Digitizing Hidden Collections: "Amplifying Unheard Voices"
Program Assessment

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Research Questions

Digitizing Hidden Special Collections: "Amplifying Unheard Voices" (DHC:AUV) is a grant program administered by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). Our assessment answers the following questions:

RQ1: What elements of the program, including the framing of the program call, guidelines, applicant support, and reviewer engagement, work well? What can be modified to improve applicant experiences?

RQ2: How can clarity and transparency of program operations, and participant satisfaction, be increased, particularly for participants located outside large institutional libraries or archives who may lack significant experience in grant seeking?

We examined applicant support, program structure, application language and timelines, proposal review activities, the communication of results to applicants, and applicant experience.

Methods & Data

We conducted the DHC:AUV program assessment from May 2021 to June 2022. We gathered perspectives from various program stakeholders (i.e., CLIR staff, reviewers, applicants, and those who expressed interest in the program). Our data sources include:

- **Survey**
  - 56 "non-applicants" (those who expressed interest in the program but did not apply)

- **Content analysis**
  - 7 program materials (e.g., program guidelines, applicant handbook, IP agreement, etc.)
  - 166 received eligible applications
  - 476 applicant support emails
  - 9 post-webinar surveys

- **Semi-structured interview**
  - 8 members of the review panel
  - 17 initial-stage applicants
  - 15 full-stage applicants
  - 3 unfunded applicants
  - 4 funded applicants

- **Four focus group discussion**
  - 1 with program staff
  - 3 with reviewers

Select Findings

RQ1:
- Applicants noted the **clarity, completeness, and approachability** of CLIR resource materials.
- Many applicants requested **additional applicant support activities**, such as consultations with program staff, review of application drafts, or open "office hours" to speak with CLIR staff.
- Increase **reviewer support and engagement**, including implicit bias awareness, a more structured rubric to guide evaluations and comments, and advice to create specific and actionable feedback to applicants.

RQ2:
- Additional activities may better "amplify unheard voices," specifically:
  1. to **identify collections representing underrepresented groups**, and
  2. ethically describe "unheard" collections and remove harmful or offensive terminology through **reparative description**.
- Remove recipient requirement to sign "intellectual property" contract, which transfers unrestricted license to CLIR or its designees, toward an agreement **respectful of community notions of ownership and access**.
- Further **shorten initial application**, removing file attachments and condensing project planning elements.

Council on Library and Information Resources

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