

## Society of American Archivists [Spotlight Award](#) Nomination

For all of the archivists she's influenced, Emily Pfothenauer will be the first to tell you that she's not an archivist. But her archives-adjacent work over the last decade and a half has left its mark on the field just the same.

Beginning with her work on the [Wisconsin Historical Society's Decorative Arts Database](#) in 2006, Emily touched on the archives field even as she pursued her first love of art history. The Decorative Arts Database combined her interest in material culture with the practice of digital collection creation and curation. Then in 2009, Emily joined WiLS (Wisconsin Library Services) in contributing to [Wisconsin Heritage Online](#), a collaborative effort to "inspire education and discovery by making Wisconsin's cultural heritage available to the public via the World Wide Web." Emily shepherded WHO until 2013, when it became [Recollection Wisconsin](#), and through another evolution in 2016 when it became the state's pathway to the Digital Public Library of America, which continues to grow today. Recollection Wisconsin has become a central resource for nearly 250 content partners' digital collections and shares expertise and resources about how to create, curate, and tend digital collections in organizations of all shapes and sizes. Emily's work with Recollection Wisconsin has also made it a critical hub for the DPLA network. Her stewardship of Recollection Wisconsin has made it an unmatched national model in terms of organization, governance, and success working across a statewide network of diverse cultural heritage organizations.

All of this is the backdrop for Emily's outstanding, quiet, unmistakable impact on the digital heritage environment in Wisconsin and beyond. I have the pleasure of writing this nomination as someone who has been deeply influenced by Emily's commitment to digital archives mentorship, first meeting her in 2019 as a graduate student and continuing to work as her colleague beginning in October 2020. Below are several key examples, in addition to her leadership on Recollection Wisconsin, of Emily's contributions:

- Emily's work with Wisconsin's Native Nations: beginning with the [Mukurtu Midwest hub](#) in 2017, Emily has led efforts to support Indigenous communities throughout Wisconsin in their own initiatives to digitize and make accessible, in culturally sensitive ways, their own cultural heritage materials. This work has included partnering with the [Tribal Libraries, Archives, and Museums class](#) at the [UW-Madison iSchool](#) - only one of the many ways Emily has mentored students throughout her time at WiLS. In particular, Emily's understanding of Indigenous heritage sovereignty informs her approach to both the projects and to how she teaches students to contribute responsibly to Indigenous digital collections work. She was also the lead advocate for funding for this work, successfully receiving funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the National Endowment for the Humanities over several years.

Mukurtu Midwest continues with the [Curating Indigenous Digital Collections project](#) that assists three different Wisconsin Native Nations in curating their own collections over a three-year period while also providing hands-on training and experience for three post-graduate fellows. Emily's influence will be felt in the next generation of Indigenous digital collections work as each of the three years of the project have offered fellowships to post-graduate students.

- Emily conceived of, received funding for and implemented the [Curating Community Digital Collections project](#). Funded by IMLS, the project partnered community cultural heritage organizations with library school students and digital collections mentors throughout Wisconsin. Students and site supervisors received training on digital preservation fundamentals and spent a summer practicum period writing institution-specific digital preservation policies. The relationships formed by students, supervisors, and mentors continue to be foundational to Wisconsin's digital collections practitioners. Emily's role in teaching complicated, technical concepts with patience and kindness was superseded in value only by her facilitating these key relationships around the state.

- Over the course of several years, Emily shepherded the [Digital Readiness Community of Practice](#), funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The project gathered data on the needs of small and under-resourced cultural heritage organizations throughout Wisconsin. The Community of Practice then implemented responses to those needs, including the [Digital Readiness Toolkit](#) and associated resources. The Toolkit is written intentionally to appeal to a broad audience, in accessible language and meeting digital projects practitioners (many of whom are volunteers) where they are. Emily is consistently committed to community-driven resources, as she listens closely to what people ask (and don't ask, out of fear and anxiety); she uses these observations to respond to the digital projects community around the state.

- Finally, Emily has taken on practicum students from the UW-Madison Information School many times, spending hours teaching students about the ins and outs of digital collections management with her trademark thoroughness, patience and intention.

Emily's influence is felt far and wide, in places less obvious. Countless students and new professionals have benefited from her thoughtful and knowledgeable leadership and her vast experience. She is genuinely committed to growing the circle of voices, forging new partnerships and communities, and making knowledge accessible to anyone who wants it. Historical practitioners across the state of Wisconsin will benefit for years to come from Emily's extraordinary ability to understand their needs and build innovative and exciting solutions.

The spotlight rarely falls on work like Emily's; the Society of American Archivists can shine the Spotlight Award on her consistent, tireless, deep dedication to digital cultural heritage.

**Other outstanding characteristics:**

Emily's skill in communicating the value and importance of the stewardship of digital collections, across audiences of all skill levels, is remarkable. She is simultaneously able to make digital collections knowledge accessible to nonprofessional volunteers in local historical societies and communicate complicated technical concepts to the IT departments at Tier 1 universities. Stakeholders at all levels benefit greatly from her advocacy for their needs in every direction.

Emily's track record in securing grants from federal agencies and private foundations highlights her ability to articulate the need as well as showcase thoughtful and thorough project management prowess. Having managed both statewide and national federal grant initiatives, she is a trusted voice in the state and across the country in digital archives.

It's been said a few times in this application but bears highlighting specifically:

Her ability to meet stakeholders and local historical organizations where they are in capacity and skill, without judgment, bringing an empathetic understanding of under-resourced and under-staffed organizational challenges - this is the core of Emily's contribution to the statewide landscape. Recollection Wisconsin would not be the vast set of resources that it is, with 250 content partners and millions of annual page views, without her knowledge and empathy.