

**From the Fringe, To the Center:
A Look at Community-Based Media and DIY-Archiving at AMIA and Beyond**

The Community Archiving Workshop (CAW) is now a mainstay of the annual Association of Moving Image Archivists conference. Starting in 2011, a collective of AMIA members decided to host a workshop that connected local community volunteers with professional media archivists. Every workshop intends “to help an organization jump-start the preservation of an audiovisual collection” wherein teams assess and catalog materials together.¹ While examining program information during an exploratory data-entry project, I became interested in the role that community-based work plays in the conference realm of moving image archiving. I wanted to look more closely at how the frequency of sessions, panels, screenings, or workshops like this reflect collective AMIA goals and intentions.

In 2016, AMIA elected to include four, new curated streams of programming for their conference in Pittsburgh, PA. For the purposes of my inquiry, I became interested in their “Do It Yourself and Community Archiving”, or DIY&CA, events specifically. The stream was intentional in investigating “solutions and methodologies for archiving independent, activist and community archives.”² Unlike all other aspects of the AMIA conference that year, program organizers elected to open the series of sessions up to

¹ “About CAW,” Community Archiving Workshop, accessed March 18, 2018, <http://communityarchiving.org/about-caw/>.

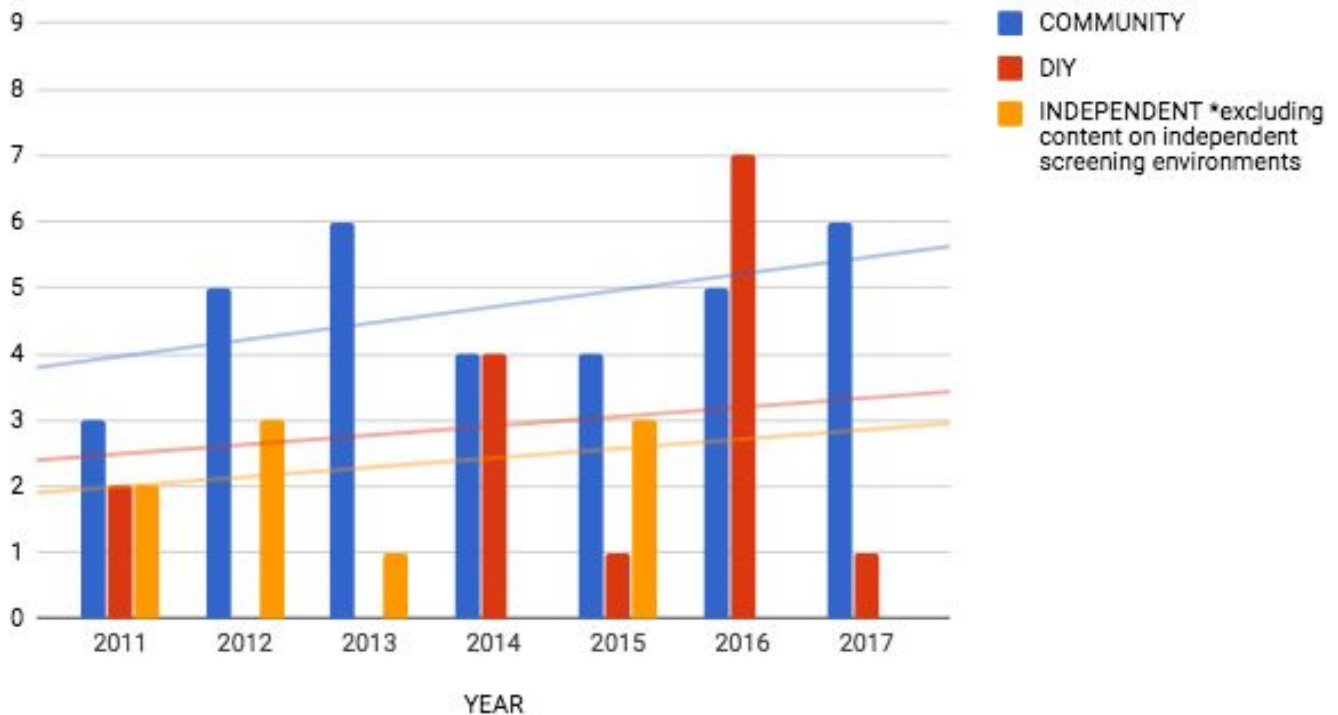
² “AMIA 2016 Presentations,” AMIA, December 5, 2016, <http://www.amiaconference.net/amia-2016-presentations/>.

the local community as a free day-long symposium and live-stream all presentations for those outside of the region. Programming featured archivists and educators from NYU's Moving Image Archiving and Preservation (MIAP) Program, Witness, XFR Collective, Smithsonian Institution, Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC), Texas Medical Library, People's Archive of Police Violence, DuSable Museum of African American History, La MaMa Archives, Human Rights Watch, New York Public Library, California Audiovisual Preservation Project (CAVPP), and the Wisconsin Center for Film & Theater Research. Topics ranged from regional audiovisual preservation coalitions and community collection archiving to documenting the impact of gentrification in Pittsburgh through film and the existence of independent media behind the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe.³

To understand how the role of this radical programming decision interacted with broader interests at AMIA, I decided to compare the presence of DIY, independent, and community-centric content from programming between 2011 and 2017. Though I elected to focus this research on session language, subject categories, and event content around the above described terms, I briefly considered including the word *access* in my data research, as it is highly-relevant in this work. However, access touches upon every element of media archiving and preservation, so including that large of a data set resulted in a somewhat skewed and non-representative visualization. As the graphic below demonstrates, panel content specifically centered around DIY or independent methods and community archives has remained relatively stable at AMIA conferences in the recent past.

³ "Do It Yourself & Community Archiving Symposium Presentations," AMIA, November 14, 2016, <http://www.amiaconference.net/do-it-yourself-community-archiving-symposium-live-stream/>.

Community-Centric, DIY, and Independent Sessions, Panels, Screenings and Workshops at AMIA



The majority of the community-centric data above represents the annual CAW event, city-based screening nights, and some human-rights conscious archival panels. Most of the DIY data originates from the DIY&CA stream (2016, 2017), as well as through some standalone open-source methodological sessions. I decided to not include independent screening environment-related sessions, as they weren't the focus of my analysis. I had hoped that the presence of these programs would increase over time, potentially reflecting further investment in directly supporting community-based work or non-traditional archiving methods. It is entirely possible that a closer examination of past programs by a more knowledgeable or connected AMIA member would yield a slightly different dataset, but I doubt that it would express a more

exponential growth pattern than what is present above. With the few years addressed here, the increase in relevant content has only been marginal. In looking at these somewhat disappointing numbers, I wanted to conduct a bit of external research to see the presence of DIY and community-centric programming in other professionalized contexts and located two entire conferences of specific relevance – the International Conference of Indigenous Archives, Libraries, and Museums from the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums in the US (ATALM) and the Community Archives Conference from the Community Archives and Heritage Group in the UK (CAHG).

ATALM is “an international non-profit organization that maintains a network of support for indigenous programs, provides culturally relevant programming and services, encourages collaboration among tribal and non-tribal cultural institutions, and articulates contemporary issues related to developing and sustaining the cultural sovereignty of Native Nations.”⁴ Their 2017 conference featured programs like “Community Centered Digital Strategies”, “Developing an Oral History Center on a Shoestring Budget”, and “What Was Ours: Who Owns the Material Culture of Native Communities and What Can We Do?”. CAHG identifies as a “national group which aims to support and promote community archives in the UK & Ireland.”⁵ Somewhat less comprehensive as ATALM or AMIA, CAHG is a one-day conference that takes on a different topic each year, often at the University College London’s Information Studies

⁴ “About ATALM,” Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, accessed March 18, 2018, <http://www.atalm.org/node/1>.

⁵ “About the Community Archives and Heritage Group,” Community Archives and Heritage Group, last updated July 9, 2017, <http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/content/about/history-and-purpose>.

department. In 2010, the organization explored “Sound & Vision” through sessions on independent archives and oral history, magic lantern slides, and solutions for securing digital heritage in smaller archives.

In this brief analysis, it’s difficult to capture the core of AMIA’s goals or intentions when it comes to presenting content about DIY methods, community archives, or independent media. Though it is clearly important to organizers and attendees, it is not the focus of the AMIA conference overall. After exploring the data, I began to wonder if a handful of events is enough for a conference of this size. When there are entire conferences and organizations like ATALM or CAHG dedicated to community archiving and the needs of those archives, as well as a plethora of DIY resources from many of them, what role should the AMIA conference play when it comes to these matters? From an external perspective, I think an annual one-day symposium that is part of the conference should engage in DIY methods and community-based archiving, especially if, like in 2016, it can be livestreamed or made available to the public for free. It is an impossible task to expect a professional organization to meet all the needs of their audience as well as cover new territory that is maybe done more successfully by those who center their work around it. Overall, I hope that the frequency of these conference events either grow or, in the very least, remain stable in the immediate future.

Works Cited

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