



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF PRESERVATION AND ACCESS

## **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the NEH Division of Preservation and Access application guidelines at <http://www.neh.gov/divisions/preservation> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Preservation and Access staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Our Stories: South Asian Americans in Los Angeles

Institution: South Asian American Digital Archive NFP

Project Director: Samip Kumar

Grant Program: Common Heritage

**A. What is the significance of this event to the community’s members and its cultural institutions?** In 1928, Vaishno Das Bagai, one of the first known South Asian immigrants to the U.S., checked into a hotel in San Jose, turned on the gas oven, and killed himself. Bagai was a member of the Ghadar Party, a political organization advocating for an end to British colonial rule in India. He had become an American citizen in 1921, but was forcibly denaturalized following the 1923 Supreme Court decision that deemed South Asians ineligible for citizenship on racial grounds. The effects of losing U.S. citizenship were traumatic for Bagai – he was forced to liquidate his property, including his San Francisco-based general store. Furthermore, he was denied a U.S. passport to visit India and was instead recommended to apply for a British passport and resume his British citizenship. Increasingly disillusioned, Bagai took his own life. In a suicide note left behind to his family and published in the *San Francisco Examiner*, Bagai wrote: “I do not choose to live the life of an interned person: yes, I am in a free country and can move about where and when I wish inside the country. [But], is life worth living in a gilded cage? Obstacles this way, blockades that way, and the bridges burnt behind<sup>1</sup>.”

Bagai’s possessions were inherited by his granddaughter, Rani Bagai. She kept the boxes full of her grandfather’s correspondence, photographs, political writings, and religious pamphlets in her home in Los Angeles’ Koreatown neighborhood. Though she could not bear to part with them, Rani knew that these materials were historically important and relevant to the experiences of other South Asians in the United States. In 2012, she allowed volunteers from the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) to digitize them for online access. This collection is just one example of the type of historic materials that are in the hands of community members in Los Angeles, waiting to be digitized, made accessible, and used by scholars, students, and community members.

South Asian Americans have been a presence in the United States, and in California specifically, for more than 130 years. Early immigrants during the first wave of immigration from South Asia in the late 1800s and early 1900s worked on farms and in factories, helped build railroads, studied at California’s universities, fought for India’s freedom from British rule, and struggled for equal rights at home. The first Asian American congressman, Dalip Singh Saund, represented the 29<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Southern California in the mid -1950s. Today, more than 3.4 million individuals in the U.S. trace their heritage to South Asia. In Los Angeles County alone, there are 114,922 South Asian Americans according to the 2010 census, or 1.2% of the total population. More strikingly, South Asians are one of the fastest growing communities in LA County; between 2000 and 2010, LA County’s Bangladeshi population grew 122%, Pakistanis 59%, Sri Lankans 45%, and Indians 29% in comparison to only a 3% total population growth in Los Angeles County over the same time period.<sup>2</sup> The South Asian American population in Los Angeles includes communities and individuals as diverse as: descendants of the first wave of South Asian laborers and students who came to the West Coast at the turn of last century; physicians, engineers, and other academic professionals who came from India following the passage of the Immigration & Nationality Act of 1965; and more recent working class immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The proposed “Our Stories: South Asian Americans in Los Angeles” events seek to uncover the undocumented, under-documented, untold and little-known histories of Los Angeles’ South Asian American communities. We define South Asian America broadly, to include those in the U.S. who trace their heritage through one or more ancestors to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe.

The applicant organization, SAADA, is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that digitally documents, preserves, and shares stories of South Asian Americans, giving voice to overlooked histories

---

<sup>1</sup> Read more at <http://www.saada.org/tides/article/20140806-3682>

<sup>2</sup> Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los Angeles, “A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in Los Angeles,” 2013.

and creating a more inclusive society for future generations. Through its website (<http://www.saada.org>), SAADA provides free public access to digital copies of archival records documenting South Asian American history. Established in 2008, this archive is the largest publicly accessible collection of materials related to the experiences of South Asians in the United States. SAADA works creatively to reimagine the possibilities of storytelling in the digital era. For example, through its First Days Project (<http://www.firstdaysproject.org>), SAADA provides a platform for immigrants from around the world to document their own histories by creating brief video, audio, or textual records about their first experiences in the U.S.

As the only community-based national organization that is systematically documenting and archiving the stories of South Asian communities in the U.S., SAADA is uniquely placed to conduct this project. As evidenced in earlier projects such as the “First Days Project,” SAADA’s approach to archives underscores communities and individuals creating and maintaining ownership over their materials, their archives, and ultimately their own narratives. This means that the proposed project is driven by stories and materials collected from and by South Asian American communities, and thus ensures that community members shape the narrative that is being shared.

South Asian American stories are an integral part of the history of the United States, California, and Los Angeles, yet very little information is available to the public about these stories, including to South Asian Americans themselves. SAADA has already undertaken significant work to digitize important collections of archival materials related to South Asian American immigrants in Los Angeles; for example, in addition to the Bagai collection described above (315 items), SAADA’s archive includes materials related to Bhagwan Singh Gyanee, a community-leader in the 1950s (265 items), Bhagat Singh Thind, whose case for citizenship went to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1923 (28 items), as well as Congressman Dalip Singh Saund (described above). Of the more than 2,100 archival objects currently in SAADA’s archive, 457 (22%) of these items were created in the State of California. The proposed project builds on these strengths by linking these historical materials with the everyday materials documenting both the recent history and contemporary lives of community members.

As South Asian communities in Los Angeles are as diffuse as they are diverse, the proposed “Our Stories: South Asian Americans in Los Angeles” project will take place at two different venues in the Los Angeles area: at the Artesia Library, which is the Los Angeles County public library branch in Artesia, CA, which is known as Los Angeles’ “Little India” neighborhood; and at a community venue such as the YMCA or a City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks facility in the “Little Bangladesh” section of Koreatown. These two communities, roughly 20 miles apart, reflect vastly different experiences of what it means to be South Asian American and showcase a microcosm of the diversity of stories within one immigrant community. The events will highlight the importance of preserving South Asian American stories and communicate the idea that everyday community history *is* important history. In this way, the events will serve to counter the ways in which South Asian Americans have been ignored and/or misrepresented by mainstream media and memory institutions such as history textbooks, classrooms, museums, and archives. Furthermore, the events will help build connections within the community by asserting the importance of a pan-South Asian American identity beyond national, religious, and regional boundaries. Lastly, these events will expose the broader public to the stories of a more recent and quickly growing immigrant group that they may know little about.

**B. What arrangements need to be made to digitize the public’s cultural heritage materials, to get information for the metadata describing each item, and to provide access to the digital copies?**

SAADA has operated an innovative post-custodial digital-only archive since 2008. In its approach, SAADA does not take physical custody of archival collections, but rather, borrows them from individuals, families, organizations, and other archival repositories, digitizes them according to the Library of Congress preservation standards, describes them using culturally appropriate terminology, and

makes them freely accessible online. As such, the infrastructure is already in place to smoothly carry out the proposed project.

At both sites (Artesia and Little Bangladesh), public venues will be used for both the digitization and public programming aspects, which will occur on the same day.

At both sites, digitization stations will be set up for the public to bring in their materials for digitization. SAADA staff will transport SAADA's high-quality large-format Epson1000XL scanner from its current location at UCLA (where SAADA co-founder and board member Michelle Caswell is faculty) to the venues. Two commercial-grade Canon LiDE 220 portable flatbed scanners will also be purchased for use in this project. (After the project is over, these newly acquired scanners will be used by SAADA in its digitization work.) These three scanners will create three simultaneously operating digitization stations. Equipment to digitize audio recordings and home movies in a variety of formats will also be borrowed from UCLA's Department of Information Studies.

Each station will be staffed by an MLIS student from UCLA's Department of Information Studies, who will be trained to go over SAADA's Donor Agreement Form with the participants, carefully handle the materials, digitize them according to Library of Congress preservation standards, and interview community members who brought the items in order to obtain crucial contextual information for subsequent creation of metadata. For example, participants will be asked to provide information about the date, location, creator, and context of the digitized item in order to later create descriptive item-level metadata according to the Dublin Core metadata standard. Students will also ask community members to share a short narrative about the items they brought in and their connection to these items. These narratives will be recorded and made available online alongside the digitized items. Students will provide guidance to community members on how best to store their materials for preservation purposes. Students will also upload a copy of the high-resolution digital files to a public server and email a link to the donor so that they can later be downloaded by the donor from home. All participants will be asked to sign SAADA's Rights Agreement form, which is described below.

The digital files will immediately be uploaded to SAADA's cloud storage and added into SAADA's redundant storage workflow. These files will later be appraised in accordance with professional archival practice using SAADA's collection development policy as guidelines.<sup>3</sup> Materials that fit within the scope of SAADA's collection policy will then be accessioned by the archive, described using Dublin Core metadata based on the interviews conducted with participants, and made publicly accessible via the SAADA website, <http://www.saada.org>. All viable materials digitized for the project will be made accessible online through a separate web interface developed specifically for this project at <http://www.saada.org/losangeles>.

To summarize, UCLA MLIS student workers will staff each digitization station and complete the following tasks with each participant:

1. Explain SAADA's Donor Agreement and ask donor to sign the form.
2. Digitize the items according to digital preservation standards.
3. Ask for and write down contextual information about the item so that metadata can be created.
4. Ask for and record a short narrative about the item and its significance to the donor. With the donor's permission, this recording will then accompany the digitally accessible item online.
5. Give the donor advice about how best to preserve the physical item at home.
6. Give the donor information about how the digital copies can be accessed online.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.saada.org/contribute>

The SAADA website is built using Drupal 7 (<https://www.drupal.org>), the open-source content management system, and hosted on the Pantheon (<https://pantheon.io>) website management platform. SAADA uses the LOCKSS (“Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe”) principle as the basis of its digital preservation methodology. Digital files are kept in three locations: one Amazon S3 bucket and two local servers. Files are periodically checked for bit rot and other signs of damage. The SAADA website is also backed up daily in triplicate using Pantheon’s in-built mechanisms. The SAADA archive currently comprises nearly 1TB of data.

The project will be promoted both through SAADA’s existing channels and new outreach conducted specifically for this project. The SAADA website, which will be home to the online interface for the project, received more than 160,000 users in the last year alone. Stories and materials from the project will also be highlighted through social media and email lists. The organization has 3,099 followers on Facebook, 999 on Twitter, and maintains an active email list with 2,035 subscribers. Targeted outreach for the project will also be conducted, including press releases publicizing the project and key findings and advertisements in Los Angeles media outlets and South Asian American community newspapers and websites such as *India West*, *India Currents*, *India Abroad*, NBC News Asian America, Angry Asian Man, and others. SAADA and its projects have previously been featured by community publications across the United States and in South Asia<sup>4</sup>, and the organization will draw upon these existing press relationships to promote this project as well.

Although the event will be marketed to South Asian Americans through community channels, no one will be turned away from having their materials digitized at the event. All of the materials scanned at the digitization day events will be made available online on a section of the SAADA website for the project, however only those items that fit within SAADA’s collection policy will be accessioned into the online archive.

The project will be co-directed by SAADA’s Co-Founders, Samip Mallick and Michelle Caswell, who will supervise the digitization and run the public program on both days. For the last three years, Mallick has worked full-time as SAADA’s Executive Director. Mallick is a professionally trained archivist with a B.S.E. in computer science and a Master’s of Library and Information Science (MLIS). Caswell serves on SAADA’s Board of Directors. She is an assistant professor of archival studies at UCLA with an MLIS and PhD in Information Studies. SAADA’s seven-member community-based board of directors<sup>5</sup> (made up of two MLIS-trained archivists, two professors of Asian American studies, a lawyer, a journalist, and a digital marketing strategist) will oversee the project in full.

During both events, Caswell will also pass out brief questionnaires to participants as they exit in order to evaluate the impact of the project on community members (see Appendix B).

**C. In digitizing and providing access to the public’s historical materials, what plans will be in place to deal with intellectual property rights and the permissions process?**

Community participants will be asked to sign SAADA’s Donor Agreement form (Appendix A), which gives SAADA the non-exclusive rights to publish digital copies of the materials. Participants will not be required to sign this form in order to get their materials digitized; however, a signed form *will be* required for the materials to be made accessible via the SAADA website.

**D. What kind or kinds of public programming are proposed?**

After a 4-hour digitization event on each day, Mallick and Caswell will run a 1.5-hour public program. The first 45 minutes of the event will consist of an interactive presentation on South Asian American

---

<sup>4</sup> See a full list of press coverage of SAADA at <http://www.saada.org/press>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.saada.org/board-of-directors>

history featuring images and multimedia from the archive. Mallick and Caswell have spoken at more than 70 such events around the country in the past seven years since SAADA's founding. The next 45 minutes will highlight materials that were digitized earlier in the day, and will include Mallick and Caswell contextualizing the materials, as well as community participants discussing the personal and cultural significance of the materials, if they are willing. In this section of the event, digitized materials will be projected on a wall of the venue and publicly shared.

Both events will occur over a single weekend during Asian Pacific American Heritage Month in May 2016. Mallick and Caswell will hold a training session for the student workers on the Friday before the events. The event at the Artesia Library will be held on a Saturday during regular library hours. The event in Koreatown will be held on a Sunday.

## **E. What is the plan of work for the project?**

### **January 2016**

- Confirm community venues and reserve dates: Samip Mallick

### **February 2016**

- Build project website at <http://www.saada.org/losangeles>: Samip Mallick

### **March 2016**

- Build project website at <http://www.saada.org/losangeles>: Samip Mallick

### **April 2016**

- Write a press release to publicize the event: Samip Mallick
- Publicize events through SAADA's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Email List, SAADA's Blog): Samip Mallick
- Publicize events through Los Angeles South Asian American community channels: Samip Mallick

### **May 2016**

- Publicize events through SAADA's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Email List, SAADA's Blog): Samip Mallick
- Publicize events through Los Angeles South Asian American community channels such as newspapers and websites: Samip Mallick
- Samip flies to Los Angeles for Our Stories training and events: Samip Mallick
- Hold one day digitization training for 3 UCLA MLIS Students: Samip Mallick and Michelle Caswell
- Artesia Our Stories Event: Samip Mallick, Michelle Caswell, and 3 MLIS students
- Little Bangladesh Our Stories Event: Samip Mallick, Michelle Caswell, and 3 MLIS students

### **June 2016**

- Follow up with community members from events: Samip Mallick
- Evaluation of impact using data collected at events: Michelle Caswell
- Publicize project website through SAADA's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Email List): Samip Mallick
- Write blog post on SAADA's blog *Tides* describing the events: Michelle Caswell
- Appraise digitized materials for inclusion in SAADA's archive: Samip Mallick and Michelle Caswell
- Ingest appraised materials and metadata into SAADA's archive: Samip Mallick