



Above: worker-owners of ENTRE Film Center, from left to right: Andres Sanchez, C. Díaz, and Monica Sosa

Case Study: ENTRE Film Center and Regional Archive

Preserving Media Through Holistic Community Participation and Activation of Place

Magnetic Media Collection Size: Micro collection size (200 items)

Staff Size: One full-time staff, two part-time staff, volunteers and interns

Annual Budget: Small Budget Size (\$50,000)

Digitization Rate (previous year): Small digitization rate (35 items)

Location: Harlingen, Texas, Rio Grande Valley



Above: ENTRE Film Center and Regional Archive

Introduction

ENTRE Film Center and Regional Archive (ENTRE) is an artist-run community film center and regional archive founded in 2021 and located in Harlingen, Texas, in the border region of the Rio Grande Valley. It focuses on the creation, exhibition, and preservation of community-made cinema, documentary, video art, and other forms of alternative cinematic expression from the four counties making up the Valley: Cameron County, Hidalgo County, Willacy County, and Starr County.

Mission and Model

ENTRE's mission is to provide access, knowledge, and skills in filmmaking and archival practices, inviting more voices to document, share, and preserve the vast narrative of US/Mexico border communities.

"We are nonhierarchical and NOT a nonprofit, so we are doing things differently. But we are not profit-driven. It would be great to show other people what is possible. Especially for a small organization."



Above: Co-founder and worker-owner Andres Sanchez explaining the significance of the logo—a Super 8 camera made of the 4 Rio Grande Valley counties ENTRE serves.

ENTRE's model is significantly different from a traditional institutional archive. It operates as a worker-owned cooperative, rather than a nonprofit. It is collectively owned and operated by the two co-founders and a third worker-owner. ENTRE is also a screening venue offering multiple film screenings per month—including Home Movie Day Screenings, screenings of archival footage of local communities, pop culture films, documentaries, and independent films. Often the screenings are curated by a guest programmer from the community, who presents the films and encourages discussion. It is also a community education center—offering classes in photography, personal archiving, and media making. An example of recent classes is analog film processing using plants and soil that come from the region. The ENTRE space, located in downtown Harlingen, Texas is where digitization takes place. They do not store physical collections, because their space is not equipped with proper storage conditions to do so. They have a digitization station that staff members use to digitize magnetic media as a fee-for-service. To encourage local participation, the station is free for local participants who want to digitize home movies and personal footage on their own. ENTRE offers an approach to preservation and access of magnetic media that prioritizes community engagement in preservation and curation.

Economic Model

ENTRE receives roughly 75% of its funds from nongovernment grants and 25% of its funds from for-profit activities. As a cooperative, they receive and manage grant funds, as well as a small amount of funding from community members who pay for the low-cost digitization of their home movies. Digitization is available at a low cost of \$20 per tape.



Above left: Artist Lilith de la Torre preparing an ofrenda for Dia de Los Muertos.

Above right: Downtown Harlingen, Texas.

Reliance on personal connections and community ties is strong. For example, because of their personal enthusiasm for the collection, the building owner offers a below-market-value rent. The decision to use a cooperative model rather than a for-profit model was carefully considered because the worker-owners believed that a worker-owned cooperative provided them with more flexibility to perform social justice work as well as greater freedom of expression. They report that none of the worker-owners “make a living wage.”

Staff

Of the three collective worker-owners, ENTRE employs one full-time paid staff member. Much of the work is done on a volunteer basis while the worker-owners maintain other jobs. Grants occasionally support artists and creative projects, such as the creation of the altar for Dia de los Muertos, where ofrendas (offerings) are placed on an altar in remembrance and prayer for deceased loved ones. These offerings traditionally include photographs; however, the ofrenda at ENTRE includes film as a centerpiece, emphasizing the blending of media with traditional cultural practices. The worker-owners, artists, and community members in charge of programming and digitization each bring their own personal and professional experiences to the project. No one on the team has received formal academic instruction as an archivist, despite having a variety of production-related training.

Volunteers and Interns

Volunteers and interns help with collection cataloging, teaching classes, curating screenings and events, and creating artworks and installations. Ongoing programs provide an opportunity for local community members to develop new skills outside their normal profession or studies—such as film curation or public speaking—that support their careers or interests.

Community Served

ENTRE's programs are hyper-local, with the primary community served being those living in the Rio Grande Valley, mostly on the American side. The organizations' worker-owners expressed interest in doing more work in Mexico.



Above: C. discussing plans to turn the courtyard behind ENTRE into an outdoor community space

Significant Collections

The primary focus of ENTRE's archive is the preservation of home movies, especially those that depict life in the Rio Grande Valley. This region, rich in cultural diversity, has long been underrepresented in mainstream media, and the worker-owners aim to correct this by collecting, digitizing, and sharing local history. To be considered for inclusion in the collection and digitization, footage must be locally produced, in the hands of a local person, or have a local connection.

ENTRE has two collecting and digitization streams. The first is a Rio Grande Valley-focused project, the Texas Film Round-Up, a program initiated by the Texas Archive of the Moving Image (TAMI). The Texas Film Round-Up offers free digitization for Texas-related films and videotapes in exchange for the donation of a digital copy of the materials to TexasArchive.org. In 2023, ENTRE partnered with TAMI to do a local, Rio Grande Valley-focused version of the Texas Film Round Up. This was an essential step in the expansion of the Film Center into archival practice. The collaboration culminated in a major collection effort, gathering over 2,000 pieces of film and video materials, including both magnetic media (VHS, Hi8, MiniDV, Betamax) and film formats (16mm, Super 8, Regular 8). "TAMI came into town and we had one big final push for collections. We ended up on the news on Sunday morning and that hit the jackpot," explained worker-owner C., "People were in a line outside the museum waiting to bring their tapes in, and they were bringing baskets and bags of tapes. We were nonstop in taking stuff." The second stream of collecting is an ongoing community home movie digitization program. Locals can have their materials digitized for a small fee, or they can do it themselves for free if they learn how to use the digitization equipment. ENTRE does not keep physical, analog materials after digitization because it does not have proper temperature and relative humidity storage conditions. Families take home a digital copy of their home movie and the original. The digital files remain on a hard drive at ENTRE, but there is no present clear plan to maintain the digital collection long-term.

C. Díaz's Family Collection is one important section in the collection. It includes their grandfather's Super 8 home movies. These films, which date back to the 1970s, document the opening of their grandfather's chain of grocery stores across the Valley. But what makes these films particularly meaningful is the magnetic sound accompanying them—capturing not only images but also the distinctive way people in the region speak. The accents and rhythm of speech are a unique marker of regional identity.



Above Left: Boca Chica Beach today



Above Right: a photograph showing a family at Boca Chica Beach, circa 2000. Courtesy of Monica Sosa.

Boca Chica Corazon Grande Collection and Project

C. notes: "We have an ongoing community archival project that's called Boca Chica, Corazón Grande, where we're trying to collect documentation of Boca Chica Beach, which is where SpaceX is currently located." As a central place for community gathering that is rapidly changing from a somewhat isolated natural and community area due to SpaceX's incoming industry, Boca Chica Beach represents a critical documentation gap—with only three photographs from the 1920s and 1930s at the Brownsville Historical Association and one 1960s home movie in TAMU's archive, making their collection potentially the largest of its kind.

"We want to train people in our community to steward the archive with us."

Digitization / Preservation

Because community and place are central to ENTRE's mission, decisions about preservation workflows and equipment choices support community accessibility and preservation of all materials while using the least amount of equipment possible for the job, as well as simplicity and streamlined workflows. The goal is to achieve the best possible digitization using the simplest, least expensive, and easiest-to-learn methodology and tools; this makes the workflow extremely sustainable, even if the file quality may not meet preservation standards for institutional archives that value technical precision and quality. The model allows community members to participate directly in community preservation work by operating the equipment.



Above: C. holds the digitization manual, which is used to train community members on how to use the equipment and to ensure consistency in digitization methods among staff.

Digitization Rate and Risk of Loss

ENTRE is one of the only organizations surveyed that stated they are 100% confident that they can preserve all of their materials. This is because no material is brought in unless it can be preserved. This could change if a significant collection comes in as a donation or if the relationship with TAMI ends.

Tape to File Digitization Workflow

Decision to Digitize / Curation

Any Rio Grande Valley-related material brought in by the community is digitized, provided ENTRE or TAMI has the necessary equipment.

Pre-Digitization

Community members who bring in material for digitization fill out an agreement form and choose whether to digitize their tapes themselves or pay a small fee to have ENTRE digitize them.

Triage, In-house vs. Out-of-house

Magnetic materials are digitized on-site. Film and materials gathered during the Texas Round-Up are digitized at TAMI in batches.

Intervention

Minor repairs and cleaning are done in-house. ENTRE reports seeing some moldy tapes, but few other issues.

Digitization Workflow

Tapes brought in through the Texas Film Round-Up are digitized offsite at TAMI in Austin, Texas, roughly a five-hour drive away from ENTRE. ENTRE has one in-house digitization station that is used for incoming materials by community members. The station is located in the ENTRE space, where education and training classes take place, as well as public events and screenings. It is always set up and ready to be used.



Above: Andres with ENTRE's digitization station. Andres does most of the digitization work.



Above: The ENTRE digitization set-up located behind their screening/educational area. The affordable analog-to-digital converter ENTRE uses.

The in-house digitization system is wired directly—there is no switcher or patch bay. Digitization equipment includes an iMac computer and several magnetic media decks and cameras (VHS, Super Betamax, mini DV, Hi-8, microcassette, and compact audio cassette). ENTRE also has optical media players. ENTRE uses a Lala Max cable as its analog-to-digital converter and connects the computer and decks through a series of cables and a CalDigit hub to accommodate for the lack of inputs on the computer.

They digitize directly to the computer hard drive, then move the material onto a LaCie spinning hard drive when the computer drive is full.

Target File Formats

ENTRE makes only one file, rather than a preservation and access file.

Audio: .wav; 24 bit; 48 Kh

Video: .mp4; 8 bit color; h.264 codec

Software

Airtable is used to store basic collection information, and OBS (Open Broadcast Software) is used to import video files. Audition, Audacity, and Reaper are used to import audio files. Adobe Premiere Pro is used to trim the files. The comments section in Apple software is used to add simple metadata, such as the client's name.



Above: C. points out the Airtable used to store collection information and their plans for building it out to accommodate more data.

Quality Control

ENTRE checks the beginning, middle, and end of digitized files to look for aberrations and audio sync issues. Occasionally files are imported into Premiere to manage audio sync issues.

Section: Equipment Sourcing and Repair

Most legacy equipment is sourced from estate sales, auctions, and donations. Donations play a key role due to close community ties. ENTRE does not have a relationship with a repair technician, however, they recently learned of the existence of a local TV repair person and will investigate this as a possible source of equipment repair and knowledge.

Auxiliary equipment

ENTRE has a backlog of equipment that is used for art-making and workshops and the artist in residence program. ENTRE has a BAVC Media Hands-on Training in Audiovisual Preservation (HOT-AV) kit, used to train in analog workflows and troubleshooting. They also have a collection of TV-VCR combos, used for video installations and demonstrations.



Above: C. and Andres with auxiliary equipment, including the BAVC Media HOT-AV kit and a collection of TV-VCR combos.

File Storage

Files digitized at ENTRE are placed in Dropbox, and clients have 30 days to download them. Files from the Texas Film Round-Up are currently stored on hard drives at TAMI. There is no central system for storing the entire digital collection.

Access, Copyright, and Licensing

A few films from the Texas Round-Up are currently streaming on TAMI's website. Access is also provided through community events like Home Movie Day and the Dia de los Muertos event. "We're not set up to do licensing," shared Andres, "I think that's something that might come up in the future."

Emergency and Disaster Issues and Preparedness

ENTRE has no formal emergency and disaster preparedness plan written. It can flood up to one foot of water in the area, and preparation for this is part of ENTRE's common practice. Before a storm, staff turn off electrical breakers and elevate materials and equipment off the floor. ENTRE keeps a surge protector that also has a battery charger.

"A lot of people don't know about the importance of preserving their materials—that it's important to hold onto their tapes. We are still helping people to grasp holding onto their culture."

Advocacy

Staff note that, because ENTRE is small, it is helpful to work with other organizations and communities that can amplify their voice and the work that they do.

Training and Education Needs

The ENTRE staff has no formal education and training in archival work. However, their combined experience in color grading, music recording, photography, and filmmaking, along with on-the-job training, brings a variety of skills to the program. The staff states that they would like more training and education in caring for and accessing digital files. They also point out that they would benefit from understanding models around open-source tools and software.

There is interest in training not only staff but also the community in caring for their own collections, with more tech fluency in general in the region being helpful, as some people do not have computer skills. As a young archive and a living and growing part of an ever-changing community, they also want to develop structured workflows that are easily shareable with new folks that come in to work with the team.

Next steps and goals

ENTRE has several visions and goals important to their next steps. The largest goal is to become a research center, including an interactive map geotagged with their archive collections of the region. The development of a strong succession plan that is flexible, responsive, and emergent over time is also important to the organization. More immediate goals include developing online streaming and access to digitized collections, in tandem with a strong digital storage and maintenance plan. ENTRE is interested in opportunities for collaboration with larger institutions and museums, which can support collection visibility.