

In June 2018, six archivists from UCLA Library Special Collections wrote an [open letter](#) critiquing the library's increasing trend toward creating temporary archival positions instead of permanent professional-level positions. In their letter the archivists articulated the long-term, deleterious effects of contingent employment on the staff, the library, and the archival profession. They further requested that their temporary positions be converted into positions with potential permanent status. While the outcome of that request remains uncertain, the UCLA archivists' letter garnered widespread support and helped to focus attention on a longstanding concern in the archival profession.

The New England Archivists (NEA) recognizes that contingent employment in our profession is simultaneously valuable and problematic. While many archival professionals and institutions benefit from project-based employment, long-term reliance on this model in lieu of permanent employment is a concern requiring greater attention.

In 2016, NEA launched an internal study to assess the nature and prevalence of contingent employment among archivists in New England. The comprehensive [study](#) indicated that temporary employment is both widespread in our region and embedded within the institutions in which many of us work. It is a complicated issue that cannot be resolved overnight.

NEA recognizes that there are broader factors affecting contingent employment, including:

- chronically under-funded institutions;
- expansion and perpetuation of the gig economy;
- imbalance in the supply of and demand for trained archivists;
- high cost of graduate education and resulting economic distress for those with debt;
- strong reliance on grant funding for staffing archival institutions.

As long as these structural barriers impact our professional community, NEA will continue to counteract them through its ongoing advocacy work. The organization is invested in supporting all of its members—regardless of career stage, job configuration, or economic status—and, through its [strategic plan](#), is working to better serve the needs of economically vulnerable colleagues in the region. Examples of our commitment include:

- using results of the [2016 Contingent Employment Survey](#) to develop new activities, programs, and venues for supporting contingently employed archival professionals;
- developing a wider range of [training and educational opportunities](#) for members at all career levels, with a particular focus on providing economical, accessible options;
- holding conference sessions and workshops that address personal/professional advocacy and organizing strategies;
- maintaining a robust [mentorship program](#) for those wanting to build skills and connect with other archival professionals in the region;
- offering a range of [awards](#) and [scholarships](#) that help to make participation more affordable.

But there is still much work to be done.

In addition to pursuing recommendations from the Contingent Employment Survey report and continuing to fulfill NEA's strategic plan, hearing directly from the people we serve is vital; the organization relies heavily on the membership's feedback in the effort to build a stronger and inclusive organization. We invite all archivists and allied professionals in New England to share with us their ideas and strategies for better serving our diverse community. Working together to address this concern amplifies our voices and strengthens our efforts. We look forward to hearing from you.

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