

## Lighting the Way: illuminating the future of discovery and delivery for archives

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Stanford University

Stanford University Libraries requests \$148,130 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services through its National Leadership Grants for Libraries program under the National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives project category to convene a series of national meetings focused on integration of “front-end” systems for discovery and delivery of archives and special collections. These meetings are necessary in order build consensus around strategic and technical directions to improve user experience, access, and interoperability across systems used by archivists, librarians, and researchers working with archival material. The project will develop actionable recommendations to address these key challenges facing archives and special collections.

**Statement of National Need:** The proposed project builds on previous efforts led by Stanford Libraries around [ArcLight](#), a project intended to build a web-based environment to support and improve discovery and digital delivery of archival collections. ArcLight’s [user-centered design process](#) identified a number of key needs for both archivists and researchers concerning improved discovery of and access to archival materials, as well as a set of systems integration issues relating to discovery and delivery raised by archivists that impact both constituencies. These include: 1) improving access to digital materials (either digitized or born digital) when available in an archival collection, especially delivering digital objects within the context of archival description; 2) the complexity of integrating embedded viewers for digital material into discovery systems, especially across a spectrum of emerging formats; 3) addressing the challenge of data management for archival discovery given the use of a wide number of backend systems; and 4) integration with request management systems used to page material for research or fulfill digitization requests. Inadequate integration leads to a poor user experience for researchers and archivists, and also makes discovery and delivery systems harder to implement and maintain, impacting archivists and technologists from an operational perspective.

We know that other groups and projects have identified complementary issues about integration of archival systems in general, as an important area worthy of focused of attention. These include the [Research and Learning Agenda for Archives, Special, and Distinctive Collections in Research Libraries](#) published by OCLC Research in October 2017 and the Educopia Institute’s IMLS-funded [OSSArcFlow project](#). However, current projects focused on archival systems integration have primarily emphasized integration of “back office” archival systems, such as collection management systems and repositories. Furthermore, while software supporting access to digital archives has progressed, integration of cutting-edge access tools like [ePADD](#) for email archives with other user-facing systems remain uncertain. These factors, plus the recent [proposed revisions](#) to principals of *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* for archival description and the establishment of the [International Image Interoperability Framework \(IIIF\) Archives Community Group](#), have articulated the importance coordinating strategy related to cutting-edge discovery and delivery for archives.

As successful archival discovery and delivery relates to the user experience for both archivists and researchers, this provides a timely opportunity to evaluate systems integration in a holistic fashion as it impacts the discovery and delivery user experience. This project is intended to provide broad future applicability for both individual institutions, as well as the network of finding aid aggregators that support regional- and national-level discovery. Rather than focusing exclusively on system- or platform-specific integrations, this project will provide an actionable roadmap containing strategic recommendations, architectural patterns, and use of shared specifications (e.g. IIIF) across the landscape of discovery and delivery systems, informed by standards for archival description. Nevertheless, the project also leverages strong expertise with software and initiatives such as ArchivesSpace (collections management and access), ArcLight (discovery), Aeon (request management), ePADD (appraisal of and access to email archives), and IIIF.

**Project Design:** Grant funding will primarily support the attendance and participation of approximately 30 delegates for a two-and-a-half day forum, and 20 delegates for a second two-and-a-half day working meeting. The first meeting, held at or in the vicinity of Stanford University in Stanford, California in fall 2019, will include a selection of keynote speakers to highlight both progress and challenges regarding discovery and delivery system integration for archives and special collections, and focused breakout sessions for participants

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to propose ideas, articulate priorities, and identify opportunities for collaboration. These breakout sessions will progress in three rounds, with exploratory activities that will clarify the vision and challenges, generative activities to identify potential solutions, and evaluative activities to identify the most promising and feasible of the proposed solutions. The second meeting, held near Stanford University in spring 2020 will focus on collaborative, in-depth discussions about the proposed solutions identified in the first meeting to outline the work necessary to frame additional progress towards the deliverables.

The activities within the project will be centered around four goals: 1) mapping out the ecosystem of systems that relate to the discovery and delivery of archives and special collections; 2) improving the understanding of archivists and technologists around the integration points between these systems needed to support common use cases; 3) developing practical recommendations for architectural patterns used to implement those integrations; and 4) activating forum participants to implement these patterns within their archival discovery and delivery environments, across a variety of institutional contexts and software platforms. Work towards these goals within this project will produce four key deliverables prepared by the project team and a subset of meeting participants that will offer practical and strategic advances for archives and special collections discovery and delivery:

- **Foundational resources** prepared in advance of each meeting, including a literature review, an environmental scan, and a taxonomy of systems and types of integrations.
- An implementation-focused **integration handbook**, each identifying specific use cases, the systems to be integrated, and specific integration patterns and strategies as practical recommendations.
- A **white paper** for the overall project to synthesize the activities and outputs of the project, establishing a shared agenda for improving front-end system integration and identifying shared specifications for archives and special collections. The white paper will include identification of key stakeholders and partners for future advancement and sustainability of the agenda.
- Dissemination through **conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications, and post-forum webinars**, that will further share information about forum activities and outputs, and engage archivists, technologists, and other key stakeholders around these issues.

To complete the work of this grant, the project plans to gather key professionals across multiple disciplines, including both public services and technical services archivists as well as user experience designers, software developers, product managers, and other technologists from both within and outside the context of archives and libraries. While the project team has yet to confirm preliminary commitments from specific individuals, we have confirmed strong interest in participation from institutions including University at Albany, ArchivesSpace, Atlas Systems, Brooklyn Historical Society, California Digital Library, Denshō, University of Denver, Duke University, University of Michigan, National Library of Medicine, OCLC Research, Princeton University, Rockefeller Archive Center, and the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art.

**National Impact:** Supported by the National Forum Grant, this project will lead to the creation of a national, collaborative agenda and technical strategy that will inform the effective integration of front-end systems that support discovery and delivery for archives and special collections. Addressing the goals listed above will 1) develop a common understanding and a shared vocabulary around the ecosystem of discovery and delivery for archivists and technologists; 2) reduce barriers to building and maintaining user-facing systems and environments for access; 3) improve the user experience for researchers for both analog and digital collections; and 4) serve as a pathway for future implementation and research projects for archives and special collections.

**Preliminary Budget:** Our \$148,130 request consists of \$82,400 in participant support, which includes air travel (\$22,700), lodging (\$35,850), meals (\$9,150), transportation (\$1,700), participant honoraria (\$10,000), and venue fees (\$3,000); \$9,000 in conference travel for the project team to facilitate smaller meetings and disseminate outcomes at the Fall 2019 DLF Forum, the Spring 2020 Code4lib Conference, the Spring 2020 CNI Membership Meeting, the Summer 2020 RBMS Conference, and the Summer 2020 SAA conference; \$38,710 for salary support, and fringe benefits; and \$18,020 in indirect costs.