Diane Dimkoff

Customer Services Director Diane Dimkoff introduced NARA’s new Research Executive Bill Mayer.

Interview questions for Mr. Mayer will be addressed in the next issue of Researcher News.

Bill Mayer

Thank you for your patience last Thursday so I could talk to all of the Research Services staff.

Mr. Mayer’s Priorities include:
- Creating a place to find records.
- Understanding the landscape of NARA.
- Connecting between researcher and the records.
- Understanding the “story” of our records; lifecycle.
- Understanding who is coming to NARA physically and virtually. Also, why are they here and how do we adapt to their needs.
- Making sure the network holds up to demand.
- Replacing the Researcher Registration System
- Creating the automated pull slip
- Aligning our mission so all have the same public access to permanent records.
- Partnering

Researchers

Researchers’ topics and Mr. Mayer’s response:

I. Request online pull slips.
   - Looking at how to make this happen. Give me a few more months. I am reaching out to other institutions.
   - I have a background in these types of systems; built the Washington Resource Library Consortium.
   - I acknowledge that it would be ideal for it to have the MLR information.

II. What is the status of HMS?
   - It is a work in progress for nationwide use. Mostly used at Archives I and II. Primary focus of adoption in other NARA locations.
   - 96% entered into HMS at Archives I
   - Let’s do a 6-month check in (around March). This will allow me time to provide an update with credible information.
III. More staff, especially archive specialists, is needed.
   - Share this concern. It seems to be cyclical on specialists and generalists.
   - Hiring freeze currently, but working on getting more staff. Just got 8 more staff positions approved.
   - I’m interested in not limiting who can apply. Not requiring history degrees of archivists. Librarians and Archivists have similar goals: discovery, access, preservation, and possibly ingest.

IV. Request an online explanation on records; where they go, how to access, value, and why accessioned at NARA for Federal Executives.
   - We need a cohesive research services
   - We must Harness finding aids

V. Suggest that you centralize social media.
   - Working towards having a research page created by Research Services.

VI. Clients of professional researchers, the common researchers, do not know how to interface with NARA.
   - Would love to see individuals have unmediated access to the records without an expert.
   - Concern about how do we go forward and helping people re-think how we’re going to do it.

VII. Professional researchers are treated differently from the “regular” researchers.
   - There should not be a difference, but recognize that there are some. How do we deal with multiple needs in a changing environment?
   - Online access makes access deceivably easy to get. In-person records are harder to get. There is the joy of discovery.
   - Need your help with what you’re learning to make better choices. Need partnership.
   - Align our mission so all have the same public access to permanent records; really understand our mission and execute.

VIII. Can we have pulls requests after 5pm?
   - Depends on how we re-constrcut.
   - Looking at how to change and the consequences. Looking at biggest demand. Change services based on what people need is a discussion we need to have.

IX. Are we now customers instead of patrons?
   - We have a mandate to serve the regular citizen. It is not clear that we serve professional researchers. We need to understand who our customers are – it is not just the professional researcher.

   - Appreciate that and you will see a change in the relationship.
XI. What became of the GAO report from years ago on how NARA should have better customer service.
   • An idea implemented baldly does not mean it’s a bad idea.

XII. Suggest training where a staff person is a researcher for a day.
   • Good idea. This was the idea behind the Citizen Archivist. Looking at “how do we make it better?”

XIII. Archives staff should be up on archival standards.
   • Cultural changes happening – example is hiring me.

Bill Mayer

My goal is that we partner, acknowledge constraints and that simple ones get in the way. I guarantee that we will continue this conversation. As I told my staff, I’m as smart as you make me.