

Creating, Maintaining, and Sharing Archival Descriptions: The Experiences and Values of US Archivists

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For the past 18 months, OCLC Research has been conducting original research as a part of Building a National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN), 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). This presentation will report on methodology and findings from 10 focus group interviews with 52 archivists. The focus group interview participants were selected to represent a wide variety of institution types and sizes, professional roles and responsibilities, and geographic distribution, reflecting the NAFAN project value “to support meaningful, inclusive and low-barrier pathways to cultural heritage institutions across the United States.” We will share how we approached designing a study to address our research questions and capture the voices of archivists, methods for data analysis, as well as high-level preliminary findings from the focus group interviews. Findings relate to the variety of constraining and enabling factors experienced in creating archival description. We also will summarize the factors that the focus group interview participants described as either motivating them to contribute to a national finding aid network, or limiting their participation in such a network.

About the author:

Merrilee Proffitt works in OCLC Research and provides expert support to institutions within the OCLC Research Library Partnership. In 2014, Merrilee was elected as a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists. She is the editor of [Leveraging Wikipedia: Connecting Communities of Knowledge](#) (ALA Editions, 2018) and a co-author on the recently published report, [Reimagine Descriptive Workflows: A Community-informed Agenda for Reparative and Inclusive Descriptive Practice](#). Her current projects and interests include supporting the work of unique and distinctive collections including working on the NAFAN project, and developing more inclusive descriptive practices for libraries and archives. Before coming to OCLC in 2001, Merrilee was Director of Digital Archive Development at the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.