The South Asia Open Archives (SAOA) has grown immensely over the past year, from March 2019 to March 2020. The October 18, 2019 public launch of SAOA (saoa.crl.edu) was the result of nearly five years of project planning, collection building, and infrastructure development. Since the public launch with 350,000 pages, SAOA has grown by 57% to its current collection of 15,000 items and 550,000 pages. The collection is curated currently around the following themes: Social and Economic History, Literature, Women and Gender, and Caste and Social Structure.

SAOA, with administrative support from the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), is pleased to share updates on behalf of the Executive Board and the Working Groups on Digitization, Infrastructure, and Funding. To learn more about SAOA’s activities, colleagues are encouraged to attend the upcoming virtual SAOA meeting on Thursday, March 19, 9:30-11:00am (Central Time). Further information on SAOA is available on the CRL website.

Executive Board
David Faust (2019-2022), SAOA Co-Chair (2019-2020), University of Minnesota
Aruna Magier (2018-2021), SAOA Co-Chair (2019-2020), New York University
David Magier (2017-2020), Princeton University
Mara Thacker (2019-2020; ex officio), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Judy Alspach, Center for Research Libraries

The SAOA Executive Board has guided the organization since its inception, through its recent public launch, and into the planning stage for SAOA’s next five years. Over the past few months, the Executive Board has focused on building the collections, drafting the Second 5-Year Plan, reaching financial sustainability, and preparing for the upcoming membership renewals. Additionally, SAOA’s outreach has helped make an immediate impact on South Asian studies, as documented in the Publicity Scrapbook. Representatives from member institutions have taken opportunities to present on SAOA in a variety of forums including conferences and roundtables in South Asia and North America. These efforts have promoted the resource to new audiences and have planted seeds for possible future collaborations.

SAOA would like to acknowledge the critical contributions of its Members and the federally-funded South Asia National Resource Centers which help sustain ongoing program costs. In order to expand SAOA’s community, please refer potential members to the How to Become a Member page and follow the new Facebook and Instagram pages.

Digitization Working Group
Aruna Magier (Chair), New York University
Deepa Banerjee, University of Washington
Abhijit Bhattacharya, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
Gary Hausman, Columbia University
Jeffrey Martin, University of Michigan
Gautham Reddy, Emory University

The Digitization Working Group identifies, evaluates, selects, and prioritizes important primary and secondary sources for SAOA’s curated collections. The group’s recently approved proposals include Bombay Presidency Reports - Part III (held by the Roja Muthiah Research Library, Chennai), Hindi Punch.
An important earlier project now available in SAOA is Jugantar (held by the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta). The Digitization Working Group is currently working directly with a number of archives and libraries to explore inclusion of their special collections. For example, the working group initiated a new partnership with the American Institute for Lankan Studies (AILS) and Princeton University Library that will bring a digitized archive of dissent from Sri Lanka to integrated discovery and access in SAOA. To help guide SAOA’s collection development priorities during the next 5-year plan, the group also made recommendations for significantly expanding collection scope to include additional themes, wider geographic coverage, more languages, post-colonial materials, and new resource types such as image collections, audio, video, data sets, and maps. As SAOA continues pursuing new research materials, please feel free to make proposals through the online suggestion form.

Infrastructure Working Group
David Faust (Chair), University of Minnesota
David Magier, Princeton University
Mary Rader, University of Texas
Laura Ring, University of Chicago
G. Sundar, Roja Muthiah Research Library

The Infrastructure Working Group provides guidance on all matters associated with the technology and framework of SAOA. In order to prepare for the SAOA launch, the Infrastructure Working Group was instrumental in the process of adapting to the JSTOR Forum cataloging environment, increasing the efficiency of upload and ingest, improving the quality control procedures, as well as registering the URL (saoa.crl.edu) and implementing the redirect. Over the summer, the Infrastructure Working Group guided SAOA through the user testing phase and continually provided input to JSTOR on the SAOA site and discovery interface. The Infrastructure Working Group updated the Digitization Guidelines in November 2019. In 2020, the Infrastructure Working Group has made significant progress on identifying a dark archive for SAOA’s long term preservation needs.

Funding Working Group
David Magier (Chair), Princeton University
Ellen Ambrosone, Princeton University
Karen Farrell, Indiana University
Todd Michelson-Ambelang, University of Wisconsin
James Nye, University of Chicago
Mara Thacker, University of Illinois

The Funding Working Group has been working on projects to reach financial sustainability over the next five years. The Funding Working Group discussed membership renewal strategies, the Statement of Value, and the financial aspects of SAOA’s Next 5-Year Plan. The Funding Working Group has also explored ideas for new membership models in order to expand SAOA’s community. Additionally, SAOA has welcomed Michigan State University as a new member. In July 2019, SAOA submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) through the Center for Research Libraries to make accessible the 1931 decennial census of British India and the Princely States – which included the current nation-states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma – the census of Ceylon, and the census of the Maldives. SAOA expects to hear whether the project is funded in December 2020. The Funding Working Group is currently drafting a CLIR Digitizing Hidden Collections grant proposal for a project to digitize Indian Official Publications.