

# End-User Research Findings from the Building a National Finding Aid Network Project

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## Abstract

This presentation will share findings from end-user research from the Building a National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN), an IMLS-funded project building the vision for a broad, inclusive national network to provide access to archival description. It will focus on needs and behaviors of the broad range of users who search for archives online, drawn from semi-structured interviews with genealogists, graduate and undergraduate students, avocational, vocational, and faculty researchers.

There is a significant gap in the archival literature in understanding the needs of the broad range of researchers who search online for archival collections. Much early work in the field focused on researchers' understanding of finding aids as a genre, or interaction with finding aids rendered in online interfaces. More recent work has tried to determine the information-seeking behaviors and research practices of scholars using primary sources, but has focused almost entirely on historians and other academic researchers. Recent user personas developed for archival software projects indicate that users of archives are scholars, genealogists, avocational researchers, students, and a range of researchers using archives for their professional and creative work, as well as librarians and archivists. There is little research on this broader cross-section of users, but existing work indicates different researcher types have significantly different needs.

To address this gap and inform the NAFAN project, OCLC Research conducted both a pop-up survey and semi-structured interviews with users of regional archival aggregation websites. We will share findings from this research, focused on needs and behaviors of the broad range of users who search for archives online. The research offers useful insight for the NAFAN project that can inform other projects serving archival researchers, and surfaces new questions that may offer new paths of inquiry to fellow researchers of archival users.

## About the author:

*Chela Scott Weber* is a Sr. Program Officer for the OCLC Research Library Partnership, where she focuses on work supporting archives, special, and distinctive collections. Chela shapes learning and engagement programming designed to move the community forward in this strategically important area for research libraries, as well as serving as a liaison to broader special collections and archives communities. Her recent work includes leading the RLP Collection Building & Operational Impact Working Group, culminating in the publication of *Total Cost of Stewardship: Responsible Collection Building in Archives and Special Collections*, and leading OCLC's research efforts for the Building a National Finding Aid Network project.