Collective Responsibility

Seeking Equity for Contingent Labor in Libraries, Archives, and Museums

Sandy Rodriguez, Ruth Tillman, Amy Wickner, Stacie Williams, & Emily Drabinski

Credits & Acknowledgments

Advisory Board

- Dorothy J. Berry, Houghton Library, Harvard University
- Paul Kelly, public library perspectives
- Mark Matienzo, Assistant Director for Digital Strategy and Access, Stanford University Libraries. Mark provides perspectives as a current manager whose responsibilities include grant writing and project development, and as a former contingent worker.
- Rachel Mattson, museum worker perspectives
- Becca Quon, CLIR, funder perspectives

Grant Team

- Sandy Rodriguez, co-PI
- Ruth Tillman, co-PI
- Emily Drabinski, co-Investigator
- Amy Wickner, co-Investigator
- Stacie Williams, co-Investigator

Contributors

Additional contributors include forum attendees who opted into this list, white paper editors, and those who otherwise provided feedback on this white paper. The list is alphabetized by surname:

Rayna Andrews, Kristin Britanik, Elizabeth Caringola, Perry Collins, Jess Farrell, Sarah Hamerman, Natasha Hollenbach, Erin Hurley, Mary Kidd, Cory Lampert, Laura Y. Liu, Anna Neatrour, Margo Padilla, Rebecca Pattillo. Kristen Regina, Megan Senseney, Weatherly Stephan, Laurie N. Taylor, Stephanie Williams

The team would like to thank Galen Charlton, Francis Kayiwa, and Anne Slaughter who drew from their experiences serving as Code4Lib community support volunteers to advise the project team on how to approach the creation and enactment of an event Code of Conduct.

Funding and Support

Executive Summary

Introduction

The *Collective Responsibility* project (IMLS LG-73-18-0236-18) seeks to address the specific problems of precarity that grant-funded positions in digital library, archive, and museum (LAM) work create and reproduce, and how those positions impact the lives and careers of workers, particularly workers from marginalized and underrepresented populations. The project's work consists of two phases:

- Developing a collective understanding of worker experiences
- Constructing best practices, recommendations, and benchmarks appropriate to participating institutions and funders

This white paper presents the outcomes of the first phase. It draws worker experiences from a pre-forum survey and outcomes of Meeting 1: *Experience*, which took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, over 1.5 days, April 24-25, 2019. Goals for this forum were:

- To provide a space for workers to share their experiences and thoughts.
- To better understand each other's experiences and build solidarity.
- To identify commonly-shared negative experiences and reflect on the structures and systems that perpetuate them.
- To identify structures that promoted wholeness or minimize harm.
- To reflect on how we may use what we've learned to create structural change.

Methodology

We designed the project, including survey methodology and forum session design, to center the experiences of contingent workers and minimize risks to participants. Project design began with assembling a project team (co-Principal Investigators, co-Investigators, and advisory board) that includes managers, activists, unionized workers, funder representatives, and currently and formerly contingent workers representing multiple institution types and geographically dispersed across the United States. A majority are members of marginalized and underrepresented populations.

In order to include a large number of grant-funded digital LAM workers' experiences and voices, the co-PIs conducted a survey of qualitative and quantitative aspects of workers' experiences on grant-funded projects. The project team invited 35 participants to the forums. Fourteen participants are currently or have recently been contingent digital LAM workers; the remainder are LAM managers and/or represent funding agencies. As much as possible, the grant team identified and eliminated barriers to attending the forum via funded travel, lodging, and childcare, among other measures.

The forum sessions included an opening activity, keynote talk, lightning talks, presentation of survey results, four breakout sessions, and an open forum for closing reflections. The breakouts asked participants to reflect on the research, testimony, and other evidence presented throughout the forum, and to discuss how this information reflected successes and failures in their own institutional contexts. Self-generated breakout discussions formed around scope, supervision, funder responsibilities, recruitment, and the value of conflict. To respect participant privacy and agency, we implemented the Chatham House Rule, a photography and recording policy, and anonymous group

notes. Name tags, a code of conduct, community agreement, acknowledgements, facilitation and notetaking resources, and a group activity to reflect on power all aimed to address and disrupt group power dynamics. To incorporate perspectives beyond LAM, the team invited Dr. Laura Liu, Associate Professor of Global Studies & Geography at The New School, to deliver the keynote talk, given her research on community organizing, labor, migration, urban development, and design. Opportunities for participants to reflect on the forum included closing reflections, post-forum assessment, and the option to contribute a blog post to the *Collective Responsibility* website.

Survey Results and Themes

The survey received 100 complete responses from current and former contingent workers across LAM. Two major themes emerged from the data. One is a lack of attention to the professional or personal futures of workers. The second is workers' dependence on direct supervisors for support at every stage of contingent work.

Numerous additional themes emerged from participant discussions at the forum, as documented in collaborative notes. Grant-funded contingent workers have had to balance career choices with life decisions, often incurring financial impacts. They feel powerlessness or lack of control and carry the trauma of long-term contingency into permanent positions. There is a lack of organizing among contingent LAM workers. Institutional factors contributing to these worker experiences include inadequate leadership and project planning. Hiring practices and labor cultures in LAM include racialized and gendered dimensions. Institutions fetishize youth and technology. These factors, which stem from the movement of power in and across institutions, contribute to poor compensation and support for workers. In addition to discussing workers' experiences and institutional issues, participants developed a contextual understanding grounded in four interconnected areas: categories of labor; the structural conditions of work; the uses and abuses of mobility and flexibility; and how labor is valued.

Participants identified responsibilities that employers, funders, and workers hold for improving labor practices and conditions in grant-funded digital LAM. Employers must plan better projects, value labor by hiring equitably and compensating workers fairly, and provide contingent, grant-funded workers with equitable access to resources relative to permanent staff. Funders must provide explicit guidance and stringent requirements that address labor and the sustainability of grant-funded work during the application process. They must also improve their own infrastructure for application reviews. Workers must find solidarity with other contingent and precarious workers in LAM and beyond. Workers participating in the forum framed future desires in terms of stable employment, communication, access, agency, creativity, credit, and respect. Educators, professional organizations, and other entities can play a role by supporting contingent workers and students. Lastly, participants identified collective action and honestly evaluating our relationships to power as collective responsibilities.

Outcomes and Next Steps

Meeting 2: *Practices* will address the following goals:

- Understand how mission, regulatory, and legal frameworks shape current granting practices around labor

- Understand shared and individual goals of funding organizations

- Develop a framework for actionable, concrete guidelines on grant labor practices

As we design the next forum, the grant team will rely upon feedback from Meeting 1. Participants reacted positively to structured discussions, the use of a keynote for historical and political context, group size, and the clarity of plans and expectations. They ask that we address issues of in-person representation and include more perspectives from within institutions. Lastly, participants ask: How can we both work to make contingent positions more ethical while also exploring ways to eliminate contingency itself?

Introduction

A grant proposal to digitize a rare collection of slides at 150dpi would never make it through review. A digital preservation plan consisting of CD-ROMs in a closet would be returned for revision. Yet, every year, institutions develop, reviewers approve, and funders support dozens of term positions that are part-time, under-classified, or without benefits: the labor equivalent of these digital strategies.

The *Collective Responsibility* project (IMLS LG-73-18-0236-18) seeks to address the specific problems of precarity that grant-funded positions in digital library, archive, and museum (LAM) work[1] create and reproduce, and how those positions impact the lives and careers of workers, particularly workers from marginalized and underrepresented populations. Although we hold the well-being of LAM workers as a central concern, the project intends to demonstrate the detrimental effects of precarious term positions on the end products which institutions and funders seek to create.[2]

While grants operate within a framework of assessment guidelines, rules, and regulations that affect both applicant and funder, evaluative standards in LAMs focus on products rather than workers. Just as funders may require that a grant include a preservation plan or prioritize the work of making diverse collections accessible, they should also establish appropriate benchmarks in the positions they support. *Collective Responsibility* aims to develop such benchmarks — taking into account an understanding of worker experiences, of funder opportunities and barriers, and of the roles of institutions in this process.

The project's work consists of two phases:

- Developing a collective understanding of worker experiences
- Constructing best practices, recommendations, and benchmarks appropriate to participating institutions and funders

This white paper presents the outcomes of the first phase, understanding worker experiences, which the project team has developed from a pre-forum survey and first meeting. The survey, conducted by the project's Principal Investigators (PIs), gathered broad data about quantitative and qualitative aspects of term positions created through grant funding. In consultation with our advisory board,[3] the team used these responses and other preliminary research to plan Meeting 1: *Experience,* with the following 5 objectives:

1. To provide a space for workers to share their experiences and thoughts.
2. To better understand each other's experiences and build solidarity.

---

[1] We recognize that contingency and precarity in LAM are a far more extensive problem than positions created by grant funds or digital work. Our team's intent was to include a wide variety of participating workers and institutions while limiting the scope sufficiently that strategic outcomes may be applied. We intend for the understandings of labor conditions and recommendations from these meetings to inform the broader conversation on labor in LAM.

[2] For an excellent overview of effects on institutions, as well as workers, see: Courtney, Dean, Lori Dedeyan, M. Angel Diaz, Melissa Haley, Margaret Hughes, and Lauren McDaniel, "UCLA Temporary Librarians," June 11, 2018, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1h-P7mWiUn27b2nrkk-1eMbDkqSZtk4Moxis07KcMwhI/edit

[3] The grant team and advisory board members are listed in the Credits and Acknowledgments section of the paper.

3. To identify commonly shared negative experiences and reflect on which structures and systems perpetuate them.
4. To identify structures that promote wholeness or minimize harm.
5. To reflect on how we may use what we've learned to create structural change.

We structured the 1.5-day event as a mixture of informational presentations and group breakouts.[4] Participants represent three key groups in the conversation: contingent and recently-contingent workers on grant-funded projects; representatives of funding organizations; and management/institutional representatives. IMLS funds covered attendance for 14 worker participants who have recently held or currently hold grant-funded positions. The event took place under the Chatham House Rule and related community agreements[5] that encourage participants to synthesize topics and concerns while maintaining confidentiality of details.

---

[4] The full schedule can be found here http://laborforum.diglib.org/forum-1/
[5] See Appendices for forum documents.

Centering Contingent Worker Experiences: A Methodology

In designing this project, the team sought to minimize risks to contingent workers and other participants. Such risks arise not only from contingency and precarity, but also from the structural norms of power, privilege, and oppression such as white supremacy and neoliberalism. Speaking honestly about painful experiences and vulnerability might lead a worker to be unable to find future employment. A more established administrator or funder participant might face censure for openly sharing their institution's failings. The team made the following design decisions so that project participants, particularly those in current or recently-contingent circumstances, could safely provide honest responses to the survey and fully engage in meaningful dialogue during the forum.

Establishing a Diverse Project Team

The project team, which consists of two co-PIs, three co-Investigators (co-Is), and five advisory board members, represent roles that include managers, activists, unionized workers, funder representatives, and currently and formerly contingent workers. We also broadly represented institution types such as academic libraries and archives, museums, public libraries, grant-funding agencies, and public and private institutions. The team resides in various regions across the United States, although mostly the Midwest and East Coast, and represent different identity groups. A majority of the team are members of marginalized and underrepresented populations.

Establishing a core team that represented various worker roles, identity groups, institution types, and regions allowed us to depart from traditional survey and forum designs – for example, by collecting demographic data in a way that respects self-identification, and by establishing the Chatham House Rule to mitigate risks for participants. The co-PIs designed and administered the survey and analyzed its results; the broader investigator team (co-PIs and co-Is) designed the overall forum and its sessions; and the advisory board provided critical feedback on forum design and recommended funder and management participants to invite.

Conducting a Pre-Forum Survey

In order to include more grant-funded digital LAM workers' experiences and voices, the co-PIs conducted a survey of workers' experiences on grant-funded projects, synthesizing and presenting findings to identify trends, further questions, and areas of focus for the forum participants.

The survey was open to anyone currently or formerly performing digital work in libraries, archives, and museums, whose position is or was term-limited and created using grant-funding. We conceived of "digital" work and workers quite broadly, including everyone from software developers to archivists who create non-paper finding aids. Opening up survey participation for digital LAM workers also provided forum participants with a degree of anonymity and space to share experiences, as we strongly encouraged them to also complete the survey.

The survey gathered information about both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of working in grant-funded, term-limited positions. It included questions about years of work experience and credentialing, the position's characteristics, experiences in holding the position, and how accepting

the position impacted the worker's support structures. Most questions were multiple-choice, with some opportunities for longer clarification and comment.

The Co-PIs distributed the survey to eight library and archives email lists and two closed online spaces for LAM workers of color. Survey design and data analysis do not conceive of or deliberately sample from a "universe" of contingent workers in digital LAM. Results of the survey appear in the "Survey Results" section of this paper.

Designing a Dialogue-Driven Forum

Approaching these labor issues collectively, rather than dismissing them as the concerns of individual outliers, recognizes them as a systemic issue. Bringing together the primary actors in the system — workers, funders, and management — to engage in critical dialogue is an opportunity to interrogate contingent and precarious grant-funded labor as a system. It is a chance to name the responsibilities and assumptions from which each actor operates; to study how the system's behavior reflects its purpose; and to identify rules that perpetuate the system. This examination enables collective identification of leverage points: places of power in which to intervene, change system behavior, and transform outcomes for grant-funded laborers. We will further explore these leverage points in Meeting 2: *Practices*.

In order to effectively manage dialogue for the forums, the project team decided to invite no more than 35 participants to the forums, 14 of whom would represent currently or recently contingent digital LAM workers. The remainder would represent LAM management and funders.

The first forum meeting, *Experience*, took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, over 1.5 days, April 24–25, 2019. Sessions included an opening activity, keynote talk, lightning talks, presentation of survey results, several breakouts (three on predetermined topics and one self-generating), and an open forum for closing reflections. Members of the project team and participant volunteers took on facilitator roles to allow other attendees more space to participate. We designated notetaker roles to collaboratively create documentation that would inform both ongoing research and the second forum.

The project team made key decisions and developed structures to support full participation in the forum. We focused on eliminating barriers to attending the forum, respecting participant privacy and agency, addressing group power dynamics, establishing a focus on workers, and exploring perspectives beyond LAM.

Eliminating Barriers to Attending the Forum

Recognizing that grant-funded workers do not often receive institutional support for professional development, the project team budgeted IMLS grant funds for travel and accommodation expenses for the 14 worker participants. Funding also covered meals, snacks, and childcare services for all forum attendees.[6] The project team also provided each worker participant with one $5 bill per night spent in the hotel to cover tips for housekeeping services during the forum.[7]

To ensure diverse representation – particularly of those in precarious, grant-funded positions – the project team recruited worker participants through existing involvement with the DLF-sponsored Labor Working Group, contact with similar groups including Museum Workers Speak, and an open application process that we publicized via disciplinary listservs and social media. The open application included an optional, free-text section for demographic self-identification to ensure that forum participation included voices from a variety of identity lenses.

The project team identified and invited manager and funder participants,[8] who were responsible for securing their own funding to attend the forum. Accommodations such as livestreaming allowed remote attendance for a few representatives of federal agencies whose travel funding was withheld.

The project team also considered the possible macro- and micro-aggressions that attendees of color might experience. These have occurred at recent academic[9] and LAM events, coming not only from white attendees but also from hotel or event staff who question the right attendees of color have to be in a space. Such an incident had occurred in December 2018 at a DoubleTree hotel in Portland, in which staff called police to remove a black man who was a guest of the hotel.[10] A member of the *Collective Responsibility* project team met with the Pittsburgh DoubleTree's event coordinator to discuss safety and the right-to-belong of all attendees. The co-PI reviewed the anticipated demographic makeup of attendees and how the event's Code of Conduct asked attendees to behave toward each other. She asked that the hotel's staff be apprised that attendees of color would be staying in and regularly moving through the lobby.

---

[6] Restrictions in place by Penn State's Risk Management required the team to offer childcare as refunds for daycare choices made by the parent, rather than providing on-site daycare, as we'd originally planned. We recommend that others consult with their institutional risk management up front to determine any limitations.

[7] The practice of #5ADayHotelStay, a hashtag created by Dr. Karla Holloway https://twitter.com/ProfHolloway/status/450332578281955328, promotes daily tipping of housekeeping workers. By tipping daily, hotel guests ensure that the person cleaning their room each day will get a tip, even if they are not scheduled to work on the day the guest checks out. See the related note in the American Hotel and Lodging Association guide to gratuities https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/guestGratuityGuide.pdf

[8] Participants were identified through various methods. The team identified funders with major influence in LAM and invited program officers. They identified managers and administrators who had engaged in labor-related advocacy in the past, who were recommended by the advisory board, or who had expressed interest in the project and invited a subset to represent libraries, archives, and museums. If initial invitees were unable to attend, the team asked them for recommendations.

[9] Emma Pettit, "After Racist Incidents Mire a Conference, Classicists Point to Bigger Problems," The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 7, 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/article/After-Racist-Incidents-Mire-a/245430.

[10] Mihir Zaveri, "Doubletree in Portland Fires 2 Employees After Kicking Out Black Man Who Made Call From Lobby," The New York Times, December 28, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/28/us/black-man-kicked-out-hotel-portland.html.

Respecting Participant Privacy and Agency

The project team established several structures that would ensure participants retained their right to privacy and agency in sharing their own involvement in the forum. Specifically,

The Chatham House Rule, which allowed participants to document and use information shared in the forum without revealing any identifying information such as participant name and affiliation. We applied this rule to both group notes and social media.

Photography and Recording policy, which encouraged participants to seek permission of speakers or fellow participants prior to taking photographs or sharing them on any platform. If a participant felt compelled to record any part of the forum, the policy instructs them to consult with the project team first.

The use of **Riseup Pad** for collaborative note-taking.[11] Editors are anonymous by default but can change their own display names. Each editor's contributions appear in a different color (Authorship Colors).

Addressing Group Power Dynamics

The project team prepared several documents and an activity in order to create spaces conducive to honest sharing and dialogue with less risk of repercussion. Specifically,

Name tags, which we kept simple by including only the participant's name and an option to fill out pronouns. The project team determined that listing institutional affiliation could unnecessarily introduce biases and attitudes that could impact how participants approach their conversations with each other, especially given that their first point of contact would be during the opening breakfast.

Code of Conduct and Community Agreement, which encouraged forum participants to enact an ethic of care, paying attention to themselves and to the welfare of other participants. The Code of Conduct focused primarily on setting an expectation and responsibility that all forum participants engage in inclusive behavior and keep the meeting free from harassment. The Community Agreement directly addressed the power dynamics of bringing together workers in vulnerable situations and those with institutional privilege, as well as the whiteness of LAM. The Community Agreement follows. We practice community by:

- making space/taking space – encouraging and yielding the floor to those whose viewpoints may be under-represented in a group, taking space made for you as you're able;
- respecting a person's description of their experiences of marginalization or discrimination (and not excusing, explaining, or defending the intentions of those in the dominating group);
- using welcoming language (including a person's pronouns) and favoring gender-neutral collective nouns ("folks" or "y'all," not "guys");
- accepting critique graciously and offering it constructively;
- giving credit where it is due;

---

[11] Riseup Pad is a browser-based, hosted instance of Etherpad provided by the Riseup Collective.

- seeking concrete ways to make physical spaces and online resources more universally accessible;
- practicing self and community care – pay attention to your body's needs and, as Active Bystanders, to the welfare of those around us.

Given the dialogue-driven design of the forum, the project team also established a set of **Agreements on Listening** to guide forum participants in active listening,[12] as well as an **Experience Forum: Facilitators' Guide**[13] for those who had volunteered to facilitate breakout sessions. We tasked facilitators with keeping conversations flowing and disrupting social dynamics where needed, ensuring full participation of all attendees. The guide provided Do's and Don'ts along with a set of strategies for getting unstuck, engaging conflict and tension, keeping participants actively engaged, disrupting power dynamics, and dealing with topics that were out of scope. We based this guide heavily upon the Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance (AORTA) **Anti-Oppressive Facilitation Guide**,[14] which we encouraged all participants to review prior to the forum.

We also incorporated anti-oppressive approaches into the aforementioned **Experience Forum: Notetakers' Resource**,[15] specifically by promoting note-taking as a means to challenge oppressive language and by encouraging the distribution of responsibility for note-taking. The resource included options for visual or other non-textual notes, supporting alternative forms of documentation.

We also addressed social power dynamics through the framing of the forum. The team provided an opening welcome session that not only reviewed the Code of Conduct, agreements, and resources, but also included a set of **Acknowledgments**: a land acknowledgment,[16] brief account of the history of uprisings in Pittsburgh, and support for the people of Pittsburgh who had, in the previous 12 months, endured the violence of white supremacy in their community.[17]

After the opening welcome, the project team led a **general activity** that explored various ways in which we each hold power. The team prompted forum participants to think about their work and identify where they felt they held power and where they lacked it, writing each down on Post-It notes. Given time to reflect, participants then shared their thoughts and reactions. At the conclusion of the activity, we placed the Post-Its on a wall so that participants could review and consider them throughout the forum.

The project team intentionally placed the power activity early in the forum schedule so that participants would begin by recognizing their various forms of individual power as well as how they

---

[12] See the full Code of Conduct, Community Agreement, and Agreements on Listening: http://laborforum.diglib.org/code-of-conduct-and-community-agreement/.

[13] Included in forum documents; see Appendices.

[14] Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance (AORTA), *Anti-Oppressive Facilitation Guide*, updated June 2017, http://aorta.coop/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/AO-Facilitation-Resource-Sheet.pdf.

[15] Included in forum documents; see Appendices.

[16] This region was cared for historically by the Adena and Hopewell mound builder cultures and the Monongahela culture. Shortly after early European colonization of the Americas, it became part of the Haudenosaunee confederacy and was home to Shawnee and Lenape tribes, forced West by British settlers, and pressured by French down from Quebec. We acknowledge that in this forum we are not engaging directly with members of those peoples who remain in the area today.

[17] The police shooting of Antwon Rose II, an unarmed black high school student as well as the mass shooting at Tree of Life/L'Simcha synagogue, the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in the United States.

could build collective power. The intended outcomes for this activity included an ability to articulate how power is often thought of in the workplace, understand power as contextual and relational, and understand power to be produced in and through systems that distribute power differentially, systems that are subject to change through the mobilization of collective power.

Establishing a Focus on Workers

Keeping in mind the primary aim of the project's first phase – *to develop a collective understanding* of the experiences of grant-funded digital LAM workers – one challenge lay in creating a space for deep exploration of worker experiences without slipping too far into developing solutions, given that project's second phase would focus on determining practices and solutions. The project team decided not to prohibit solutions-based discussion; however, we ensured a focus on worker experiences by creating a set of forum goals, sharing survey results, setting pre-determined breakout topics that centered workers, creating strategies for re-focusing dialogue, and establishing several opportunities for worker representatives to share their experiences.

First and foremost, it was critical to establish and communicate the *Experience* **forum goals**, both prior to the forum and as part of the opening welcome remarks. As stated in the introduction, goals were as follows:

1. To provide a space for workers to share their experiences and thoughts.
2. To better understand each other's experiences and build solidarity.
3. To identify commonly-shared negative experiences and reflect on the structures and systems that perpetuate them.
4. To identify structures that promoted wholeness or minimize harm.
5. To reflect on how we may use what we've learned to create structural change.

To maintain a focus on grant-funded worker experiences, the **survey results** immediately followed the opening activity. Worker participants then delivered 5-8 minute **lightning talks** describing one aspect of their experiences as a grant-funded worker, covering institutional or personal impacts. Facilitated **breakout sessions** on key topics with various participant groupings served as yet another method of gathering data for worker experiences during the forum. Round tables in the meeting room could comfortably seat 8. The project team placed several packs of Post-It notes on each table, encouraging participants to jot down topics of interest or reactions to the data presented in the survey results or any forum session. We collected Post-Its left on meeting room tables at the end of the first day to determine topics for the **self-generating breakout session** scheduled the next morning.

The first breakout session grouped funders and management, while workers formed several small groups. The topic, "Discuss survey findings, stories, and experiences" centered on responses to survey data and lightning talks, but also encouraged participants to share their own experiences. To keep everyone engaged and supportive of the goals, the project team offered participants opportunities to serve in facilitator or notetaker roles for the breakout sessions, providing prompts for each. The prompts for the first breakout session were:

- Do you hear your own experience reflected in the survey findings, stories, and experiences?
- Share one thing you heard someone else say today that stuck with you. Why did it stick?
- What surprised you about what we heard today?
- What new questions do you have after what we heard today?
- Given what we've heard today, what is the problem we need to address?

For the second breakout session, "In what ways has today's sharing reflected successes and failures in your own environment?" management formed one group while each funder representative met with a group of workers. We provided an additional prompt beyond the topic:

- What additional information, resource, and support would help you continue these successes and address these failures?

The final predetermined breakout topic, "What aspects and impacts of experience can be concretized in best practices and grant guidelines?" brought workers into one large group and management and funder representatives into another.

Recognizing the limitations of predetermining every discussion topic, we planned for one self-generating breakout session to explore unanticipated but interesting topics. Both the Facilitators' Guide and Notetakers' Resource introduced strategies for "parking" topics that were out of scope, to either address in the next forum or consider for the self-generating breakout. Facilitators left Post-It notes on tables for "parked" topics. The project team collected these notes at the conclusion of the first day, grouped them thematically, and created table tents for each new topic. Participants could join the table with the topic that interested them most and move to other tables throughout the scheduled session time. Self-generated breakout discussions formed around scope, supervision, funder responsibilities, recruitment, and the value of conflict.

Exploring Perspectives Beyond LAM

The project team determined that a keynote talk could provide an opportunity to broaden participants' labor perspectives beyond digital LAM contexts and approach forum discussions with a different lens. The team invited Dr. Laura Liu, Associate Professor of Global Studies & Geography at The New School, to deliver the keynote talk, given her research on community organizing, labor, migration, urban development, and design. Her talk, "Contingent Worker Solidarity: Which Workers are We Similar To?," was followed by 30 minutes of Q&A.

Providing Opportunities to Reflect on the Forum

Providing opportunities for reflection was another critical element in the project design. We designated the final session of the *Experience* forum for **closing reflections**, an open forum for all participants to share their final thoughts. Participants had additional opportunities to share feedback and reflections after the forum, by either completing an assessment of the forum or contributing a post-forum reflection blog post[18] to the *Collective Responsibility* website.

---

[18] http://laborforum.diglib.org/posts/

Survey Results

As previously mentioned, the project team conducted a survey on the experiences of current and former grant-funded workers in preparation for the *Experience* forum. Quantitative data gathered included years spent in grant-funded positions, whether workers left before the conclusion of a project, the position's salary and FTE, whether the position required a move, and whether it included cost of living adjustments and support for professional development. Qualitative data-gathering included opportunities to comment on quantitative answers as well as questions related to perceptions of displacement and belonging when the position required workers to relocate.

The survey was intended as a space for both non-attendee and attendee workers to contribute anonymously to the conversation at the forum. Our assessments of qualitative and quantitative data shaped the conversation prompts and questions at the forum. During the forum, the co-PIs presented results, held time for breakout discussions of the presentation, and led a full-group discussion and response period. Quoted text in this section draws from the free-text responses to the survey.

The survey received 100 complete responses. We removed three incomplete responses from the results. The major theme which emerged from the responses was a **lack of attention to the professional or personal futures of the workers**. Responses challenged the idea that term positions are necessary stepping stones to secure employment or that they contribute to a worker's professional growth. Numbers for professional development and travel funding (even when relevant to the grant), cost of living adjustments for positions longer than one year, and retirement contributions were all concerningly low. 49% of workers received salaries lower than $40,000/year.[19] Completing one term position at an institution was more likely to lead to more contingent work there[20] than to full-time work at that institution.

Throughout their comments, respondents described how lack of benefits, fear that time off would endanger the grant's timeline, and the churn of short-term positions and job hunts prevented them from taking important life steps. One respondent who held three term positions over six years wrote, "I was constantly either on the job market, about to be on the job market, or on-boarding to a new place, none of which are conducive to either [being pregnant] or nurturing a child through their first year of life." By the time she had "paid her dues," found a permanent position, and felt secure enough to have a child she was considered to be "of advanced maternal age."

A second theme which emerged in the comments was **dependence on one's direct supervisor**. Some respondents reported that their supervisors advocated for them or otherwise made an effort to ensure that they received parity in benefits and development. Others wrote that their supervisors

---

[19] During the forum, conversation challenged the perception of $50,000 as a "good" salary. Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator (https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm), $50,000 in January 2009 equates to $59,607 in January 2019. This does not account for areas experiencing particularly rapid cost of living increases, such as San Francisco, New York City, or Boston.
[20] 66% of people rehired at the same institution were rehired into contingent positions.

were unaware of benefits available to them, such as paid time off, and that they (workers) were not properly onboarded or made aware of their options until near the end of grants.

Only one third of respondents felt that they could rely on their human resources (HR) departments for support with any issues which arose, and another third marked the question "n/a." This response is at least as concerning as those who responded that they could not rely on HR: It indicates that respondents did not feel that they had access to HR services at all. While the survey did not directly collect data on the size and type of institution, textual responses revealed that fewer than 10 percent worked at organizations so small as to not have an HR department.

The conversation that emerged through forum discussions and activities validated both themes arising from the survey. The following section will expand on these themes and the respective responsibilities participants identified during the forum. See Appendix B for survey data.

Themes & Responsibilities

When the co-PIs presented themes from the survey at the *Experience* meeting, participants had already engaged in a group exercise reflecting on their own forms of power. Five worker participants followed the survey presentation with lightning talks on their own experiences. In the afternoon, participants broke out into groups to discuss and respond to what they had heard. This section describes themes that emerged from these conversations. It first relates the experiences of grant-funded workers in LAM, then establishes a shared understanding of the roots of these experiences in institutional practices and broad patterns in the recent history of labor. Lastly, it enumerates our collective responsibilities. Quoted text in this section draws directly from forum participants' collaborative notes.

Experience: What Workers (Have Had To) Do

Workers bear impacts of grant-funded temporary jobs through insufficient or inequitable compensation including pay, maternity leave, health care, professional development, travel funds, and relocation support. Indeed, confusion about available benefits was a key finding in the grant team's survey results. Contingency and precarity influence workers' decisions about life and career. They take pay cuts to accept grant-funded jobs that promise to advance their careers "doing what [they] love," weighing health risks and lack of benefits against their fear that resume gaps compromise financial sustainability and future opportunities. The cumulative financial impact of term positions includes the costs of moving often – rent and broken leases, commuting, childcare, health care, and coordinating with partner circumstances – sometimes far from support structures. LAM workers find themselves in sequential term positions; one participant recounted "ten years of positions with expiration dates."

Term positions inhere as a kind of powerlessness or lack of control, as workers find themselves constantly job hunting, under pressure to do excellent work with "no time to be mediocre for a week," and little able to set boundaries at work. The latter involves gendered and racialized expectations of labor that contingent workers may not be in positions to resist. Furthermore, workers on short-term contracts frequently do not have – or do not feel they have – the power to give feedback on project scopes. Precarity plays a role in LAM workers' lives from the very start of their careers, given the expectation that MLS students and other new workers will gain skills through unpaid internships. Not knowing how best to ask about salary, benefits, and working conditions puts early-career LAM workers at a disadvantage relative to employing organizations.

The similarity of these experiences across various types of organizations suggests that, although positive outcomes are possible, high-level reprioritization is necessary. As survey results show, the quality of a worker's experience often depends entirely on the efforts of a supportive supervisor who holds power and a stable position at the organization. Workers suffer without a mentor or advocate. A well-scoped and planned project is also critical. However, such supervisors and projects appear uncommon. More frequently, grant-supported temporary positions involve repetitive work and limited tasks that can be difficult to represent on resumes and CVs in ways that are understandable and relevant to job postings. These conditions also produce challenges in finding and transitioning to permanent work.

Moving into a permanent position does not lessen the trauma of long-term contingency. Formerly contingent workers fear paying forward negative experiences to their own employees. They worry that others will exemplify their own transitions as "successful," discounting the rarity and strain of obtaining permanent work. Many such transitions seem smooth because workers disguise how difficult they are – an extension of the pressure workers feel to always be "on" lest they damage future prospects for employment.

Historically, workers have responded to inequitable working conditions by organizing. For example, worker centers in occupations like the garment industry, home health care, construction, and restaurants emerge from conditions of contingency and precarity as a kind of mutual aid. Similar collectives do not often exist in LAM.[21] There are several possible reasons for this absence. Not only is organizing a lot of work, but the frequent isolation of grant-funded workers can also make it difficult to find allies or share information. Even when workers move into permanent positions, coworkers who recall their temporary status may treat them with less respect. Although Meeting 1 conversations did not address differences between organizing in public and private areas of LAM, this may be a productive area for future discussion.

Power at Work: What Institutions Do

Institutional practices that produce these worker experiences fall into five interrelated categories: leadership, project planning, hiring practices, labor cultures in LAM, and how power moves in institutions.

Motivation to apply for grants varies across institutional **leadership**. When fundraising leaders in larger, well-resourced institutions turn to grants, it can mean initiating work beyond the institution's capacity to support. Meanwhile, smaller, poorer organizations rely upon grants to support core functions. Regardless of resources, a top-down mandate and alignment with institutional priorities do not mitigate harm to workers. When institutions and leaders address risk, they do not always consider the risk of harming or losing workers.

Forum participants' extensive background in grant-supported work included many poorly planned and scoped projects. **Project planning** issues begin with not accounting for equitable labor costs. Grant writers submit – and funding agencies accept – budgets that account for wages but not benefits for grant-funded workers. Employers split hairs regarding state law to avoid paying for health care, sick leave, overtime, childcare, and other benefits. Grant-funded positions are often part-time at 25 percent or 50 percent, which limits the pool of applicants to those who can afford to interview, relocate, and find one or more additional sources of income. Reporting lines may cause additional

Reflections on Temporary Appointments and Innovation/Diversity Culture in Libraries and Archives
By Des Alaniz

Exploring connections between temporary appointments, library residencies, and the diversity and innovation culture in academic libraries and archives:

http://laborforum.diglib.org/2019 /08/14/reflections-on-temporary-appointments-and-innovation-diversity-culture-in-libraries-and-archives/

---

[21] The Los Angeles Archivists' Collective, https://www.laacollective.org/, though not a formal organizing group, shares commonalities with worker centers and collectives in other industries.

stress. Some institutions create full-time positions that report to multiple bosses who have different styles, divergent expectations, or incomplete knowledge of the grant scope. Such conditions challenge the most vulnerable members of an organization to lead without authority.

Project planning dovetails with **hiring practices** to produce working conditions. The timeline between when a grant is awarded and when it begins can be brief. As a result, hiring timelines may seem rushed or follow different processes than full-time, permanent positions doing similar work. Communication gaps among PIs, project managers, fiscal services, and HR departments can produce budget mismanagement or low pay that is inconsistent with the terms of the funded budget. In one instance, a project PI was unaware until several years into a grant that HR had chosen to under-pay a grant-supported worker relative to the awarded budget. A worker may receive an entry-level salary in successive positions despite cumulative experience as institutions hire experienced workers while budgeting for entry-level salaries.

These institutional patterns and practices reproduce **labor cultures** with impacts for contingent and precarious workers. An expectation of dues-paying is prevalent in LAM: the idea that "I struggled so others should too." As previously mentioned, supervisors play an outsized role in contingent workers' experiences, which doubles or triples the impact of workplace bullying. Low pay assumes that workers can rely on partners or parents for supplemental income. This imagined "spousal subsidy" is both heteronormative and misogynistic: The partner is assumed to be male and therefore higher paid.

Hiring, compensation, and other labor practices in grant-funded digital LAM furthermore have a racialized dimension. Using grants to highlight diverse collections enforces a belief that diversity in collection development is not mission-critical. As forum attendees pointed out, these grants are often the only projects hiring people of color. When permanent positions become available, workers in these positions do not get the offers. Previous experience with "diverse collections" or "hidden collections" work gives employers the impression that job applicants only work with material related to their own race or ethnicity — which can bear little relation to workers' actual areas of expertise. Precarious employment is tied to "pipeline" issues in digital LAM. Student labor is often precarious, with little expectation among employers that they should provide health insurance or that workers will fight for better pay. Seeing contingent labor as the standard way to enter the field accounts in part for the overwhelming whiteness of LAM. Not only is entry prohibitive to people of color, but many of the conditions associated with contingent labor also comprise the realities of Black or Latinx workers in libraries, at any level: "Just because you're tenure-track doesn't mean you're not considered expendable."

On Listening: Reflections on the First Collective Responsibility Forum
By Joy M. Banks

When we listen to learn, grant funders can be a part of the community that encourages and builds ethical labor environments for everyone in libraries, archives, and museums:

http://laborforum.diglib.org/2019/07/23/on-listening-reflections-on-the-first-collective-responsibility-forum/

In the experiences of forum participants, LAM institutions fetishize youth and technology, including by associating "digital" work with early career positions. This linkage serves to justify low compensation for and investment in work that is often extremely specialized and requires intensive technical skill. The fantasies of universal access (via

digitization) and complete efficiency (via standardization and automation) also drive institutions to underestimate the demands of digital work. Participants describe how this "cruel optimism"[22] manifests in digital LAM not only in low compensation for workers but also in the short-sighted use of term funding and labor to implement work that calls for long-term maintenance. When grants end, the accomplished work can lie dormant without anyone to promote it. Grant-funded workers question the purpose of creating pilots or workflows without institutional commitment to support them over the long term.[23] If a grant-funded project does not end when term workers depart – as usually happens – immense technical debt and a loss of institutional memory are just one more staff turnover away.

Participants expressed that they and other LAM workers felt "groomed" to accept all of the above as natural or inevitable. They also recounted the idea, which employers repeat, that temporary work is "abnormal" – even as they bounce from term position to term position and institutions continually generate and maintain such positions on a contingent basis for years on end. It is important to note here that many of the fields to which LAM looks for models – such as academic humanities – rely on adjunct professors, post-docs, and other temporary workers to fulfill core activities such as research and teaching. Permanently retaining a temporary workforce has been mainstream practice in American business since the 1980s.[24]

These patterns stem from **how power moves** in institutions, and they have impacts for individuals and institutions. Wealthy and cash-strapped institutions alike make use of grant-funded term employees. However, forum participants wondered whether certain requirements of grant applications actually create barriers for smaller organizations to receive funding. Well-resourced "grant-writing machines are churning out applications" that flood the applicant pool and hamper funders pursuing accountability. A term employee cannot, for example, directly contact a funding agency to report discrepancies between promised and actual compensation, particularly if they do

---

[22] Lauren Berlant originated the concept of "cruel optimism." See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). For a foundational application of "cruel optimism" to archives and archival work, see Marika Cifor, "Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse," *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (March 2016): 7-31, https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9261-5.

[23] Recently, the IMLS has attempted to address this through its National Digital Platform. NEH has offered Digital Humanities Advancement Grants, which allow applicants to propose upgrading or maintaining mature projects as well as starting new work. Research projects such as the NEH-funded Sustaining DH (https://sites.haa.pitt.edu/sustainabilityinstitute/), Sustaining the Digital Humanities (https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.22548), and Socio-Technical Sustainability Roadmap (https://sites.haa.pitt.edu/sustainabilityroadmap/) address these concerns in a digital humanities context. In a four-part series of blog posts, staff at the University of Virginia Scholars' Lab describe the challenges of "Archiving DH" (https://scholarslab.lib.virginia.edu/blog/archiving-dh-part-one/).

[24] Louis Hyman, *Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary* (New York: Viking, 2018).

not have access to the full grant proposal. An institution writing a grant does not consider or accept responsibility for how a person's livelihood takes shape around those one or two years; in fact, temporary relationships with little to no investment are desirable. Credit and prestige associated with winning and fulfilling grants accrue to PIs, departments, or institutions — not to grant-funded contingent workers.[25]

As important as these grant-specific dynamics, however, are patterns of inter- and intra-institutional power across all LAM contexts. The grant team observed disproportionate representation of "collections care" workers (such as processing archivists, project managers, metadata analysts, and digitization technicians) relative to "collection development" workers (such as curators) among funded participants and the larger pool of applicants. Here we also note that, across LAM, curators are majority white and hold advanced degrees, while collections care work continues to fall disproportionately upon marginalized workers. Yet another aspect of how power moves within and across institutions surfaced when a forum participant asked why the conversation needed to be framed in terms of "us versus them." This question opened a valuable discussion of the different kinds of power that flow through workers and managers, and the phenomenon of managers at progressively higher levels of administration and protection who insist upon their own powerlessness. Participants representing institutions included both upper and middle managers. They share the experience of feeling caught between obligations at or to different levels of institutional hierarchies, in ways that naturalize those hierarchies.

How Did We Get Here? Towards a Contextual Understanding

Institutions' practices and actions have roots in contextual factors. Indeed, precarity is a problem throughout LAM and beyond. Participants emerged from the forum with a contextual understanding grounded in four interconnected areas: categories of labor; the structural conditions of work; the uses and abuses of mobility and flexibility; and how labor is valued.

Changing **categories of labor** account in part for precarity's historical roots. A shift to post-Fordism in the last century saw global financial and technological firms seek cheaper workforces and lax environmental regulations. State collusion via weak regulation and enforcement contributed to the resulting exploitation of workers. A move towards "an economy based on doing things, not making things," saw the growth of the service economy. As Dr. Laura Liu described in her keynote address, the service economy runs the gamut from "low-end, low-waged, so-called low-skill" labor up to "high end, high-wage, so-called high-skill work." Low-end or low-status workers include secretaries, janitors, and security workers. High-end or high-status labor includes workers in academia, computer programming, creative fields, and information work. Many LAM workers tend to position themselves and/or be positioned at the "high" end of this spectrum as "knowledge workers." However, rather than focus our energies on attaining and maintaining specific categorizations within the service economy, it is to LAM workers' collective advantage to understand ourselves as sharing experiences, conditions, and interests with other workers along the high-low spectrum. Indeed, precarity proliferates among all of these workers and continues to do so despite — or perhaps because of — narratives of progress and modernization. LAM workers therefore have a great deal in common with all kinds of service workers: "We assume that other workers are completely different at our own peril." We face an

---

[25] Within an institutional context, the worker may still have more prestige than temporary workers whose positions are not connected with a higher-status grant-funded project.

important opportunity to challenge divisions among workers and draw lessons from the organizing strategies of other contingent and precarious workers.

Dr. Liu proposes the sweatshop as a starting point for examining contemporary industries and work. **Understanding the structure** of a specific form of contingent work can point the way to addressing contingency across all contexts. This means paying close attention to the boundaries of a given form of contingent work; what the work actually entails; categories of work and workers; the spatial characteristics of where and how the work takes place; and any other features "that allow the work to be spatially and otherwise set apart."

Throughout the weekend, forum participants expressed the conviction that change would be possible if the right managers, administrators, or agencies "only knew" about the precarity that exists throughout LAM. Dr. Liu's examination of sweatshops illustrates the value of organizing and research to counteract pervasive narratives about work. However, it also tells us that it is equally important to identify where said narratives come from and who maintains them. LAM institutions today borrow from the managerial approaches that structured, restructured, and transformed American corporations throughout the 20th century, in part through promoting the permanent use of temporary labor like consultants, office temps, and day laborers.[26] The very managers, administrators, and agencies that we wish would address contingency and precarity have designed these conditions into their organizations.

Another angle towards a structural understanding of digital LAM labor is the use and abuse of **mobility and flexibility**. The rise of precarious work in LAM and elsewhere has paralleled an "embrace of flexible hours, contract work, telecommuting, and working at home." These characteristics particularly impact digital positions; and, in fact, many forum participants cited them as benefits with the potential to improve working conditions for grant-funded workers. However, they also contribute to blurring boundaries between work and home – put another way, between "sites and practices of production and reproduction." Crucially, the effort for solidarity among workers is distinct from the kind of workplace-as-family framing that positions individuals in affective relation with institutions via "flexible" work arrangements. As we have seen above in workers' experiences and institutional practices, employers expect – but do not support – mobility and flexibility on the part of workers.

Developing Imagination
By Dorothy Berry

An examination of the social and occupational outcomes of specifically identity-based digital projects contingent hiring:

http://laborforum.diglib.org/2019 /06/24/developing-imagination/

To understand the roots of precarity in digital LAM, we must also identify how institutions produce and maintain mobility and flexibility for themselves. The complex reconfiguration of work processes into "pyramid subcontracting structures" isolates both labor processes and laborers from one another in space and time. Globally, this enables corporations to change sites of production, seeking less stringent regulatory environments and more vulnerable populations of workers. Corporations then cite their lack of direct control to distance themselves from subcontractor labor practices. In LAM, subcontracting includes workplace procurement and digitization of records; vendors for both services are known to make use of

---

[26] Hyman, *Temp.*

incarcerated people's labor.[27] As in other industries, the supply chain of knowledge work is complicit in exploitative labor.

Finally, our contextual understanding addresses different ways in which **labor is assigned value**. As forum participants emphasized, "Our labor is not being understood." Not only is contingency invisible, but so too are the specific characteristics of digital LAM work. For example, the training and credentials required to call oneself an archivist have little to do with the kind of "piece rate work" that digital LAM workers – along with Task Rabbits, Mechanical Turkers,[28] and underpaid day laborers – find themselves doing. Rather than read this disconnect as evidence that digital LAM is superior to other forms of work, workers would do better to trace the source of this gap: how "the way we characterize work is produced through institutional and social relations that involve power and hierarchy." Indeed, a LAM-wide reliance on racialized, feminized, and other traditionally underpaid laborers for collections care work reflects labor practices across the service economy. What is the relationship between LAM, policies that gentrify regions and support certain industries and workers, and the marginalization of other industries and workers? To understand where digital LAM fits, we might begin by asking, "What is digital work?" and "How is it valued?"

Our Responsibilities

Discussions throughout the Forum touched on five areas of responsibility: those of institutions applying for grants and employing temporary workers; those of foundations and funding agencies; those of workers; those of other entities; and responsibilities that are truly collective.

What Can Employers Do?

Forum participants attribute certain responsibilities to the LAM institutions that hire workers on a temporary basis to fulfill grant-supported work. These responsibilities are shared among managers at all levels, development or grant-writing offices, HR, and fiscal services.

First, employing institutions must **plan better projects**. They must carefully scope the work for which they seek funding by accounting for labor throughout the project. This includes allotting time to prepare groundwork for the main tasks as well as promoting, preserving, maintaining, and/or sunsetting the project and its outputs. Timelines must be realistic and fit within an institution's full scope of work. Employers must ask themselves whether this work truly constitutes a term-limited "project" that calls for grant funding. For example, they must consider whether they are able to fund a permanent position for the work, promote internally, or use another method of project support that does not rely upon recruiting and discarding contingent workers. If the work actually calls for grant funding and contingent work, employers must identify clear outcomes not only for the institution but also for any workers involved.

Second, institutions must **value labor** by hiring equitably and compensating workers fairly. Forum participants agreed that grant budgets must build in the costs of recruitment, including expenses for interview travel and relocation. Employers also have responsibilities in recruitment. In soliciting and evaluating applications, they must consider the difference between potential and experience: What

---

[27] Shane Bauer, "Your Family's Genealogical Records May Have Been Digitized by a Prisoner," *Mother Jones*, August 13, 2015, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/08/mormon-church-prison-geneology-family-search/.

[28] Services through which workers sell their labor for a variety of work, from taking a survey to running errands or performing physical labor.

are the markers of potential that grant teams might look for when hiring? When employers advertise "entry-level" positions with entry-level pay as requiring several years of work in the field, they risk eliminating truly entry-level candidates with strong potential. Employers must consider what populations of qualified applicants their job descriptions and levels of compensation are automatically excluding from consideration. Relying on local connections to recruit can help make term positions less risky and damaging to the people who accept them – a small step towards reducing one of the many obstacles that marginalized people face in LAM. Investigating the possibility of remote work, without a need for relocation, can also open searches to a wider range of candidates.

Fair compensation means several things to forum participants, including equitable pay and benefits relative to permanent staff and taking time to disentangle the legal, state, and institutional regulations involved to make this possible. It means relocation support and a cost-of-living increase each year. It also means allowing work time for learning and skill-building towards an eventual permanent job, and providing transitional assistance from term to permanent work at the grantee or another institution. Grantee institutions might adopt "onboarding, off-boarding, exit surveys, and other known ways to manage transitions into and out of positions." It is important to note that even permanent employees of institutions across LAM are subject to low pay and other forms of exploitation. However, equitable compensation eliminates one of several barriers to connection among contingent and non-contingent workers.

Third, employers must provide contingent, grant-funded workers with equitable **access to resources** relative to permanent staff. This includes sharing information about local costs of living and working conditions, as well as institutional knowledge that others on the project already have. It means providing workers with space, equipment, professional development opportunities and funding, opportunities to collaborate, and any other forms of support to which non-contingent workers are entitled. Forum participants consider it to be employing institutions' responsibility to provide contingent and non-contingent workers alike with the same capacity to set boundaries. This can be especially valuable in managing grant "scope creep" or in avoiding excess service demands that are irrelevant to a contingent worker's longevity at an institution.

What Can Funders Do?

Forum participants concluded that **funders** hold responsibility for more **explicit guidance and stringent requirements**, of a kind that forces employing organizations to answer difficult questions and critically examine their own practices from the time of application through interim and final reporting. Proposed questions cover not only labor but also the sustainability of grant-funded work in general:

- How will working on this project benefit term workers that the grant supports?
- How will the grant provide for employees' professional development?
- How will you integrate grant-funded term workers into your overall staff?
- What is the precise nature of work that funded workers would perform?
- How will you use funding to support internal growth and keep the project alive?
- How will you support projects that exceed budget or time?

Recognizing the different motivations behind funding applications, funders can scale requirements to the size and capacity of applicant institutions. They must offer guidelines on budgeting or planning for labor, such as checklists for onboarding and offboarding, or encourage funded organizations to hire from within and build internal expertise. To improve communication about grants across an

institution, funders can require meetings with specific participants, such as project managers, PIs, and HR representatives. Given the scale of grantmaking activity, it may be more feasible for funders to build a discussion of labor into orientation sessions and annual grantee meetings which engage more than PIs. Funder representatives noted their distance from funded workers performing the day-to-day work of many grants. While the ratio of funded workers to program officers would make it difficult to schedule one-on-one meetings, funders should explore opportunities to regularly solicit feedback from workers other than PIs.

Funders also hold responsibility for producing infrastructure for more effective application reviews. Indeed, funder representatives who participated in the forum expressed appreciation for any codified recommendations that they can pass along to reviewer panels as guidelines. Such guidelines would ask reviewers to specifically address how budgets and other application components account for labor. Funders are also responsible for recruiting and supporting a diversity of experiences among reviewers, as well as bringing them together as a group to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to give feedback.

What Can Workers Do?

Forum participants concluded that **workers'** greatest responsibility is to find solidarity with other contingent and precarious workers in LAM and beyond. This means finding common cause with workers in academia (such as adjuncts), public schools, service industries, and beyond, based on shared experience, shared places in the public imagination, and shared understanding of the roots of labor conditions. Although institutions may capitalize (literally) upon actual or manufactured crises, workers can reframe crises as opportunities to develop new forms of solidarity: "Which workers are we similar to?" Indeed, a key step for many may be moving beyond the previously described culture of LAM labor to understand and emphasize to others that it doesn't devalue oneself to feel or find solidarity with others of a different class, rank, or institutional context. The group raised the possibility of a national advocacy group or union for grant-funded workers in digital LAM. Generally, forum participants expressed interest in developing peer networks and mentorship opportunities for contingent workers outside of the workplace.

Systemic change demands that LAM institutions, funders, and workers develop new understandings of success. For workers, this means setting aside the narrative of contingent work as natural and obligatory. Rather than tell ourselves, "This is what I'm getting out of it," even as we know we're being exploited, we can ask, "What do we want instead?" Forum participants put forward several elements of a possible future:

- A hard salary line, full-time with benefits including retirement
- A single, supportive boss who will share usable information and advice and be an advocate for workers
- The power to say no
- Information that can support planning and certainty
- Orientation to institutional politics, strategies, and unwritten rules
- Honest two-way communication about expectations
- A direct line to funders, a seat at the table
- Agency and creativity: the ability to explore problems and look for solutions, even if they don't work out, and shape one's own work
- Credit and respect

Indeed, "maybe more than mentoring we want comradeship."

Who Else Can Help?

There may be roles for **educators, professional organizations, and other entities** to contribute to a better future for grant-funded workers. Accreditation, professional standards, or best practices may improve job descriptions, grant proposal applications, advocacy, and hiring patterns. LAM can look to public history and other disciplines for models in these areas. Library schools and other LAM-related educational institutions have roles to play, whether in facilitating ethical work placements for students or preparing students to advocate for their salary and benefits when considering term positions. Educators can stand up for their students and for digital LAM labor in general, perhaps drawing upon their knowledge of adjunctification in higher education to make a compelling case.

What Is Our Collective Responsibility?

A sense of **collective responsibility** emerges from the first Meeting around two areas: looking for and building networks and alliances; and honestly evaluating our relationships to power.

Contingency and precarity in grant-funded digital LAM are major problems with deep roots and no easy solutions, calling for **collective action**. Proposals for building on the work of the forum without reinventing the wheel include identifying potential partner organizations; developing a "national network of people who want to talk about contingent labor"; gathering examples of situations in which people have successfully advocated for themselves and their labor; creating guidelines and best practices for funders to identify peer reviewers; creating guidelines and best practices for supporting grant-funded workers; and producing an advocacy toolkit to accompany those documents. Middle managers, however committed to change, may see themselves as caught in the middle or uniquely subject to burnout. Finding allies locally and nationally will equip these managers to acknowledge their capacity and act upon their responsibility to workers. In confronting and fulfilling this collective responsibility, digital LAM must focus on commonalities and address problems structurally, while also embracing conflict and difficult conversations.

Second, workers, managers, funders, and anyone else participating in these conditions of contingent and precarious labor must **honestly evaluate our relationships to power**: "Expressing collective power requires we acknowledge our own individual power." Managers must do the hard political work of standing up for workers and projects. Workers who are not contingent must advocate for those who are, wherever there are opportunities to engage in change. A good relationship with a person who holds power makes it possible to work on behalf of others. Likewise, as the person who is "listened to," one must be aware of how the things one says are heard differently. The risks of advocacy can be significant, but they vary; an honest evaluation of power also means better

Fostering Transparency in Grant Writing: Reflections on Collective Responsibility Forum 1
By Perry Collins

Sharing grant proposals offers transparency, an opportunity to learn from one another, and one way to assess how we are (and aren't) supporting grant-funded positions:

http://laborforum.diglib.org/2019 /06/19/fostering-transparency- in-grant-writing-reflections-on- collective-responsibility-forum-1/

understanding one's vulnerability to types of risk. Lastly, big changes come from "building thick connections" and "putting our power together." Although the work is long, we improve with practice.
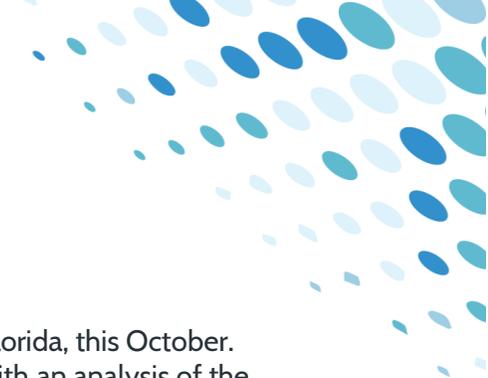
Outcomes & Next Steps

Our practice continues with the second national forum gathering in Tampa, Florida, this October. Drawing on the discussions and connections made at the first forum, along with an analysis of the survey results, the second event focuses on action. Knowing what we do about how grant-funded and contingent labor emerges in libraries, archives, and museums, what steps can we take to transform those labor conditions? What must we do now to facilitate fair working conditions for all of us?

Answers to these questions must grapple with the point at which decisions are made about work: when grants are written, reviewed, and funded. For institutional employers, funding organizations largely set the guidelines. And for funding organizations, guidelines are informed by complex frameworks that determine what is worth the money (equipment, travel, and overhead),[29] and what is not (too often the worker themselves). Through dialogue and shared analysis, the second forum seeks to:

- Understand how mission, regulatory, and legal frameworks shape current granting practices around labor

- Understand shared and individual goals of funding organizations

- Develop a framework for actionable, concrete guidelines on grant labor practices

As we convene a second meeting of participants, we will incorporate lessons learned from our first forum. Feedback from the first forum affirmed the value of structured discussions around labor issues framed by a keynote address that offered historical and political context for the conversation. Attendees appreciated the size of the group, the balance between listening and talking, and the clarity of plans and expectations for the event.

While feedback was positive overall, Forum planners take participants' concerns seriously. Comments surfaced a key tension of the forum itself: How can we both work to make contingent positions more ethical while also exploring ways to eliminate contingency itself? This is a common paradox of political work that seeks to remake the world. We must seek an entirely different and better future while also attending to the needs of the present. Confronting this tension directly in our conversations is a necessary step, as is the recognition that there are incommensurable differences between the workers who perform critically important and underpaid and undervalued cultural heritage work and those in a position to fund them.

This work also requires attention to challenges in representation, as multiple attendees articulated. Wealthy institutions were more likely to be in the room, an issue that might follow from the cost of submitting and supporting grants in the first place. Any comprehensive approach to understanding and intervening in the problems of grant-funded labor must make space for the experiences of workers at other kinds of libraries, archives, and museums, as challenges and solutions may be different. While the scope of this grant is too narrow to afford a comparative analysis of contingent work across institution type, the need for such work is clear.

---

[29] There is often little transparency to workers and grant-writers on whether overhead costs could be repurposed to support labor.

Attendees also wanted to hear more from people in positions of institutional power to fund and facilitate grant-funded work. While the forum did include these perspectives, discussions did not yield sufficient information about things like constraints put in place by human resources departments, or limitations that emerge from regulatory frameworks. Disrupting dominant power requires a deeper analysis of it, a knowledge project that could be made easier by the presence of more of these voices.

Appendices

The following appendices can be found in the *Collective Responsibility* project on the Open Science Framework website, OSF.io: https://osf.io/af9hz/.

Each appendix specifies the materials shared and project directory in which they can be found. The OSF repository will continue to be updated with materials, including a copy of this white paper and materials related to the second forum.

Appendix A: Meeting 1 Schedule and Handouts

Directory: Meeting 1 Resources

Content: PDFs of the following documents from Meeting 1:

- Meeting 1 Agenda
- Code of Conduct and Community Agreement
- Notetakers' Resource
- Facilitators' Guide
- Breakout Sessions Guide

Appendix B: Survey and Results

Directory: Survey

Content: PDF copy of the survey, two Excel spreadsheets with different versions of the survey data, and codebooks:

- Collective_Responsibility_Worker_Experience_Survey.pdf – PDF export of the survey as automatically generated by Qualtrics.
- 01_Data_Cleaning_Text.xlsx – remediated/redacted copy of survey results with full textual responses.
- 01_codebook.txt – textual codebook corresponding to 01_Data_Cleaning_Text.xlsx.
- 02_Data_Cleaning_Numbers.xlsx – remediated/redacted copy of survey results with numerical codes substituted for values.
- 02_codebook.xls – codebook for numerical values, field labels, and other pertinent data.
- README.md – brief overview of differences between survey data versions and information about data processing actions taken.

Appendix C: Bibliographies

Directory: Bibliographies

Content: Bibliographies of materials used by the team in project planning.

- Forum Design Resources.pdf – resources related to code of conduct design, facilitation, anti-oppressive practices, and white fragility.
- LAM Labor Resources.pdf – resources related to precarity, organizing, and the state of labor in LAM.