

# Preparing Archives for a Changing Climate

## A May 2023 Workshop from Safeguarding L.A. Community Histories: An L.A. as Subject Workshop Series and Knowledge Sharing Initiative

Led by Eira Tansey, an archivist based in the Ohio River watershed, this four-part webinar provides key insights and actionable items for archives and cultural heritage institutions responding to climate change.

### Climate Change 101

A science-based grounding is necessary for archivists to interface with the public, including core terminology:

**Weather:** a day-to-day phenomenon

**Climate:** the average weather over a period of decades

**Greenhouse effect:** natural warming that occur when gases in the earth's atmosphere trap heat and sunlight

- Human activity, especially the burning of fossil fuels, has intensified the greenhouse effect, warming the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2000 years.
- As the burning of fossil fuels continues, the amount of heat being trapped increases and the climate grows warmer.
- Other contributing factors:
  - Wildfires, production of oil and gas (especially methane leaks)
  - Industrial and agricultural activity
  - Landfills
- We continue to cross thresholds of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
- If major reductions to emissions and existing pledges for greenhouse gas emission reductions are not implemented, warming could increase by 3.2 degrees Celsius by 2100.

#### Long-Term Trends

Intensification of wildfires

Drought

Intensification of hurricanes

Ocean acidification

Extreme rain events

Sea-level rise

## Impacts

Displacement

Mental health stress

Physical health stress (water/food scarcity, zoonotic diseases)      Political instability

## Climate Grief and Climate Action

*"The most important thing an individual can do is be a little less of an individual and join together with others in movements large enough to make change."* - Bill McKibben

- Climate anxiety/grief/anger/fear is a normal reaction to the crisis and ecological loss.
- Climate emotions can manifest as helplessness, overwhelm, sadness, despair, and numbness.
- Acknowledging and tending to these emotions is essential to climate work.
- Overwhelm and uncertainty can make people susceptible to hateful messaging, reactionary groups, and nihilism.
- It's hard to do the necessary work if we are feeling pessimistic or defeated.

### Responses

- Treat those emotions as sources of information; they can be productive fuel for action.
- Cultivate joy and connection. This is essential to not only countering climate nihilism but also to propel us toward making the necessary changes to address the crisis.
- Strengthen networks.
- Communities that have contributed the least to climate change are the ones that are going to be impacted the worst; make sure those communities get what they need in order to thrive.

### Actions

Hiking

Join a climate activist group

Caring for a community garden

### Activity

To identify meaningful activities, answer the following questions from the Climate Action Venn Diagram, designed by marine biologist Ayana Elizabeth Johnson:

- 1) What brings you joy? (NOT what makes you feel guilt or obligation?)
- 2) What are you good at?
- 3) What needs doing?

# Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation within Archives

**More than 90% of archives will be impacted by at least one climate-change factor:**

## Collections

Damage from rapidly changing temperatures

Humidity fluctuations

Damage from disasters

## Infrastructure

Stress on HVAC systems and other mechanical systems

Increased risk of flooding

Power grid impacts on digital infrastructure

## Users

Urgent need for vital records following disaster

Disaster-related closures

Weather impacts on visits

## Staff

Weather impacts on commutes /working conditions

Staff capacity for disaster response

Loss of staff knowledge due to precarious labor

- Imperative to start mitigation and adaptation work now; any measures (ex: LED lights) are a good start.
- You can't manage what you can't measure; data on energy usage at archives is scarce, but case studies (Penn State Library & Rockefeller Archive Center) offer some insights.
- Building emissions (heating, cooling, lighting, IT) and transportation have the largest percentages.
- Cloud services may have a significant impact on IT-related services.
- At large institutions where facilities and purchasing are handled by other departments, it is still possible for archives to deploy substantive mitigation and adaptation efforts.

## Suggestions

- Appraisals are one of the most important functions that archivists perform. They are a key area for energy conservation: staffing capacity; stewarding material with environmental costs.
- Install room-occupancy sensors.
- Use recycled materials.
- Reconsider research travel with large carbon footprint.
- Reassess resource-intensive digitization.

## California Considerations

- Climate data and visualization materials can provide insight into how communities will be affected
  - Climate Mapping for Resilience and Adaptations Assessment
  - Cal-Adapt
- Most jurisdictions have a climate action plan (sometimes called a “sustainability plan”), which gives a sense of how local officials plan to steer their region.
- Adaptation Clearinghouse collects action and sustainability plans

### Los Angeles community histories and climate

- Major producer of technology, food, and culture
- Center of immigration, especially South America and Pacific Rim (will be strongly impacted by climate change)
- Home to diaspora communities

### Collections and records that might be in demand in the near future

- Newspapers, newsletters, local history
- Science and data collections (atmospheric science, aerospace, agriculture)
- Local government records (population numbers, policies, and budgets)
- Vital records
- Maps

### California collections related to climate

- Claremont College Collections
- NASA Jet Propulsion Library
- LAPL Photo Collections

### Questions

- What materials contribute to how we talk about climate change?
- Are there climate-related collections that can be prioritized and shared with communities?
- What records will be in demand in the future?
- What communities are represented in your collections? How does climate change impact them?

## Resources

- Britt Wray, a newsletter about staying sane in the climate crisis: <https://www.brittwrap.com/gen-dread>
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Speaking of Nature,”: <https://orionmagazine.org/article/speaking-of-nature/>
- Amy Westervelt, “The Case for Climate Rage,”: <https://popula.com/2019/08/19/the-case-for-climate-rage/>
- Mary Annais Hegler, “Home Is Always Worth It,”: <https://medium.com/@maryheglar/home-is-always-worth-it-d2821634dcd9>
- “Is This How You Feel?”: <https://www.isthishowyoufeel.com/>



- Marigo Farr, “How Climate Organizers Are Making Joy Part of Their Toolkit,”: <https://grist.org/fix/advocacy/climate-organizers-using-joy-activist-toolkit/>
- Project Drawdown: <https://drawdown.org/>
- Repo Data – identifies US archives and how they will be impacted by climate change: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ce11ef66b3b2471c83daf3fa99a27c29>
- Climate Mapping for Resilience and Adaptations Assessment: <https://resilience.climate.gov/#top>
- Cal-Adapt: <https://cal-adapt.org/>
- The Adaptation Clearinghouse: <https://www.adaptationclearinghouse.org/>
- Archives at Risk Help Desk: <https://laasubject.org/archives-risk-help-desk>
- FEMA, “After the Fire: Advice for Salvaging Damaged Family Heirlooms” AIC & FAIC “Soot and Ash segment”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9i9BfofVFo>
- California Preservation Program: Disaster Recovery Assistance: [https://calpreservation.org/services/disaster\\_assistance/](https://calpreservation.org/services/disaster_assistance/)
- National Disaster Recovery Fund for Archives: <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/saa-foundation-board-of-directors/national-disaster-recovery-fund-for-archives>

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Quick Guide Summary Created by Liz Brown

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