

Who Searches Archives Online? Results From a User Survey from 12 State and Regional Archival Finding Aid Aggregators (NAFAN)

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Who searches for archival materials online, and what are their purposes, behaviors, expectations, and needs? This is crucial for the development of any discovery system, but surprisingly little research has been done on users of archival finding aid aggregators. This presentation focuses on a survey of users hosted by twelve state and regional archival finding aid aggregators from across the U.S. It describes several initial key findings, including the demographics, types of projects, and search behaviors of the survey respondents. The presentation provides both descriptive statistics and an overview of how different demographic features, such as education, occupation, and gender, impact searches for archival materials. These findings will serve as a cornerstone of the Building a National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN) project, a two-year, IMLS-funded research and demonstration project that seeks to lay the foundation for a national finding aid network that serves as the central point of search for archival finding aids across all collections (LG-246349-OLS-20). With a purposive, convenience sample of more than 2,500 unique users responding, the survey is the first of its kind to describe the users of archival aggregation from a broad section of the U.S. population and what drives them towards archival aggregators online for their research projects.

About the authors:

Lesley Langa is a strategic research and program manager with over 15 years of experience managing national initiatives that address the needs of libraries, museums, and other heritage institutions. Her work focuses on access to information and cultural heritage collections, including who has access vs. who does not, how we curate and protect information for future study and use, how we support the cultural sector in its daily work to improve access and sustain our collective history. She is a policy-driven action researcher who aims to provide useful tools that can affect practice in the field and deliver practical solutions for cultural heritage professionals and helping to evaluate the mechanisms we use to do all of this. Her work has spanned several areas including digital collections, metadata management, evaluation and research, and user experience across the cultural heritage sector in museums, federal cultural agencies, and small nonprofits. She recently completed a PhD at the University of Maryland's iSchool.

Chris Cyr's research looks at the ways that public services are provided to local communities. He is interested in the contrast between services from private businesses, and services from government entities like libraries. He has looked at this contrast in diverse contexts around the world, ranging from Ohio to Somalia. Chris also researches the ways people get and evaluate their information in different online environments, including search engines, databases, and

repositories. Chris graduated from The Ohio State University with a BA in Political Science and History, and earned an MA and PhD in Political Science from the University of Colorado Boulder. Prior to his time at OCLC, Chris was an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Eastern Kentucky University, and an ABD Fellow at the One Earth Future Foundation.