



Research Findings from Building a National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN)

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Researchers face significant challenges to finding and using archival collections relevant to their interests. Many archives struggle to publish their finding aids online. Those archives that do have information about their holdings online often only make these available on their website, requiring researchers to conduct repetitive inquiries in siloed systems. Regionally based aggregators of archival description have contributed significantly to making archives more visible on the web. Still, only 14 aggregators covering archives in 23 states currently exist in the US.

OCLC led research for the Building a National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN), an IMLS-supported research and demonstration project rooted in the goal of providing inclusive, comprehensive, and persistent access to

finding aids by laying the foundation for a national finding aid network. The project was led by California Digital Library, with partners at OCLC, the University of Virginia Library, Shift Collective, and Chain Bridge Group.

OCLC has published five reports detailing findings from their work, representing an unprecedented level of research for the archival community. This research will inform the next steps for the NAFAN project and offers a wealth of information on archival user behavior and needs and the current state of archival description workflows and data.

OCLC Research is one of the world's leading centers devoted exclusively to the challenges facing libraries in a rapidly changing information technology environment. OCLC Research works with the community to collaboratively identify problems and opportunities, prototype and test solutions, and shares findings through publications, presentations and professional interactions.

An unprecedented level of research effort to benefit archives

OCLC was responsible for conducting and synthesizing research to understand the needs of both archival researchers and cultural heritage institutions regarding finding aid aggregation, and for an evaluation of the quality of existing finding aid data at scale.

OCLC has published five reports on its research findings:

- **Summary of Research**—Synthesizes findings from across all research activities on the NAFAN grant
- **Pop-up Survey**—Summarizes results from a national survey of online archive users on their search behavior, information needs, and demographic characteristics
- **User Interviews**—Details findings from interviews with archival aggregation end users on their information needs and information-seeking behavior
- **Focus Group Interviews**—Shares outcomes from focus group discussions with archivists to examine their needs for describing collections and contributing description to an archival aggregation
- **EAD Analysis**—Reports on an analysis of the consistency and structure of EAD data to understand how well it can support discovery of archival collections

A NATIONAL FINDING AID NETWORK MUST ADDRESS:

- **Discovery challenges**
Make archival collections more visible and discoverable on the web
- **Access challenges**
Support users to more easily access archives in person and online
- **Archivists' challenges**
Address inefficiencies that make aggregation participation difficult
- **Inequity in the archival landscape**
Make discovery of archives and participation in aggregation easier
- **Potential challenges to sustainability**
Address tensions between expectations for a national aggregation system with available data and funding resources

The research described in these reports provides valuable insight that can be used by the NAFAN project and inform other projects serving archival researchers and archivists, those wishing to leverage archival descriptive data, and researchers of archives and archival users for exploring new paths of inquiry for their own research.



Access the reports at oclc.org/nafan-research.

Explore OCLC's research for Building a National Finding Aid Network. The findings investigate end user and contributor needs for finding aid aggregations and existing EAD encoded finding aid data quality.



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