

Summary of NFACE Focus Groups

[Note: This is a preliminary report, prepared by Jenifer Burlis-Freilich, on the focus groups held in conjunction with the NFACE project. It was prepared for use by the Program Committee at its February 2000 meeting. A final version will be prepared and distributed to the NFACE participants prior to the April conference.]

Twenty-three (23) states (listed below)* and the New England Archivists, held a total of 36 focus groups to discuss the questions posed by NFACE. More than 600 people participated in these focus group meetings.

The sizes of the groups varied from 5 attendees at a half-hour meeting, to over 60 attendees at an all-day conference. The average focus group involved approximately 12 people in an hour and a half discussion. Although the groups used the same four questions to facilitate discussion, the answers generated assumed a few different formats. Most of the reports listed specific needs, but others spoke generally of areas of education needing more attention, and a few dwelt more on what was already being offered, rather than what was needed. Despite all of the differences in the reports, there are many consistencies in the findings which are summarized below.

This summary attempts to give a broad analysis of the responses, and has sometimes assigned a response to two or more categories when the context seemed to indicate that interpretation. The numerical listings included in this document refer to the number of focus groups which included that particular response, not individuals. (These numbers are very general, and should not be given the same consideration as the statistics generated by the individual surveys.) Also, some of the focus group reports indicated "most agreement" and "least agreement," or degree of importance on responses, while others assigned no priority. These differences are not reflected in this analysis.

(Although all of the needs mentioned by participants are found in the Core Components listing (assembled by Kathleen Roe and the program committee) they do not necessarily fall in the same configuration. For instance, most respondents placed EAD, SGML, and data base development under technology, not arrangement and description. And many had storage as a separate concern from preservation. This lack of understanding in identifying needs lends support to the idea that the first thing needed is a category listing of core components for the archival profession, so that individuals will be better able to match educational workshops to the skills they are seeking.)

*The states that held focus groups are: Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, and the New England Archivists. A list of how many focus groups each state held, and the number of attendees is appended.

Question 1. What are your greatest needs for education and information services concerning the care of historical records?

All of the reports that detailed how much time was spent on the questions indicated that Question 1 generated the most discussion, usually taking up over half of the time involved for the entire focus group.

The categories identified as the greatest needs by the different focus groups are listed below. Where possible, they have been structured under the same general category listings as identified in the core components document. The numerical summary to the right refers to how many focus groups included this category as a greatest need in their summary comments. Where more specific topics were indicated, they are included in an indented entry below the main category.

<u>Category listing</u>	<u>Numerical summary</u>
Appraisal	12
Basic workshops on Archival fundamentals	25
(Not clear here in many cases, whether the respondents were referring to establishing an archives, or basic information needed in appraisal, arrangement and description, collection policy development, etc.) (Suggestions for covering these included yearly “basic” workshops, a “basic” tool kit, a “basic” manual, and “basic” video training materials)	
Best Practices/Guidelines/Manual	5
“Beyond the Basics” Project Planning, Grant Writing	10
New developments in field (techniques products)	3
Ongoing-intermediate/advanced training in basics	4
Preservation/Conservation	23
Preservation of non-textual materials	4
Storage	4
Micrographics	1
Disaster Preparedness/Recovery	8
Management of Photographic collections	6
Use of technology (general)	3

Database design	4
MARC and other cataloging	6
EAD/SGML	6
Outreach	10
(marketing, promoting, public relations)	
Exhibits	2
Train-the-trainer	5
Reference/working with the public	4
Training for users	3
Legal Research	1
Genealogy	1
History (local-collection related)	1
Security	4
Records Management basics	9
Management training	13
(including Personnel, records laws,. Budgets, Strategic planning, electronic records management, preservation)	
Advocacy to parent institution	9
<u>Legal Issues</u>	
Access laws	2
Copyright law (especially for Internet use)	6
Electronic Records	13
Digital Imaging/Scanning	7
Training for volunteers	5
Use of Internet/Web site development	9
Government documents	1

Vermont suggested that one of the first things needed was an understanding of the archival vocabulary (and shared standards, i.e., artifact or record? Do they mean the same thing, how do small historical society staff differentiate, and how do they know where to go for help. Other examples included “cost-sharing”, and “cubic foot”)

Perhaps a Core Vocabulary needs to be developed along with the Core Components (definitely could be included in the list of things that make a workshop effective).

Question 2. Where do you go now for assistance?

Question 2 generated very straightforward lists of contacts. Not a lot of discussion, although in some cases, the participants started suggesting improvements—those comments have been moved to the response for Question 3. And while the numbers seem to indicate that most participants of the focus groups use their state archives/SHRABs as resources (the groups, after all, were organized by the SHRABs), experience (and the HRRS) tell us that many records keepers have no knowledge of what a SHRAB is. One volunteer participating in the Iowa focus group—after listening to fellow participants listing professional organizations, SAA, MAC, Council of Iowa Archivists, college and university special collections departments—startled the group by saying “with the exception of the SHSI (State Historical Society of Iowa) you haven’t mentioned a single group I have heard of.” He then went on to say that he would be inclined to head to the local high school history teacher as the first source of information on how to handle materials in a local historical society.

The focus group responses seem to validate the assumption that people are more likely to go to the organizations they know when looking for help. Museum professionals go to the Museum associations. Librarians go to the Library associations, and local government officials turn to their local and regional associations.

The responses have been grouped in like categories. In some cases the participants identified specific organizations (e.g., SAA, MAC, Montana Association of Counties), but many referred generally to national conferences, regionals, state and local government associations, and simply “professional” associations. General responses are listed at the top of each category, with specific organizations and institutions listed in the indented column below. Acronyms have been identified where possible, some remain anonymous. Again, the numbers indicate the number of focus groups reporting, not individuals.

<u>Category listing</u>	<u>Numerical summary</u>
Nationals	6
AASLH (American Association of State and Local History)	3
ACRL (Academic College Research Libraries)	1
AIIM	2
ANSI	1
Church of Latter Day Saints	1
GMIS (Government Management Information Services)	1
IIMC	1

MLAI (Museum and Library Archives Institute)	1
Modern Archives Institute	1
NACO (National Association of County Officials)	1
NAGARA (National Association of Government Records and Archives)	3
NARA (National Archives and Records Administration)	5
National Genealogical Society (NGS)	1
NIRM (Nuclear Information and Records Management)	1
OPLS (Office of Public Library Services)	1
RLG (Research Libraries Group)	1
SAA (Society of American Archivists)	14
Smithsonian	1
(Total references to national associations:	46)

Regionals	8
MAC (Midwest Archives Conference)	4
MARAC (Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference)	2
NEA (New England Archivists)	1
NEMA (New England Museum Association)	1
Northwest Archivists, Inc.	1
SARC	1
SSA (Society of Southwest Archivists)	2
(Total references to regional associations	20)

ARMA (Association of Records Managers and Administrators) (Most of the references were to local chapters, not to the annual conference or website.)	5
---	---

Preservation

AMIGOS	3
NEDCC (Northeast Document Conservation Center) (some of these specified web-site)	4
SOLINET	3
State/Regional Level Associations	29
State Archives/SHRABS	23
State Historical Societies	5
Graduate Training Programs	3
Continuing Education offered by Universities/Library Schools	3
University Archives and Special Collections	4
Library Associations	5
Colleagues	14
Internet/websites	6
Listserves	10
Books/Videos/Journals	8
Vendors	6
Professional experts (lawyers, conservators)	2
State Bar	1
Commercial continuing education (i.e., COHASSET?)	1
Distance Learning Programs	1
The Vatican	1
No one (do it ourselves)	1

Question 3. How could available resources and channels for information about record keeping (including those offered by state archives, SHRABs, and professional associations) be enhanced?

The responses to this question were very similar from group to group. No numerical summary has been included here, just the suggestions made.

1. Provide more advanced workshops. Not always introductory. Could SAA offer more of its workshops regionally, not always with the annual meeting?
2. Provide more diverse levels of training.
3. Provide more regularized basic training, to meet the needs of constant influx of new employees and volunteers.
4. Provide better information on the content, prerequisites, audience, etc., for all training so that attendees will know they have chosen the correct workshop for their skill level and needs.
5. Provide state-level coordination of educational and information offerings. (This response came up on almost every summary.)
6. Provide more affordable classes. (Some responses included the comment that providing more local workshops would help reduce the travel costs involved.)
7. Limit the size of workshops to enhance the learning experience. Offer more frequently to allow more people to attend.

(Offering workshops on consecutive days in near proximity to one another could help to defray costs while providing more attendance opportunities. Annual meetings of regional and national associations could investigate having workshops before and after the meetings to accommodate more participants—workshops regularly fill quickly.)

8. Provide alternate hours of training to allow greater attendance—weekends, evenings—in addition to weekdays.
9. Establish basic skill levels for trainers.
10. Provide “train the trainer” workshops to allow attendees to return to their institutions/regions and share the information.
11. Provide scholarships for training.
12. Need to have diverse delivery systems—people learn differently.
13. Provide more geographically diverse meeting and workshops, especially in the geographically larger states and regions. Take into consideration travel costs when

planning large workshops and conferences (airport hubs, even if physically farther away, may be much less expensive than smaller cities that are geographically closer).

14. Provide educational opportunities in more community-based locations—high schools, churches, organizational meeting places where people congregate.
15. Quality workshops should include quality handouts/manuals/contact information that the attendees take with them for future reference.

Specific suggestions included establishing a mechanism for ongoing contact with the instructor, and handouts that summarize the workshop content for reference when applying the learned skills.

16. Have more and better sample materials, and more visual presentations.
17. Offer more teleconferenced workshops and on-line training to reach a wider audience.
18. Provide more hands-on experience in workshops, even with teleconferencing or e-training. Include more case studies.
19. Include more tours/examples of successful/correct professional archival facilities and records programs. (Learn by example.) Take people to a good records center, have them fill out the forms, have them retrieve records and show them what a good system should look like.
20. Offer more video and audio tapes for training.
21. Provide written materials aimed at volunteers (basic information, non-technical language, easy to follow).
22. Publish a written brochure educating administrators on the significance and special needs of historical records (and the need for continuing education on their care.)
23. Find a way to offer on-site consultations, even for short times. Specific advice and answers are often what is needed, not general training.
24. Provide a quick reference contact list of experts for answers in a hurry.
25. Establish a mentoring program.
26. Provide certificates for archival training.

Question 4. What was your best and/or worst training experience?

The various responses are listed below.

Best

- Workshops from national and regional organizations. (This hit the best and worst list, see the footnote under Worst.)
- Modern Archives Institute/Western Archives Institute/Georgia Archives Institute
- Tours of well-designed and run facilities—positive role models.
- The best sessions actively involve the students in such things as interactive case studies and exercises. They also make sure that there are limits on the participation so that people do not only learn about the ignorance of others.
- Technology aids that work can be very effective—power point presentations, slides, etc.
- Well done and informative handouts are almost always a part of the best sessions.
- A manual is even more effective than handouts.
- In the very best sessions, the trainer knows the content and how to teach. Presenters need to be more than just prepared, they need to be enthusiastic and able to share their knowledge. (Kathleen Roe did a workshop at which she used humor effectively to cover the material and keep us entertained.)
- In the very best sessions, the trainer knows his or her audience and matches the material to the audience.
- One on one training.
- Hands-on training.
- One of the most valuable items at a meeting or workshop is a handout packet that lists all the people who attended and their addresses, telephone numbers, etc. for future sharing.
- The setting is important—good lighting, large enough, easy to find, able to hear.
- Workshops that adequately target their audience (homogeneous group attending the workshop so it wasn't slowed down by people with either very basic or very technical questions).

Worst

- *Workshops from national and regional organizations.
- Bad/contradictory advice given by the presenter (i.e., being told that deeds of gift were unnecessary, handing original documents around the room with no protection after lecturing on safe handling).
- Workshops where the presenter does not have a backup plan for technical difficulties (i.e., the power point presentation doesn't work, or the VCR eats the tape).
- Didn't deliver what the workshop said was going to be offered. (Example: A professional association workshop that was supposed to help develop data bases for use in archives. The participant thought he would learn to use existing data-base systems to enhance access to his collections. It was actually a class on "what is a MARC record, how to use a MARC record, how to develop MARC records for your collections" and while interesting, the workshop was not what it was billed to be.) "Spending the time and money to attend a conference and finding that about five minutes were devoted to the topic for which I came, though it had been prominently featured in the brochure."
- In the worst sessions, the trainer is unprepared, does not know the audience, has inadequate visual materials, reads the presentation, uses no examples, goes into too much technical detail for the audience/talks "down" to the audience.
- Delivering information that is not useful to the audience (i.e., a preservation workshop that only delivers information about expensive products, to an audience of small historical societies with limited budgets).
- Poor facilities (bad acoustics, bad lighting, etc., contribute to poor workshop experiences).
- Too wide a range of experience (or lack of) in the participants—not adequately screened. . Accurately describing workshops and targeting the audience is the key. The various levels of experience and expertise can make the difference in \$25 (or \$250) well-spent or wasted. (Instructors often have to gear down to the lowest level, so others don't get the training they needed and expected.)
- Trying to fit too much information in a session that was not long enough. Focused is better for short workshops, save longer presentations for the longer formats.
- Long lectures—for most participants, lacking recent "student" experience, lectures are a difficult learning format.

* It became apparent, after reading through the many comments, that what people were really complaining about was not the quality of workshops offered by the various organizations, but about the shortcomings of an individual workshop or presenter offered by that organization.

Detailed attendance information on Focus Groups

Twenty-three (23) states (listed below) and the New England Archivists held a total of 36 focus groups to discuss the questions posed by NFACE. More than 600 people participated in these focus group meetings.

The states that held the focus groups are listed below, with the number of meetings and attendees following.

STATE	MEETINGS HELD	NUMBER ATTENDING
Alaska	1	5*
Arizona	3	8/7/10
Florida	2	9/6
Georgia	1	21
Iowa	1	15
Michigan	1	20
Minnesota	3	16*/14*/18
Missouri	1	21
Montana	1	5
Nebraska	2	11/3
Nevada	1	6
New Hampshire	1	22
New Mexico	2	10/10 (estimated)
New York	1	21
North Dakota	3	(70 total)
Ohio	1	18
Pennsylvania	2	13/13
South Carolina	1	11
Texas	1	14
Utah	1	60 (all day conference)
Vermont	1	12
Virginia	1	22
Wisconsin	3	70/18/12*
New England Archivists	1	25

*Indicates the comments from this focus group were not included.