

*Donors and Archives: A Guidebook for Successful Programs.* By Aaron D. Purcell. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015. 200 pp. Index. Softcover. \$55.00. \$49.00 for SAA members.

Working with donors can simultaneously be the most rewarding and the most frustrating aspect of archival work. In *Donors and Archives: A Guidebook for Successful Programs*, Aaron D. Purcell creates a handbook for archivists designed to take all of the mystery out of the process. It is a well-crafted blend of the hard and soft skills necessary to navigate the many steps involved with archival donations. Purcell takes it one step beyond the archives and includes the development officers of organizations in the conversation. If properly educated and prepared, allies will pay off in the form of both great collections and monetary compensation to care for those collections.

The author divides the book and the donation process into four sections: planning, process, partners, and payoff. In the first section on planning, he gives a basic overview of the types of archives and the importance of having your legal ducks in a row. He also stresses the primacy of good internal and external communication. All of your staff should know the basics of how collections are reviewed and accepted and should be prepared to transmit that information to any prospective donor. You should know what you are capable of doing before speaking with donors. Some donors will ask for the world, and if you are not able to fulfill their request to quickly install an exhibit based on their donation, digitize a collection, or achieve a set time frame for processing, you should communicate that to them immediately. Purcell also nicely describes the types of people who donate collections and what their motivations often are. These descriptions are uncannily accurate, fitting nearly every donor I have encountered during my career.

The second section deals with everything involved in the actual physical act of the donation, beginning with the initial contact and negotiations. Purcell supplies a handy list of items you should bring with you on a site visit and questions to ask to troubleshoot any potential problems that could arise regarding safety. Having crawled through my share of attics, basements, barns, and abandoned buildings I was surprised at a few items I had not thought of or things that I really wish someone had told me before I went to my first appraisal. (For instance, always bring a flashlight.) One bit of advice that jumped out at me was Purcell's comment that the term *appraisal* should never be used with donors, since most people associate it with monetary value, not the historical value that concerns archivists. The section ends with a description of the process a collection goes through as it moves from the loading dock to the shelves as well as everyone involved (such as processing archivists and collection managers). It also discusses publicity and the importance of keeping donors updated on a collection's status as well as other institutional events that might interest them. A few key points of communication can pay off handsomely.

This leads straight into the third section, which discusses the various partnerships vital to an archival program. Purcell repeats and expands his description of the types of donors you will encounter and what they might want from you as well as what they might be able to do for you. He also addresses the importance of involving your development or philanthropy coworkers. Purcell recommends educating them on the basics

of archives before you even deal with donors. Fund-raisers may not be aware of the expense of processing and housing collections. Development officers have been a huge assistance to me in my current position, so it pleased me to see this point emphasized. Also important are your stakeholders, including boards, other supporting organizations like genealogy or history groups, friends groups, and even other archivists. One nice aspect of the archival profession is the lack of competition among archivists and their eagerness to place a collection with its most logically appropriate repository. Everyone you encounter has the potential to be your ally if you play your cards right.

What is the payoff for all of these diligent negotiations and hard work? Hopefully, it is an archival program that has historically vital records that people know about and use and that is financially secure. Purcell has described exactly how to set up a donor program with clear goals and strategies to achieve those ends. It can only happen if, during each step of the donation, from negotiation to loading dock to reading room, you are properly coordinated and aligned with allies in your institution and your community. The clichéd phrase “it takes a village” certainly is appropriate when it comes to preserving our history.

Christine Schmid Engels  
Archives Manager  
Cincinnati Museum Center