

CNI Project Briefing | August 2023

Research Findings from the Building a National Finding Aid Network Project

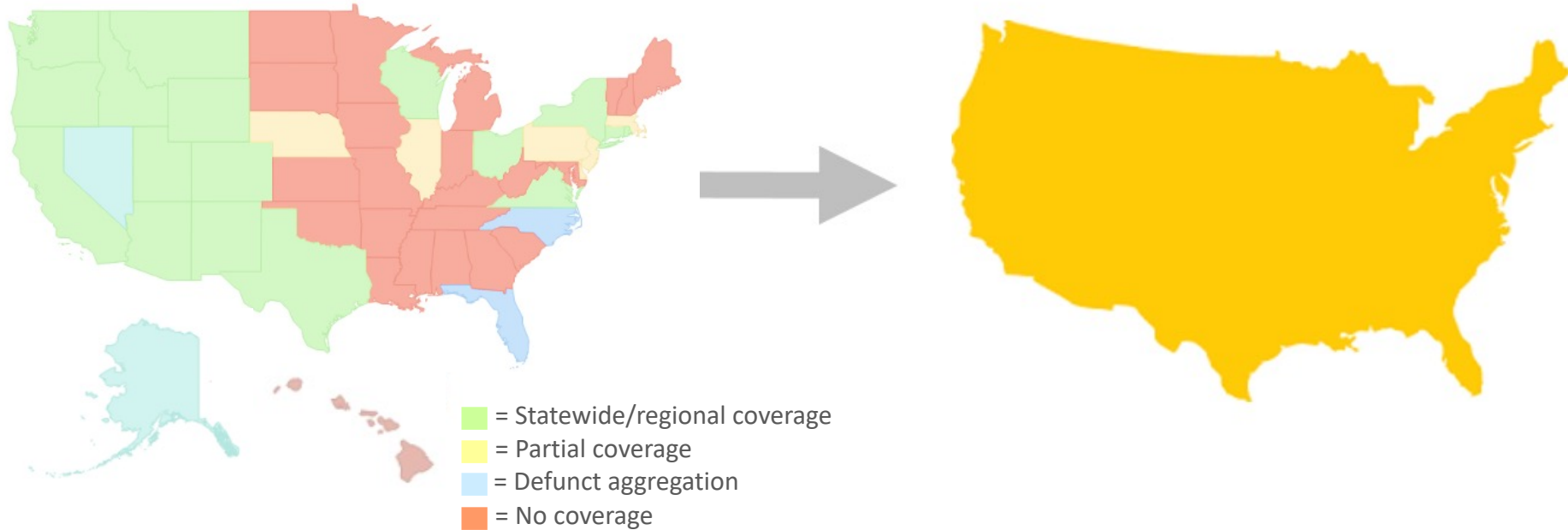
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NAFAN

“A national finding aid network that is community-driven, -sustained, and -governed.”



*not to scale

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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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”

“intuitive to use”



“information so I can contact that archive”

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

Address Archivists' Challenges

"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.**"

Archivists' Description Challenges

“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*

Archivists' Aggregation Challenges

“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

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