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Dainan M. Skeem

Brigham Young University, dainan\_skeem@byu.edu

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# Donor Relations in the Twenty-First Century

Dainan M. Skeem

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the professional literature regarding donor relations and then addresses many issues the author has experienced in working with twenty-first century donors. Since manuscript repositories would not exist without individuals willing to donate their materials, it is vital that curators and archivists establish good relationships with their donors and maintain those relationships throughout their careers since many of them will continue to interact with their materials for decades after the initial gift. However, the twenty-first century has brought with it new challenges regarding donor relations that need to be recognized and addressed.

## Introduction

As a manuscript curator, one of my primary responsibilities is to work with donors in appraising and acquiring manuscript materials. This is a responsibility I enjoy and is one of the reasons I am a manuscript curator today. My archival education included instruction on appraisal and acquisitions; however, it did not include instruction on donor relations, nor is this a common topic at workshops or other development opportunities for archivists. Although the topic of donor relations has been discussed more in the archival literature recently, this attention still pales in comparison to how much has been written, and continues to be written on other archival responsibilities.

Since manuscript repositories would not exist without donors, our responsibility in establishing good relationships with our donors and maintaining them throughout our careers is vital. Many of these donors will continue to interact with their materials and us as caretakers of their materials for decades after the initial donation. However, the twenty-first century has brought with it new challenges regarding donor relations that need to be recognized and addressed. The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, to examine the literature to discover what has been said about donor relations; and second, to discuss some of the challenges and issues I have experienced with donor relations in the twenty-first century, stressing the importance of relationships in donor relations.

## Literature Review

Since the founding of the modern archival profession in the early twentieth century, work with donor relations has changed in many ways. The topic of donor relations was not written about in the professional literature until Barbara J. Kaiser's 1969 article entitled "Problems with Donors of Contemporary Collections."<sup>1</sup> By this year, the modern archival profession had been around for decades and the Society of American Archivists had been in existence for over 30 years. With the exception of Kaiser, it appears the earliest archivists were not writing about donor relations.

Kaiser's article is enlightening, as she compares the problems twentieth century archivists were having in contrast to their earlier counterparts. She suggests that the twentieth century had broadened the types of donors that were giving their materials to archives.

Our donors now run the gamut—from an individual to a corporate entity; from the naïve to the sophisticated, that is, in terms of their previous exposure to primary sources and historical documentation; from those with a primary interest in preserving materials because of historical value to those whose interest stems almost completely from ego satisfaction or tax deduction possibilities.<sup>2</sup>

Donors in the early twentieth century were interested in gifting their materials to an institution in one complete donation and then walking away. Kaiser says donors in the latter half of the twentieth century were different in that there was a "continuing relationship that usually evolves between the donor and the collecting agency."<sup>3</sup> Along with this, it became more common to see "the donation of materials in segments at regular or irregular intervals" instead of one large donation done at the end of a donor's career or life.<sup>4</sup> This also puts more pressure on the institution to provide access to the materials to the donor, who may find that they need to reference their materials over the remaining decades of the relationship. "The collecting agency must anticipate the possibility that it will have to provide for the donor reference, research, or other kinds of service, which have not been necessary previously in the acquisition of older historical records."<sup>5</sup>

Another distinction Kaiser makes with late twentieth century donors is their closeness to their materials. With the shift away from institutions donating to archives and more towards individuals giving their personal papers, archivists see

1. Barbara J. Kaiser, "Problems with Donors of Contemporary Collections," *The American Archivist* 32, no. 2 (1969): 103-107.
2. Kaiser, "Problems with Donors of Contemporary Collections," 103.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, 104.
5. Ibid, 107.

donors as resources to whom they can return to obtain further information about the donation after ownership had been transferred. This closeness, however, also leads to the donors being more reluctant to let go of their materials, keeping important segments back with the intent to use them for their own research projects.<sup>6</sup> It also makes restrictions more common as it is “frequently the only way to gain the consent of the donor to preserve materials at all, and in many cases it avoids a severe weeding of the collection by the donor.”<sup>7</sup>

The tax benefits offered by a potential donation also came to light with the late twentieth century donor. This presented new problems for archivists such as having to ensure they did not become involved in the monetary appraisal of the materials, as that is unethical and illegal. Yet this places the burden and expense of obtaining the appraisal squarely upon the donor, which may dissuade the donor from executing the gift. Also, if a collection has a high monetary value, such as a collection of autographs, it usually has a lower research value, while collections with high research value do not usually appraise for a high monetary value.<sup>8</sup>

If there is one thing that archivists think will upset an established donor or their family, it is to deaccession their materials. We all dread the day when we need to call the donor to say that their materials have been found wanting in our estimation and they need to be picked up or destroyed. Mark Greene wrote about the process his institution went through to reappraise their collections and deaccession those they felt no longer fit their collection scope. In his article, “I’ve Deaccessioned and Lived to Tell About it: Confessions of an Unrepentant Reappraiser”, Green reports that over a three year period, they decided to deaccession 200 collections.<sup>9</sup> “We have had exactly one donor who was irate when informed that we had reappraised and deaccessioned his collection. On the other hand, five of those donors actually went so far as to thank us for how we handled the whole matter, and three of those went so far as to send us checks in appreciation!”<sup>10</sup> Of course they had developed a systematic way of reappraising and letting the donors know why their materials were being deaccessioned, being able to give solid reasons for doing so. This kind of preparatory work can aid in maintaining donor relations, even in our most dreaded responsibilities.

When working with donors, it is important that archivists remember that there are legal issues at play as well. Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt’s 2008 work entitled *Navigating*

6. Ibid, 104.

7. Ibid, 105.

8. Ibid, 106.

9. Mark A. Greene, “I’ve Deaccessioned and Lived to Tell About It: Confessions of an Unrepentant Reappraiser,” *Archival Issues* 30, no. 1 (2006): 7-22.

10. Greene, “I’ve Deaccessioned and Lived to Tell About It,” 11.

*Legal Issues in Archives* addresses a few of these issues as they relate to donor relations.<sup>11</sup> She lists several points that should be remembered when working with a donor. “Exercise good faith and fair dealing, avoid favoritism, remain professional, avoid the appearance of impropriety or unethical conduct, and do not profit personally from donations. Avoid false or misleading statements, misrepresentations, and promises that cannot be kept.”<sup>12</sup> The list is more exhaustive than this but ultimately it comes down to being an ethical archivist. Ethics in archives is such an important matter that the Society of American Archivists has created a Code of Ethics to guide us in our work.<sup>13</sup> By following this code and the points outlined by Behrnd-Klodt, not only do we remain ethical, but we prevent getting ourselves and our institutions into legal problems.

Geoff Wexler and Linda Long wrote an article in 2009 entitled “Lifetimes and Legacies: Mortality, Immortality, and the Needs of Aging and Dying Donors.”<sup>14</sup> They discuss how “those of us responsible for acquiring collections often work with people at the end of their careers and the end of their lives,” and how that should affect the way we approach and work with the donors.<sup>15</sup> They point out that little in the literature or instruction on donor relations discusses how to deal with a donor, or their family, just before or after their passing. “But even if most archival training cannot, in a practical sense, encompass the complexity of issues within this sensitive zone of life and death, as archivists we must have some understanding of these matters to fulfill our mission effectively.”<sup>16</sup>

Wexler and Long then review the five stages of consciousness that most people diagnosed with a terminal illness experience (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance), as identified by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 work entitled *On Death and Dying*, and discuss how donors diagnosed with these terminal illnesses follow the same stages of consciousness.<sup>17</sup> It is helpful to understand that donors who are terminally ill will go through these stages, which will reflect in their dealings with their personal papers. They may delay transferring custody of the materials to the repository with the belief that they are not going to die anytime soon.

11. Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt, *Navigating Legal Issues in Archives* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2008).
12. Behrnd-Klodt, *Navigating Legal Issues in Archives*, 46.
13. “SAA Core Value Statement and Code of Ethics,” Society of American Archivists, last updated January 2012, [https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics#code\\_of\\_ethics](https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics#code_of_ethics) (accessed August 28, 2018).
14. Geoff Wexler and Linda Long, “Lifetimes and Legacies: Mortality, Immortality, and the Needs of Aging and Dying Donors,” *The American Archivist* 72, no. 2 (2009): 478-495.
15. Wexler and Long, “Lifetimes and Legacies,” 478.
16. *Ibid.*, 480.
17. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

Then they may become angry when approached by the archivist, interpreting the approach as a suggestion that they will die soon. They may also try bargaining with the archivist to make sure they get everything they want into the repository, threatening to withhold the important elements of the collection if everything is not taken. “Understanding these and other aspects of aging is important for archivists who collect papers and records, since the aged are prominently represented among donors.”<sup>18</sup>

With donors living longer and the trend of couples having fewer children, archivists need to be aware that there are “obvious implications for those collecting personal papers. Archivists should expect to receive larger collections that may come to their repositories over longer periods of time.”<sup>19</sup>

In 2012, Scott Cline compared the work we do with donors to the process of making covenants, defined by him as “a compact between equal partners who forge a relationship to achieve shared goals.”<sup>20, 21</sup> Since working with donors is almost a daily endeavor for many of us, perhaps it explains why we do not write about it, as it has become an all-too-common event, one into which we should perhaps inject a bit of sacredness, “built on relationships of moral commitment and obligation.”<sup>22</sup> The focus of Cline’s article, as he states, is to explore three concepts central to an archival covenant: *genuine encounter*, *sacred obligation*, and *piety of service*.<sup>23</sup>

With the explosive growth in collecting seen in archival repositories of the twentieth century, donor relations were not the focus; the donation was the focus. In the twenty-first century, Cline argues that, instead, we need to focus on the donors and create *genuine encounters*, or “encounters of mutual respect, response, and reciprocity.”<sup>24</sup> Often, such encounters create a covenant of love between donors and archivists. With a focus on our *sacred obligation*, we change our attitude from one where “the core functions of appraisal and selection, arrangement and description, and preservation are performed to meet that first obligation—providing access to records” to “reframing the question as ‘who is our first obligation?’”<sup>25</sup> We covenant with donors to fulfill certain obligations when we accept their materials, and they should be our first obligation. “If archivists integrate these notions of genuine

18. Wexler and Long, “Lifetimes and Legacies,” 484.

19. Ibid.

20. Scott Cline, “‘Dust Clouds of Camels Shall Cover You’: Covenant and the Archival Endeavor,” *The American Archivist* 75, no. 2 (2012): 282-296.

21. Cline, “‘Dust Clouds of Camels Shall Cover You,’” 284.

22. Ibid, 286.

23. Ibid, 284.

24. Ibid, 289.

25. Ibid, 291.

encounter and sacred obligation and infuse them in our professional activities, then we cast archival duty as commitment to *piety of service*.<sup>26</sup>

In her graduate thesis from 2014, Megan Garbett-Styger also addresses the issue of grieving and dying donors.<sup>27</sup> She covers many of the same issues discussed by Wexler and Long's article but, as part of her research, she interviewed multiple professionals who had worked with dying donors or their surviving families. Part of her interviews focused on the relationship that forms between professional and donor, a topic I think is vital in donor relations. Is it acceptable that we establish friendships with our donors—Cline suggested we make covenants of love and respect with our donors, which indicates a deep relationship—or does this extend beyond our professional duty?

Garbett-Styger questioned her interviewees “if there was a balance between building a personal relationship with bereaved or dying donors and working with them as a professional.”<sup>28</sup> One interviewee responded, “archivists often work intimately with potential donors, which can lead to friendly relationships, but at the end of the day the archivist is a professional and is performing a duty for the institution he or she serves.”<sup>29</sup> Another responded, “the danger might be, depending on the circumstances, of course, that you would become too close of a friend to somebody.”<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, Garbett-Styger suggests “it is important to be ‘friendly enough with people that they trust you with their stuff’ but the archivist also needs to remember that they are working as a professional.”<sup>31</sup> Is it truly possible to become too close of a friend with a donor? We obviously need to maintain a critical eye on the materials offered to us, but if we understand our jobs well and keep our collection development policies in mind, I see no problem developing friendships with our donors. Later in this paper I will share several instances where donor relations have led to friendships while performing my duties in collection development.

Aaron D. Purcell recently wrote a book about donor relations in 2015 entitled *Donors and Archives: A Guidebook for Successful Programs*.<sup>32</sup> Purcell walks through the entire process of working with a donor, from planning out the first contact, negotiating, signing the contract, and ultimately taking possession of the materials.

26. Ibid, 293-294.

27. Megan Garbett-Styger, *Death, Dying, and Archives: Learning to Work with Grieving and Dying Donors* (master's thesis, Western Washington University, Washington, 2014).

28. Garbett-Styger, *Death, Dying, and Archives*, 53.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid, 55.

31. Ibid, 54.

32. Aaron D. Purcell, *Donors and Archives: A Guidebook for Successful Programs* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

Purcell dedicates an entire chapter to describing twenty-first century donors. His classifications include some of the same donor types identified as twentieth century donors by Kaiser, such as those with their heart in the right place. He goes on to identify others like the sick and elderly; the unassuming and the rich and famous; and the difficult, demanding, and non-donors who are usually donating for less altruistic reasons. Purcell goes even further and identifies personality types including the easygoing, the collector, the packrat, the scholar, and those who are legally mandated to donate, such as the office manager and records officer.<sup>33</sup> Many of these types, if not all, emerged before the end of the twentieth century, but they are definitely staples of the twenty-first century.

The reasons for donating are also covered in Purcell's book. Some donors do so because it is the right thing to do or because they cannot bring themselves to throw the material away, while others are looking for a way to become immortal through preserving their memory after their passing. Others feel an allegiance to the institution and provide not only materials but also financial donations. Some decide to donate because of the financial breaks they will receive in tax deductions and others because they are obligated to transfer materials to the archives.<sup>34</sup>

Once the donation has occurred, Purcell points out, it does not mean that the work with donors is finished and they can be forgotten. Stewardship is the process of maintaining donor relations beyond the initial donation. Many donors feel the desire to know what is happening with their materials and may even become volunteers in the archive. Others may want to continue donating materials once they see how well the repository treats their materials after donation. "This ongoing cultivation leads to additional gifts to support archives programs. But goodwill quickly evaporates if donors are forgotten, disrespected, or treated unfairly."<sup>35</sup>

Using these publications, I would like to discuss some of the identified issues in working with donors and relate them to the twenty-first century donors we work with today. I will share several experiences I have had working with donors and offer suggestions on ways to overcome these issues.

## Twenty-First Century Donors

Kaiser suggests in her 1969 article that twentieth century materials had broadened the types of donors that contributed their materials to archives.<sup>36</sup> Instead of government agencies and corporate administrators archiving their records, we

33. Purcell, *Donors and Archives*, 124-129.

34. *Ibid*, 11-16.

35. *Ibid*, 114.

36. Kaiser, "Problems with Donors of Contemporary Collections," 103.



started to see archivists preserving the personal papers of individuals. The second half of the twentieth century began a process that has continued strongly into the twenty-first century—that of documenting the lives and experiences of the average citizen, including, and especially, minorities. Official records took priority at both academic libraries where I have worked, one a state institution and the other private; however, both positions I held were also dedicated to identifying and preserving the personal papers of citizens outside of the organization. At the University of Hawaii, I curated a collection of Japanese American veterans' papers with the intent to document the prejudice they suffered before being allowed to serve in the United States military, the bravery and honor they displayed in fighting for America's freedom, and the recognition they received during and after their service. At my current institution, Brigham Young University, I am documenting the history of twenty-first century Mormons, Utah, and the West through the acquisition of the personal papers of authors, artists, politicians, scholars, businessmen, scientists, and others from within the communities of Mormons, Utah, and the West.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, potential donors ranged widely in their personal experiences with archives, a larger proportion having little or no previous experience with one. As the twenty-first century dawned, public outreach by archivists increased dramatically. No longer content to serve only those who happen to walk through the door, archivists of all types of institutions now create exhibits and invite the local press to cover the event to raise the public's awareness of the materials that are housed in the archive. Academic archivists are joining their fellow librarians in working with professorial faculty to bring their students into the reading room to provide archival instruction and incorporate primary source materials into class assignments and research papers. Archivists have started blogs to create a public place where the materials can be displayed and written about. Social media has been one of the recent tools used by archivists to quickly spread the word about their initiatives. All of this has been in an effort to expose more people at a younger age to the world of primary sources for genealogical, academic, and personal interest purposes, in sharp contrast to donors of the twentieth century.

Kaiser and Purcell discuss donors who gift their materials for less altruistic reasons than their predecessors.<sup>37, 38</sup> Society has changed from one that had several large corporations that controlled much of the business world to one where any person can be an entrepreneur and start their own small business, bringing a business mindset to the masses. Donors of this century are often interested in selling their materials or at least taking a tax break when they give their materials to an archive. Recently, a small local filming company agreed to establish a collection of their production materials to the archive and was happy that the donation could be reported to the IRS for a tax write-off. Archivists, however, have had to be very careful

37. Ibid.

38. Purcell, *Donors and Archives*, 129-131.

in recusing themselves from the appraisal process to avoid ethical dilemmas in accepting materials that they have deemed to have monetary value.

Another issue with twenty-first century donations is the prevalence of sensitive materials interspersed throughout the collection. Personally Identifiable Information (PII) can be found in almost every donation given to a collecting repository, whether it be full names, mother's maiden names, birthdates, birthplaces, addresses, or phone numbers. Each institution has had to develop policies and procedures on what PII information they are willing to allow researchers to access.<sup>39</sup> Other types of even more serious PII information commonly found are social security numbers, medical information and records, financial records, and even educational records—particularly prevalent in academic archival repositories. Archives must restrict access to such information by implementing policies and procedures to identify and redact them before allowing the public to access them.

Many twenty-first century donors are young. They have rarely thought about how they will preserve their records and personal papers. Often the materials have been created on a computer and never existed in a physical format. All too often hard drives crash, completely destroying digital files. Also common is the digital obsolescence built into computers today. Designers intentionally abandon file formats in pursuit of formats that offer better options, leaving older files unreadable or unable to even be opened. Although archivists have been working to overcome these challenges, it has taken a lot of time and effort, even spawning side fields in archives such as digital forensics and digital preservation. In an effort to prevent the complete loss of a generation's documentary materials, archivists have to be proactive in identifying potential donors and establishing procedures for archiving their digital materials.

Donors of the twenty-first century also live in a society driven by pop culture where everyone is looking for their 15 minutes of fame. In this instance, archivists have been able to benefit by approaching potential donors and helping them to see the benefits of starting a collection of their materials with the archive. The donors can announce that they have started an archival collection with an institutional repository, benefiting not only the donor by helping to get their name in the news, but also the repository by increasing public awareness of their existence and efforts to preserve history.

In summary, twenty-first century donors continue to be made up of corporations, experienced archive users, and altruistic individuals, similar to pre-twentieth century donors. They also continue to be individuals instead of corporations, inexperienced archive users, and egocentric donors that Kaiser identified. However, they now include new categories specific to the twenty-first century: young individuals who are

39. See, for example: Valerie Harris and Kathryn Stine, "Politically Charged Records: A Case Study with Recommendations for Providing Access to a Challenging Collection," *The American Archivist* 74, no. 2 (2011): 633-651.

barely starting their professional careers, technologically savvy individuals who understand computers and digital files better than most archivists, and donors who have come to rely on the immediate information that a Google search can provide on a broad range of questions. How do we, as archivists, relate to these types of donors in a manner that will establish deep, abiding relationships? How do we provide services such as organizing and describing their materials, or providing reference services in a timely manner that will satisfy their expectations? These are some of the challenges we face working with twenty-first century donors.

Today's archivists need to change in order to meet the needs of our donors. We can no longer remain in our offices and wait for records to be transferred to our institutional repositories. We need to actively seek out donations that fit our collection scope and develop the people skills that will allow us to reach out to these potential donors and work with them to see the importance of preserving their records. We need to be assertive and confident when communicating our mission and we must communicate clearly how we accomplish that mission, helping the donor to see they are a vital part of the process. We need to be able to work with the younger generation, understanding their desire for quick answers to their questions and concerns, but also teaching them how the process works so they will be more understanding of the time commitment needed to work with archival materials. We must also demonstrate the patience we expect to see of the younger generation while working with the older generation. As discussed below, we often work with elderly donors who can be reluctant to turn over their materials to an archival institution. Archivists and curators of the twenty-first century need to be flexible when working with the large variety of donor types and develop good communication and people skills.

### Establishing Relationships

In my previous position, I worked with Japanese American veterans who had fought in World War II, or their surviving family members. In either case, the interest was to preserve a legacy by donating the personal papers of the veteran to our institution. I first read Cline's article, "Dust Clouds of Camels Shall Cover You: Covenant and the Archival Endeavor" while working on this project and it resonated with me and the experiences I was having. I truly felt that I was establishing relationships and making covenants with these donors, or "a compact between equal partners who forge a relationship to achieve shared goals."<sup>40</sup> I was attempting to have *genuine encounters* each time I met with them or their family members to ensure that they knew I took genuine interest in their life experiences. I felt a *sacred obligation* to ensure that their story was preserved for future generations by accepting them into the archives and taking the necessary steps to make them available to all researchers. Overall, I felt I carried out my job with a *piety of service* where I demonstrated my

40. Cline, "Dust Clouds of Camels Shall Cover You," 284.

love of the topic and people by acquiring the materials so that future generations would know the service that these men gave to their country.

One of the donors with whom I was the closest was a man in his mid-nineties who had served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and then the Military Intelligence Service during World War II. As he aged, he became more involved with other veterans of Japanese ancestry until he became the *de facto* scholar for oral histories, scholarly articles, documentaries, and other publications on the topic. After giving his personal papers to the archives, he continued to come in to use the materials for research on topics in which he was interested. He regularly attended events that celebrated what these courageous men went through and willingly took me along to introduce me to other veterans and scholars. Through his efforts, I identified new potential donations, made connections with the men and their families, and increased the number of veterans' collections.

Working with this donor meant I needed to be ready to provide continued reference services for his research queries. He was one of the most dedicated scholars I have ever seen, continuing his research into his advanced years. I always needed to be ready to pull not only materials from his own collection but from many other collections that he would use in his research. He would occasionally call me and ask if I was ready to come look at more of his materials to add to his collection. There were always more topics he wanted to write about and would, therefore, withhold certain materials until he was done using them. It was obvious that letting go of some of the material was a difficult process for him as he began to realize that he would not have time to conduct research and write all of the books he wanted to before passing. He also withheld some materials due to the closeness he felt with them. The correspondence he sent back and forth to his parents were some of the materials he refused to donate, feeling that they were too sensitive and personal to allow anyone outside of his family to read. Because of the relationship I had built with him, he began showing me some of the letters he had written home. He was a great writer; the letters were very poetic and touching as he attempted to share his feelings with his family, never sure between one letter and the next if he would be alive to write home again. As I spoke with him about the archival value of these letters, he eventually agreed that he would donate these materials to be included with the rest of his papers.

I also had to be accommodating to his physical limitations and even console him when his wife passed away. Our relationship was almost as a father and son where interests were shared and joy found in those shared interests. The rich experiences I gained by knowing him, working alongside him, and providing archival services to him made the relationship one of trust and deep friendship. We had covenanted with each other to preserve the memory of the men who fought two distinct battles during World War II: one for the right to serve their country and the other to defend that country which almost denied them the right to serve, many of them ultimately giving their lives to do so.

Perhaps not all donors will become deep and abiding friends. However, it is still vital that we work to establish a relationship of trust so that they feel confident that leaving their materials in our care is a good decision. I recently worked with an artist who has kept a daily journal in comic book form since 2008. We approached her about donating her manuscript materials to our repository with the promise of using the materials for exhibitions. Because of the relationship we established with her up front, we were able to bring her into the exhibition process. She felt confident in the way we were telling her story through the exhibit and willingly loaned us additional material for the display cases. The exhibition caught the attention of our campus magazine and they interviewed her for a piece about art on campus, bringing more attention to her work. She has been happy with the exposure her donation has brought and will continue to work with us into the foreseeable future.

Occasionally a relationship with a donor comes naturally and almost effortlessly, though in most instances it can take several visits before they feel comfortable donating their materials. In one instance, I met a donor two years previously at a comic convention; we discussed his work as an author and I explained how his manuscript materials would fit our collection scope for literary manuscripts. At that point, he felt he needed more time to establish himself professionally before he would be willing to donate his materials. I continued to visit with him for the next two years, establishing a good relationship. As he became more comfortable with the idea of donating his materials, we were able to bring him in for a tour of Special Collections, demonstrating how we would treat his materials and explaining why we thought it was important that his materials be included in the archive. He in turn invited us to his historic home for a tour followed by the donation of his materials. He was so impressed with the process that he immediately began suggesting other artists that fit the collection scope.

In many instances, potential donors are not aware that the materials they own are worth archiving. A local artist who has seen success in the community became excited when I discussed with him the possibility of accepting his manuscript materials for preservation. He replied that he thought only the finished artwork had any value and was excited to donate his papers to our institution. Our relationship, although established quickly, was built on his relief that his materials would be preserved and trust that we could preserve them for him.

In some instances, establishing a relationship of trust extends beyond the immediate donor. A young artist with whom I worked became comfortable with the idea of donating her materials to our repository but encountered resistance from her parents who thought she should keep the materials for their potential monetary value later in her life. I invited the parents to our institution to see firsthand how her materials would be treated, preserved, and made accessible to researchers. The relationship I was able to build with them helped them understand the value of adding their daughter's manuscript materials to our repository. Once they understood our mission and purpose and felt comfortable with me individually and

my institution as a whole, they were excited to see a collection of their daughter's materials archived with us.

## Continuing Relationships

Several of my donors have expressed so much excitement with the establishment of their collection that they are willing to reach out to their friends and colleagues who have similar materials. The relationship I establish to create the collection will continue in the future as I work with them to identify other potential collections. They will make establishing new relationships much easier as they introduce me to their friends and colleagues. The benefits of establishing good relations and then maintaining them are exponential.

As a curator assigned to work with content creators of the twenty-first century, it also means that I work with a much younger generation. Many of my donors have been actively creating materials for the past 10 to 15 years, which puts them in their thirties or early forties. They are still considered young in their profession and have decades ahead of them with much more content creation to come. I have felt the need to establish relationships with them now while they are beginning their careers to explain to them the importance of preserving their materials. It is never too early to begin an active plan of records management and archiving of materials. This means that once they commit their materials to us, we will continue to work with them for decades to come. One such donor of his literary manuscripts published his first work of fiction when he was 30 years old and now, at age 42, has 43 publications of varying lengths. He has continued to donate his papers in increments and will continue to do so for many more years. I believe working with donors in an iterative process will become the norm for archival repositories.

Some of the younger donors I have worked with have also been family members of an elderly veteran who has passed away. Working with these donors can be very simple and straightforward as they look for an immediate solution to the stressful problem of what to do with their father's materials. Complications often arise, though, as they begin to see the collection as a memorial to their father, a way to preserve every piece of evidence of his existence. One such donor was convinced that the collection needed to include her father's military shaver, a dead stuffed turtle that had been picked up in the Ryukyu Islands while in the military, and even his professional papers that had nothing to do with his service in the military. She even questioned if the family china could be added to the collection. It was not always easy to educate her about the types of materials we accepted since she felt that anything that had a connection to her father needed to be preserved and argued that his service in the military influenced every other decision he made in his life.

These donors, however, also tend to be more invested in the materials and are often willing to volunteer in the archives to assist in processing their parent's papers. They can also be sources of monetary donations as they see the work that goes on

behind the scenes and often the financial burdens that archives take on when they agree to acquire, arrange, describe, and preserve the materials.

Infrequently there are donors who can be more difficult with which to come to a consensus about their donation. They can ask for impossible stipulations that the repository is not able to fulfill, such as adding endless restrictions to their materials, requiring that all of the materials in their large donation be digitized and mounted to the Internet within six months of donation, or demanding that materials that do not fit within the institution's collection scope be taken along with the materials that do fit the scope. It is important that the archivist knows how to work with these donors to overcome such impossible stipulations.

It is always best to begin negotiations with a frank discussion about what is possible with the donation and why some of their demands cannot be met. Perhaps they need to understand that the mission of the institution is to collect materials that can be made available to researchers as quickly as possible with shorter restriction limitations; otherwise, it serves no purpose to be held at the institution. It may be that there are just not enough resources available to the institution that would allow large projects to be done as quickly as the donor would like. Maybe they would like to assist in identifying individuals in photographs, creating an inventory of the correspondence files, or other processing tasks that the archivist deems necessary. Alternatively, donors of influence could become advocates for the repository with administration to increase funding or staffing to accomplish the work at a steadier pace.

At some point, if the donor is unwilling to relent on their requirements, the archivist should not hesitate to deny acceptance of a donation. It is never wise to saddle the institution with a collection that has so many stipulations that it cannot be properly processed and made available to researchers. Doing so will only stretch the already finite resources of the institution to a breaking point and upset the donor that their material is not being taken care of as promised. Upset donors can talk negatively about the repository to their family, friends, and other potential donors, ruining the reputation of the repository. If the donor does not fully understand or accept the practical limitations of the repository, the archivist could suggest other institutions with which the donor could approach to take their materials and attempt to part amicably. Most donors appreciate being told honestly before the donation that the institution is not able to handle the collection as the donor wishes.

## Conclusion

Donor relations is one of the most important aspects of archival work. It may seem like a topic that is so commonplace that we do not need to think about it. This, however, needs to change. As professionals, we need to ensure that we are openly discussing how to establish relationships of trust with our donors, beginning in the classroom and continuing in the literature and through workshops and other professional development venues.

Donors of the twenty-first century vary in many aspects, from young to old, experienced to inexperienced archival users, altruistic to self-interested, technology savvy to technology resistant, and a plethora of other types. Archivists must understand the motivations of donors and develop the skills to work with every type so as to further the missions of their institutions in collecting and preserving important historical materials. Donating materials is no longer a once-and-done activity and archivists need to be prepared to deal with donors and their requests for years after the initial donation. If we do not treat our donors with the respect they are due, we will lose our connections to materials and our collection development activities will stagnate.