Research Findings from the Building a National Finding Aid Network Project

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NAFAN

“A national finding aid network that is community-driven, sustained, and governed.”
NAFAN Research Findings – Five Reports

- Summary of Research
- Pop-up Survey of Users
- User Interviews
- Focus Group Interviews
- EAD Analysis

https://oc.lc/nafan-research
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- Rachel Walton, Rollins College
- Ricky Punzalan, University of Michigan, School of Information
Mixed Methods Research Design

- User Survey & Individual Interviews
- Archivist Focus Group Interviews
- Aggregated Finding Aid Data
RESEARCH FINDINGS
Value Proposition for NAFAN

“A core principle guiding work on this phase of work on NAFAN is that the project team must gather evidence to better understand and articulate the value proposition that a national aggregation can provide.”
Address Discovery Challenges

“It does take a lot of time…it's guessing what repository might have something, was this person based on the East Coast, or this company? It does take a lot of time and energy to try and find those archival materials.”

-- Professional Researcher
Address Discovery Challenges

“...being indexed through ArchiveGrid is the only way that we can currently search across our finding aids.”  -- Archivist, Academic Library, West
Address Discovery Challenges

“[Aggregation] makes our resources more discoverable, and it also puts them in a conversation with other resources at other institutions that are similar.”

--Curator, Academic Archive, West
Address Discovery Challenges

"A national aggregation can provide important value by making archival collections more visible and discoverable on the web and making connections between collections much more easily visible to users."
Address Access Challenges

Researchers need better support to access archives

Key Challenges:
• In-person research is prohibitive
• Mediated access is poorly supported
• Digital content delivery is clunky and confusing
Delivery Desires

• Easy to tell which repository has a collection
• Easy to find contact information or access policies
• Easy connection to digital content

“if everything was online, that would be my perfect world”

“information so I can contact that archive”

“intuitive to use”
Address Access Challenges

The NAFAN platform can provide value by:

• supporting access needs
• helping researchers find collections held nearby
• supporting easier access to digitized collections
"Archivists face significant barriers and challenges in creating and publishing archival description. Inefficiencies in participating in current archival aggregation systems can exacerbate these issues, creating additional or redundant work for archivists and preventing participation in aggregation."
“we’re doing a lot of manual encoding, which means that for us, EAD encoding does not happen as a priority...I'll be honest.”  
- Curator, Public library archive, Northeast
“We joined the [aggregator], and I have not put anything there yet because I have to reformat and redo the data that I have done already so that their system can read it and it's so time-consuming...”

--Archivist, Museum archive, Midwest
Address Inequity in the Archival Landscape

"Our research identifies that there is significant unevenness in the resources available to both archives and archival researchers, with real impacts on the historical record, scholarship, and knowledge access and dissemination"
Address Inequity in the Archival Landscape

Inequity for Archives and Researchers

Key Challenges:

• Visibility of collections held in small and underfunded archives
• Support for participation for small institutions
• Inequity in who can access archival collections
Potential Challenges to Sustainability

“A guiding principle for the NAFAN project has been ‘we must design our work with sustainability in mind from the outset.’”
Discovery Expectations & Data Realities

There is a tension between:

• Archivist attitudes around aggregation data requirements
• Users’ discovery desires
• Archivists’ discovery expectations
Cost Expectations & Resource Realities

There is a tension between:

• Archivists’ expectations for a low- or no-cost service
• Desired contributor support and aggregation features
“There is significant value to be drawn from a national aggregation of archival description, and there are significant challenges to overcome to build the community of participation a national finding aid aggregation will require to be sustainable.”

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Next Steps for NAFAN

Next phase will focus on sustainability and governance to build a robust and inclusive network:

- Establishing and coordinating institutional engagement
- Securing membership commitments

Summative grant report and market research forthcoming from CDL

- [https://confluence.ucop.edu/display/NAFAN/](https://confluence.ucop.edu/display/NAFAN/)
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