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## Review of Advocacy and Awareness for Archivists

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**Kathleen D. Roe. *Advocacy and Awareness for Archivists*. Archival Fundamentals Series, volume 3. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2019.**

In 1990, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) released the first volume of the Archival Fundamentals Series. This series, in its various incarnations, has served as a set of core textbooks for many archival studies graduate programs as well as for seasoned professionals looking for reference texts. As evidenced by the title of the series, the texts constitute a framework for what is considered fundamental knowledge in the archives field. *Advocacy and Awareness for Archivists* is one of the volumes in the third iteration of this series, Archival Fundamentals Series III, and marks the first substantial expansion in subject-area coverage since the original 1990 series. The extension of the series is representative of the significant movement within the archives field to expand access and use of collection materials, both in person and through evolving digital technologies. Additionally, the text serves as a formal recognition of the critical need for archives to connect and communicate the role of archives to each archive's respective community, whether that includes pursuing advocacy and awareness initiatives to stakeholders within its own institution or to members of the community in which the archive resides. Written by Kathleen D. Roe, previous director of archives and records management operations of the New York State Archives and author of *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* in the Archival Fundamentals Series II, this volume serves as an introduction and reference for archivists seeking to understand and implement the concepts of lobbying, advocacy, and awareness in archival practice through pragmatic tips and resources.

Roe utilizes a “how-to” approach that starts with understanding the history of advocacy in the archives profession and moves into the practical goal-setting, planning, and execution of advocacy initiatives. To provide a common frame of reference for her text, Roe defines advocacy as actions that provide a “focused, purposeful message to a targeted audience in order to effect a positive change” (6), and awareness as increasing “the general knowledge about the existence of archival collections, the institutions that hold them, and the professionals who manage them” (5). In the context of Roe's book, outreach is used to indicate that an advocacy or awareness initiative is being conducted toward an external audience. Broadly, the premise of Roe's book rests on the principle that advocacy initiatives conducted by archives can “increase the use of archival records, bring resources and attention to institutions that hold them, gain support and respect for the professional archivists that manage them, and broaden the understanding of the value of archives and archivists” (2).

To accomplish these goals, Roe believes that archivists must adopt an advocacy frame of mind and work every day to correct the common public understanding of archives as stewarding materials that are hidden and inaccessible. Roe argues that archivists must go beyond simply showcasing the “curiosities” in archival collections and focus instead on “serious and purposeful” uses of archives (65). Roe defines these uses in a way that is narrow and reflective of her extensive experience in a state archive—namely, she lists genealogy, government accountability, scholarly research, and criminal evidentiary research. Roe ignores recreational and artistic uses of archival collections that are equally valid and can engage many individuals who may never wish to connect with the often inherently exclusionary and privileged “serious and purposeful” uses she identifies. Despite this limited definition, through targeted questions, Roe compels the reader to articulate a

concrete, compelling, and locally unique response to the question of “Why archives?” and identifies clear and specific purposes or goals for advocacy and awareness initiatives (38). She urges archivists to examine institutional priorities through the lens of existing archival practices, such as appraisal or processing, to determine institutional values and needs (13). Beyond identifying the need or action that is at the root of the advocacy effort and answering the question of why that effort is being undertaken, advocacy and awareness initiatives must specifically identify the relevant target audience, key stakeholders, and supporters. Roe defines each of these groups as follows:

Audience—Person(s) whose opinions, behaviors, or actions you want to influence.

Key stakeholders—Individuals or groups who have some influence in whether or how you are able to accomplish your goals.

Supporters—Individuals or groups who can and will support your efforts to accomplish your goals. (47)

When selecting an audience, Roe makes an important point that the “general public” is not a coherent group that can be used in advocacy and should never be stated as a targeted population. To generalize in such a way, she argues, erases the unique contributions, needs, experiences, and histories of diverse groups of people. Additionally, Roe distinguishes between internal and external advocacy efforts by noting that some of the most important advocacy can also be internal—just because an archive exists at an institution does not mean the institution fully understands or values that archive. Crucially, Roe states that an archivist’s supervisor may be one of the first target audiences an archivist may encounter when seeking to advocate for a project or change in resource allocation. As a result, the subject of *Advocacy and Awareness for Archivists* is not only about how to advocate at the department or institutional level but also about how archivists can effectively advocate for themselves in a compelling, systematic way.

Advocacy initiatives, Roe states, must be more specific than a broad statement requesting a need for funds for a project. Her focus in the “Developing Goals” chapter encourages archivists to ask the “hard” questions to delve more deeply into precisely how a request supports the archive or broader institutional mission, who is benefiting from the project, and why the project is being undertaken (42). While individuals who have applied for and managed grants may find this content familiar, those less experienced with the grant-writing process will likely find this section helpful in both making direct advocacy cases to the local community and learning how to write a grant proposal that will get funded. Roe also discusses how the method of delivery can be as important as the content itself. Depending on whether the target audience is a fiscally minded administrator or a community member, storytelling or hard data can variably be used to create compelling cases. Appendices include examples of public-facing content created for advocacy initiatives conducted by archives and archival organizations, an overview of the legislative process, a listing of all SAA policy briefs and position statements, and a checklist of things to do when creating an awareness or advocacy initiative. These resources provide helpful ready reference materials that can be used as inspiration for writing and planning advocacy initiatives.

Two chapters, “Advocacy and Awareness in the ‘Real World’ of Archives” and “Advocating with Government Officials,” and one appendix focus almost entirely on advocacy at the national level, composing a fourth of the whole text. This focus seems slightly misplaced because, as Roe notes

in the introductory chapter, many institutions must limit lobbying activities according to applicable laws or internal policies. However, the choice to include so much content focused on advocacy to national governments highlights an important point: instead of only being frustrated at the laws or policies that impact archives work, archivists have the power to do something about them. At the same time, spending so much of the book talking about advocacy initiatives at the national level makes it clear that the most important populations in this text are those with the power to grant archives more significant funds and resources, such as legislators or administrators, rather than the community in which the archives reside. While Roe extensively covers advocacy initiatives at the national level, there is a lack of equally in-depth discussion of initiatives targeted toward more local communities, even though much of the work conducted by archives is done at the local or state level. As a result, smaller organizations or community archives will have difficulty connecting with the examples Roe provides.

Despite the consistent implied focus on power, the text avoids any discussion of the power dynamics that underpin the history and current reality of archives, especially as they relate to collecting materials created by marginalized communities often underrepresented in archives. Although Roe does mention the trust issues that can exist between marginalized populations and archives, her single mention of the subject of inequity is a statement that “some groups or communities will not feel comfortable placing records in a university archives or special collections that is part of an institution associated with white privilege” (58). The author’s only response to this truth is to ensure staff have loosely defined cultural competency skills, rather than actively working to use advocacy to conduct reparative work between archives and the communities in which they reside. While noting that archivists should be willing to listen to community members and take whatever role the community needs, including using archival skills to act as an advisor to community archives, when Roe writes that “many groups have good reason not to trust the requests from people who have not developed a relationship with them in the past” (108), she fails to acknowledge the legacy of archives as institutions that have historically underrepresented or actively harmed marginalized communities and the resulting need to rebuild trust within these communities that was justifiably lost. Roe’s only explicit discussion adjacent to this topic is that in order to work with an underrepresented group, focus should be placed on being a member of a marginalized community or developing relationships with individuals who are members of that community who can help further the advocacy initiative. As an example, she shares an anecdote about Stephen Fullwood’s work with Black lesbian and gay communities while at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Such an approach will inordinately place additional labor on archivists of color and queer archivists. By not commenting on the importance of privilege, power, and identity in outreach, Roe reinforces the role of archives as institutions that bolster dominant narratives and power dynamics while minimizing historically underrepresented perspectives.

Outside of archivists advising community archives or directly taking custody of collections, there is no room in Roe’s view of advocacy for archives that take a post-custodial perspective. Despite the existence of pioneering organizations such as the South Asian American Digital Archive, which has no physical collections yet remains deeply connected to the South Asian American community, there is no discussion here of advocacy and outreach informed by the legacy of white supremacy on the destruction of historical records and the justifiable desire of many communities to keep the records of their communities with the record creators. However, Roe does make the

critical point that efforts to document diverse experiences and topics are moot if supported only by one archivist and not backed up at the institutional level by all employees displaying cultural competency. Roe also suggests archivists pose the following questions: “Who are they? What matters to them? What can I do for them?” (53). Although not explicitly stated by Roe, these questions allow archivists to reframe advocacy from being about the archive to being about the community. While it is clear that Roe has done work in this vein previously—one anecdote briefly mentions an initiative where she created focus groups of members of an underrepresented community to identify target areas in which the community felt their histories needed to be documented—approaches centralizing outreach informed directly by marginalized groups are by no means emphasized in the text (69). By neglecting any significant discussion on this topic, Roe perpetuates the creation of advocacy, awareness, and collecting initiatives that further reinforce existing systemic inequalities.

The choice to expand the Archives Fundamentals Series III to include advocacy and awareness formally acknowledges the work that many archivists, but especially archivists in community archives, have long been doing. The existence of the volume more solidly centers and creates a baseline for outreach as a core archival function and underscores the need for archivists to express the importance of archival work in ways that can compel anyone, from a congressperson to a community member, to care about, understand, and support archives. As uncomfortable as it can sometimes be, archivists must be able to make the business case and discuss why the work done by archives and memory institutions broadly defined is necessary for the creation of a fair and equitable society. However, the text is silent on the critical issue of power dynamics and inequity in archival representation, collecting, and description, and the role of power dynamics in advocacy efforts to marginalized populations. The text would have benefited from engaging more directly with scholarship by Michelle Caswell, Lae’l Hughes-Watkins, Jarrett Drake, Anne Gilliland, Randall Jimerson, and others who write from perspectives emphasizing an ethic of care and a need for reparative practice when conducting archival work in all spheres. Without integrating a commitment to acknowledging and conducting reparative work that addresses the legacy of white supremacy in archives into all advocacy initiatives, archivists cannot in good conscience conduct outreach to communities whose materials and histories have been ignored or discarded by archival institutions. Despite these flaws, this book remains an important call to action to consistently communicate the work and impact of archives at the local, regional, and national levels.