It's preposterous how much library school costs considering how low most librarian and archivists salaries are. The market is flooded and these schools are churning out more graduates than there are jobs. Something has to give, because it's just not fair to new people entering the field.”

## V. Contingent Employment Experiences

This section of the survey asked respondents how contingent employment impacted them personally, professionally, and financially. All survey takers were given the option of participating in a follow-up interview, and fifteen people agreed to be interviewed. During the interviews, the research team asked how contingent employment affected workers, their colleagues, managers, and workplaces, and the profession at large. Because there was significant overlap, this section combines survey responses with quotations from the interviews.

It was difficult to select only a few quotes to feature in this section, because each participant's answers reflected their unique perspective and circumstances. We attempted to select passages that either typified a trend we saw in the data, or presented a particularly compelling perspective that we thought should be highlighted.

This section contains some quotations noting positive aspects of contingent employment. We included these comments to present a balanced view of this topic, but we do not want their inclusion to misrepresent the prevalence of these sentiments or distort the rest of our findings. Every single respondent mentioned at least some negative aspects of contingent employment, including low pay, inadequate benefits, low morale, and a destabilizing sense of precarity in their professional and personal lives. As one respondent noted when describing the positive aspects of one of their contingent positions, "It was better than a lot of jobs, but nothing about it was better than a permanent job."

### The Big Picture

We asked respondents to describe their experience with contingent employment in a few sentences.

"It was extremely destabilizing and frustrating."

"It is a great option for me as I am very early in my career, but as I gain more experience I will want a permanent position."

"It has worked for me and my circumstances, but if I did not have financial support from family, this job would not be sustainable."

"I learned a lot but almost all of that was under my own steam. Without benefits or community or support, it's hard to feel like you're a part of anything. And the expiration date is just a constant threat."

"I was very lucky to find a contingent position that did offer very good pay and benefits and treated me as if I were a permanent employee for the duration of my

term. My prospects for a renewed contract or a permanent position at the same institution were significantly over-promised, however.”

“Very stressful - particularly financially. I felt like my position was too precarious to advocate for myself strongly and there was no clear path to getting a non-contingent position.”

“It was morale busting and financially stressful. Emotionally, I found it difficult to put on the smiley professional persona in these environments where I was a worker who could be dismissed in an instant and had few protections and no benefits. It made every application and interview for a non-contingent full-time position feel make-or-break.”

When interviewees were asked to describe their experience with contingent employment in three words, the most common three were stressful, uncertain, and underpaid.

A common narrative in our field is that new professionals must “pay their dues” or “get their foot in the door” by being contingently employed for a few years. However, the study found that for many archival workers, the path to stable employment is not so short, simple, or linear. Long periods of contingent employment are the norm for many of our colleagues, not just new professionals. 18% of survey respondents said they had been contingently employed for five to seven years over the course of their career, and for nearly 17%, it was at least eight years.

We discovered a significant difference in the experiences of new professionals compared to mid-career and late-career respondents. Of people who had been in the field for over eleven years, 61% had one or two contingent positions over the course of their career, and 38% had had only one contingent position. This is a sharp contrast to newer professionals. Of those who have been in the field between four and six years, 50% have already had at least three contingent positions, and 23% have already had four. And among new professionals who have been in the field for less than four years, around 20% have already had three or more contingent positions.

This is a stunning statistic that demonstrates a few things. Firstly, it suggests that contingent employment has become worse in our field over time, not better. Secondly, the first few years of their career are incredibly unstable for many new professionals. How can they be expected to develop as professionals when they have to juggle multiple part-time positions or go through the ordeal of finding a new job every year or two? How are they receiving meaningful job experience, let alone mentorship? Some respondents also noted that they had to relocate multiple times in a short period of time, which adds another level of stress and financial strain. Additionally, the [Education](#) section established that student loan debt already puts many new professionals in a precarious financial position, which can make the uncertainty of contingent employment even more difficult.

It is possible that these statistics suffer from survivorship bias, as they may not reflect the experiences of mid-career and late-career workers who have already left the field due to the instability of protracted contingent employment. If that is the case, it only demonstrates the troubling consequences of the continual overreliance on contingent employment in our field. Contingent employment threatens the sustainability of the archival profession. 37% had considered leaving the field because of contingent employment, and among people who had been in the field for less than four years, it was 40%. Meanwhile, only 16% of respondents who had been in the field for more than seventeen years said they have considered leaving the field due to contingent employment.

### **Working Conditions and Morale**

Why would contingent employment cause someone, particularly a new professional, to leave the field of their choice? Nearly 87% of survey takers said they disliked the financial insecurity of contingent employment, and 84% said contingent employment made it difficult for them to plan for their futures professionally and personally. 52% said they had to spend a significant portion of their free time job searching.

*Table 2. Aspects of contingent employment disliked by respondents. Respondents had the ability to choose multiple options.*

Financial insecurity/precarity	86%
Difficulty planning for my future, professionally and personally	84%
Pay and benefits	69%
Spending my free time job seeking	51%
Lack of support for my professional development	38%
Workplace culture	27%
Other	6%

Contingent employment also negatively impacts the personal lives of many survey takers. Nearly 63% of respondents said their physical or mental health was negatively affected by contingent employment. While there are some professional benefits, these are almost always balanced against many personal and financial difficulties.

*Table 3. Impact of contingent employment on respondents' lifestyle. Respondents had the opportunity to choose multiple options.*

I have felt unable to or chosen not to commit to significant decisions such as getting married, buying a house, or starting a family	54%
I have experienced financial distress	45%
I have less free time	33%
I have felt isolated from my family, friends, community, or other support networks	22%
I have relocated when I would not otherwise have chosen to do so	20%
My commute has increased significantly	19%
I have lived apart from my partner or family when I would not otherwise have chosen to do so	13%
Other	10%
None of the above	6%

The interviews provided more detail about contingent workers' concerns. As one interviewee noted, "We're far away from our families...Our parents are aging ... I definitely am concerned ...where will I go next, you know?... I've put a lot on the line for this institution. And the fact that they won't give me more... also stings sometimes." Another said, "Professionally, I could really say I have a wealth of experience...personally, it felt restrictive in some ways. I did feel like I just had to be so careful about other choices I was making and whether, like, did I really have room to change my living situation? Could I ever live without roommates? That sort of thing."

Contingent workers also had mixed opinions about the impact of contingent employment on their careers. 89% of survey respondents said that their contingent employment gave them valuable professional experience, although a few noted that they would have also gotten the same experience in a non-contingent position. 53% said that in their contingent positions, they had access to mentors and professional development resources that have helped their career. However, nearly 16% said that they did *not* have access to mentors and professional development resources, which made it difficult for them to grow professionally.

30% said that they did not feel able to participate in professional service activities because of the uncertainty of their contingent employment. This suggests that the stress and uncertainty of contingent employment can limit workers' professional growth and make it more difficult for them to engage with the broader professional community. With the tenuous nature of their contingent positions, many people do not know if they will still be employed in the archival field or living in the same geographic area in a year's time, much

less the two or three years required for many professional service commitments. This is particularly concerning for professional organizations like NEA, which are struggling to foster member engagement and participation.

Others described the uncertainty of working without timely or reliable renewal of their contracts. To be clear, these are not project positions in the conventional sense of the word. In most cases, these respondents were working on ongoing projects and providing routine services in positions that could have been permanent. Instead, they were subjected to the stress and uncertainty of waiting to hear if their contract had been renewed, often on an annual basis. In some cases, workers were left wondering if they would have a job in a few weeks' time. As one person wrote, "The main issue for me is the uncertainty of whether my job will be renewed again (it has been renewed three times so far). There is no commitment from [my employer] to fund the position long term. I would like to stay here, but if they aren't able to decide, this puts undue stress on me...I don't know where I'll be working in six months, and I don't make a lot to begin with...If things continue like this, how will I move on with my life?"

Some respondents reported that their status as a contingent employee negatively impacted their morale and experiences in the workplace. In particular, many contingent workers felt isolated from their colleagues. One of the biggest concerns was being excluded from workplace activities and professional development opportunities. Others were disrespected or treated differently than their non-contingent colleagues.

"When I worked in a contract position, I did not get to participate in the full workplace culture, [and] felt left out and unchallenged."

"I was excluded from things like yearly personnel evaluations that I feel would've helped me improve professionally. The difference in my treatment at work when my second contingent position was changed to a permanent position was palpable."

"[I] have experienced disrespect [and] being treated like a second-class citizen."

"I think the biggest part for me about all these positions is I didn't feel a real part of the team. That it was contingent, it was clear that I was there on a project basis, I was part time... I never felt like a full part of the team, it definitely felt like I was apart from everyone else who was working."

Additionally, many felt that their work was not valued, particularly by management and administration.

"I felt less than or disposable, as if my position or work was less important or valuable to the institution and my colleagues."

"I always felt like no matter how important my contribution, or how much I worked, that I was less valuable and more disposable than non-contingent employees. No

matter how prevalent contingent employment was at any institution, I didn't feel like I fit in."

"I understand the funding is a barrier to FT employment at many institutions. However, I find that excuse flimsy when the salaries of administrators and high-level staff are taken into account. Young or early professionals' time is as valuable as anyone else's, and should be treated as such. After my first contingent position, where I worked overtime (literally and figuratively) to help the institution, I felt that I was used and tossed aside."

"I would get feedback, 'you're a great person to work with, you're a great colleague,' you know, 'you've really transformed this program,' and yet there was no support for me."

Others did not feel able to freely share their ideas or report workplace issues out of fear that their employer would retaliate by choosing not to renew their contract or extend their position. One person wrote that "speaking on workplace issues [meant] possibly risking my renewal/future employment."

### **Contingent Employment: Stepping Stone or Necessary Evil?**

When asked why they had accepted their most recent contingent position, nearly 76% said they needed the pay and/or benefits. 60% wanted experience, and 13% said they wanted the flexibility of a contingent position. However, 43% said they felt it was their only option. This suggests that although there can be positive aspects of contingent employment, it is often a necessity rather than a choice.

In a similar vein, the survey asked if, given the choice, respondents would choose to be contingently employed. Out of eighty-three respondents, only one person said yes. Nearly 46% said no, and over half said that it would depend on the specifics of the job. For many people, their experience with contingent employment varied based on the specific circumstances and working conditions of each position. What, then, are the factors that would make someone choose a contingent job? And when does protracted, long-term contingent employment stop being a beneficial "stepping stone" at the beginning of a new professional's career?

When asked which aspects of their contingent employment experience they liked, the most common answer was that it gave them valuable experience. However, some noted that non-contingent positions could have provided equally valuable experience, along with more time, space, support, and resources to grow professionally. Other popular answers were support for their professional development and the opportunity to network.

One respondent noted that part-time employment gave them the flexibility to spend more time raising their children. A few people noted that they enjoyed the goal-oriented nature of project positions. In the interviews, one person said that the flexibility of contingent



employment allowed them to support their partner's career, which involved moving frequently. Another used contingent positions to gain a variety of experience in different kinds of archives. However, for many, the upsides of contingent employment could not outweigh the impact of financial precarity and professional instability. In the words of one interviewee: "I don't know how to fix this because I feel like they're a necessity, but also I feel that they hurt everyone involved."

A common theme in both the survey responses and interviews was the cumulative impacts of protracted, long-term contingent employment. Many participants entered the archival profession knowing that contingent employment is very common and expecting to be contingently employed for a few years at the beginning of their careers. But for some, a permanent position never materialized. As one respondent wrote: "For too many of us, it's a fallback position because we can't find permanent, full-time jobs."

The strain of contingent employment often builds up and becomes more unsustainable and unacceptable over time.

"I was only a couple years into contingent employment when I completed the 2016 [NEA Contingent Employment] survey, and did not anticipate I would be contingently employed for several more years. While I do think contingent employment is often an inevitable stepping stone to non-contingent employment in the archival field (to gain experience, learn various subfields of the profession), contingent employment for that amount of time is not sustainable! I experienced pretty serious burnout. Even though I loved many of the positions I held, I am a much healthier person having one non-contingent job."

In general, the study found that the people most satisfied with their contingent employment experience were those for whom the "stepping stone" system had worked as intended: people who had one or two contingent positions at the beginning of their career and then transitioned to stable, non-contingent employment. However, it is important to note that even these workers struggled with the negative impact of contingent employment professionally and personally.

"I was very lucky that I was treated well and my terms were always renewed and I was able to leverage my last contingent position into a permanent one, but it was stressful to feel like I couldn't rely on the job being there."

"I'm grateful that my contract led to a permanent position, but I think I would leave the field before going through that all again."

"It did lead me to a position I enjoy, however, I often struggle with the reality [that] working in this field can be incredibly difficult."

"It sometimes feels like I started working as an archivist two years ago, even though I've been in the field full-time since 2012. Because when you're contingently employed there's always that feeling of being outside a little bit - outside of the field, outside of your institution, outside of professional organizations because you don't have support to join them. So I was able to get the job I have now, which is a great job, because of all the experience, but at the same time I sort of feel like, I guess behind is the right word for it."

On the whole, many mid-career respondents thought that in the current job market, they have been forced to continue accepting contingent employment as a necessary evil. Early career professionals also worried that using contingent employment as a stepping stone will not pay off, and that they will not be able to find a non-contingent job.

"Useful for a while, as a student perhaps, but not sustainable longer-term than a few months or a year."

"I'm grateful that contingent employment helped me eventually get to a job that I love, but I'm also still bitter at the complications it caused. I'm also bitter on behalf of friends who got screwed over big-time by contingent employment, making my experience look like a cake walk."

"[Contingent employment] isn't a mandatory stepping stone or a rite of passage. It is often the best option between employment and unemployment."

"It works for the time being. My hope is that it is setting me up with useful work experiences that will help in applying to full-time positions later on."

## **Recruiting and Retaining New Professionals**

Some study participants thought the overreliance on contingent employment has a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of new professionals in the archival field. Several said that they advised people interested in a career in archives to choose another field. Others wrote that if they had known the realities of contingent employment, they might not have chosen this career path.

"I just don't see how the field can retain anyone who doesn't have a lot of patience and willingness to have their life be a series of question marks...It's hard for me to consider recommending that someone pursue this career path just because I know most people have a really hard time. And I have been unusually lucky and still in the past six months so seriously considered just throwing in the towel on all this because it's really hard."

"I ran into this guy...who was like, 'I'm gonna start library school and I want to be an archivist.' And I was like 'that's a terrible idea, like don't do that.' ... That's not good for the profession, that we have people with a lot of experience who have been in the

field a long time discouraging people from entering the field.”

“[Contingent employment is] unfair, makes you question the validity of your MLS degree, makes you hesitant to stay in the field.”

Some also said that there is inadequate training and support for new professionals, and that early career archival workers are expected to use contingent employment to gain practical experience that was missing from their graduate library and information studies education.

“I do really see the benefits of having contingent employment as an option, but I think it should be restricted to early and pre-professional work. I think this is a job where you really learn by doing...Honestly, I learned very little in grad school that was directly applicable to what I’m doing. Having that apprenticeship style of employment was really helpful, really necessary. But yeah, it should just be for the pre and early professionals, it shouldn't go beyond. I don't know why we're so resistant to the idea of apprenticeships, like we do it for a lot of trades. And it's kind of like we've inherited the historian, academic, manuscripts mindset of it, but no! We're in it, our hands are very dusty all the time.”

“It felt like the only way to gain sufficient professional experience in order to compete for non-contingent archival work. It meant that I was financially unstable for the first five years of my career following graduate school.”

“I actually think it's on the MLIS farms. Like I do think that it's on these institutions that have no entry requirements, very few academic requirements... They're not challenging. I mean, I know there are exceptions. And I did have a good graduate school experience, but I personally had a good graduate school experience because I was in a dual-degree program.”

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Many participants thought that contingent employment has significant implications about diversity, equity, and the recruitment and retention of new professionals from diverse backgrounds and marginalized communities.

“My contingent employment experience ultimately made me decide that libraries and archives are really no place for me as a woman or queer identifying person of color. I know there are needs for representation, but asking people to be the first or the few, only to give them no real support and only offer contingent employment is cruel and exploitative. I'm thankful for my experience but so glad it's over.”

“I think it's a major barrier to having a more diverse field that needs to be solved. I am very lucky that I have a partner with a stable, higher-earning job who can help support me until I find a full-time job with benefits and who supports me... Many people don't have that kind of support....We NEED diversity in this field, but we're not

going to get it in an environment where our labor is routinely undervalued and exploited.”

“I do not think it is a sustainable model to increase retention in the field or to recruit, welcome, and retain more diverse candidates (age, race, gender identity, geographic, etc.)”

We asked respondents if they thought any aspects of their identity have impacted their experience with contingent employment, including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, religion, age, and disability. Over 33% said yes. Some thought that their race, gender, age, marital status, or access to generational wealth gave them privilege which impacted their experience.

Others recalled their experiences with racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, and fatphobia as contingent workers. Some respondents said that their precarious status as a contingent employee made them feel more vulnerable to discrimination and hostility at work. One person wrote, “Being in a residency position as one of a few BIPOC employees at my org meant I felt I was in a 'marked' position on staff.” Another said, “It just felt like being a contingent worker placed me even lower in the hierarchy. And as a person of color, it's really demoralizing to realize there was yet another way to be boxed in and marginalized.”

Over 17% of free-text responses to this question mentioned disability and chronic mental or physical health concerns, particularly feeling unsupported and judged at work. One respondent lost their job because their employer did not provide appropriate accommodations for them. In some cases, respondents felt stuck in a vicious cycle of contingent employment because the stress of contingent employment worsened their health condition, which made it more difficult to find another job. These findings suggest that contingent employment creates unique challenges for workers with disabilities and chronic health concerns.

Another common thread was the significant economic barriers to entering the field, which privilege people from middle-class and wealthy backgrounds. In addition to the high cost of many MLIS programs, new professionals are often expected to take unpaid internships and low-paying contingent positions to gain experience. The expectation of providing free or underpaid labor forces many people into precarious financial positions, and prevents some from entering the field at all. Many respondents mentioned that they would not have been able to continue working in the field if they did not have family, partners, spouses, and friends to help pay for school, provide free or affordable housing, or provide cash outright while they were contingently employed.

"Without a higher-earning spouse, this would have been much more difficult and I might have left the field."

"I don't think I'd ever go to school and take on debt for an MLIS degree, because I worked at a place that could afford staff but simply didn't feel like advocating for them or filling positions. I can't risk that as someone who doesn't have a safety net or family to fall back on."

"[Contingent employment] has only been possible because my husband has a job with benefits and is the primary breadwinner in our family."

"I have been very fortunate to have parents who supported me throughout my undergraduate education, graduate education, and career thus far...Had I been on my own financially, I would likely never have made it as an archivist."

Another facet of contingent employment's intersection with issues of diversity and equity is the different kinds of work that are often only supported through contingent positions. A couple respondents noted that archival work related to marginalized communities is often relegated to project positions and diversity fellowships, which do not receive the same long-term funding, support, and resources.

"I want to work on projects that affect my communities and focus on diverse material. I have found that, typically, this is found more often in contingent positions so, if I want to do work I care about, I have to be in a contingent position."

"I have found the work within contingent employment positions to be inherently more interesting, because it often revolves around community-focused projects or projects directly working to fill gaps in the archival field. However, I wish I could do this work in a permanent position."

## **The Future of the Field**

Several participants noted a generational divide between late-career archival workers and newer professionals, who often felt that more established professionals minimized or did not fully understand the challenges of contingent employment in the current economic climate.

"I think everyone entering the field since the 2008 market crash understands how shitty the job search is, but those who have been secured and tenured since before then don't quite click with what a struggle it can be."

"I know it's tricky, but I would encourage people to listen to the up and coming archivists who care about these issues. I find that people often turn to people who have been in the field for a long time who don't have recent experience with these issues."

"I have been glad to see a lot of conversations [about contingent employment], but I'm also very disheartened to see all the resistance from people who are in places of power in the field, people who are in established positions and have been doing this work for a long time and have a platform, and seem to think that the answer is 'Oh, well if that's not the thing for you just say no.'"

A few mid-career workers also felt that they were in an awkward position where they had first-hand experience of the negative aspects of contingent employment, but little power to change their workplaces. They also worried that the vast disparities and inequities between contingent and non-contingent workers would lead to resentment and divisions in their workplaces and within the field at large.

"There's always this idea in the back of your head like, 'Well I can get someone on a grant to like, process [a collection] for me.' And then it's like, 'No, I don't want to do that!' ...So I think it's like it's just very cyclical, like you feel like you get into these cycles of like, 'Well if I did it.' ... I will say personally, the people I consider colleagues and friends have all made really concerted decisions to not [hire contingent workers]. To not have that kind of exploitative environment, but I'm sure that's not pervasive."

"In terms of my employer, they've lost a lot of really talented employees because they can't afford to stay in those positions, so they leave for other jobs. And... it doesn't help morale for employees ... It's depressing to see it happen to other people, even though I'm not in that position myself anymore. Like I hate seeing it happen over and over again. And, I mean, ultimately, I think it doesn't reflect well on the place."

"I have thought sometimes about just how painful it's been to watch other people in contingent positions, who maybe three or four years ago were very much my peers, like in the same place professionally speaking... And like, it feels kind of awful to be the one person who has stability, like there's definitely guilt there. It's like, 'What did I do to luck into this job that, you know, pays \$40,000 a year.. and has benefits and it's not going to go away...and they're not going to make me wait until June first every year to renew my contract?' ...There's a lot of bitterness and resentment, you know, not just about that experience but also for those people who don't really get it. And I would maybe put myself in a category of like, maybe doesn't really get it."

"There are people who are contingent workers who have been here longer than I have, who don't get [the same benefits as non-contingent staff]. It's weird to talk about and it's awkward."

"It's easy to get in the mindset of, 'Well, I had to do my dues so everyone else needs to do that too.' But that's why we need to change! ... We need to break that."

## VI. Improving Contingent Employment Experiences

While the primary purpose of this report is to provide an actionable list of recommendations for New England Archivists, the task force has also compiled this list of suggestions for supporting and improving the experiences of contingent workers. We believe all archival workers can and should advocate for these things in their workplaces, including non-contingent workers, managers, and administrators.

The survey asked respondents what would have improved their experience as a contingent worker. 74% said higher wages, 65% said better benefits, 54% said employee rather than contractor worker status, 48% said reliable and timely renewal of their contract, 40% said ability to participate in staff activities and professional development, and 31% said being part of a union or collective bargaining unit. Other free-text responses included “respect from non-contingent staff” and “recognition of the precarity/difficulty of my position from the institution or my supervisor.” The qualitative data from the interviews reiterated many of these themes.

If an employer is not able to provide adequate pay and benefits, good working conditions, and appropriate training, mentorship, and professional development resources to contingent workers for any reason, we believe it would be more ethical and beneficial for both the employer and employee to delay recruiting and hiring for the position until these issues are resolved. It is not fair to the employee to put them in a situation where they do not have the necessary support to do their job, nor is it beneficial to the employer if their employees are not able to do their best work.

Contingent workers often do not feel comfortable advocating for themselves, and look to their managers for support. As one interviewee observed, “I sometimes feel that I don't get enough advocacy for certain issues that come up so I would encourage managers to try really hard, even if it's outside of their comfort zone, to be the best advocate possible for your contingent employees, because a lot of times we're in a position where we can't advocate for ourselves.”

It benefits both employees and the employer to take the necessary time and resources to make sure archival workers can thrive at work. One interviewee said that, “When you have a lot of contingent work, the projects become the focus for that short period of time, and there's all this attention on the project. Everyone gives it all this energy and then when the money runs out, it just kind of goes away. And I think that that's really destabilizing...There was [more than one organization] where after I left everything fell apart, like they had all this turnover. And I think that turning to contingent employment for something that should really be a full-time role ends up exposing some things or creating some fractures in the organization.”



## **Advocate for a living wage and generous benefits**

This was the most prominent issue that came up again and again in survey responses and interviews. Managers and administrators should advocate for a living wage and generous benefits for all of their employees, including contingent workers. MIT's Living Wage Calculator is a good starting resource for calculating a living wage.<sup>12</sup> Benefits should include paid sick time, paid vacation time, health insurance, and retirement matching or pension schemes. At minimum, contingent employees should get the same benefits package as their non-contingent colleagues.

In the words of one interviewee: "If you can't afford to give someone benefits, you can't afford to hire. If you have not written into your budget that the person you're hiring gets medical, dental, vision, paid time off, sick time, all of those things, then you have failed to budget appropriately or your institution is not giving you the resources you need."

## **Advocate for longer term lengths**

Many respondents said that shorter term lengths (generally shorter than two or three years) were not helpful professionally and disruptive personally. Some did not have time for adequate training and onboarding before they were expected to lead large and complex projects with short time-frames. Shorter term lengths also lead to the loss of institutional knowledge and high rates of staff turnover. One interviewee said, "It's helpful to have your coverage and you have people doing the work you don't have time for. That's great, but also a lot of that knowledge walks out the door. Like you have someone who pioneered a process or worked with a collection...And now you're all of a sudden like 'what's going on here?' I feel like with contingent workers there's not usually an official handoff process."

Being forced to take a string of short-term positions can also negatively impact the careers of contingent workers. A respondent wrote, "A work history with lots of short term positions makes me feel scattered and like I've been unable to develop a depth of knowledge in my field – try as I might. I'd like to be able to put down roots and become a real expert in something." Finally, shorter term lengths put personal and financial strain on workers, who are subjected to the stress of a looming end to their employment. Many feel forced to spend a significant amount of their free time frantically searching for a new job, which often involves the further complications of relocating.

## **Be honest about term lengths, extensions, and renewals**

If you manage contingent workers in term positions, be honest and realistic about the possibility of their term being extended or a contingent position being converted into a non-contingent one. Several participants said that their managers exaggerated or lied

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<sup>12</sup> Glasmeier and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "Living Wage Calculator," accessed January 13, 2022, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>.

about the security of their jobs to avoid having these awkward conversations. This is difficult for contingent workers because they have less time to look for other jobs, find alternative living arrangements, and make informed decisions about their personal and professional lives.

One interviewee said: "It was kind of like, 'Oh, you know, we're putting a full-time position in the budget, like we think you'd be really great for it,' and they kind of carrot-sticked me along with that. But then that position didn't get approved, and I was kind of thrown into panic mode, because I was told that this was happening! And then it kind of fell through. But before they made it seem like it was a done deal, like 'Okay we're putting it in the budget, it's gonna get approved.' It was not." Another said that managers should "just be clear that if the job is going to be up in six weeks, encourage people to look for their next best option and help them."

### **Renew contracts in a timely manner**

Some respondents said that they were uncertain about the status of their contract renewal less than a month before the end of their contract. This makes it difficult for workers to decide if they should begin looking for another job, and even if they can afford to continue in their current living situation, if they have to commit to signing a lease. The 2018 open letter from six temporary archivists and librarians at University of California, Los Angeles outlines the consequences of this type of employment for workers and employers.<sup>13</sup>

Give all employees, especially contingent workers, ample notice about the renewal of their contracts, preferably at least a few months. If an employee is on a one-year contract that has been renewed several times, employers should consider converting them to a longer contract. This will give the employee more security and reduce the administrative costs of going through the process of renewing the contract every year.

### **Provide training, mentorship and professional development**

Participants said that one of the most significant factors in their experience as contingent workers was mentorship and support for their professional development. Many said they felt used by their employers in contingent positions, because they lent their time and expertise to projects but received little or no training, benefits, recognition, or support in return. Employment should be reciprocal rather than extractive and transactional, with an employer trying to extract as much time and labor from their employees for the smallest possible investment in salary, benefits, and professional development resources.

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<sup>13</sup> "Archivists on the Issues: An Update on UCLA Temporary Librarians," Society of American Archivists Issues and Advocacy Section blog, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://issuesandadvocacy.wordpress.com/2019/03/11/archivists-on-the-issues-an-update-on-ucla-temporary-librarians/>.

All employees, including contingent workers, should be provided with adequate training, mentorship, time, and support for their professional development. New employees should not be expected to “hit the ground running” without adequate support, especially in contingent positions designed for new professionals. Employers should understand that they need to invest time and resources in training and mentoring their new employees to foster the development of their expertise and independence.

In the words of one respondent: “It was disheartening and isolating to feel so undervalued and to have no one to speak up for me. Having a peer group to connect with in some way, or mentors who took me seriously would have made all the difference.” Another said, “There was no support for my professional development and I was a lone arranger so I felt professionally isolated too.”

### **Support unionization and collective bargaining**

31% of respondents said that belonging to a union or collective bargaining unit would have improved their experience as a contingent worker. Union positions, even contingent ones, tend to have higher pay, better benefits, and stronger job protections. One person said that they were able to get tuition assistance for graduate school because they belonged to a union.

Many study participants said that they felt they did not have the power to advocate for themselves and their colleagues. Workers are stronger together, and collective bargaining can help us improve salaries, benefits, and working conditions for all of us, regardless of our job title, educational background, or the size or type of institution where we work.

## VII. Related Labor Issues

The survey and interviews asked participants many questions about their entire employment history, including non-contingent jobs, benefits, unemployment, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and specific types of positions like residencies, internships, and volunteer positions. We discovered that contingent employment intersects with several other labor issues in our field that make long-term professional and financial stability unattainable for many archival workers.

### The Long and Winding Road to Stability

The [Contingent Employment Experiences](#) section demonstrated the effects of contingent employment on archival workers, particularly the financial precarity and uncertainty of long periods of contingent employment. However, more underlying problems in our field mean that very few archival workers feel secure at any point in their careers: not enough jobs, rampant low pay and poor benefits, insecure funding, and job cuts.

Finding a non-contingent position is no guarantee of permanent stability. 58% of respondents had landed a permanent gig at some point in their career. But of these, 40% still ended up contingently employed afterwards. 71% of survey respondents had also resorted to working multiple jobs simultaneously, often cobbling together a living out of multiple poorly-paid positions. Shockingly, 22% of all respondents had held three or more jobs simultaneously at least once since entering the archival field.

Many struggled with unemployment and finding any job in the field, even contingent positions. 36% of respondents had experienced a period of unemployment between jobs. 12% said that although at least one of their current jobs was related to archives, they were also working in another field. Over 50% had held jobs outside the field since entering the profession. When asked why they had taken a job outside their field of choice, most said that they needed the money or couldn't find a position in the archival field.

### Benefits

One of the most pressing issues that the study uncovered was the number of archival workers, even non-contingent workers, who do not receive benefits from their employers. Of the 207 jobs reported on the survey which were not student jobs or internships, 40% did not provide benefits of any kind. What's more, paid sick time was the only benefit many respondents received from their employer. It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, paid sick time was considered a benefit, although it is a state-mandated right for workers in some states.

This statistic represents only a slight improvement from NEA's first contingent employment study, when over 49% of jobs reported in this section did not provide any benefits.<sup>14</sup> This longitudinal data demonstrates that access to benefits has been a long-standing issue for archival workers for many years. Unfortunately, the data from the 2021 study suggests that access to benefits for most archival workers has not measurably improved in recent years. 24% of CES-II respondents had been in the field for less than four years, and the majority of these new professionals still reported that even excluding student jobs and internships, at least one their employers did not provide benefits of any kind.

Access to adequate benefits, particularly health insurance, was one of the biggest concerns for archival workers. In free-text responses and interviews, dozens of people told us that the lack of benefits, particularly health insurance, affected their lives, families, and careers. Several said that they had considered leaving the field due to their inability to find a job that provided adequate benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic has only underscored the importance of a comprehensive benefits package, particularly paid sick leave and affordable health insurance. After six years of contingent employment, one interviewee said: "I love this work. Will I get to do this work? Because this is becoming unsustainable. I don't have health insurance. I don't have anything but the [state-mandated] sick time."

## **Internships and Volunteering**

Students and new professionals are sometimes advised to volunteer or take internships, often unpaid, to gain experience in the field. The survey found that these are both still common practices.

48% of respondents had held a volunteer position. When asked why they sought out a volunteer position, the most popular answer was that they wanted to gain professional experience. Over 32% of respondents had had an unpaid internship. It is important to clarify that this excludes unpaid internships and work placements that were required for a course of study and for which they received academic credit. In most cases, respondents had unpaid internships during graduate school. However, over 3% took an unpaid internship after graduate school. When asked why they sought out an unpaid internship, most said that they wanted to gain professional experience. Others wanted the opportunity to network, enjoyed the work, couldn't find a paying job, or hoped they would be hired for a paying job at the same institution after the internship.

However, as several study participants pointed out, many people simply cannot afford to work for free, especially when the costs of housing, transportation, tuition, and health insurance are taken into account. The expectation that students and new professionals take unpaid volunteer and internship positions privileges people who can afford to absorb the financial impacts of that choice. Some respondents observed that new professionals are

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<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that in 2015, only a year before NEA's first Contingent Employment Study, Massachusetts enacted legislation requiring most employers to provide paid sick time. Massachusetts was the most well-represented state in both studies, which likely affected the statistics about benefits. In many cases, the only "benefit" respondents receive from their employer is 40 hours of state-mandated sick time per year.

expected to use contingent employment to fill the significant experience gaps in their graduate education, and it seems that unpaid internships and volunteer positions follow the same pattern.

### **Residency Positions and Diversity Positions**

We also added several questions about residency positions and diversity positions, which have become more prominent in recent years. We defined diversity positions as “a position designed to promote diversity by hiring a person from an underrepresented group or a position designed to work with user populations or collections from underrepresented groups.”

Over 2% of respondents had held a residency position. One of these respondents was still currently in a residency position at the time of taking the survey, and another left before the end of their residency. With such a small sample size, we cannot make any assertions about the effectiveness of residency programs in providing experience and mentorship for new professionals, or the rate at which workers were able to find non-contingent employment after their residencies. However, one respondent who had a residency position shared that “being in a residency position as one of a few BIPOC employees at my org meant I felt I was in a 'marked' position on staff.”

Over 3% of respondents had held a diversity position. Although this is a very small sample size, it is significant to note that 100% of these diversity positions were contingent positions. One person wrote, “I want to work on projects that affect my communities and focus on diverse material. I have found that, typically, this is found more often in contingent positions so, if I want to do work I care about, I have to be in a contingent position.”

Many residency positions and diversity positions are designed to provide mentorship and support to new professionals, particularly people from diverse backgrounds and marginalized communities. There were simply too few respondents who had held these types of positions to draw any definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of this model of contingent employment, but we hope there will be further research in this area.

### **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The study captured an invaluable snapshot of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our field at a particular moment in time, almost exactly a year into the pandemic. From the beginning, our task force knew that the results of the study would be inextricably linked to the public health and economic crisis. However, we decided to maintain the original scope of our charge, and make a survey about contingent employment more broadly, rather than shifting the entire focus to the impact of COVID-19 specifically.

We added a few questions about how COVID-19 affected respondents, to give them a specific place to share their experiences with the pandemic. Nonetheless, we believe that

the pandemic has influenced nearly every aspect of the study's findings, particularly in the [Job Seeking Experiences](#) and [Job Postings Survey](#) sections. We do not believe that the pandemic has invalidated the results or nullified the many valid comments, observations, and criticisms study participants shared with us. On the contrary, the pandemic has merely underscored harmful and unsustainable trends and practices that have persisted in our field for many years.

Nearly 40% of respondents said that their employment status, salary, hours, benefits, or other job prospects were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, 12% of survey respondents lost their jobs due to the pandemic. 13% were furloughed, and 7% reported having their pay cut as a direct result of the pandemic. Others lost access to benefits and had their start dates at new jobs delayed.

Employers' responses to the pandemic were particularly concerning for working parents and workers with disabilities and chronic health concerns. One respondent said that they had to take unpaid leave to care for their children, who were transitioning to remote schooling. Another said that they could not continue their job search because their children's school was closed. Two people wrote that they had to leave their jobs because they were immunocompromised or lived with someone who was immunocompromised. In these cases, their workplace was not taking adequate safety precautions, and their employers would not accommodate their requests for safer work arrangements.

At the time of the study in the spring and early summer of 2021, workers were concerned about keeping their jobs and benefits in the short term. In the long term, many predicted that budget cuts and hiring freezes would make it even harder to advocate for full-time, permanent positions with a living wage. In the words of one interviewee: "How do we make our budgets bigger? We're scrimping and saving...How do we make this work, especially in a post-COVID world where all our budgets have been cut? And they're not looking like they're ever going to come back because let's face it, once libraries lose it, they don't get it back."

Many worried about their ability to find a job during a global pandemic, particularly new professionals. One wrote, "COVID-19 decimated the job market. I graduated with my MLIS in 2020...The outlook wasn't great, but jobs were regularly being posted for archivists. After COVID-19 started, I barely saw any jobs going up." Another said, "There was no option for my position to be renewed due to a hiring freeze, and many jobs I applied for had the searches terminated because of similar freezes."

At the time of writing this report in early 2022, the pandemic is still ongoing. While this study provides some insight into the short-term impacts and concerns of archival workers, the long-reaching effects of the pandemic will undoubtedly be felt in our field for many years to come.



## VIII. Job Seeking Experiences

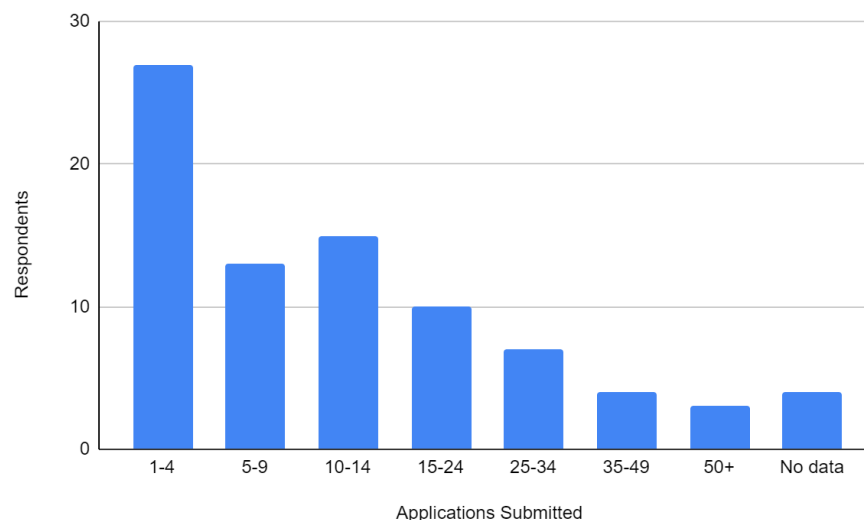
83% of survey takers had been on the job market within the last five years, between 2016 and 2021. 12% had been job searching during the pandemic, which matches the findings in the [Related Labor Issues](#) section that 12% of all respondents lost their job due to the pandemic.

The majority of participants (54%) learned about their current positions through job postings; however, networking (22%) was also important for many. Internal promotion (10%) and recruitment from either an employer or search firm (8%) ranked much lower in comparison. An “other” category (5%) allowed free-text answers. These responses fell mostly into two categories: volunteering at the organization and being an internal candidate for a competitive position.

The survey asked the length of their most recent job search, including searches that were ongoing at the time of taking the survey. 66% said less than a year, however this figure is likely affected by the number of people who lost their jobs less than a year before due to the pandemic. Significantly, over 25% said they had been on the job market for a year or two. The remaining 7% had spent more than three years searching for a job.

Respondents noted that job-seeking can be long and demoralizing, particular when they applied for many jobs without success. 66% of people submitted between one and fourteen job applications. Nearly 17% filled out more than twenty-five applications (see figure 3). One respondent said, “I have consistently looked for full time jobs in my field since 2017 and have been forced to work multiple contingent jobs in the field to make a living.” Another wrote that the process was “long and hard! I searched for basically an entire year after I accepted my first non-contingent position and immediately realized it was inadequate to my needs.”

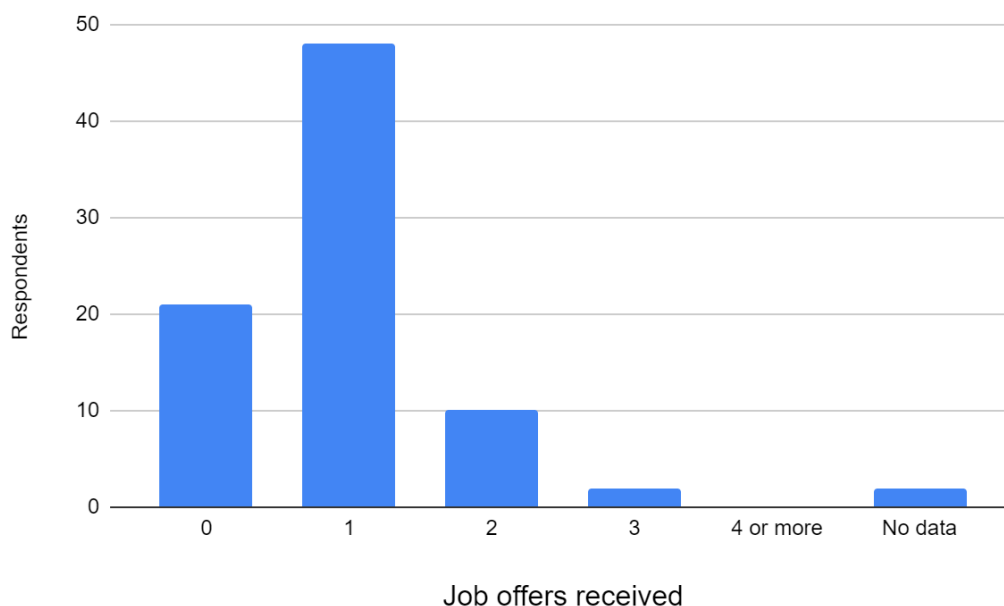
*Figure 3. Job applications submitted during most recent job search*



We asked respondents to estimate the ratio of contingent jobs they applied for during their most recent job search. 67% had applied to at least one contingent job, and 38% said that at least half of the jobs they applied for were contingent. Only 29% said they did not apply for any contingent positions during their most recent job search. Some said they deliberately chose not to apply for contingent roles because they wanted to avoid contingent employment. One wrote, “I specifically avoided applying to part-time and non-benefited positions because I was living with my parents at the time and thus could afford to take more time and focus on positions which could actually support me.” Another said, “During my last real round of applying for jobs, I did turn down a contingent position offer. I realized I did not want to spend another year building up institutional knowledge only to be forced to leave (again). And the salary was too low for me to afford to live in the area. I only applied to full term, non-contingent positions after that.”

During their most recent job search, over 33% of respondents were only invited to interview for one position. 24% were invited to interview for two positions, 9% for three positions, and just under 11% for four positions. The remaining 16% were invited to interviews for five or more positions. Despite these seemingly successful interview figures, 58% of respondents received only one job offer during their most recent job search, 12% received two offers, and only 2% received three offers. Perhaps most significantly, 25% did not receive any offers at all (see figure 4).

*Figure 4. Job offers received during most recent job search*



This underscores how difficult it can be to find any job in the field, even a contingent position. While there are many factors that might play into accepting a position, if most archival workers can expect to receive only one job offer, they might feel forced to accept it even if they would prefer not to. 43% of respondents said they had accepted a job offer they would not have otherwise accepted because it was the only offer they received. In

particular, 25% accepted a job offer they would not otherwise have accepted specifically because they were contingently employed or were trying to avoid contingent employment.

However, 18% said they did reject a job offer during their most recent job search. The most common reason for declining an offer was low salary. Other popular reasons included realizing they weren't the right fit for the position, a negative impression of the institution, personal considerations, and receiving a better offer elsewhere. A few said they had turned down a job because it had insufficient benefits, was contingent, or had an undesirable location or commute.

The results paint an unfortunate, though not unexpected, picture of the pandemic job market. Many free-text responses in this section mention that the pandemic made their job search more difficult and stressful. One respondent said, "job searching during a pandemic was particularly taxing, especially in April/May [of 2020], when so many institutions put up hiring freezes in the middle of searches. The first four applications I submitted had terminated searches before they began the interview stage."

Participants wrote about frequent issues with the application and interview process, particularly lack of transparency about salary, benefits, required experience, and the possibility of contingent positions being renewed or converted to non-contingent positions. One person wrote, "I think there are a lot of barriers to job applications. No salary listed, asking for letters of recommendation upfront, and 'possibility of extension...' are all difficult to grapple with when applying to jobs." Another said, "[I] can't get a job because I don't have enough experience, [and] can't get experience because I can't get a job."

Some also noted that employers are expecting more expertise and additional responsibilities from archival workers, often without adjusting their compensation or professional development resources accordingly. One person wrote, "Archives positions are now inevitably combined with other work and positions due to budget cuts. It's really five roles in one."

We also discovered inequities in the job search process for people of color and people with disabilities and chronic health concerns. While nearly 66% of white respondents said it took them less than 6 months to find their first job in the archival field, that was the case for only 33% of respondents who identified as African American, Black, Asian, Hispanic, or Latino/a/x. White respondents also tended to receive more job offers. 16% of white study participants received more than one job offer during their most recent job search, but not a single person of color did.

On average, respondents with disabilities also took longer to find their first job in the archival field. Over 48% of respondents with disabilities said it took them longer than a year to find their first job in the field, compared to only 21% of non-disabled respondents. People with disabilities also reported being on the job market for longer. Only 37% of respondents with disabilities said they had been on the job market for less than six months during their most recent job search, compared to 54% of non-disabled respondents.

We suspect that many of the above issues with the job application process contribute to bias and inequities, most notably the general lack of transparency about salaries, benefits, term lengths, and the likelihood of term jobs being extended or converted to permanent positions. NEA should continue to advocate for more transparency in the job application process. Additionally, many respondents said that networking and mentoring were important for their job searches, and that these were the parts of NEA membership they found most valuable. By offering opportunities like the mentoring program, resume review, and mock interviews, NEA can support our contingently employed, underemployed, and unemployed colleagues.

## IX. Job Postings Survey

In addition to surveying current and former contingent workers, the task force analyzed data from job postings for archival positions to better understand the state of the job market. Postings were gathered from August 2020 to September 17, 2021, with consistent weekly or bi-weekly data collection occurring from mid-December 2020 to September 17, 2021. Postings were taken from a number of job aggregating websites including [ArchivesGig](#), [Indeed](#), [USAJOBS](#), [HigherEdJobs](#), [LibGig](#), and job listing sites run by the [New England Museum Association](#) (NEMA); [Simmons University's College of Organizational, Computational, and Information Science](#) (Simmons Jobline); and the [Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners](#) (MBLC).<sup>15</sup> Postings for jobs and internships that included archival work or responsibility for archival collections were counted, including positions involving local history collections, special collections, records management, archival instruction, and fellowships at archives, libraries, museums, historical societies and other cultural heritage institutions.

We compiled data from 217 job postings and forty internship postings.<sup>16</sup> Data collected from each posting included the date posted, job listing site, job title, employer, location, full-time or part-time status, hours worked per week, salary, benefits, if the position was term-limited and its duration, if there was a possibility of extension or renewal of the contract or term position, if the position was grant funded, if the position was part of a union or collective bargaining unit, and the required education and experience.

The results of this survey reveal a serious lack of transparency in job postings. Whether this is intentional or not, employers should be aware that lack of transparency negatively affects applicants and their own chances of conducting a timely, successful search to find a candidate who is both qualified and willing to accept the terms of the job offer.

### Contingent Positions

The most important and difficult task in analyzing these postings was to determine the number of contingent positions, in order to get a better sense of job prospects for archival workers. Based on the definition of contingent employment utilized in the study,<sup>17</sup> over half of the 217 positions were contingent (52%). This startling figure aligns with the difficult and frustrating experiences survey respondents shared with us in the [Job Seeking Experiences](#) section. Positions were considered to be contingent if the job posting

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<sup>15</sup> Postings were occasionally drawn from other sites and listservs as they came to our attention including the NEAdiscuss listserv, the [Society of American Archivists](#) (SAA), the [Connecticut League of History Organizations](#) (CLHO), [Lensa](#), and [DiversityJobs](#).

<sup>16</sup> A few postings included multiple positions in one posting, in which case the posting was added to the spreadsheet once for each position. Three job postings were also re-posted several months apart, and both the initial posting and the re-posting were counted in the survey. This was done to accurately reflect the number of job or internship opportunities available to archival workers over the entire survey period.

<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of this study, contingent employment includes temporary and term positions, grant-funded positions, part-time positions, positions without timely or reliable renewal of contract, and any employment without benefits colleagues at the same institution enjoy (e.g. vacation time, health insurance, retirement contributions).

specifically stated that the job was part-time, term-limited, contract, grant-funded, and/or without benefits. About one third of positions were not contingent (30%), 15% were likely not contingent, and eight positions (4%) were “inconclusive,” meaning that there was not enough information provided in the posting to determine with any certainty whether or not the position was contingent.

Uncertainty was a recurring problem when analyzing data, as many postings did not include sufficient information about the criteria we used to determine contingency. Positions were categorized as non-contingent if they were explicitly permanent or indefinite, a “regular” employee, or tenure-track. Positions were categorized as “likely not contingent” if they had at least three of the following criteria: full-time hours, salaried rather than hourly pay, benefits of some kind, and union or collective bargaining unit membership. Also included in the “likely not contingent” category were positions with a job title or job duties suggesting they were likely not contingent.<sup>18</sup>

Of the 217 positions, about 60% were full-time and 26% were part-time, with 11% including no information about hours. Additionally, a few positions were flexible about full-time or part-time status. 37% of positions were term-limited and 14% were explicitly not term-limited. However, almost 48% of positions had no data indicating if they were term-limited or permanent. Of the positions that specified a definitive duration, a troubling 73% lasted only one year or less. Nearly 95% lasted two years or less, and no term-limited positions lasted more than three years. Almost 15% of the term-limited positions did not include any information about the duration.

Several interviewees expressed concerns about the negative impact of short-term positions on the livelihoods of archival workers.

“But when I look at job postings, like, I see a lot of term positions. I even see a lot of things specifically listed as short term, and it's like, a year is not a long time when part of the assumption is that a lot of people are going to have to pick up and move, and honestly that's just no way to live a life.”

“At the same time towards the end of it, I was very tired of having to leave and restart. Because it's really difficult to build up all this knowledge, and then all of a sudden, you leave and you have all this knowledge and you have to start over again. And I actually did turn down a position. I just left [employer], and it was another position that was only going to be a year, and I was like ‘I can't do this, I absolutely cannot restart again.’ And you know, you learn so much about a collection and then to just have to drop that and redo it again. So I turned it down.”

“[I]t is very disappointing to see only, like, two-year term positions. And it's like, you move someplace, you uproot your life, you restart your life or friend group or whatever, you gain all that institutional knowledge and then you're done. Or like,

<sup>18</sup> Job titles such as “Manager” or “Director” suggested that a position was not contingent. Job duties suggesting a position was not contingent included supervision of staff, participation in committees, and expectations of further training and professional development.

maybe you're lucky and extended for one more year... And then you have to do it all over again."

"[T]hese projects, these... positions that are like one or two years with no chance to renew or like possibility of renewal, or possibility of renewal but who knows... [are] super damaging... in the long term. ...You have to keep looking for a job, you know every year, every two years, and moving to different places because there's no way you're going to be able to find another position in the same city."

Of the term-limited positions, only 17% provided the possibility of renewal or extension, 3% did not, and 80% included no data about whether or not a position could be renewed or extended. This data lends credence to the concerns expressed by study participants about the uncertainty of contract renewals, as outlined in the [Job Seeking Experience](#) section and the following quotes from interviews.

"You have to play... it's almost like a game of chicken, near the end where it's like, now if within so many months, they haven't signaled to you that they're thinking about renewal or something like that, then you're kind of like... I guess I need to start applying for jobs."

"And my contract would only be extended between... like two weeks, and six months, and never more than that. So, it was just... a never-ending job search, because I just never knew what was going to happen."

Surprisingly, only about 6% of positions indicated that they were grant-funded, 7% were not, and 87% included no information about whether the position was funded by a grant. Another common perception is that it is usually small organizations who rely on contingent employment, often funded by grants, because they would otherwise not be able to afford to hire. However, several study participants told us that large, well-resourced institutions were increasingly relying on contingent employment as well. One said, "So many of my friends are working this way, especially in large well-funded public or private universities, which could afford to hire non-contingent staff."

About 30% of positions included benefits of some kind, just over 5% specified there were no benefits, and almost 65% of positions did not mention benefits at all. Only 20% of positions included health insurance benefits and only about 18% mentioned some form of paid time off such as sick time, vacation time, or holidays. This supports the testimonies of respondents in the [Job Seeking Experiences](#) section who said that lack of transparency about salary and benefits is endemic in our field.

Only 8% of positions were included in a union or collective bargaining unit, with about 13% indicating they were non-union, and just under 79% including no data.

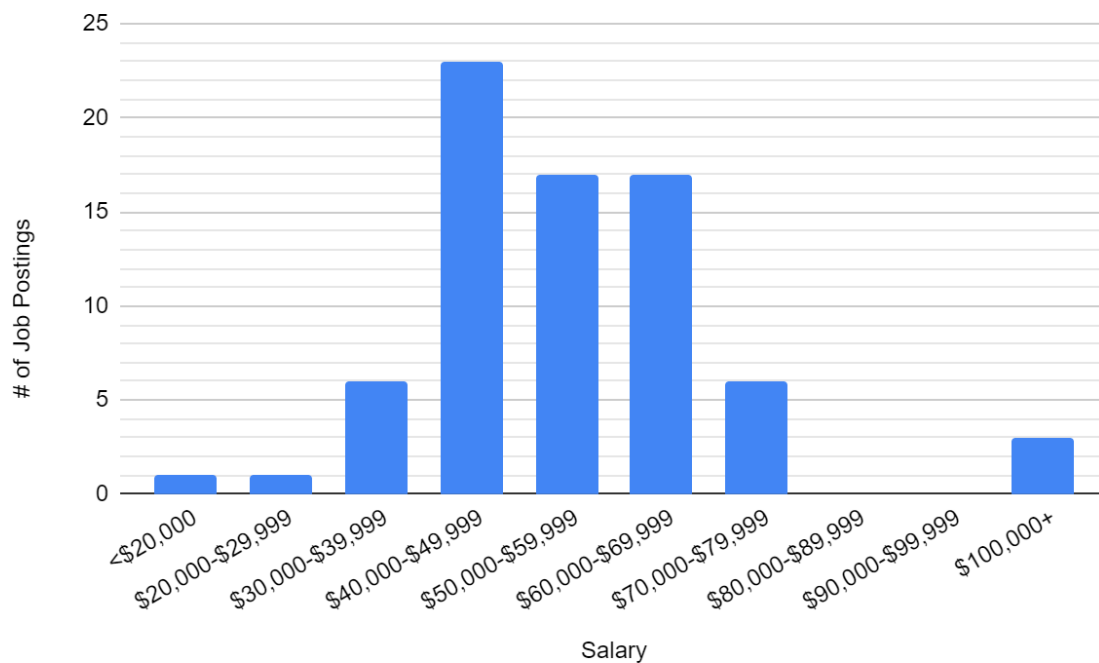


## Location and Pay

The job location was the only category for which every posting included data. Approximately half of the positions (54%) were located in Massachusetts, 16% in Connecticut, 7% in Maine, 6% in New Hampshire, 5% in Rhode Island, and 2% in Vermont.<sup>19</sup> There were nineteen (9%) fully-remote positions, which were also included in the survey, as these jobs would be open to applicants in any location, including in New England. For two positions (0.92%), the location was negotiable.<sup>20</sup>

When examining pay, nearly a third of job postings (31%) included no information at all. This data reflects the frustrations that many survey participants felt about unspecified salaries in job postings, which was discussed in the [Job Seeking Experiences](#) section. When looking at positions that did include information about pay, 35% of positions were salaried, 31% paid an hourly wage, and four positions were paid with a stipend. Nearly 75% of salaried positions fell in the \$40,000-\$69,999 range (Figure 5), and nearly 80% of positions with an hourly wage paid between \$15-\$29 per hour (Figure 6).

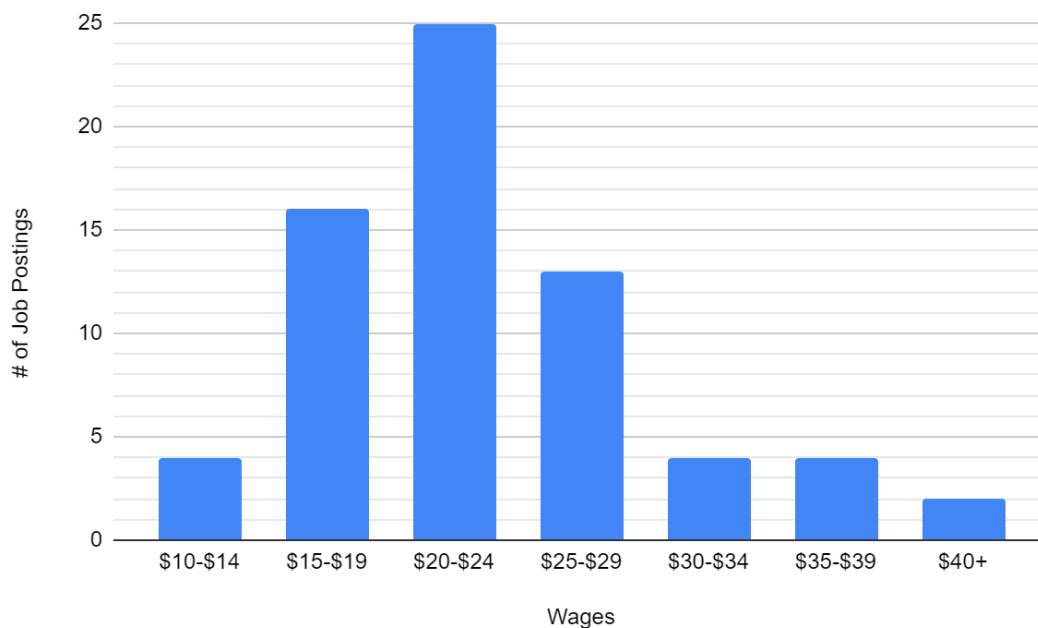
*Figure 5. Annual Salaries in Job Postings*



<sup>19</sup> Excluding state-specific job posting sites (MBLC and CLHO) yields largely the same distribution of positions in each state: MA 49%, CT 16%, ME 7%, NH 6%, RI 5%, and VT 2%.

<sup>20</sup> A negotiable location implied that work could be conducted by New England residents.

Figure 6. Hourly Wages in Job Postings



When examining pay for internships, 75% of the forty internship positions were paid. Some postings listed an hourly rate while many indicated a stipend. Most hourly wages ranged from \$14-\$18, but the pay for a few internships was as low as \$9 per hour. 8% were unpaid, and a significant 15% included no information about pay. As for benefits, one internship provided housing, only two provided sick time, and three offered a stipend to offset job-related costs. In other words, 85% of internships had no benefits of any kind or did not mention benefits in the job posting. On the surface, 75% appears to be a promising proportion of paid internships, but it is more troubling when the low pay and lack of benefits, even sick time, are taken into account. As noted in the [Related Labor Issues](#) section, survey respondents expressed concerns about having to cover living costs while working in unpaid or underpaid positions, including internships.

### Required Education and Experience

Job postings included far more specific data concerning applicant educational requirements. The most common required level of education was enrollment in or completion of an ALA-accredited MLIS program or equivalent (41%). Nearly 18% required an undergraduate degree, 6% required only a high school diploma or GED, and one position required a PhD. Other requirements included a master's degree other than an MLIS or an unspecified master's degree, unspecified advanced degrees, and assorted certifications unrelated to the archival field. For a few positions (5%), the required level of education was contingent upon an applicant's level of experience. Fewer than 1% of postings specified that no education was required at all, and about 15% of postings provided no data about required education.

Job postings included a great deal of information about required and preferred experience. For ease of compiling data, experience was categorized by the number of years of experience required. Just over a third of positions (35%) indicated that some experience was required, but the amount was not specified in a quantitative way. 30% of positions required one to two years of experience, 16% required three to four years of experience, and just over 8% required five or more years of experience. Only three positions (1%) specified that no experience was required. This finding reinforces the observations of respondents in the [Job Seeking Experiences](#) section that even entry-level positions require significant experience.

## Conclusion

The largest obstacle in analyzing job postings was the lack of information included in postings. Data was more consistently included for categories such as location, full-time or part-time status, required education, and required experience, but postings lacked a significant amount of information relevant to job seekers such as benefits, pay, term duration, contract extension and renewal, and basic information about whether a job was term-limited, grant-funded, or permanent.

Some job listing sites run by library, archives, and museum organizations require salary or wage information, including sites run by the Society of American Archivists, Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the New England Museum Association, and the NEADiscuss Listserv.<sup>21</sup> While great strides are being made to increase salary transparency, it is clear from the findings of this survey that transparency is still lacking in many areas. Continued advocacy for salary transparency as well as transparency in reporting benefits, term duration, and the possibility of contract extension or renewal are necessary to provide archival workers with critical information that guides their career and lifestyle choices.

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<sup>21</sup> Other sites used in this survey, including ArchivesGig and the Connecticut League of History Organizations, encourage but do not require salary information, while many of the large aggregators such as Indeed and HigherEd Jobs continue to have no such requirements.

## **X. Conclusion: The Long View**

Comparing the data from the 2016 and 2021 NEA Contingent Employment Studies, along with even earlier data from other sources, shines a light on the long-term extent and impacts of contingent employment in our field. What, if anything has changed? If NEA commits to conducting the Contingent Employment Study every five years, what might our field look like in 2026?

### **Earlier Contingent Employment Data**

Contingent employment has been a concern in the archival profession long before CES-I in 2016. In 2010, Amber L. Cushing published "Career Satisfaction of Young Archivists: A Survey of Professional Working Archivists," which examined the career paths of generation Y (1972/1973) and younger archivists. Cushing's data was gathered in 2008, around the time of the Great Recession. Of the 21% (fifty-one) of survey takers who identified as being in a full-time temporary position and 5.8% (fourteen) who were in part-time temporary positions, 66% stated they were dissatisfied with their employment. Their responses show how little things have changed over the past decade, as they expressed familiar frustrations with contingent employment, including difficulty achieving professional and personal stability and having to search for jobs and move frequently. Cushing likewise noted that "two of the respondents dissatisfied with their temporary positions mentioned having done temporary work for many years." Some respondents in temporary jobs said their employers' promises of full-time employment had fallen through.<sup>22</sup> Cushing's prediction that "young archivists may have increasing difficulty finding permanent positions in the archival field" has proven prescient.<sup>23</sup>

Matthew R. Francis published data gathered in the wake of the Great Recession that captures similar information. In "2013 Archival Program Graduates and the Entry-Level Job Market," he noted the challenges facing recent graduate students. Francis found in a sample of 284 responses that 37% of recent graduates were in temporary positions, 23.8% full-time and 13.5% part-time. Francis observed that the reliance on temporary and part-time work often led to issues with job satisfaction, and that he found it "worrisome that these positions represent such a significant portion of the profession's entry-level job market."<sup>24</sup>

### **Contingent Employment in New England, Then and Now**

Data from nearly ten years before CES-I highlights the long-term prominence of contingent employment in our field at large. More specific longitudinal analysis of data from CES-I and CES-II allows us to gauge how much has changed over a five year period in New England.

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<sup>22</sup> Cushing, "Career Satisfaction of Young Archivists: A Survey of Professional Working Archivists," 610.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 610.

<sup>24</sup> Francis, "2013 Archival Program Graduates and the Entry-Level Job Market," 533.

On the whole, very little has changed. However, there have been some shifts in the data that provide interesting insights into the state of our profession and our region.

### *Demographic Information*

The demographic makeup of respondents did not change significantly between CES-I and CES-II in terms of race, gender, age, and sexuality. There was richer geographic diversity in the 2021 survey. In CES-I, 71% of respondents lived in Massachusetts and 74% worked in Massachusetts, down to 55% and 52%, respectively, in the 2021 survey.

The most drastic demographic shift was in terms of disability. In 2016, 17% of survey respondents identified as having a disability or chronic mental or physical health concern. In CES-II, that number nearly doubled, to 33%. The reasons for this change are not immediately apparent, although there are several potential factors. Since 2016, there has been more open discussion about mental health, and many mental health conditions can qualify as disabilities. Mental Health America studies suggest that the number of people who need mental health treatment has increased over the past decade,<sup>25</sup> perhaps because more people have been seeking out mental health diagnoses and treatments. The COVID-19 pandemic is also likely a factor. Research conducted by Mental Health America found that rates of anxiety have gone up during the pandemic.<sup>26</sup> A more recent news report in April 2021 predicted that people will continue to seek out mental health treatment as a result of the ongoing public health crisis.<sup>27</sup>

### *Paying for Education*

Over 70% of survey takers in both studies stated that they took out student loans in order to fund their higher education. For their undergraduate education, most took out less than \$60,000. For their graduate education, most took out around \$40,000. In CES-I, a little under 17% of people took out \$80,000 or more for their graduate education, which increased slightly to 19% in CES-II. This reflects the increasing cost of education and contributes to the precarious financial position of many new professionals.

In CES-I, 53% of survey takers had at least \$60,000 in outstanding student loan debt. In CES-II, this figure decreased to 42%. In CES-I, 47% paid more than \$400 per month towards their student loan debt. This also decreased slightly to 43% in CES-II. However, nearly 8% of CES-II respondents paid over \$900 per month, when only 2% of CES-I

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<sup>25</sup> Mental Health America, "The State Of Mental Health In America," accessed January 11, 2022, <https://mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america>.

<sup>26</sup> Mental Health America, "COVID-19 and Mental Health: A Growing Crisis," accessed January 11, 2022, <https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Spotlight%202021%20-%20COVID-19%20and%20Mental%20Health.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Rogers and Spring, "Mental Health Professionals Are in High Demand as the Pandemic Enters a Second Year," CNBC, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/02/mental-health-professionals-are-in-high-demand-as-the-pandemic-enters-a-second-year.html>

respondents reported paying that much in 2016. In many parts of New England, \$900 is more than half a month's rent.

### *Job Seeking Experiences*

The changes to job seeking experiences represent some of the biggest shifts between the two surveys. In particular, fewer people found jobs through networking and internal promotions in CES-II.

*Table 4. How respondents found their current/most recent job in the archival field*

	CES-I (2016)	CES-II (2021)
Internal promotion	20%	10%
Job announcement	47%	54%
Networking	23%	21%
Other/No data	10%	15%

The fact that internal promotions decreased by half is concerning, although the exact cause is unknown. It could be part of the general trend of fewer job opportunities for non-contingent positions, including promotions. This could also reflect some study participants' experiences with promotions promised by their employers never materializing. Many said that their chances of receiving a promotion, particularly being promoted from a contingent position to a non-contingent one, were overstated.

CES-I respondents generally received more interviews than CES-II respondents, another indicator that finding a job in our field has only become more difficult over the last five years. Over a quarter (26%) of CES-I respondents said they had turned down a job offer in their most recent job search. This figure fell to only 18% in 2021. Considering the fact that 58% of CES-II respondents only received one job offer during their most recent job search and 25% did not receive any offers at all, this suggests that fewer workers felt they were in a position to turn down an offer in 2021.

These longitudinal comparisons paint a troubling picture of how the job market has changed over the past five years. Although it is likely that the pandemic is largely responsible, this does not change the fact that archival workers are struggling under the current stresses and instability of the job market.

### **A Five Year Forecast**

It is difficult to predict what the next five years will look like in the archival field, while we continue to live with so many uncertainties on a national and global scale. One thing is certain, however: contingent employment is endemic, chronic, and harmful for many

archival workers. Short term lengths, low pay, poor benefits, and unsupportive work environments put many people in precarious financial and professional situations where it is a struggle to survive, much less thrive. Employers have benefited from a tough job market where positions are scarce and the market is oversaturated. In these conditions, contingent positions are often the only option, leaving many of our colleagues constantly job seeking and forced to take any position that comes their way.

These conditions cause frustration and resentment for many, particularly new professionals and mid and late-career workers who are forced to continue taking contingent jobs. Most of all, the current state of contingent employment in the field is unsustainable. For many, it is simply financially impossible to remain in the field. As one interviewee put it, "you can...love the work that we do and love the community of people that we work with. But it's very much, like, the job doesn't love you back. The career does not love you back. And the institutions definitely don't love you back."

If there are not sustained efforts to fundamentally change our profession's relationship with contingent employment, we predict that more and more people will be forced to leave the field. It might also become more difficult to recruit and retain new professionals, particularly people who come from diverse backgrounds and marginalized communities. Study participants told us that they had advised young people not to pursue a career in archives specifically because of many new professionals' struggles with long-term contingent employment. Although there will likely always be people who want to do this work, the number of people who can afford to do so, and who are willing to tolerate current working conditions, is decreasing.

If more and more archives jobs continue to be term-limited and part-time positions, the legitimacy of our profession may be called into question. Why should a master's degree be required for temporary or part-time positions that do not even pay a living wage? How, indeed, can our professional communities grow and evolve when so many of us are caught in a revolving door of contingent positions, with no path to stability or opportunities for advancement and professional development?

However, we would not have spent the past year of our lives conducting this study and writing this lengthy report if we thought all hope was lost. Systemic, structural problems require systemic, structural solutions. There are things we can all do, individually and collectively, to support our contingent colleagues, improve working conditions, and demonstrate the enduring, long-term value of our labor. This report contains several ideas for how New England Archivists can support contingent workers in the short-term and begin advocating for more long-term solutions.

In five years, there will still be contingent employment in our field, but more ethical contingent positions are possible. More permanent jobs are possible. More apprenticeships and mentoring programs are possible. More solidarity and collaboration are possible. We choose to end our work in hope.

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## Appendix A. Survey Questions

[Part I. Demographics](#)

[Part II. Education](#)

[Part III. Paying for Your Education](#)

[Part IV. Employment History](#)

[Part V. Contingent Employment Experience](#)

[Part VI. Experience Job Seeking](#)

### Part I. Demographics

1. In which state do you currently live? Please select all that apply.
  - a. Connecticut
  - b. Maine
  - c. Massachusetts
  - d. New Hampshire
  - e. Rhode Island
  - f. Vermont
  - g. Outside of New England
2. In which state do you currently work? Please select all that apply.
  - a. Connecticut
  - b. Maine
  - c. Massachusetts
  - d. New Hampshire
  - e. Rhode Island
  - f. Vermont
  - g. Outside of New England
3. Are you currently a member of New England Archivists?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. What is your age?
  - a. 18-22
  - b. 23-29
  - c. 30-39
  - d. 40-49
  - e. 50-59
  - f. 60-69
  - g. 70+
  - h. Prefer not to say
5. What is your race/ethnicity? Please select all that apply.
  - a. Asian
  - b. Black or African American
  - c. Native American
  - d. Pacific Islander
  - e. White/Caucasian
  - f. Prefer not to say
  - g. Other [free-text box]
6. Are you Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish in origin?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

7. What is your gender identity? Please select all that apply.

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Cisgender
- d. Nonbinary
- e. Transgender
- f. Other [free-text box]
- g. Prefer not to say

8. Are you LGBTQ+?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

9. Are you a person with a disability or chronic mental or physical health concerns?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

10. If you are currently employed in the archival field, what is your current net annual salary, after taxes?

- a. Less than \$20,000
- b. \$20,000-\$29,999
- c. \$30,000-\$39,999
- d. \$40,000-\$49,999
- e. \$50,000-\$59,999
- f. \$60,000-\$69,999
- g. \$70,000-\$79,999
- h. \$80,000-\$89,999
- i. \$90,000-\$99,999
- j. \$100,000 or more
- k. Not currently employed in the archival field

11. Are you the sole income earner in your household?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. Is there anyone other than yourself for whom you are partially or fully financially responsible? This could be a legal dependent or someone with whom you share financial resources more equitably.

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

13. You indicated you are partially or fully financially responsible for another individual. What is their relationship to you? Please select all that apply.

- a. Parent(s)
- b. Child(ren)
- c. Spouse/partner(s)
- d. Other relative(s)
- e. Roommate(s)

- f. Other [free-text box]

## Part II. Education

14. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
- Some high school (including if you are currently enrolled in high school)
  - High school diploma or G.E.D.
  - Some undergraduate study (including if you are currently enrolled in an undergraduate program)
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Some graduate study (including if you are currently enrolled in a graduate program)
  - Master's degree
  - PhD
  - Other [free-text box]
15. Do you have a master's degree in library science, library and information science, archival science, or information science?
- Yes, and my degree has a specialization or concentration in archives
  - Yes, and my degree does not have a specialization or concentration in archives
  - No
16. Are you currently enrolled in a degree program or non-degree certification program?
- Yes
  - No

If yes:

17. What degree or certification are you working toward?
- Master's in library and information science, library science, archival management, or archival science
  - Archival certification
  - Library certification
  - Other [free-text box]

## Part III. Paying for Your Education

18. Did you work during your undergraduate studies?
- Yes, I worked part-time as an undergraduate
  - Yes, I worked full-time as an undergraduate
  - No
  - I did not go to college
19. Did you work during your graduate studies?
- Yes, I worked part-time as a graduate student
  - Yes, I worked full-time as a graduate student
  - No
  - I did not go to graduate school
20. Please tell us your *undergraduate* student loan debt at the time of completing your degree. If you are currently enrolled in an undergraduate program, please tell us your current student loan debt.
- Less than \$20,000
  - \$20,000-\$39,999
  - \$40,000-\$59,999
  - \$60,000-\$79,999

- e. \$80,000-\$99,999
- f. \$100,000-\$119,999
- g. \$120,000-\$149,999
- h. \$150,000 or more
- i. I did not take out undergraduate student loans
- j. I did not go to college

21. Please tell us your *graduate* student loan debt at the time of completing your degree. If you are currently enrolled in a graduate program, please tell us your current student loan debt.

- a. Less than \$20,000
- b. \$20,000-\$39,999
- c. \$40,000-\$59,999
- d. \$60,000-\$79,999
- e. \$80,000-\$99,999
- f. \$100,000-\$119,999
- g. \$120,000-\$149,999
- h. \$150,000 or more
- i. I did not take out graduate student loans
- j. I did not go to graduate school

22. As of today, do you have outstanding student loan debt?

- a. Yes
- b. No, I have paid off all of my student loan debt
- c. No, I never had student loan debt

If a or b:

23. As of today, please tell us your total current student loan debt.

- a. Less than \$20,000
- b. \$20,000-\$39,999
- c. \$40,000-\$59,999
- d. \$60,000-\$79,999
- e. \$80,000-\$99,999
- f. \$100,000-\$119,999
- g. \$120,000-\$149,999
- h. \$150,000 or more

24. What is your monthly student loan payment?

- a. Less than \$200
- b. \$200-\$299
- c. \$300-\$399
- d. \$400-\$499
- e. \$500-\$599
- f. \$600-\$699
- g. \$700-\$799
- h. \$800-\$899
- i. \$900-999
- j. \$1,000-\$1,099
- k. \$1,100-\$1,199
- l. \$1,200 or more

25. Approximately how much of your household's net monthly income goes to repayment of student loans? Please include student loan debt for which you are fully or partially responsible, including for a spouse, partner, or child.

- a. Less than 10%
- b. 10-19%

- c. 20-29%
- d. 30-39%
- e. 40-49%
- f. 50% or more
- g. No one in my household has outstanding student loan debt.

26. Do you feel now, today, that your education in library science, archival science, or information science was worth the overall cost?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat
- c. No
- d. I do not have formal education in library science, archives, or information science.

27. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experience paying for your education?  
[Free-text box]

#### **Part IV. Employment History**

28. What is your current employment status? Please check all that apply.

- a. Employed, working one full-time job
- b. Employed, working more than one full-time job
- c. Employed, working one part-time job
- d. Employed, working more than one part-time job
- e. Employed, but furloughed
- f. Unemployed, currently job seeking
- g. Unemployed, not currently job seeking
- h. Student
- i. Retired
- j. Other [free-text box]

29. Was your employment status, salary, hours, benefits, access to health care, or other job prospects affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

30. How were you affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? Please select all that apply.

- a. I lost my job
- b. I was furloughed
- c. I lost access to benefits, including health care
- d. My pay was cut
- e. My hours were cut
- f. I had a promotion or raise revoked or canceled
- g. I had a job offer revoked or canceled
- h. I had to take an additional job
- i. I had to take a job outside of my chosen field
- j. I had to leave my job to care for children or other dependents
- k. I had to leave my job because a member of my household was high-risk for COVID-19
- l. Other [free-text box]

31. Are you currently employed in the archival field?

- a. Yes, all of my current jobs are related to archives
- b. No, none of my current jobs are related to archives, but I am seeking work in the field
- c. No, none of my current jobs are related to archives because I left the field
- d. At least one of my current jobs is related to archives, but I also work in another field

32. How do you define your professional identity in the archival field? Please select all that apply. If you have left the field, please select the option that corresponds with your position at the time you left the field.

- a. Student
- b. Pre-professional
- c. Paraprofessional
- d. Professional
- e. Other [free-text box]

33. How many years have you been in the archival field? Please include all employment in the field, including part-time and paraprofessional positions. Please do not include internships, student jobs, or volunteer positions.

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1-3 years
- c. 4-6 years
- d. 7-10 years
- e. 11-13 years
- f. 14-16 years
- g. 17-20 years
- h. 21+ years

34. How long did it take for you to find your first job in the archival field? Please include the TOTAL time you were job seeking until you found a job, including part-time and paraprofessional positions. Please do not include internships, student jobs, or volunteer positions.

- a. Less than 6 months
- b. 6-11 months
- c. 1 year
- d. 2 years
- e. 3 years
- f. 4 years
- g. 5+ years

35. Over the course of your career, what is the TOTAL length of time you have been contingently employed? Please select the total length of time, even if periods of contingent employment were nonconsecutive.

For the purposes of this study, contingent employment includes temporary and term positions, grant-funded positions, part-time positions, positions without timely or reliable renewal of contract, and any employment without benefits colleagues at the same institution enjoy (e.g. vacation time, health insurance, retirement contributions).

- a. Less than 6 months
- b. 6-11 months
- c. 1-2 years
- d. 3-4 years
- e. 5-7 years
- f. 8-10 years
- g. 11-14 years
- h. 15-20 years
- i. 21+ years

36. Have you ever had a non-contingent position in the archival field?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

37. How long did it take for you to find non-contingent employment? Please include your TOTAL time in the archival field before you found a non-contingent position.

- a. Less than 6 months
- b. 6-11 months
- c. 1 year
- d. 2 years
- e. 3-5 years
- f. 6-8 years
- g. 9-11 years
- h. 12+ years

38. How long have you been employed in non-contingent positions in the archival field? Please select the total length of time, even if periods of employment were nonconsecutive.

- a. Less than 6 months
- b. 6-11 months
- c. 1 year
- d. 2 years
- e. 3-5 years
- f. 6-8 years
- g. 9-11 years
- h. 12+ years

39. Have you been contingently employed after you obtained a non-contingent position? This could include a contingent position you held at the same time as a non-contingent position, or a contingent position you held after leaving a non-contingent position.

- a. Yes
- b. No

40. Have you had period(s) of unemployment between jobs since entering the archival field? Please select all that apply.

- a. Yes, I had a period of unemployment after a contingent position
- b. Yes, I had a period of unemployment after a non-contingent position
- c. I had multiple periods of unemployment after multiple positions
- d. No

41. Have you held jobs outside of the archival field since entering the field?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

42. Why did you take the position(s) outside the field? Please select all that apply.

- a. I held the other position(s) in addition to work in the archival field in order to pay the bills.
- b. I remained in a position I held prior to entering the field.
- c. I was unable to find a position in the field.
- d. The position paid better than positions in the field.
- e. The position had better benefits than positions in the field.
- f. The work was intrinsically interesting to me.
- g. I sought out other work because I was considering leaving the archival field.
- h. Other [free-text box]

43. Have you ever held multiple positions simultaneously since entering the archival field?



- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

44. Answer this question thinking of the time you held the highest number of positions at one time while working in the archival field. How many jobs did you work during that time?

- a. 2
- b. 3
- c. 4
- d. 5 or more

45. Roughly how many total hours per week did you work during this period?

- a. Less than 10
- b. 10-19
- c. 20-29
- d. 30-39
- e. 40-49
- f. 50-59
- g. 60-69
- h. 70+

46. Have you ever held a volunteer position in the archival field? Please do not include internships.

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

47. Why did you take the volunteer position(s)? Please select all that apply.

- a. To gain experience in my chosen field.
- b. Deciding if I wanted to work in the archival field
- c. I hoped I would later be hired at the same institution
- d. As a professional development opportunity.
- e. To remain professionally current as I was job seeking.
- f. The work was intrinsically interesting to me.
- g. I enjoy volunteering in my free time.
- h. Other [free-text box]

48. Have you ever had an unpaid internship in the archival field? Please do not include internships that were required for your course of study and for which you received academic credit.

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

49. When did you have unpaid internships? Please select all that apply.

- a. Before beginning my formal education in archival science or library and information science.
- b. During my formal education in archival science or library and information science.
- c. After completing my formal education in archival science or library and information science.

50. Why did you take an unpaid internship position? Please select all that apply.

- a. Deciding if I wanted to work in the archival field
- b. Gaining experience in the archival field
- c. Networking

- d. I hoped I would be hired at the same institution after my internship
- e. I could not find a job in the archival field
- f. To stay current in the archival field while I was job seeking
- g. The work was intrinsically interesting to me
- h. Other [free-text box]

51. Have you ever held a residency position?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

If yes:

52. Were you offered a non-contingent position by your employer at the end of your residency?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I am still currently in a residency position

53. Were you able to find a non-contingent position at the end of your residency?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I am still currently in a residency position

54. Would you like to tell us anything else about your residency experience?

[Free-text box]

55. Have you ever held a diversity position? For the purposes of this survey, a diversity position is a position designed to promote diversity by hiring a person from an underrepresented group OR a position designed to work with user populations or collections from underrepresented groups. An example of a diversity position might be a diversity residency or an African Americana collections archivist. Please select all that apply.

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

56. Was your diversity position contingent?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I have held multiple diversity positions, some contingent and some non-contingent

57. Would you like to tell us anything else about your experience in a diversity position?

[Free-text box]

## Work History

For each position you have worked for in the archival field, please answer the following questions. Please include professional, paraprofessional, part-time and full-time employment. You may include paid internships, but please DO NOT include internships that were required for your course of study and for which you received academic credit.

You may enter data about up to TEN positions. Information about additional jobs can be shared during a follow-up interview.

58. Position title [free-text box]

59. Type of institution. Please select all that apply.

- a. Consulting
- b. Corporate
- c. Federal government
- d. Historical society
- e. Law library
- f. Municipal government
- g. Museum
- h. Non-profit
- i. Performing arts
- j. Private university
- k. Public library
- l. Public university
- m. Religious
- n. State government
- o. Other [free-text box]

60. Was this position located in New England?

- a. Yes
- b. No

61. Was this a contingent position? For the purposes of this study, contingent employment includes temporary and term positions, grant-funded positions, part-time positions, positions without timely or reliable renewal of contract, and any employment without benefits colleagues at the same institution enjoy (e.g. vacation time, health insurance, retirement contributions).

- a. Yes
- b. No

62. What was the nature of your employment status? Please select all that apply.

- a. Contractor
- b. Fellowship
- c. Full-time
- d. Internship
- e. Paraprofessional
- f. Part-time
- g. Professional
- h. Project
- i. Residency
- j. Student job

63. How many hours did you work in a typical week at this position?

- a. Less than 10
- b. 10-19
- c. 20-29
- d. 30-39
- e. 40-49
- f. 50-59
- g. 60-69
- h. 70+

64. How long were you in this position?

- a. Less than 6 months
- b. 6-11 months
- c. 1 year

- d. 2 years
- e. 3-5 years
- f. 6-8 years
- g. 9-11 years
- h. 12-14 years
- i. 15+ years

65. What was your net annual salary, after taxes, at the time you were hired?

- a. Less than \$20,000
- b. \$20,000-\$29,999
- c. \$30,000-\$39,999
- d. \$40,000-\$49,999
- e. \$50,000-\$59,999
- f. \$60,000-\$69,999
- g. \$70,000-\$79,999
- h. \$80,000-\$89,999
- i. \$90,000-\$99,999
- j. \$100,000 or more

66. If you were paid hourly, provide your hourly wage upon hire.

- a. Less than \$10
- b. \$10-\$14
- c. \$15-\$19
- d. \$20-\$24
- e. \$25-\$29
- f. \$30-\$34
- g. \$35-\$39
- h. \$40 or more
- i. I was not paid hourly

67. Did you receive a raise during your time in the position?

- a. Yes
- b. No

68. What was your net annual salary, after taxes, at the time you left the position? If this is your current position, please tell us your current net salary.

- a. Less than \$20,000
- b. \$20,000-\$29,999
- c. \$30,000-\$39,999
- d. \$40,000-\$49,999
- e. \$50,000-\$59,999
- f. \$60,000-\$69,999
- g. \$70,000-\$79,999
- h. \$80,000-\$89,999
- i. \$90,000-\$99,999
- j. \$100,000 or more

69. Was your position grant funded?

- a. Yes
- b. No

70. Were you the only archival worker at your organization (i.e. a lone arranger)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

71. Was your position part of a union or collective bargaining unit?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Yes, but I chose not to join the union or collective bargaining unit

72. Which benefits did you receive from your employer apart from salary/wages? Please select all that apply.

- a. Health care
- b. Dental plan
- c. Vision plan
- d. Tuition remission
- e. Retirement contributions
- f. Sick time
- g. Vacation/personal time
- h. Childcare discounts
- i. Other [free-text box]
- j. I did not receive benefits.

73. Were you a manager or supervisor in this position? Please select all that apply.

- a. Yes, I managed/supervised staff
- b. Yes, I managed/supervised students or interns
- c. No

74. Why did you leave this position? Please select all that apply.

- a. Employment terminated
- b. Financially not sustainable for me
- c. Funding for the position ran out
- d. I moved away
- e. Fixed term for the job ended
- f. I was offered another position elsewhere
- g. I outgrew the position
- h. My employer eliminated the position
- i. I was promoted within the organization
- j. To search for a position elsewhere
- k. Workload not sustainable
- l. I disliked the position
- m. I disliked my employer
- n. Personal (family, child, partner, elder care, etc.) considerations
- o. I am still in this position.
- p. Other [free-text box]

75. Have you held any additional positions?

- a. Yes
- b. No

## **Part V. Contingent Employment Experience**

76. Did you take the previous NEA Contingent Employment Survey in 2016?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I'm not sure

If yes:

77. How has your professional status changed since you took the previous survey in 2016? Please select all that apply.

- a. I am in the same contingent position(s) in the archival field
- b. I am in the same non-contingent position(s) in the archival field
- c. I obtained a new contingent position(s) in the archival field
- d. I obtained a new non-contingent position(s) in the archival field
- e. I obtained a new position(s) outside the archival field
- f. I experienced a period of unemployment
- g. I completed my graduate studies
- h. I left the archival field
- i. Other [free-text box]

78. Have your views on contingent employment changed since you took the previous survey in 2016? Why or why not?  
[Free-text box].

79. How many contingent positions have you had? Please include all contingent positions you have held in the archival field, including part-time and paraprofessional positions. Please do not include student jobs or internships.

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4
- e. 5
- f. 6+

80. Which aspects of your contingent employment did you like? Please select all that apply.

- a. Flexibility
- b. Gaining experience
- c. Pay and benefits
- d. Ability to network
- e. Workplace culture
- f. Support for my professional development
- g. Other [free-text box]
- h. None of the above

81. Which aspects of your contingent employment did you dislike? Please select all that apply.

- a. Financial insecurity/precarity
- b. Pay and benefits
- c. Workplace culture
- d. Lack of support for my professional development
- e. Spending my free time job seeking
- f. Difficulty planning for my future, professionally and personally
- g. Other [free-text box.]
- h. None of the above

82. Think of your most recent contingent position. Why did you accept the position? Please select all that apply.

- a. I wanted to get experience in the field
- b. I wanted the flexibility of a contingent position
- c. The work was intrinsically interesting to me
- d. I needed the pay and/or benefits
- e. I felt it was my only option
- f. Other [free-text box]

83. How do you think your contingent employment has affected your career? Please select all that apply.

- a. It gave me valuable experience
- b. It helped me secure other contingent positions
- c. It helped me secure non-contingent positions
- d. It made it more difficult for me to secure non-contingent positions
- e. I had access to mentors and professional development resources that have helped my career
- f. I did not have access to mentors and professional development resources, which made it difficult for me to grow professionally
- g. I did not feel able to participate in professional service activities because of the uncertainty of my contingent employment
- h. Other [free-text box]
- i. None of the above

84. Did contingent employment negatively affect your physical or mental health? Please select all that apply.

- a. Yes, my physical health was negatively affected
- b. Yes, my mental health was negatively affected
- c. No

85. How has your lifestyle been affected by contingent employment? Please select all that apply.

- a. I have relocated when I would not otherwise have chosen to do so
- b. I have lived apart from my partner or family when I would not otherwise have chosen to do so
- c. My commute has increased significantly
- d. I have experienced financial distress
- e. I have less free time
- f. I have felt isolated from my family, friends, community, or other support networks
- g. I have delayed making significant decisions such as getting married, buying a house, or starting a family
- h. I have felt unable to or chosen not to commit to significant decisions such as getting married, buying a house, or starting a family
- i. Other [free-text box]
- j. None of the above

86. What, if anything, would have improved your experience as a contingent employee?

- a. Higher wages
- b. Better benefits
- c. More hours
- d. Ability to participate in staff activities and professional development
- e. Reliable and timely renewal of my contract
- f. Employee rather than contract worker status
- g. Union or collective bargaining eligibility (if available)
- h. Other [free-text box]
- i. None of the above

87. Have you thought about leaving the archival field because of contingent employment?

- a. Yes, I have already left the field because of contingent employment
- b. Yes, I am planning to leave the field because of contingent employment
- c. Yes, I have considered leaving the field because of contingent employment
- d. No

88. If given the choice, would you choose to be contingently employed?

- a. Yes
- b. No

c. It would depend on the specifics of the job

89. How would you describe your experience with contingent employment in a few sentences?  
[Free-text box]

90. How could NEA and other professional organizations support contingently employed archival workers?  
[Free-text box]

91. Do you think membership and involvement in professional organizations is beneficial to contingently employed archival workers? Why or why not?  
[Free-text box]

92. Do you think there are barriers to contingently employed archival workers' membership and participation in professional organizations? Why or why not?  
[Free-text box]

93. Do you think any aspects of your identity have impacted your experience with contingent employment? This could include but is not limited to race, gender, sexuality, religion, age, and disability.

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

If yes:

94. You indicated that you think aspects of your identity have impacted your experience with contingent employment. Please elaborate below.  
[Free-text box]

95. Do you have anything else you want to tell us about your experience with contingent employment?  
[Free-text box]

## **Part VI. Experience Job Seeking**

96. How did you find your current/most recent job in the archival field?

- a. Internal promotion
- b. Job announcement
- c. Networking
- d. Recruited by employer
- e. Recruiter or search firm
- f. Temp agency
- g. Other [free-text box]

97. How long were you job seeking during your current/most recent job search in the archival field?

- a. 1-6 months
- b. 7-11 months
- c. 1 years
- d. 2 years
- e. 3-4 years
- f. 5+ years

98. During what year(s) was your most recent job search in the archival field conducted?  
[Free-text box]



99. During your current/most recent job search in the archival field, approximately how many job applications did you submit?

- a. 1-4 applications
- b. 5-9 applications
- c. 10-14 applications
- d. 15-24 applications
- e. 25-34 applications
- f. 35-49 applications
- g. 50+ applications

100. Think of your current/most recent job search in the archival field. Approximately what percentage of the job applications you submitted were for contingent positions?

- a. I did not apply for any contingent positions
- b. Less than 25%
- c. About 25%
- d. About 50%
- e. About 75%
- f. 100%

101. During your current/most recent job search in the archival field, for how many positions were you invited to interview? Please include first round interviews, final round interviews, phone/virtual interviews, and in-person interviews.

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4
- e. 5-7
- f. 8-10
- g. 11-14
- h. 15 or more

102. How many offers did you receive during your current/most recent job search in the archival field?

- a. 0
- b. 1
- c. 2
- d. 3
- e. 4 or more

103. Were you offered any positions during your current/most recent job search in the archival field that you turned down?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes:

104. You indicated that you turned down a job offer during your current/most recent job search. Why did you turn down the offer? Please select all that apply.

- a. Salary was too low
- b. Benefits were insufficient
- c. Number of hours was too low
- d. The position was contingent
- e. Location
- f. Undesirable commute
- g. Negative impression at the interview of the institution

- h. Negative impression at the interview of the management
- i. Negative impression at the interview of colleagues
- j. Personal (family, child, partner, elder care, etc.) considerations
- k. Job posting was misleading
- l. Realized I wasn't the right fit for the position
- m. Current employer was able to match the offer
- n. I received a better offer elsewhere
- o. Other [free-text box]

105. Have you ever accepted a job offer you would not otherwise have accepted because it was the only offer you received? Please select all that apply.

- a. Yes, for a contingent position
- b. Yes, for a non-contingent position
- c. No

106. Have you ever accepted a job offer you would not otherwise have accepted because you were contingently employed or wanted to avoid contingent employment?

- a. Yes
- b. No

107. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience job seeking?  
[Free-text box]

## Appendix B. Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly summarize your contingent employment? For instance, how many contingent positions have you had, and how long have you been contingently employed over the course of your career?
2. How would you describe your experience with contingent employment in three words?
3. What was the single biggest factor that impacted your experience as a contingent worker?
4. How did your contingent employment impact you professionally and personally?
5. As a contingent worker, have you felt supported by professional organizations and the broader professional community? Why or why not?
6. Do you think contingent employment impacted your colleagues, workplace, or employer? How so?
7. Do you think the persistent practice of hiring contingent workers impacts the archival profession? How so?
8. Do you think there have been any changes in the pervasiveness or impact of contingent employment over the course of your career? Do you think things are currently changing, or will change in the future?
9. What advice would you give to someone considering a career in archives?
10. What advice would you give to managers who manage contingent workers?
11. Is there anything else you want us to know about your experience with contingent employment?