

## **Houston ARCH: A Community-Based Collaboration to Preserve the LGBT Past**

Houston ARCH (Area Rainbow Collective History) is a consortium of universities and community-based libraries, archives, and museums in Houston, TX that promotes the digital collection, preservation, and accessibility of the culture and history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities in the greater Houston area. Present consortium members include: Rice University, the University of Houston, the Charles Botts Memorial Archives & Library, the Gulf Coast Archive and Museum of GLBT History, Inc. (GCAM), and the Transgender Foundation of America Archive (TFA).

As the consortium's lead organization for this grant, Rice University requests two years of support from the NEH to arrange, describe, and catalogue 103 core holdings held among the Member Collections (Botts, GCAM, and TFA). While many of the Member Collections' holdings are unique, these core holdings contain materials from individuals and organizations of regional and national historical significance. Collectively, they offer important resources not only for Houston's LGBT communities, but also for researchers, scholars, and students from a range of fields, especially the study of history and contemporary culture. Although the archives are regularly open to the public and researchers alike, effective access is greatly limited by differences in organization and the lack of standard electronic descriptive tools. Their breadth (paper documents, clothing, buttons, film, video, audio tapes, and ephemera) and size (GCAM alone fills seven storage units) have also inhibited the Member Collections from forming a master preservation plan that would integrate their work into standard research databases and finding tools.

As the first phase of a long-range plan to resolve these issues, Houston ARCH seeks support from NEH to hire three archivists to establish intellectual control of the 103 core holdings while training Collection Managers in basic collection processing. The completed project will increase accessibility, establish a standard approach to archival practices based on accepted standards, and provide the essential foundation for a future digitization phase.

The methods of the project will adhere to professional archival standards and entail the following:

**Assessing, Planning, and Training** – Houston ARCH archivists will establish coherent description vocabularies and train the Collection Managers in standard description practices. The Project Archivist and Archival Consultants will work with Member Collections to implement a standard approach to Arrangement and Description.

**Archival Arrangement and Description** – Project Archivist will track needs for the future, and train and guide the Collection Managers in arrangement of core holdings in accordance with accepted standards. As Collection Managers create finding aids for their core holdings, the data will be transferred to the Project Archivist for later encoding into EAD records.

**Encoded Archival Description (EAD) Encoding and Online Publishing** – The Project Archivist will create EAD records for the 103 core holdings, install them on the Houston ARCH website, and make them accessible to widely used search engines, such as Google. In addition, other possible partnerships with various repositories will be pursued.