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Review of Leading and Managing Archives and Manuscripts Program

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Peter Gottlieb and David W. Carmichael, eds. *Leading and Managing Archives and Manuscripts Programs*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2019.

Archival repositories are, above all, enduring organizations. The fundamentals of our profession emphasize preservation of information and sustainability of practice. However, there are always times when repositories and their policies must change and react to change. For example, as of this writing in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic is providing many unsolicited opportunities for changes in archival practice and services. A public health crisis is an apt reminder that repositories are not really made up of things, they are made up of people who administer things. Therefore, opportunities for change in our organizations are opportunities to lead our colleagues. While there are many monographs and articles available to archivists on working with archival things, fewer concern working with archival people.

To the latter body of literature, the Society of American Archivists has added volume 1 of the Archival Fundamentals Series 3, *Leading and Managing Archives and Manuscripts Programs*, edited by Peter Gottlieb and David W. Carmichael. The editors bring their fifty years of combined experience in historical societies, government archives, and university archives to bear in contributing to and shaping this volume.

Counterintuitively, and perhaps playfully, the volume begins with the statement that there is no “formula of leadership that can be learned from a manual.”¹ The point is well made that leadership, like other competencies, is mastered through practice and collaboration, not just study. The introduction offers useful working definitions of “leading” and “managing”: leaders cope with change, and managers cope with complexity.² The editors pertinently point out the characteristics of archival units that make them unique among organizational cultures, and thus singular in their leadership and management challenges. Many of us are in small, hierarchically flat units, undertaking institutionally funded, donor-driven, cooperative programs.³ Being embedded in larger institutions, and reporting to administrators with varying levels of archival literacy, creates challenges around advocacy.⁴ While our constituencies and stakeholders are diverse, all archivists face similar challenges, which are addressed throughout *Leading and Managing Archives and Manuscripts Programs*.

Gottlieb and Carmichael are aware of the continuum of archives leadership literature and their volume’s place in it. The intention is clear: to build on what has come before, rather than supplant other publications.⁵ The title and content of this new volume are (perhaps deliberately) reminiscent of works like Bruce Dearstyne’s *Leading and Managing Archives and Records*

¹ Introduction to *Leading and Managing Archives*, 1.

² Introduction to *Leading and Managing Archives*, 2.

³ Gottlieb, “Building Relationships within and beyond the Archives,” *Leading and Managing Archives*, 68.

⁴ Carmichael, “Communication,” *Leading and Managing Archives*, 18.

⁵ Introduction to *Leading and Managing Archives*, 2.

Programs (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2008). Like the earlier work, Gottlieb and Carmichael mix essays on general subjects with case studies from repositories with varying missions and collections. Rather than feeling like a rehashing of existing literature, however, this new entry provides additional insight into leadership and management concepts that is specific to the archival field.

The volume comprises two parts: part 1 contains topical chapters by Gottlieb and Carmichael on the subjects of communication, strategic leadership, resource management, transformative change and crisis, relationship building, and development of leaders. Other topics that archivists might be seeking, such as establishing mission and vision for a unit, archival advocacy, determining return on investment, and serving users, are not addressed in separate chapters, but rather are recurring headings within the other chapters of part 1. This may be confusing to first-time readers or casual browsers, but the chapters are strengthened by having these essential functions infused throughout, rather than trying to artificially separate them from the main chapter topics.

For the most part, the discussion in part 1 ably embodies widely accepted archival principles and best practices, and is suitable for emerging archival leaders and managers. However, some passages do clash uncomfortably with contemporary conversations in the field. Chapter 3, “Resources and Budgets,” returns multiple times to the topic of volunteer labor in archives, encouraging managers to recognize the “dollar value” of unpaid workers and count them as a “significant resource” in budgetary planning.⁶ Volunteer positions are, of course, deeply entrenched in many programs and apprenticeships that make up our field, especially among local and community programs with small budgets. However, in light of recent conversations in the field around the value of archival labor, this non-nuanced take on unpaid time may strike some readers as tone-deaf or slightly out-of-date.⁷ While it is certainly difficult for print publications to keep up with real-time discussion in the field, it may be jarring to some readers within a volume dedicated largely to changing repositories for the better.

Part 2 presents original case studies from six different archival leaders. They share insight from their respective careers in state government, corporate archives, historical societies, nonprofit organizations, university archives, and in training archival leaders. While the casual reader may be tempted to only review case studies closely related to their own corner of the archives field, there are common threads throughout, demonstrating the similar challenges all archivists face around advocacy, serving their public, and leading from the middle.

⁶ Carmichael, “Resources and Budgets,” *Leading and Managing Archives*, 42.

⁷ “Only Paid Internships to Be Posted to the SAA Career Center,” Society of American Archivists, July 9, 2019, <https://www2.archivists.org/news/2019/only-paid-internships-to-be-posted-to-the-saa-career-center>.

For example, Jennifer I. Johnson addresses the challenges and peculiarities of business archives in chapter 8. Johnson's advice to business archivists to be "part champion, part marketer, part storyteller, and part historian" is appropriate for all of us. However, the chapter emphasizes activities that are applicable to any archival unit embedded in a larger institution, such as addressing "corporate folklore" with archival outreach, demonstrating the strategic value of archives, and securing funding for a non-profit unit. These types of activities comprise "leading from the middle," an underlying theme of much of the volume's content. This theme is addressed explicitly in the title of Rachel Vagts's chapter, "Blooming Where We Are Planted: The Future of Archival Leadership" (chapter 12). Vagts draws on her experience as both alumna and director of the Archives Leadership Institute to develop an appraisal of archival leaders and methods for developing them, concepts applicable across all kinds of repositories.

All in all, *Leading and Managing Archives and Manuscripts Programs* is a tremendous resource for anyone seeking an introduction or well-developed reference guide to archival leadership and management topics, which honestly should include every archivist (and every aspiring one). The annotated bibliography alone will be worth the cover price for those seeking to read widely on the topics of leadership and management in archives, cultural heritage institutions, and other organizations. While students and new professionals stand to gain a lot from this volume, Carmichael reminds us that even "established leaders must continue to *become* good leaders" (author's emphasis) (p. 80). Those who are deeply steeped in the literature of archival leadership may find something new here as well, especially in part 2's case studies.

The volume as a whole is a promising window into the new Archival Fundamentals Series 3 from the Society of American Archivists. A foreword by series editor Peter J. Wosh outlines upcoming monographs in series 3, and their overall relationship with their predecessors in series 1 and 2. If upcoming works on eternal archival concepts like advocacy, appraisal, arrangement and description, access, and preservation can build on previous volumes the same way Gottlieb and Carmichael have here, they will be excellent contributions to the literature.