

Consultancy brief

The impact of spontaneous collecting on the mental wellbeing of the record keeping workforce

Introduction – Archives and Records Association (ARA)

ARA is the lead professional body for archivists, archive conservators and records managers in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The ARA aims to support its membership through training, continuous professional development, identification of employment opportunities, professional help and advice, and by providing a community to which the membership can belong and from which they draw benefit through open discussion and debate, as well as through gathering of information and advice.

Our strategic aims and further information about ARA is available in full on our website www.archives.org.uk

Vicarious trauma and emotional wellbeing is a major risk factor for people working with archives and records. ARA pioneered work in this area. In 2017 a training needs survey of members saw 52% of those who replied request training on coping with vicarious trauma and receiving emotional support linked to issues caused by working with disturbing material. A follow up survey saw exactly the same number of members – 52% - say they had been emotionally affected at work following working with disturbing material. An example of disturbing material is a member who was working through Coroner's Office records from the 1920's and suddenly coming across photographs of decapitated bodies.

As a result of this need the ARA commissioned and published three wellbeing guides. The first was advice for those about to work with disturbing material. The second was for those who had just worked with disturbing material. The third was advice and guidance for employers. The guides can be found here <https://www.archives.org.uk/resources>

Context

We have now identified a need to support the wellbeing of people involved with spontaneous collecting after tragedies and major national and international events.

Examples of spontaneous collecting after tragedies include the Manchester Arena attack and Grenfell. Spontaneous collecting need not be after tragedy but it will always be immediate and fast paced. Organisations will send staff to collect the memorials and other material left behind by the public, friends and families. The type of material collected takes many forms including capturing

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murals, letters, photographs, flowers, audiovisual material and records of decisions at the time and also of the aftermath of the event. Collecting can be carried out on behalf of families or others impacted by the event as well as the organisation collecting the material. Competing priorities make this work even more complex. Meeting the needs of families, witnesses to the event, bystanders, the media and the employer will increase the additional stress on the person collecting. This work is necessarily done at short notice and there needs to be guidance in place to consult at the time of the event. Afterwards is too late and the effects of collecting material related to a tragedy or disaster will be traumatic.

Aims and Objectives

This tender is to commission new research on the impact of spontaneous collecting on the profession and of employers understanding of it. It will also result in improved strategies for spontaneous collecting and sustainable ways of collecting.

We will then use the research to update existing guidance for individuals and employers and deliver training. The overall purpose of this project is improved mental wellbeing for the workforce and wider benefit their employers.

The consultant will:

Conduct research and provide a report on:

- the impact of spontaneous collecting on the record keeping profession
- employers' understanding of the impact [of spontaneous collecting on their staff and volunteers]
- recommendations on how to collect, the processes that should be in place, terms of reference for collecting, resources needed to collect and how to know if you are resourced enough to collect
- recommendations about whether volunteers should be used for this type of work and if staff should be mandated without the opportunity to decline. How should the people doing this work be selected? How can they be supported?

We expect a broad range of case studies based on both national and local events. Pressure can be more intense in local situations where there is less support available.

The trauma will randomly reappear for those who experienced it and this should be reflected in the report. It also may appear someone is not affected and they may not feel the trauma until a long time later.

By the record keeping profession we mean individuals collecting, managers, the overall collecting institution and staff who will follow on and look at the material in the future. It includes the training courses for records keepers and we want to know if they should teach an element about spontaneous collecting and vicarious trauma? Are there recommendations for ARA itself?

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We expect guidance for employers who may be sending staff and volunteers out without the understanding, or first-hand knowledge, of what those staff and volunteers will experience.

We will expect the consultants to attend an initial meeting and then provide an interim report for consideration at an interim meeting with subject experts prior to finalisation of the report.

The consultants should be aware of their own emotional support needs as they research this report.

Key sources of information

[https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/projects/manchester-together-archive#:~:text=More%20than%2010%2C000%20items%20\(such,to%20the%20Manchester%20Arena%20attack](https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/projects/manchester-together-archive#:~:text=More%20than%2010%2C000%20items%20(such,to%20the%20Manchester%20Arena%20attack)

<https://www.archives.org.uk/resources>

<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/your-wellbeing/vicarious-trauma/vicarious-trauma-signs-and-strategies-for-coping>

<https://www.ica.org/resource/template-responding-to-vicarious-trauma/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media/4tybnie0/headlines-guide-to-vicarious-trauma.pdf>

Methodology

Please tell us in your proposal what your methodology will be including research methods and how any working/steering group will be involved in the work.

Product

The consultant will provide a written report using the above points. The report will be provided as a MS Word document and PDF. It will be published and made freely available on the ARA website. Some case studies may not be suitable for inclusion in the report but can be used to influence the guidance.

Costs

The budget for this project is £6,500 excluding VAT. Please provide a budget with your tender, stating inclusive or net of VAT.

Timetable

Please include a project timetable with key milestones in your proposal

Liability Insurance

Please include a copy of your professional liability cover with the proposal.

Contractor Personnel

Please include in your proposal details of who would be working on the project with a clear indication of who will be leading.

Monitoring

This project will be managed by the ARA Chief Executive- John Chambers

Quotations and timings

Completed proposals should be sent by e-mail to John Chambers, Chief Executive, Archives and Records Association, john.chambers@archives.org.uk by Friday 5th April 2024. Interviews will be held week commencing 29th April 2024.

The appointed consultant is expected to complete the project by 30th September 2024.

For an informal discussion contact John Chambers.
john.chambers@archives.org.uk