

RESEARCHER FORUM

NOTES



William A. "Bill" Mayer

Research Services Executive William "Bill" Mayer led two forums in December 2013; this is a compilation from the meeting notes. He covered topics and concerns in the following areas and addressed Research Services' nationwide goals.

BUDGET

- **TRUST FUND – DIGITAL SCAN COSTS**

Starting January 2014, digital scans will cost 60 cents per scan. Mr. Mayer explained that this pricing is based on the cost estimate calculated by the Trust Fund staff.

Researchers expressed concern that this cost is too high. One researcher proposed that National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) could charge 60 cents for each paper copy and 25 cents for each digital copy.

- **TRUST FUND – KIOSK FOR MAKING COPIES, WASHINGTON, DC**

Researchers seem to like the kiosk, but are concerned about what might happen if the system goes down. Mr. Mayer assured them that we have staff who can help provide change if that happens and also reminded researchers that they can call if the system goes down. Chief Financial Officer Micah Chetham explained how many of his staff have done extensive testing on these systems and are confident that they can address any concerns that researchers might have. Presently, the 301 telephone number is fine, but the 202 number just rings. We will address that immediately. A researcher said that she left a message on the 301 number the other day, and someone from NARA got right back to her and was very responsive.

- **DIGITIZING, SCANNING, AND PRINTING**

Researchers asked about Digital Scanners at the National Archives at College Park (Archives II). Mr. Mayer explained the technical challenges working with some of the records at Archives II that was holding up the deployment of self-serve digital scanners; NARA is working on how to provide this service for these types of records.

Mr. Mayer will take these concerns and suggestions to the Trust Fund. He also reminded researchers that we provide other services, such as free access to Ancestry.com. In addition, NARA is looking at 10 cents a page for printing on the public access computers. This is keeping in line with other institutions.

He agreed that duplex printing should be an option. A researcher also offered another suggestion that it be possible to send a PDF to oneself.

FORUM NOTES

● RESEARCH ROOM HOURS

Mr. Mayer recognized that several recent events have affected our ability to serve our researchers.

- ◆ Sequestration/Current Hours: With the continued sequestration and the Government operating under a continuing resolution through January 15, 2014, the current hours for the research rooms will remain the same for the foreseeable future.
- ◆ Shut-Down and Resulting Start-Up: We recognize that the Government-wide shut-down affected service to our researchers. The greatest concern expressed by researchers was the start-up. They felt that the website communication was the biggest problem. Several looked at the website and traveled to our research rooms based on the information they saw on the website.
- ◆ Holiday Hours: When Mr. Mayer asked, researchers responded that the early closings of the research rooms during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays did/will not affect them adversely.
- ◆ In-Service Day*

STAFF

We will invest in and train our staff by giving them the tools, knowledge, and time to develop skills that they need to help our customers. Mr. Mayer and the researchers discussed these efforts

● TOOLS

- ◆ Learn from the researchers' expertise to understand more about the records
- ◆ Learn from colleagues (succession planning)
- ◆ On-the-job training
- ◆ Directing researchers to the correct location for the records
- ◆ HMS (Holdings Maintenance System)
- ◆ Customer Service

This past summer, we trained Washington, DC, area staff in customer service. Staff improved their communication skills with positive results. Future staff training during in-service days will provide staff with additional skills. We recently had to deal with some very difficult situations with a few researchers. Additional training will continue to address these types of challenges.

● TIME

* **In-Service Day:** Important day for several reasons.

- ◆ Our goal is to provide the same high-quality research experience at all NARA archival facilities. In order to reach that goal, we need to train staff and discover additional processes and resources for tangible results that will improve our service to our customers.
- ◆ During the September 2013 in-service day, nearly 100 percent of the staff viewed the experience positively. Staff identified and worked on areas that cannot be addressed when open to the public because we are busy providing daily services. For instance, we addressed security issues in the stacks. Continuing to have in-service days will allow us to continue to work on processes that will provide better service as well as access to and preservation of the records.

FORUM NOTES

- **LIBRARY AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES IN WASHINGTON, DC (ARCHIVES I)**

The majority of the material in Archives I has been moved to the Archives II Library. The small number of selected materials kept within the building has moved to the Finding Aids Room, Research Commons, and the West Research Room. Library space in Archives I will be transformed for innovation and citizen engagement.

Additional Concerns/Questions/General Observations from Researchers

- ◆ Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)
 - List of staff with specialty areas (SMEs are not coming back)
- ◆ Retirees (loss of institutional knowledge of the records)/Succession Planning
- ◆ Low grades of employees
- ◆ Loss of real estate at Archives I
- ◆ Loss of access to records
- ◆ More space in research rooms (rearranging furniture may help)
- ◆ Finding aids – put online (Staff is clamoring for it too)
- ◆ Fewer descriptions on new systems [e.g., Online Public Access (OPA)] than were on the paper finding aids
- ◆ Limited resources – Mr. Mayer stated that there are 1.6 million cubic feet of records at Archives II, and with a limited budget, we have to ask ourselves the following questions:
 - How do we deal with the records backlog?
 - How do we continue to provide descriptions and finding aids?
 - How do we keep our doors open?

Mr. Mayer stated that many of the goals discussed during the forums cannot be accomplished overnight and will take time to develop. But, we will continue to work on improving our service to researchers.

If you have questions, contact Bill Mayer, Executive for Research Services, at bill.mayer@nara.gov.