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**Voice, Identity, Activism (VIA):
A Community-centric Framework for Approaching Archives and Recordkeeping**

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Introduction

The following draft framework [Table 1] has been developed by Anne Gilliland based on analyses of several sources: the mission, scope and activities of community-based archives in the United States; partnership projects, case studies and service learning conducted by faculty and students at UCLA's Department of Information Studies (IS)ⁱ and elsewhere over the past decade in multiple grass-roots, identity- or issue-based, and activist communities; and characteristics and themes emerging out of the work of scholars of these fields and movement leaders as well as input from community informatics scholars participating in CIRN 2012.ⁱⁱ

The table identifies, although not exhaustively, factors and considerations that can come into play relating to recordkeeping, documentation and archives from the standpoint of and in accordance with the interests of communities and groups seeking to organize, to project or protect their identities, issues and rights, to pursue social justice agendas, and to have their beliefs and experiences acknowledged and taken into account outside their communities.

The framework has been developed from the following stance:

- The interests, needs and well-being of the community are central. Robust and recognized recordkeeping and archives are as critical to the empowerment and profile development of grass-roots, identity-, issue- and experience-based, and activist communities as they have traditionally been to high-power organizations and bureaucracies such as governments, corporations, religious organizations and academic institutions, even if their manifestations may not take on the same forms as those found in more “mainstream” settings. They are, therefore, a fundamental component of social justice, civil rights, and democratic movements and have direct impact upon the lives and well-being of communities and their constituents.
- That community records and heritage materials should not simply be approached by government archives and collecting institutions as collectibles, “rescue” or “salvage” projects, or means to diversify or “round out” existing documentary sources.
- That a community-centric framework for approaching archives and recordkeeping recognizes that there are important and constantly evolving community interests, epistemologies, demographics, emotions and ways of thinking about place and time that must be addressed in recordkeeping and archives activities and that these will present challenges necessitating a re-thinking of “mainstream” archival practices as well as heightened understanding of those of the communities in question.

Not all factors and considerations are present in each context, and the framework is not meant to be a checklist or to conflate distinct concerns that exist within individual communities. Rather, the framework seeks to raise consciousness of the presence of such factors and considerations within communities, within archivists and archival researchers from non-community institutions seeking to partner with those communities, and within students who are preparing for professional careers where they may be working with community archives. The VIA framework is also being used in ongoing research that is contemplating how key professional concepts and practices, e.g., record, recordkeeping, archives, creatorship, appraisal, description and access (whether or not they are expressed in archival terms within communities) could be pluralized in

ways that could take into account the needs, beliefs, practices, and concerns of grass-roots, identity-, or issue-based, and social justice-oriented communities.

Table 1. The VIA Framework

<i>VIA-relevant communities</i>	<i>Examples:</i>
<p>Grass-roots, identity-, issue- and experience-based, and social justice-oriented communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activist groups, e.g., anti-development/urban redevelopment; anti-militarism, civil rights, environmental, economic action, organized labor, pro-democracy activists. • Alternative movements. • Arts and music communities, e.g., artists' collectives, community arts and murals projects and music festivals. • Ethnically or racially-based immigrant and diasporic communities. • Gender, gender identification, gender presentation, or sexual orientation-based communities. • Hidden or invisible communities, e.g., undocumented immigrants or students, gangs, mental health patients, survivors of sexual abuse. • Human trafficking victims and their families. • Incarcerated individuals (current and former). • Indigenous/aboriginal/native communities. • Medical and patient advocacy groups. • Migrant worker and day laborer populations. • Military veterans. • Populations without "home" or "family", e.g., the homeless, those in orphanages and foster care. • Religious communities. • Targets and survivors of political or military activity, e.g., genocides and ethnic cleansing, forcible displacement or relocation. <p>NOTE: Communities may overlap in membership and boundaries may be both fuzzy and fluid. They will usually have sub-communities, hierarchies and power dimensions, may not necessarily be cohesive, and are always dynamic and under-construction. Individual and small groups experiences within and across communities will vary.</p>
<i>Motivations for archives and recordkeeping:</i>	<i>Examples of related activities:</i>
<p>Maintaining, sustaining and recovering cultural or community practices</p> <p>To ensure voice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance/reperformance of memory and recordkeeping through traditions, storytelling, testifying, songs, dance, etc., even in communities that are profoundly presentist; protecting community knowledge; capturing knowledge that might be lost as community Elders pass away and physical landscapes and economies change. • Infrastructural support for community autonomy and self-determination. • Awareness/consciousness of the role and power of external recordkeeping about the community • Promotion and communication of community-centric narratives, perspectives and experiences. • Providing alternative and counter-narratives to official narratives by reading official records <i>along</i> or <i>against the grain</i>. • Juxtaposing community and official narratives.

<p>Community and pan-community identity development (inward and outward orientation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizing or exposing the amount, type and limitations of voice available to community members. • Community organizing and agenda development; relationship-building. • Communicating. • Sharing stories. • Displaying. • Mapping and exploiting common good resources and shared community assets • Individual and joint programming. • Educational, cultural and memorialization activities. • Fund-raising and asset identification. • Networking information resources. • Reaching or acknowledging consensus (explicit or tacit) about what history has to be remembered, communicated, passed down or otherwise saved. • Using archives to create community, or to bring together communities.
<p>Community activism and struggles in support of social justice objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection and mobilization of evidence and information in support of achieving human, civil, moral and other rights, equity, dignity, and reconciliation. • Repatriation, recovery, and obviation of appropriation of cultural goods, traditional knowledge, and community places. • Coalition and alliance-building through shared concerns, experiences or knowledge, or in solidarity. • Consciousness-raising.
<p>Conflict resolution/post-conflict recovery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection and mobilization of evidence, information and cultural goods in support of special tribunals and other legal bodies as well as of rights to reparations and compensation and the determination of geographic boundaries and traditional lands. • Statements in support of community, religious and national identity. • Development of new national identities and supporting multiple national identities.
<p>Commemoration, celebration, affirmation, recovery, therapy and mourning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective and individual remembering of persecution, liberation, disasters, epidemics, acts of defiance and other defining events in the history of the community. • Commitment “never to forget.”
<p>Recordkeeping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery of community memory, heritage, culture, belief systems, traditional practices, lands and language. • “So others don’t go through what I went through” • Addressing internal and externally-imposed administrative, legal, fiscal, knowledge management, accountability/transparency, and access needs and requirements for records. • Ensuring appropriate access, privacy and security regimes are in place for records. • Tracking rights and responsibilities, e.g., regarding reparations, compensation and benefits due to community members. • Ensuring authors and co-creators are acknowledged and their rights addressed. • Documenting land and property ownership, e.g., traditional lands, community or personal property seized or confiscated during military actions. • Mapping lineage claims, e.g., to establish Indigenous lineage or determine Native American blood quantum.

<i>Community characteristics:</i>	<i>Examples, manifestations and considerations:</i>
Resiliency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural, economic, ecological, environmental and linguistic sustainability. • Health and well-being. • Ability for the community to evolve. Growth and change are often essential for survival as are a sense of future direction or goals and an understanding of the past. • Ability for archives to form, become dormant and be reactivated as needed. • Depth, breadth and passion of engagement by community members. • Resilience of traditional forms of knowledge transmission within communities, e.g., from Elders to younger generations, woman-to-woman, master to apprentice. • Critical awareness of the ways in which intervention through the provision of education and empowerment tools, as well as shifting climate, economies, environments and technologies change communities and their cultures as well as the extent to which they physically interact.
Location or place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical and/or virtual places and spaces. • Single or distributed location. • Mobile archives. • Unlocatedness/lack of place. • Dislocatedness. • Affective (emotional and/or aesthetic) places and spaces. • Sacred/spiritual places and spaces. • Diasporic/dispersed locations. • Invisible or hidden communities. • Inward and outward orientation of communities. • Landscapes of memory. • Voluntary vs. involuntary locations. • Stable vs. unstable locations. • Accessibility and proximity to community members.
Affective aspects (emotions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uplifting: aspiration, dignity, excitement, hopefulness, humor, independence, inspiration, intimacy, passion, patience, pleasure, pride, resilience, spirituality, thankfulness, trustfulness/healthy distrustfulness. • More complicated aspects: anger, compulsion, conflictedness, disappointment, exclusivity, fear, feelings of “otherness,” grief, guilt, low self-worth, regret, reification of memory, self-deprecation, sense of otherness, sentimentalism, trauma.
Affective aspects (manifestations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive (assets): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Desire or imperative to tell or celebrate one’s story inside and outside the community, with or without anonymity or pseudonymity. - Acknowledged importance of viewing and listening to, playing and displaying archival materials, objects, stories, songs, etc. • More complicated aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concealing one’s story from all but trusted insiders. - Fear that stories needing to be heard by community members would not be available to them, or would be inappropriately made available if in the hands of external institutions. - Fear that external institutions would expose vulnerable individuals (e.g., “preserving the closet,” victims of persecution). - Fear of obliteration or alteration of documentation or exposure to

<p>Generational considerations</p>	<p>persecution if documentation is all gathered in one place and/or name indexes or dossiers are compiled and made widely available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sense that one's life doesn't merit archival attention and preservation. - Desire to forget. - Conflicted emotions about recordkeeping, e.g., concerns about or memories of external tracking or surveillance of community and its members, aversion to externally imposed recordkeeping or reporting requirements. - Hoarding vs. storing. - Material objects serving as memory triggers.
<p>Conceptual, epistemological and belief systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing community demographics and dynamics. • Multi-generational communities. • Inter-generational memory transfer and cultural and protocol barriers thereto. • Attitudes and affects relating to inherited documentation. • Changes in attitudes toward the past and the present resulting from generational and attitudinal shifts, socio-political gains, and cultural assimilation. • Differences between communities regularly replenished by immigration and those that are made up of successive generations of children born in the adopted country. • Shifts in identity due to assimilation, inter-marriage or deliberate dispersion of community members (e.g., through relocation or re-housing programs). • Community rules and sentiments about eligibility for membership such as tribal blood quantum requirements. • Shifting emphases between forgetting and remembering of defining or iconic events or experiences in community memory (e.g., Holocaust survivors and their descendants).
<p>Required specialized or insider knowledge, insight, experience, or personal attributes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understandings of power, ownership, time, stewardship, trust, what is secret or sacred, and what can be said and which stories told or recorded and what not, when, and under what circumstances. • Community ontologies. • Protocols for knowledge transmission inside and outside the community. • Protocols for handling sensitive objects, for ritual performance, or for behaviors within sacred spaces. • Protocols regarding language and specific words.
<p>Vocabulary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for insider knowledge to "explain" the records to others and to "read" what the records say and don't say or to pick up on community "markers." • Understanding language/vocabulary/community semantics, spiritual and cultural import and resonances, rituals and protocols for learning, viewing, hearing, describing, preserving, performing or otherwise handling or transmitting certain knowledge or documentation, for example, relating to gender, age, community affiliation, and their shifting contexts. • Understanding the roles of and respecting and working with community Elders, tribal councils and other community bodies, and community ethics review boards. • Terminology, semantics and cultural expressions and conceptualizations relating to archives, records, community knowledge and memory-keeping may differ considerably between community members and archival and information professionals and researchers.
<p><i>Documentation characteristics:</i></p>	<p><i>Examples of archival and recordkeeping considerations:</i></p>

Nature of the record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can take any form, tangible or intangible, analog or digital, e.g., letters, photographs, Winter counts, barks, stories and storytelling, music forms such as Native American drum beats, jazz and hip hop, jewelry, spoken language. Forms are also dynamic and shift over time. • Originals, copies, reconstructed or recovered records, partial records. • Documentary relationships between different records. • Atomicity or dependencies between different records, or aspects of a single record. • There may be conflicting accounts or information between different records. • Multiplicity of types and levels of uses of records within and sometimes outside the community. • Much community knowledge is intangible and unexpressed (e.g., metadocumentation, information or knowledge organization practices) and may need to be captured or documented to support resilience of community memory and recordkeeping in the face of changing circumstances.
Perceived or actual paucity of records and textual documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss or lack of textual and bureaucratic records and other documentation presenting community perspectives and experiences, especially in comparison to records and other documentation that is externally created about the community. • Investment of “recordness” in disparate, often otherwise commonplace objects, including “what they carried with them” and “what they were given.” • Purposive creation of documentation, often in multimedia or performative forms. • Fugitive documentation.
Perceptions of quality or value of records and various forms of documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal mementos, “what they carried with them,” and “what they were given.” • Inability to establish reliability and/or authenticity of records, either because of inability to trace their provenance or because of a lack of formal recordkeeping processes and forms. • Incidental, accidental or non-expert photography, or oral or video recordings. Materials in poor preservation state. • “Saving what survived.” • Attributing other values to materials, e.g., associative, recovery/reconstruction, sentimental. • Performative qualities. • Representational limitations of different forms of documentation. • Affective value/value as affect.
Nature of memory- and recordkeeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recordkeeping that is based in oral, music, dance or other kinetic and/or ritual traditions. • Designated or trusted living recordkeepers or storytellers, e.g., <i>griots</i>, community Elders, family history-keepers, heritage language speakers, avocational community archivists. • Survivors, witnesses and testifiers. • There may be no physical archive in a traditional professional sense. • Community language as a living archive. • Social networks as living archives. • Reliability, authenticity, originality and even long-term sustainability or materials may not be primary preoccupations.
Non-traditional sites of creation of documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The knowledge that is of interest to the community may reside as much, if not more in context about the content than in the content itself.

<p>Distributed or networked documentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site-specificity. • Indigenous “keeping places.” • Planning meetings. • Political events. • Cultural festivals. • Performances. • Lectures. • Artists and writers’ collectives and workshops. • Development/redevelopment projects. • Informal gatherings. • Restaurants. • Shops. • Churches and other religious spaces. • Places or moments of testifying. • Social media sites and other “unlocated” locations. • Co-constitution between authors and audiences. • Dispersion through diaspora, war, disaster, theft/looting, or community relocation. • Documentation linked through websites and portals. • Materials generated through social media, e.g., authoritative crowd mapping, community annotations of digitized materials such as visual and oral materials. • Networked genealogical information/genealogy networks. • Hierarchical and non-hierarchical production of documentation.
<p><i>Policy considerations:</i></p>	<p><i>Examples:</i></p>
<p>Indigenous and other cultural protocols</p> <p>Ownership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications of sovereignty or legal guarantees of self-determination for the creation, preservation, description, ownership and access of records and traditional or community knowledge and cultural practices. Ownership is a central concern. • Are professional best practices what are best for the community? • Are community protocols an empowering and feasible approach for a community/for multiple communities? • Oversight, participation and processes for developing community protocols. • How community protocols of one community might interact with those of another community or with the practices of non-community institutions (including professional and international best practices and standards)? • Processes for and implications of the evolution, updating and promulgation of community protocols. • Communities may prefer non-formalized protocols. • Flexibility of protocols when faced with complexities of reality. • Community understandings about ownership, e.g., that materials are of community rather than individual provenance or authorship, that some kinds of records or documentation cannot be owned, or that records created about the community with or without its consent might belong to the community. • Combating physical, intellectual and cultural appropriation of community materials. • Replevin actions. • Repatriation and/or digital repatriation and recovery initiatives. • Determining those aspects of a documentary object to which notions of

Ethics	<p>ownership pertain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specifying protocols and policy regarding the commodification/commercialization of community heritage or legacy by the community and by other parties. • Negotiating the dimensions of co-ownership.
Preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing community ethics review boards or processes. • Ensuring equal or equitable voice in all aspects of partnership projects with non-community individuals, groups and individuals. • Balancing the political and public nature of empowerment and recovery with individual privacy or personal or community vulnerability concerns. • Protecting sacred and secret knowledge. • Ethics of a social justice stance in terms of archival responsibilities to the historical record and implications for community and societal trust.
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that conservation and restoration practices are in accordance with community beliefs and practices, e.g., for recordings of heritage language or traditional storage, for preserving ritual items, and for keeping materials “alive.” • Identifying preservation priorities and mechanisms for materials in an environment of very limited resources. • Ensuring that digital preservation practices are in accordance with community beliefs and practices. • Exploring the potential for sharing preservation facilities and other resources across multiple communities. • Preservation implications of repatriated materials, as well as of digital repatriation and recovery.
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of organizing and providing access points to meet community needs, e.g., key topics, forms of expression, language, appropriate disclosure of information and stories. • Ensuring that descriptive tools and their accessibility/dissemination address concerns about privacy and vulnerability, e.g., avoiding “dossier compilation” and “outing” individuals. • Who should/can describe? Who is the expert? • Identifying and addressing co-creator roles and interests through description. • Models and policies for exporting or linking descriptive metadata to wider information systems. • Identifying who may and who may not have access to a community’s archives or documentation, and under what conditions and legal requirements and the shifting contexts and circumstances under which such determinations may be made (i.e., may not be a one-time decision). • Purposive “encryption” or encoding of community knowledge to obviate non-authorized access. • Right of a community to vet materials prior to making them more broadly accessible. • How should that access be facilitated and by whom? • Under what circumstances can the community archive be “dark”? • Does the community have a priority constituency, agenda or critical issue or event that would influence access and/or digitization considerations? • Accessibility to the community of community materials held within non-community institutions. • Access concerns regarding images and recordings of community materials created and disseminated by non-community institutions and individuals.

<p>Agency</p> <p>Compliance with external recordkeeping requirements</p> <p>Admissibility of records</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying digitization priorities and mechanisms for materials in an environment of very limited resources. • Ensuring that digitization practices are in accordance with community beliefs and practices. • Who may speak for the community? • Who should be consulted within the community on records and archival matters (e.g., a protocols advisory group)? • What kind of archival role(s) might exist within the community and who performs or should perform those roles? • What is the background (e.g., insider/outsider, “double-insider”) and positionality of the archivist? • What language and vocabulary is or should be employed? • To whom, if anyone, is the community or its organizations accountable or beholden? • Who supports archival endeavors, politically, financially, emotionally and in what ways? • What kinds of partnerships or relationships exist within or between communities that might be relevant to their archives and recordkeeping? • Are there identifiable moments when or reasons why community archives and records might reasonably be given to or placed within more mainstream archives, e.g., a political agenda has been achieved; community documentation is at demonstrable risk? • Reporting requirements in order to receive recognition, aid or benefits. • Maintenance of dual recordkeeping systems, e.g., according to community practices as well as external legal, regulatory or professional requirements, for accountability, funding, industry, judicial, military, educational or other reasons. • Demonstration of trustworthiness of records, e.g., circumstances of creation and preservation, chain-of-custody, transparency. • Admissibility of non-textual records in courts as evidence.
<i>Educational considerations:</i>	<i>Examples:</i>
<p>Education as a transformative force</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using archives and archival materials to promote individual and community self-knowledge about the past. • Infusing recordkeeping sensibilities and skills within a community. • Promoting individual and community reflexivity and critical consciousness about past events and what could be learned for current and future actions, whether or not the community invests in archives and recordkeeping. • Developing a “healthy distrust” as part of building critical consciousness. • Supporting community abilities to identify and adapt to change by mastering their own knowledge and information environment. • Bi-directional learning by and about communities in order to build mutual understanding, respect, and agreement about how to work together as necessary. • Motivations for training to be a community archivist or memory-keeper. • Preparing professional archivists for careers working with communities, e.g., as “mobile” or “embedded” archivists. • Educating archivists and communities on the ethical dimensions of community archiving and partnerships. • Developing an educational toolbox to support community empowerment through archives and recordkeeping and also to be able to discern patterns

	<p>retrospectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing educational programs that can support multiple literacies and learning modalities.• Engaging community experts in educational activities.
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ⁱ For more information on these activities, see Lau, Andrew, Anne Gilliland, and Anderson, Kim. “Naturalizing Community Engagement in Information Studies: Pedagogical Approaches and Persisting Partnerships,” *Information, Communication & Society*, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2011.630404.

ⁱⁱ It should be noted that IS research and education activities are informed and encouraged by social justice, diversity and community outreach mandates at the Departmental, School and University levels. Communities with which IS members have worked include Asian American, Native American, African American, Latina/o, Italian American, and Pacific Islander communities, farm and migrant workers, day laborers, undocumented immigrants, victims of human trafficking, military veterans, anti-militarism groups, community arts organizations and festivals, queer communities, the blind, incarcerated youth and adults, the homeless, and the Occupy Wall Street movement.