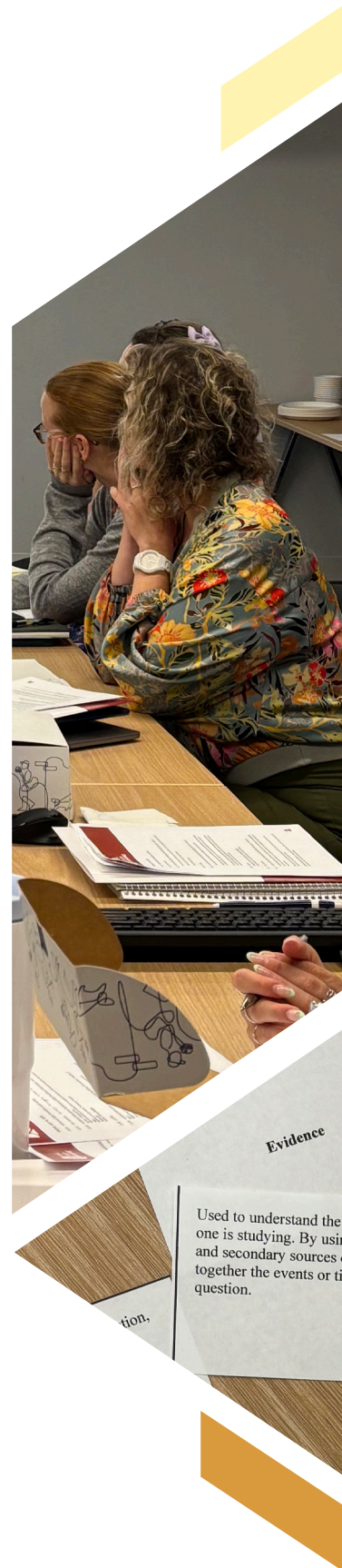


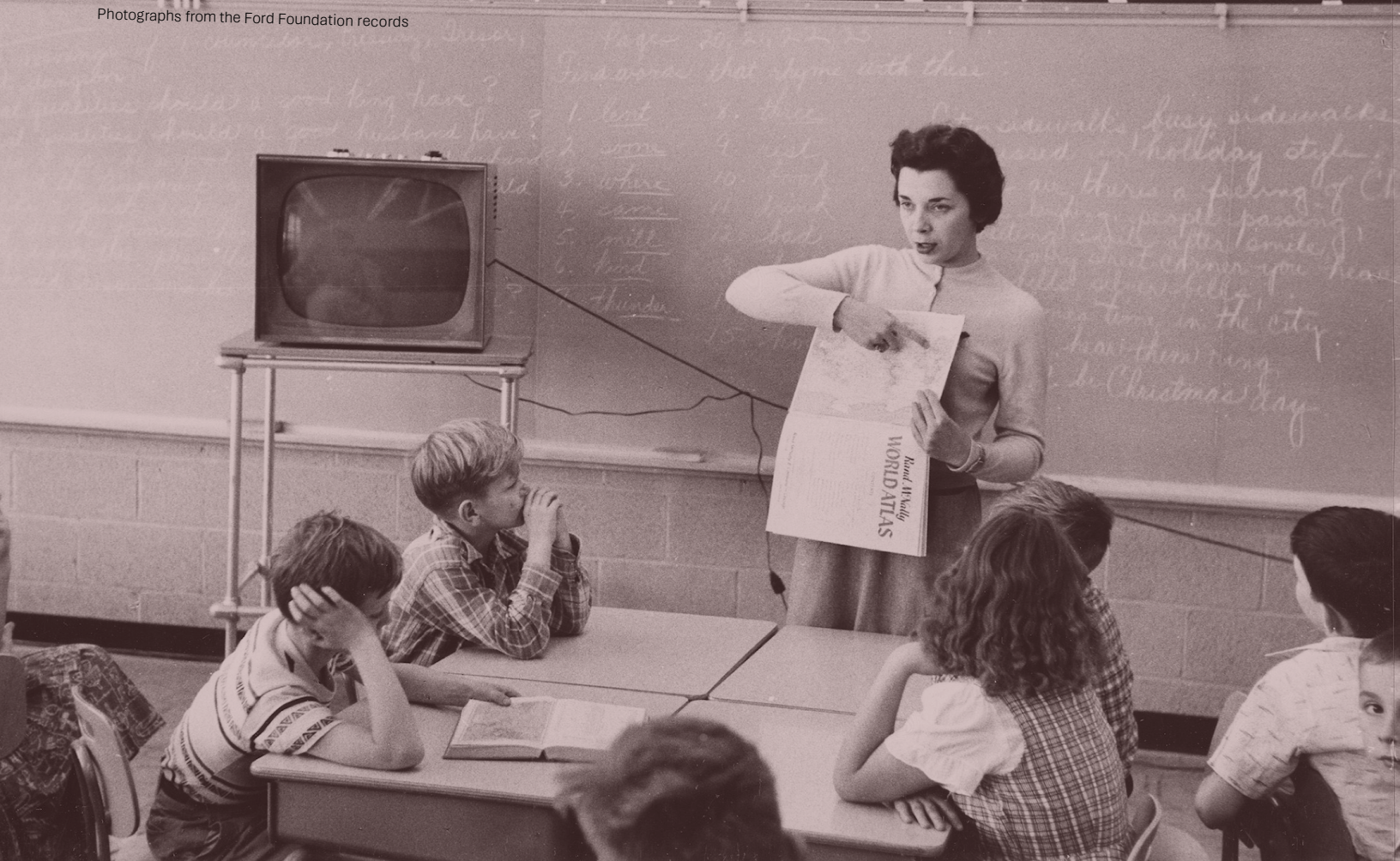
Archival Educators ROUNDTABLE

KEY LESSONS FROM
TEN YEARS OF PRACTICE





Photographs from the Ford Foundation records



ARCHIVAL EDUCATORS ROUNDTABLE (AER) KEY LESSONS FROM TEN YEARS OF PRACTICE

In the summer of 2025, the Archival Educators Roundtable (AER) gathered at New York University to commemorate the network's 10th anniversary. The annual meeting was a two-day, in-person convening to present new pedagogical approaches, workshop ideas, foster new collaborations, and reflect on the growth of the archival education field.

This reflective document shares key lessons the group has learned from a decade of collaboration, the challenges the community faces, and how we plan to continue to actively support our colleagues and advance the archival education field forward.

Who we are and why we gather

At our core, we are a community of individuals across disciplines and institutional contexts who use primary sources for outreach and education. We work with people of all ages and abilities. Some of us identify as educators, others as archivists or public historians. We see many variations in the functional description of our roles across institutions within the Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums (GLAM) sector. Some of us work in traditional classroom settings.

AER was created by the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) to connect professionals in diverse institutional settings who use primary sources for education, object-based learning, and outreach. The group meets biannually to workshop activities and engage in field-building conversations. Our first meeting was held in 2016. AER is unique in that it bridges multiple disciplines and professions that are customarily siloed from each other. Our members work, for example, in the fields of art, science, transatlantic studies, Cold War studies, English, history, medicine, and beyond. Our professions span archives, libraries, K-12 education, higher education, museum studies, and museum curation.

Archival education is a niche and growing field focused on pedagogical use of archives in diverse settings. Knowing that oftentimes professionals in this field are working independently, the RAC wanted to take an active role in field building and create a community that would support the exchange of ideas and workshopping opportunities. This group has grown over the years from five attendees at our first meeting to a listserv of over 100 professionals. This year, we have expanded our reach to include international voices from the UK, Canada, and Guatemala.

The tone and culture of AER is conversational, welcoming, and supportive. While conferences are often a venue for presenting completed work, many attendees of AER find our community to be a unique alternative—a space to hone and incorporate feedback into their ongoing work. AER gatherings create an environment that nurtures transformative professional growth through small group workshopping and sharing practical day-to-day challenges faced by people who engage audiences with primary sources.

Who is our audience?

Individuals gathered by AER serve a huge range of audiences, but when we come together to talk about our pedagogical practice, the audience we serve is each other. We are curious, self-reflective people. We are lifelong learners, and we seek to continuously improve the work we do and the impact our teaching can have.

Our goals in our gatherings

- Serve our colleagues across the archival education field by acting as each other's "experts."
- Enhance our teaching by beginning with a problem we want to solve.
- Leave with new teaching strategies that we can share with other educators who teach with primary sources. We're motivated by serving a larger community of individuals both who want to learn and who are in positions where they need to learn more about working with primary sources.

10TH ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

For the 10th annual meeting, field building was the unifying theme among our conversations and workshops.

We gathered twenty professionals, many of whom have been active AER members since the beginning in 2016. They have become partners outside of AER activities as well, collaborating on conference presentations, supporting each other's institutional outreach activities, and connecting in other formats to support the archival education field and each other.

Institutions represented include New York University, City University of New York institutions, The New School, Drexel University, the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York Public Library, and El Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA).

Keynote speaker Renee Hobbs, professor of Communication Studies at the University of Rhode Island and Founder and Director of the Media Education Lab, discussed the parallels between archival education field building and the established field of media literacy. Professor Hobbs transformed a set of instructional practices to build critical thinking about media into a recognized educational discipline. She did this by connecting with like-minded professionals, strategizing forms of outreach, and building coalitions, communities, and courses about the field.

The range of topics shared by attendees demonstrated the innovative and varied ways we engage learners of different ages and levels of experience.

We focused on how we can use our collections to inspire students to think, consume, and produce information critically.

Topics and Ideas Workshopped and Discussed

CONNECTING HEALTHCARE AND ARCHIVES

Drexel University is shaping a lesson that integrates podcasts into a 15-25 minute “4 doctors” lesson. Undergraduate students are asked to come to their own understanding of why it’s important that people have options with healthcare providers through primary source analysis.

MEDIA LITERACY ANALYSIS IN A 3RD GRADE CLASSROOM

Early elementary students are encouraged to build their understanding of media literacy by analyzing AI-generated images and primary sources. The option to earn teacher-created media literacy badges serves as a unique incentive.

SUPPORTING DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS

New York Public Library engaged AER participants in role-playing exercises to demonstrate strategies borrowed from special education as a way to support students with diverse learning needs.

FOSTERING LEARNING AND CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS

The New School workshopped a lesson using the sound/video aspect of oral histories in an instructional setting to foster listening and conversational skills and discussed how archival education professionals can make such lessons accessible to all types of students.

TESOL TRAINING IN ARCHIVAL SETTINGS

TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) seminars can improve instructional strategies, especially for those who do not have training in education, and be applied to class visits in archival settings.

BUILDING AN EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAM IN GUATEMALA

The Center for Mesoamerican Research gained feedback from participants and shared early phase work on building a primary source education outreach program to K-12 teachers in Guatemala.

BARCHIVES OUTREACH PROJECT

The co-founder of [Barchives NYC](#), an archives outreach project that invites archivists to different locations in New York City to socialize, learn the history of the setting, and interact with records, shared the development and evolution of this outreach project.

TEACHING “BIAS & ARCHIVAL MATERIALS”

Through the lens of identifying and interrogating bias found within archival materials, and, conversely, using archival materials to help counter bias found elsewhere, participants were engaged in a workshop using materials from the New York Public Library.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH, AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN

A discussion around how and where to start new projects and plans, along with a hands-on exercise that demonstrated how to apply that motivated mindset to existing projects.



WHAT AER HAS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE FIELD

Our accomplishments as a community have created important relationships with other practitioners and have even provided some healing for those who have felt exhausted or frustrated by their work. We have focused on gathering together around problems of practice, with a culture of transparency that strengthens all our work. Unlike in a traditional conference setting, attendees are not presenting their professional accomplishments; rather, they are asking for and receiving assistance from their peers. Internally, the progress we've made as a community helps us see that **our model of coming together to help each other works and there is still more work to do.**

Looking beyond our direct community of practice, we've contributed to broader community-building and competency development. We've developed a culture of responsiveness, communication, and sharing. We recognize that building community and establishing intentionality is equally important to visible outputs like curriculum design and instruction. We have also contributed to an infrastructure for sharing our work: communication channels, scholarly publishing spaces, and conferences.

As individuals and in partnerships, we have produced materials such as scholarly source sets and formal academic writing. We have developed best practices for making archives more accessible to researchers and the public. We have broadened public understanding of the need for primary source literacy and have shed light on the fact that this work exists and is effective.

KEY LESSONS FROM TEN YEARS OF PRACTICE AND FIELD BUILDING

AER has found the following to be valuable insights into what sets AER apart and how this community makes the archival education field better, stronger, and more robust.

WE HAVE BUILT A CULTURE OF RELAXED SHOULDERS AND ROUGH DRAFTS

AER maintains a low-pressure, relaxed atmosphere for sharing, celebrating, and honing our work. This is a community for many of our peers who often work in isolation as they contribute to expanding and professionalizing archival education work. AER meetings are meant to be a light lift for attendees in terms of preparation beforehand. During the meetings, whether a day or only an hour or two long, space is given for all to share their experience, expertise, and make mistakes. Organizing small, remote, and in-person meetings on a consistent basis encourages more voices to join the conversation to learn from each other and grow professionally.

WE INSPIRE, ENERGIZE, AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

Partnering with community groups is successful when individuals rely on their strengths and skills to bridge the work of the GLAM and education fields (GLEAM). Partnering with schools is successful when anticipating what is needed in the classroom, providing planning documents, and identifying each of the partners' roles in the work. Common goals are to support each other and the students, while engaging students in skill development related to archival education.

University-based archival educators often find themselves juggling the requirements of faculty peers, syllabi, and student schedules, and many of our colleagues' work is underfunded or under resourced. Connecting with colleagues about challenges and institutional barriers is helpful in dealing with them. Collaboration and cross disciplinary knowledge sharing helps to plant seeds, workshop on a micro level, and move the field forward.

WE EMPOWER, MENTOR, AND COMBAT OVERWHELM

There is no cost to join AER, which provides an alternative to high-pressure, high-cost conferences.

Our community of professionals are at varying points in their careers. We can learn from the challenges and successes of established programs and also learn from others' experiences when starting something new, whether it is a large-scale education program or a new lesson for a singular class. Successful archival education resources and activities adopt techniques from universal design, special education, and TESOL.

Starting small, no matter the archival education venture, allows for a firm foundation from which any growth should be celebrated.



WHAT AER MEANS TO PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR WORK

“AER has been an opportunity for building relationships that have helped me grow as an educator and that have helped me connect with other communities and projects. AER's format of bringing a problem and asking for advice has meant, in my day-to-day work, that I feel more comfortable being vocal in professional settings about things I haven't figured out yet. AER also helps expand our understanding of what the profession is, which I think is critical when many professional spaces are deeply siloed—just school librarians, just archivists, just classroom teachers, etc. I've valued [AER's] work to bring together a wide range of people who fit under the umbrella of archives education, because it's a constant reminder that I should also be looking more broadly for folks who do work that resembles mine and who I can learn from.”

JEN HOYER
CUNY New York City College of Technology

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One thing I treasure about AER as a deliberate person who does her best thinking while talking is that I never feel rushed at AER meetings, nor does the structure of AER meetings push participants to accelerate through a discussion, a lesson plan presentation or any other exchange. This is especially important because the diversity of experience AER participants bring to each meeting requires more contextualization and grounding, rather than a setting in which everyone's background is understood—accurately or not—as essentially the same. The heterogeneous composition of AER is a source of continuous discovery for me. I love hearing from participants talking about their interactions with K-12 students because those K-12 students will be appearing in my classroom soon enough! In my personal archives, some of the most heavily marked up and annotated documents are the lesson plans I workshopped at AER over the years. When I bring something to AER, it's not a finished product I am proud of and want to show off or add to my tenure dossier. It's a permanent draft and it comes home with me better than it arrived, but it's still not done. It's never done. AER has been a model for me in how I aim to conduct myself as a teacher in any pedagogical setting.”

JENNY SWADOSH

The New School

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It feels so great to be able to navigate my teaching shortcomings, out loud, with folks I trust, from such a helpful variety of backgrounds. I don't just learn from the details of what others are doing, but how they do it, and why they approach it the way they do. I rely on AER and the network for help with the trickiest things I'm trying to do with my teaching work. I love problem-solving, so when I get stuck on a problem and just really can't figure out what to do, AER is the best place to do it. The AER mantra—Bring a Problem, Bring a Friend—is absolutely my gold standard and my blueprint. I've worked with a lot of people in a lot of professional TPS settings and I always want to build an environment where people share their teaching challenges and build networks of support, like with AER. Try as I might, the other settings are simply never quite as good as it is with AER, with what has [been] created. But the fact that it's never quite as good, but I know it can be, is exactly what makes me want to keep trying to make things in our profession better.

MATT HERBISON

Drexel University

OUR FOCUS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

It is energizing to reflect on what we have accomplished together, and doing so highlights the work we still need to do. Our goals moving forward are to continue to add voices to the conversation and to extend the Roundtable to form a global community of archival education practice.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE FIELD OF ARCHIVAL EDUCATION.

We will work to effectively share the value of our experience and expertise with others who might want to replicate the type of community of active support we've built together.

We will be better advocates for the resources we need to expand our work—both the work of archival education, and the work of building professional communities of practice like this one.

We will connect with interested institutional partners wanting to replicate the AER model. For this meeting, the RAC and NYU combined resources for the two-day conference. We continue to explore institutional hosts and partnerships to help us expand our reach.

We will continue to add more global perspectives.

We will continue to collaborate with like-minded networks to strengthen the work we all do.

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