From Survey Design to Hackfest: Reflections on Research-in-Practice for Born-Digital Access

Rachel Appel, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College Library & Information Technology Services
Alison Clemens, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University
Wendy Hagenmaier, Georgia Tech Archives
Jessica Meyerson, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas
Introduction

- Working toward best practices for access to born-digital materials that:
  - Scale to match the volume of born-digital material
  - Acknowledge organizational capacity
- Advancing the professional discourse around best practices for born-digital access
Phase I

- Our first phase of research included survey design and distribution, followed by semi-structured interviews
  - Survey respondents
    - 129 complete (292 initiated)
  - Interviewees
    - 20 qualitative follow-up interviews
    - Recruited from survey respondents
Phase I

- **Identifying important gaps**
  - Understanding users
  - Advocating for born-digital access
  - Using agile techniques for facilitating born-digital access
  - Creating training opportunities, or bootcamps, for born-digital access

- **Methods:** R and pandas


- Creating our SAA 2015 Born-Digital Access Hackfest
Phase II

- Born-Digital Access Hackfest: Collaborative Solution-Building for Current Challenges, SAA 2015 (http://sched.co/2y9i)

- Hackfest Team topics (August 2015 - January 2016):
  - Understanding Users for Access
  - Advocacy for Access
  - Agile Methods for Access
  - Archivist Bootcamp for Access
Phase II

● Team roles:
  ○ Researcher
  ○ Leader
  ○ Notetakers

● Team deliverables:
  ○ Notes
  ○ Proposal
  ○ SAA ERS blog post (to introduce and publish proposal):
    https://saaers.wordpress.com/tag/born-digital_access/
Phase II

- Bootcamp for Born-Digital Access Group
  - The bootcamp for born-digital access group, led by Dan Johnson of University of Iowa, has met 6 times since last SAA, and has conducted an environmental scan of born-digital access educational opportunities
  - The group has also brainstormed about curriculum and scheduling for a born-digital access bootcamp training experience
  - Now, the group is working to identify an opportunity to pilot the bootcamp
Google Folder Orientation Slide

  - Preliminary report
  - Sample hackfest team folder
  - How to Design a Data-Driven Hackfest
  - Our hackfest slides
  - This presentation
Retrospective Analysis

- We gained experience and skills but lacked a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of our work:
  - Within the archival community
  - On ourselves, as reflexive practitioners
- Phase III - mapping key methodological/theoretical/conceptual tools-to-think-with back to the work we completed

- Overlapping/complementary literatures:
  - Business/organizational studies
  - Sociology
  - Information studies
- Key methods/theories/concepts:
  - Participatory Action Research
  - Community Impact
  - Research & Development
Conclusion/Article Coming Soon

- Key thesis:

  In order to tackle the challenges of curating and preserving emerging born-digital material at scale, archivists need to reframe research:

  the way we approach it and where we conduct it

  Digital archiving demands practitioner involvement in research and development; we need sustainable, participatory, translational research models in order to progress and succeed. Our project outlines a case study that can be extrapolated into one new model of research in practice.