National Forum on Web Privacy and Web Analytics

The Montana State University (MSU) Library seeks $100,000 funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services through its National Forum Grant program under the National Digital Platform project category to hold a meeting involving a diverse range of librarians, library administrators, systems developers, product designers, user experience designers, lawyers, technologists, and privacy researchers. A gathering of these stakeholders is needed in order to build consensus and develop an actionable agenda for implementing values-driven web analytics across a nation-wide spectrum of libraries.

National Need for the Project

Libraries need web analytics. The usage measurement statistics generated from web tracking software help tell a story of value and impact for library stakeholders, including funding agencies, university administrators, and community boards. Analytics also serve a crucial role for tuning, tailoring, and improving services to better help library users. Google Analytics—the powerful, comprehensive, and easy-to-install software package—has emerged as a leading choice for web analytics in libraries. From the perspective of monetary cost, Google Analytics is free to use, a factor that amplifies its widespread use. From the perspective of user privacy, however, Google Analytics is anything but free to use. As a third-party web tracker, Google Analytics participates in a vast network of third-party tracking on the web that exposes user data to countless additional trackers. In many cases, the user has not given fully informed consent for this data sharing, nor does the website owner fully understand the capabilities and consequences of web analytics and other third-party trackers.

Libraries understand that users value privacy. Libraries have historically offered safe spaces of intellectual freedom that are underpinned by a commitment to privacy in the pursuit of information, yet the widespread implementation of commercial analytics packages such as Google Analytics on library websites may conflict with the library profession's long-held values of privacy and intellectual freedom. The MSU Library's research into privacy and web analytics (as a part of IMLS grant LG-06-14-0090-14, Measuring Up: Assessing Accuracy of Reported Use and Impact of Digital Repositories) has revealed that the library community appears to have an imperfect or incomplete understanding of web privacy, web analytics, and third-party web tracking. The proposed Forum is therefore driven by the underlying need to enhance our profession's understanding and practice of web analytics and privacy with a view towards our unique commitment to privacy.

Certain key questions guide our proposal: given that usage measurements are necessary to communicate value and improve services, how can libraries continue to report web analytics while also protecting users' privacy? How can traditional library values be compatible with contemporary web analytics? Why haven't more libraries implemented alternatives to Google Analytics such as Piwik? Is it possible for the library community to build a new, privacy-focused web analytics platform? What are the tradeoffs and implications of building our own analytics solution versus advancing the conversation around third-party providers? What are the strategies for holding technology companies and vendors accountable for data collection and retention?

We seek funding to hold a National Forum that will help answer these critical questions. The Forum will prove vital for advancing professional discourse, knowledge, practice, and policy regarding third-party web tracking on library websites. By bringing together stakeholders and participants from across disciplines, we will focus our profession's privacy conversation and provide an actionable roadmap for enhancing user privacy in the age of web analytics. The MSU Library, through the research conducted under our previously-awarded IMLS grant, has developed expertise in this area, and we are well positioned to convene a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders to catalyze effort towards a national agenda around web privacy and web analytics.

Project Design

Grant funding will primarily support the attendance of approximately 40 participants for a two-and-a-half day meeting at Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana in Fall 2018. This Forum will include keynote speakers to frame the problem of privacy and analytics, and interactive breakout sessions for all participants to share ideas and advance discussion. Three rounds of interactive breakout sessions will be sequenced to develop

an agenda for addressing the problem: the first round of sessions will focus on exploratory exercises that will bring clarity to the problem; the second round of sessions will focus on generative exercises that will bring forth potential solutions to the problem; the final round of sessions will focus on evaluative exercises that will gauge the viability and feasibility of the proposed solutions.

In completing the work of this grant, we intend to gather key professionals from across the field in order to realize the IMLS theme of radical collaboration. We have confirmed preliminary commitments of involvement from: Gretchen Caserotti, Library Director at Meridian Public Library; Bethany Nowviskie, Director of the Digital Library Federation; Lisa Hinchliffe, Coordinator for Information Literacy at University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign; Andrew Asher, Anthropologist/Assessment Librarian at Indiana University; Becky Yoose, Library Applications and Systems Manager at The Seattle Public Library; Andrew Nagy, Director of SaaS Innovation, EBSCO; Bonnie Tijerina, Research Fellow and Data & Society; Stephanie Wright, Program Lead at the Mozilla Science Lab; Patrick Gage Kelley, Senior Privacy UX Researcher at Google; Gabriela Zanfir-Fortuna, Data Protection Specialist and Fellow at the Future for Privacy Forum; Magera Holton, Product Designer at Etsy; Richard Pope, Head of Design at Projects by If; and Laura Kalbag, Designer at Ind.ie.

Performance Goals and Outcomes:
This National Forum will lead to the articulation of a national agenda for meeting our professional standards of privacy while also meeting the need to implement and report web analytics. The activities of the Forum will be framed around three goals: 1. Activating and focusing our professional discourse around privacy and analytics; 2. Improving our field's understanding of third-party web tracking and web analytics; and 3. Developing practical approaches for implementing web analytics within the contemporary privacy landscape. The realization of these goals will ultimately produce four key deliverables that will offer immediate practical and scholarly advances for privacy and analytics in libraries:

- **Foundational resources** prepared prior to the forum that will include privacy worksheets completed by participants, a literature review, and an environmental scan.
- A **scholarly white paper** that synthesizes Forum activities and articulates the direction for a national privacy-focused values-based agenda for web analytics. The white paper will include identification of partners for further development and sustainability of the agenda.
- A practice-based **action handbook** that provides background, resources, and best practices to guide libraries in responsibly implementing web analytics.
- **Conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications,** and **post-Forum virtual events** that will further disseminate Forum activities and generate engagement and buy-in from library technologists, administrators, and other key stakeholders around Forum topics.

Relevance to Project Category
This project exemplifies the National Forum Grant by proposing to convene expert practitioners, qualified researchers, and key stakeholders to develop a cohesive national response to a critical issue in the library profession. Furthermore, by enhancing our professional understanding of web analytics and coordinating action towards a national privacy agenda, this project aligns with the IMLS agency theme of continuous learning in response to advances in technology. Finally, the key Forum outputs—foundational resources, a white paper, an action handbook, and open access publications—align with the IMLS agency theme of creating documentation and professional development that enables others to implement or replicate project outcomes.

Preliminary Budget
Our $100,000 request consists of $60,303.81 in participant support, which includes airfare ($25.001.81), lodging ($19,800), meals ($4,600), transportation ($1,500), participant honoraria ($8,000) and venue fees ($1,402); $15,460 in conference travel for the project team to generate community dialogue around the Forum and disseminate outcomes at the 2018 ALA Annual Conference, Fall 2018 DLF Forum, the Spring 2019 Code4Lib Conference, and the Spring 2019 CNI Membership Meeting; $14,053.90 for salary support, fringe benefits and consultant fees; and $10,182.29 in indirect costs.