

# CLIR's Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives Program: A Retrospective Assessment



Council on  
Library and  
Information  
Resources

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## PROGRAM SUMMARY

Through the generous support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, CLIR operated a regranting program from 2008-2014 to identify and catalog hidden special collections and archives in the United States and Canada. The program's aim was to improve access to materials of fundamental importance for research and teaching. Grant recipients adopted cataloging and processing methodologies that were broadly applicable, cost effective, and sustainable over time.

## BY THE NUMBERS

- 7 competitions for funding (2008-2014)
- Nearly \$27.5 million awarded
- 128 projects
- More than 170 participating institutions
- More than 6 million items made accessible
- Recipients created
  - More than 30,000 finding aids
  - More than 44,000 authority records
  - More than 304,000 MARC records
  - More than 358,000 item-level metadata records

## INSTITUTION TYPES

ACADEMIC (74)

Library

Library/Archive  
Library/Museum  
Library/Archive/Museum

GOVERNMENT (14)

Historical Society  
Agency  
Archive

Library/Archive/Museum  
Library/Archive

INDEPENDENT (72)

Museum

Association/Society  
Library/Archive  
Consortium Gallery Archive  
MediaOrganization Memorial Theater  
Library/Museum

Historical Society

Foundation  
Community Organization  
Library/Archive/Museum

PUBLIC (10)

Library

Library/Archive  
MediaOrganization



"There are many valuable collections held by such [small, community-based, and other non-conventional] institutions, collections that promise to diversify and enrich the historical record, and serve scholars, teachers, and learners in critically important ways."

- Rachel Mattson, La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (2013 cohort)

## 20 Years of Work on Hidden Collections

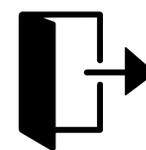
- 1998 [ARL Survey of Hidden Collections](#)
- 2000s
  - 2002 Library of Congress revises [EAD schema](#)
  - 2003 ARL publishes [Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers](#) & hosts [Exposing Hidden Collections working conference](#); LC publishes [What is FRBR?](#)
  - 2004 SAA approves [DACs; Archivists' Toolkit](#) released; Revisions to AACR2r begin
  - 2005 Greene/Meissner publish "[More Product, Less Process](#)"
  - 2006 [Archon](#) is released
  - 2008 [The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#) awards \$20 million over 5 years for CLIR's Hidden Collections initiative
  - 2009 CLIR releases [Spiro Report](#) on archival management software; ARL [Special Collections in ARL Libraries](#); OCLC conducts [survey on special collections and archives](#)
- 2010s
  - 2010 [RDA Toolkit](#) is published; work begins on [SNAC](#) to expand adoption of linked data
  - 2012 LC begins work on [BIBFRAME](#) to replace MARC21
  - 2013 SAA revises DACs; [ArchivesSpace](#) is released
  - 2014 Final cohort of [Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives](#)
  - 2015 EAD3 is released; First cohort of [Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives](#) awarded
  - 2019 Final [Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives](#) projects end

## INSIGHTS

- Nearly 90% of projects met or exceeded processing goals enumerated in applications.
  - Observations:** The high rate of success was complicated when CLIR staff found processing outputs were unable to be located or confirmed due to such things as dead links, password protected databases, or omission of reliable data that could be used to perform searches.
- 75% of projects required at least one extension to their project timeline.
  - Observations:** Many factors contributed to extensions, including delayed hiring, staff turnover, unexpected system migrations and issues, and over- or under-estimating the amount of hidden materials.
- The majority of projects surveyed in 2018 have maintained online access to descriptive outputs.
  - Observations:** Those reporting access challenges cited budget cutbacks that affected subscription services and staffing, technology issues which delayed publication, and encoding challenges when dealing with migration of legacy metadata.

## FUTURE QUESTIONS

- **Integrating Description with Digitization:** How can workflows be optimized to enable both appropriate levels of description and quality digitization for diverse material types?
- **Sustaining Access:** What work needs to be done to assure sustainability of infrastructures for discovery and access to special collections and archives when institutions are faced with difficult financial choices? What percentage of descriptive data is lost over time?
- **Ethical Staffing:** What are the career outcomes of those who work on grant-funded projects on short-term contracts? How can funders support career development in ethical ways?



"Cataloging is the backbone of collections, the doorway to access to materials."

- Latse Library (2014 cohort)

## METHODOLOGY

In early 2018, CLIR conducted a comprehensive analysis of submitted project reports, reported processing totals (as of June 2018), and responses from an online survey distributed to current employees of recipient institutions. Numbers on this poster reflect the data submitted in reports. For more information on this process and plans for a future public report, [visit CLIR's website](#).



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