

Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies

Volume 7

Article 16

2020

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Recommended Citation

Shein, Cyndi; Jones, Sarah R.; Kim, Tammi; and Irwin, Karla (2020) "Perspectives and Practices: Archival Processing Metrics Survey Findings," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 7 , Article 16. Available at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol7/iss1/16>

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Perspectives and Practices: Archival Processing Metrics Survey Findings

Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to thank James Cheng, UNLV Libraries' Library Data Analyst, for his advice on how to appropriately present these findings.

PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES: ARCHIVAL PROCESSING METRICS SURVEY FINDINGS

Archival processing metrics are used to advocate for resources, inform priorities, give weight to work plans and grant proposals, and predict costs for collection storage and care. Information professionals use independent methods to assess their archival processing projects and programs. The scope of activities they track and their methods of collecting data vary widely. They collect data points that range from quite general to remarkably detailed and use different units of measure. As of this writing, there are no profession-wide guidelines for gathering and analyzing archival processing metrics, leaving each institution to its own devices.¹ To gain some understanding of perspectives and practices across the profession, UNLV Libraries Special Collections and Archives Technical Services staff (hereafter UNLV) conducted an informal online opinion poll (hereafter “the survey”) about archival processing metrics and examined the experiences and concerns expressed by the 176 respondents. The intent of the survey was to ascertain whether or not there are common practices that point toward good practice. If so, what data points yield the most important information, and why is that information valuable? Responses reflect a variety of opinions—from emerging professionals to seasoned veterans, from lone arrangers to managers of large operations, and from underfunded programs to well-resourced institutions. In their comments, respondents expressed a range of strong feelings, using words such as “essential” and “indispensable” as well as “useless” and “sinister” to describe archival processing metrics. The diversity of the respondents’ viewpoints and circumstances indicate that processing practices and assessment are highly situational. The results confirm a lack of consensus among those who employ processing metrics and demonstrate an overarching absence of clarity about best practices. Overall, the results highlight the need for professional guidance in archival processing assessment.

Literature Review

Research articles and case studies portray processing assessment as essential to mature archival programs and grant projects. Four decades of literature demonstrate how processing metrics contribute to daily operations, reports, stakeholder communications, and planning activities.² Few articles address program-wide processing assessment, and repositories primarily report metrics within the context of grant projects.³ Since grant projects often require that proposals and reports

¹ The Society of American Archivists (SAA) partnered with the Rare Books and Manuscript Section of the American Library Association to create guidelines for assessing public services and for measuring holdings, but as of this writing no guidelines for archival processing metrics have been created.

² Literature continuously cites the value of metrics, beginning as early as W. N. Davis, Jr.’s California State Archives report in 1980 through to research completed at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 2020. For an early example, see Davis, “Budgeting for Archival Processing,” *American Archivist* 43, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 209–11. For examples over time, see the literature review in Cyndi Shein et al., “Balancing the Art and Science of Processing Metrics and Assessment,” *Journal of Western Archives* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–34.

³ Examples of program-wide metrics reports include Davis, “Budgeting for Archival Processing,” and Terry Abraham, Stephen Balzarini, and Anne Frantilla, “What Is Backlog Is Prologue: A Measurement of Archival Processing,” *American Archivist* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 31–44. Grant-related processing metrics are the focus of Karen Temple Lynch and Thomas Lynch, “Rates of Processing Manuscripts and Archives,” *Midwestern Archivist* 7, no. 1 (1982): 25–34; Helen W. Slotkin and Karen T. Lynch, “An Analysis of Processing Procedures: The Adaptable Approach,” *American Archivist* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 155–63; Richard W. Hite and Daniel J. Linke, “Teaming Up with Technology: Team Processing,” *Midwestern Archivist* 15, no. 2 (1990): 91–97; Anne L. Foster, “Minimum Standards

include processing metrics, the number of grant-related articles on processing metrics is no surprise. The scarcity of articles about program-wide processing assessment is harder to explain. It may indicate that professionals who are assessing their processing programs have not written about it, or it may be that program-wide processing assessment is not common practice. In 2010, a poll focused on how repositories measure productivity hints that the latter is likely.⁴

The literature offers multiple explanations for archivists' disinclination to collect and analyze processing data, providing rationale ranging from the cost/benefit to the complexity of the endeavor. As posited by Terry Abraham, Stephen Balzarini, and Anne Frantilla, "It is often the case that an analysis of statistical data is avoided by the archives staff on two grounds: first, that the proofs are identifiable on a common-sense basis, and second, that the time involved is better devoted to the direct mission of the repository." Other hurdles expressed in the literature are that every collection is unique and every processor's approach and skills are different, making it impossible to predict future results based on past performance. Abraham, Balzarini, and Frantilla further note, "Archivists opposed to measuring processing time or costs often argue that it cannot be done because each collection is unique."⁵ Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner's 2005 survey also acknowledges that the different characteristics of each collection impact processing productivity rates.⁶ Likewise, the University of California Libraries recognizes the challenges presented by the unique characteristics of collections and points out that processing approaches vary, depending on each processor's unique combination of experience, subject knowledge, and skills.⁷ In addition to these fundamental challenges, measuring processing is further complicated by processing nuances and varied processing methods. Daniel A. Santamaria summarizes some of these challenges: "Establishing rigorous and formal metrics for archival processing is not a simple task, however, given the wide variety of overlapping tasks which are often undertaken by multiple people. Iterative processing also adds a layer of complication to data collections because the same material may be addressed in different ways within short time periods. The flexibility of MPLP and extensible processing approaches also complicates the development of profession-wide metrics."⁸ As demonstrated by the literature, archival processing is influenced by numerous

Processing and Photograph Collections," *Archival Issues* 30, no. 2 (2006): 107–18; Emily R. Novak Gustainis, "Processing Workflow Analysis for Special Collections: The Center for the History of Medicine, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine as Case Study," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 13, no. 2 (2012): 113–28; Adrienne Pruitt, "Processing by the Numbers: How Metrics Can Help with Project Planning," paper presented at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Richmond, Virginia, October 27, 2012; Emily Walters, "Processing Large-Scale Architectural Collections," *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Archivists* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 20–51; and Cheryl Oestreicher, "Personal Papers and MPLP: Strategies and Techniques," *Archivaria* 76 (Fall 2013): 93–110.

⁴ The poll, conducted by the Center for the History of Medicine, Francis Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard, reported, "24.6 percent said they did not keep statistics on collections processed in a calendar or fiscal year, 54.5 percent did not keep statistics on creating and encoding finding aids, 87.3 percent did not measure the amount of time they spend on creating processing plans, and about half did not maintain any statistics on digitization, among other processing and descriptive activities." Gustainis, "Processing Workflow Analysis for Special Collections," 126.

⁵ Abraham, Balzarini, and Frantilla, "What Is Backlog Is Prologue," 42.

⁶ The survey asks, "Which collection characteristics have the greatest effect on processing productivity?" Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68, no. 2 (2005): 261.

⁷ University of California Libraries, "Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries (Version 4)," May 2020, 38, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4b81g01z>.

⁸ Daniel A. Santamaria, *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections: Reducing Processing Backlogs* (Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2015), 113.

variables that make its assessment challenging. In spite of the challenges and concerns expressed in this literature review, the works cited overwhelmingly conclude that assessment is essential, and they strongly advocate for the ongoing collection, assessment, and use of processing metrics.

Positionality Statement

Presenting survey findings, particularly qualitative data (free-text fields), is a subjective act. As Sharan B. Merriam notes, analysis and interpretation of a study's findings "will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place."⁹ The survey was constructed based on the needs of the authors and may not reflect the interests of the larger archival community. The findings are influenced by the authors' experiences and biases, and the authors recognize that they come from a place of privilege. They each hold master's degrees in library and information science and are faculty at an R1 academic library special collections and archives that annually receives an average of 3.5 terabytes and 600 cubic feet of archival materials. At their institution, materials are accessioned and processed by three full-time professionals whose jobs include other duties such as serving on the reference desk, performing hands-on processing (digital and physical), and supervising student processors as part of ongoing operations. Additionally, all four authors manage specially funded processing projects. They have each collected processing metrics reflecting their own work as well as analyzed metrics collected by paraprofessionals and students. They believe that core processing metrics are fundamental to planning, prioritizing, and stakeholder communications. They have found more granular metrics are useful in informing internal processes but find the collection of detailed metrics to be onerous and difficult to sustain.

Objective

The objective of the survey was to gather informal opinions and practical realities about processing metrics in an effort to understand the broader use of such metrics, to explore what data points are most essential, and to learn about potential barriers to collecting and assessing processing metrics. The survey questions were informed by a literature review and the authors' desire to improve their own metrics and assessment practices.

Survey Instrument and Methodology

The survey utilized the web-based tool Google Forms to gather responses. The survey instrument was set *not* to automatically collect IP or email addresses. The survey instrument included a total of eighteen questions, which are listed in appendix B. Quantitative data were gathered from multiple-choice (choose one) questions, "check all boxes that apply" questions, and questions rating the importance of data points on a three-point scale. For questions that asked respondents to check all boxes that apply, the percentages reported reflect the number of respondents who selected each option—for those questions, the combined percentages exceed one hundred. Multiple-choice questions included an "other" option to gather responses not included in the options provided.

Quantitative data were collected from ten required questions of the following types:

⁹ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 48.

Respondent repository type (1)
Multiple choice: select one (5)
Multiple choice: select all that apply (2)
Numeric rating (2)

Qualitative data were gathered via eight optional free-text questions that invited respondents to provide rationale or context for their responses to quantitative questions. The final optional free-text question was open-ended to encourage respondents to express any thoughts that had not been solicited by the survey questions. Respondents provided a total of 257 free-text responses in the optional comment fields across the survey. Excerpts from select comments are woven throughout the findings because they transcend and add meaning to the quantitative data. When comments are used to illustrate the findings, they are cited by question number and respondent number (Q#, R#).

All 176 respondents were presented with questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. Only respondents who indicated that they had never collected metrics or that they collected metrics on an individual basis but not at the repository level (Q4) were asked question 5 to gather opinions about why their repository did not collect metrics. These 72 respondents were not presented with questions 6, 7, 8, 9, or 10, which asked about active data collecting practices and actual data use. In hindsight, given their evident lack of practical experience, those who responded that they “may have” or were “not sure” if their repository had ever collected metrics should have been routed to the same questions as the “have never” respondents.

Data analysis.

When the survey closed, the authors exported data from Google Forms to Microsoft Excel. They converted quantitative data into tables and performed minimal normalization. When analysis indicated that responses to quantitative questions (such as repository type) that were marked as “other” actually fell within one of the provided options, the authors moved the “other” responses into the suitable category. The authors corrected typos and redacted personal and institutional names from the qualitative data presented herein.

During data analysis, in an effort to discover whether or not the results of questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 were greatly influenced by the lack of practical experience of the respondents who indicated they had never collected metrics or were not sure, the authors sorted responses into two groups: those who had collected metrics in some way and those who had never collected metrics or were not sure. Quantitative data analyzed in this way did not show significant distinctions between the responses of people who had employed processing metrics and those who had not.¹⁰ Likewise, qualitative data did not reveal dramatic differences in opinions between the two groups. For example, coding of all comments to identify attitudes toward processing metrics

¹⁰ Responses to Q11 serve as an example of the lack of significant distinction between the two groups: collection title/ID and extent were the top two data points ranked most essential by both groups. Collection title/ID was rated essential by 77% of those who employed metrics and 72% of those who did not. Extent was rated essential by 77% of those who employed metrics and 76% of those who did not. Total processing hours was rated essential by 56% of those who employed metrics and 52% of those who did not. Format was rated essential by 54% of those who employed metrics and 64% of those who did not. Processing level was rated essential by 49% of those who employed metrics and 52% of those who did not.

revealed positive comments as well as negative comments in both groups. When the extra effort of analyzing a few of the questions through the lens of the two groups offered no measurable insights, the authors did not perform this level of analysis on all the questions. There may be room for further analysis here.

During data analysis, the authors noted some responses that suggested a potential lack of understanding of either the question and/or basic metrics practices. However, the authors decided not to discard those responses because they contribute to the findings. Responses that suggest a potential lack of understanding of how to collect, analyze, and use archival processing metrics are informative (e.g., they affirm a need for guidelines).

The authors analyzed the results within the framework of three research questions:

1. For those who employ metrics, how is the data useful to them?
2. What data points are most important or essential?
3. For those who do not employ metrics, why not?

Survey dissemination and population.

The authors disseminated the survey through the Society of American Archivists listserv, American Libraries Association listserv, and the Western Archivists listserv. From there it may have been forwarded by recipients to other listservs. Responses were accepted for just over two weeks.¹¹ The survey received responses from 176 individuals. As illustrated in figure 1, respondents hailed from a wide variety of institutions, with half of them employed in academic environments. The call to participate promised to keep confidential the identities of individuals and institutions of respondents who voluntarily provided their names and contact information. The authors consider the survey “informal” in that it sought the opinions of individuals rather than the official stance of each institution. Although multiple persons from a single repository were encouraged to participate, of those who indicated their institutional affiliations, only two repositories were represented by more than one individual. Respondents who identified their institutions revealed that they work in all types of environments across the United States, from large, well-established programs with dozens of professional staff to small shops with one staff member supported by volunteers. The instrument did not collect the position titles or lengths of time that participants had been active in the profession, but respondents volunteered information indicating they represent a range of positions and program sizes. Responses suggest that the survey attracted viewpoints from novices and experts alike, and reflect an array of attitudes ranging from individuals who are open and curious about metrics to individuals expressing incredibly positive or extremely negative opinions toward them. The authors view the breadth of participants as a strength of the results.

¹¹ The complete survey results are available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/18329003>. To protect participants’ privacy, the survey instrument did not automatically collect email or IP addresses. Some participants volunteered their names, institutional affiliations, and contact information, which have been omitted and/or redacted from published results. The survey was open from October 30 to November 20, 2019.

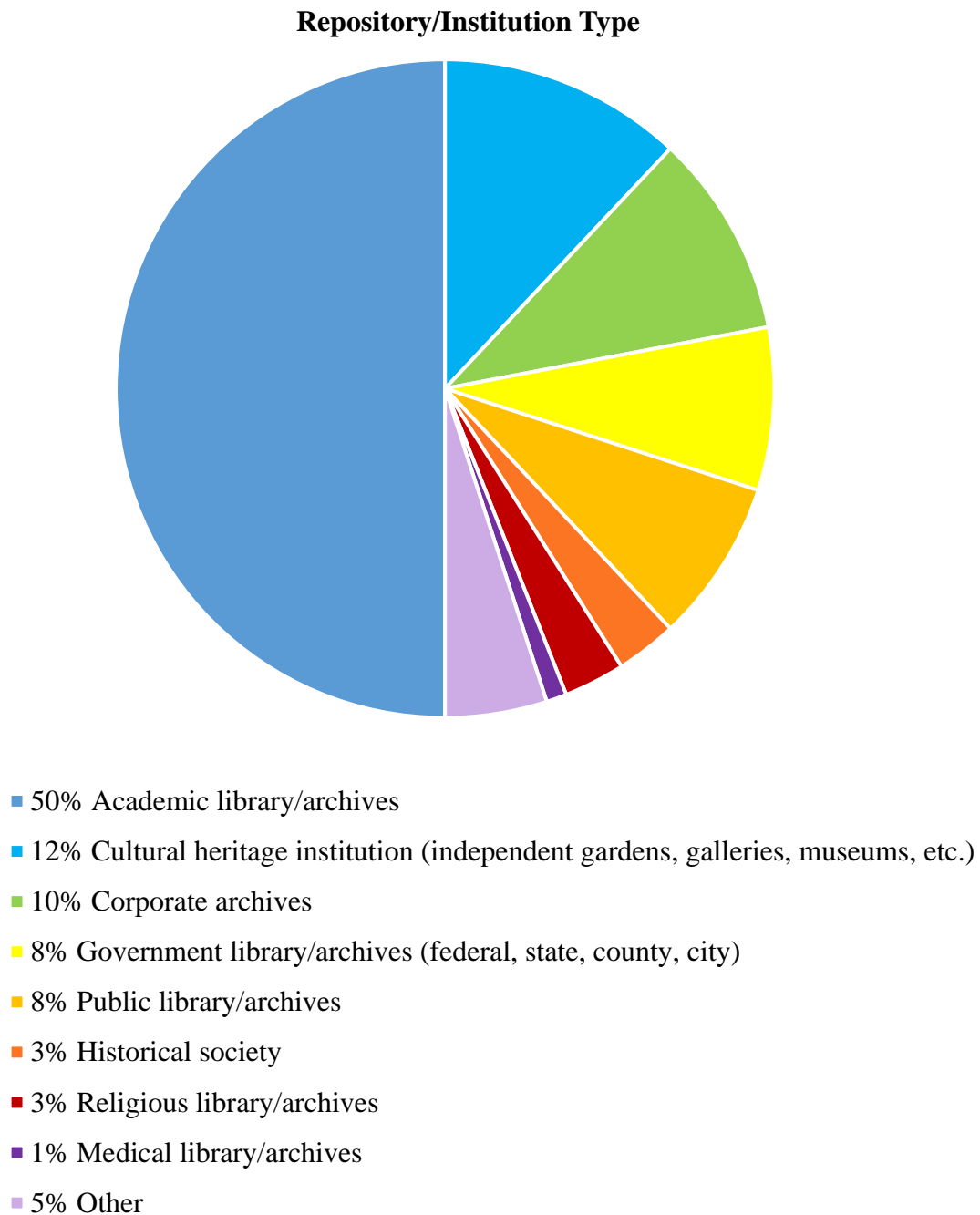


Figure 1. Diversity of repository/institution types in which respondents are employed (Q1); n=176

Survey Findings

As outlined in the literature review, respected practitioners advocate for the use of archival processing metrics. Despite the demonstrated value of assessment, responses to the survey suggest that most archival repositories do not routinely collect metrics (Q4). More than half of respondents to the poll (56%) indicate they collect or have collected metrics in some form, but only 16 percent

of them collect metrics as part of ongoing operations. Thirteen percent of respondents indicate they are in the early stages of collecting metrics as part of ongoing operations, 15 percent collect metrics only for specific projects, 9 percent collect metrics for themselves (but their metrics are not used by their repositories), and 4 percent have collected metrics as part of a pilot project but did not sustain the effort. Forty-four percent of respondents state their repository has “never collected processing metrics” or they “were not sure.” Of the fifty-seven respondents that stated they have never collected metrics, twenty-nine work in academic libraries/archives and twenty-eight work in a variety of other types of repositories. The distribution of repository types for respondents who have never collected metrics is representative of the whole—about half are academic libraries/archives and half are a variety of other repository types.

Research question 1: For those who employ metrics, how is the data useful to them?

The majority of respondents who employ processing metrics use the data to inform processing priorities and archival practices (see table 1). Many of them regularly use processing data for internal purposes (to inform operations, workflows, teamwork, priorities, and project management) and to support external reports or communications with administrators, stakeholders, donors, or funding agencies. They also use metrics to plan, prioritize, and manage processing; forecast and advocate for resources; and demonstrate how resources are used.

| How archival processing metrics are used | % | n |
|---|----------|----------|
| Inform processing priorities | 60 | 58 |
| Inform archival workflows/practices | 58 | 56 |
| Forecast need and/or advocate for more archival staff | 48 | 47 |
| Forecast need for archival supplies | 47 | 46 |
| Plan and propose grants or other special projects | 45 | 44 |
| Track and manage grants or other special projects | 43 | 42 |
| Inform budget planning/management | 42 | 41 |
| Inform strategic planning | 41 | 40 |
| Demonstrate cost to process a single collection/donation/acquisition | 39 | 38 |
| Inform which processing staff or teams are best suited for particular tasks/collections | 37 | 36 |
| Demonstrate and articulate value of archival program stakeholders (reports, outreach, etc.) | 33 | 32 |
| Evaluate individual processors' performance | 33 | 32 |
| Forecast and/or advocate for additional physical/digital space | 31 | 30 |
| Motivate/celebrate staff by demonstrating group/unit progress | 28 | 27 |
| Other | 3 | 3 |

Table 1. How archival metrics are used (Q6). Out of 104 responses to Q6, the 7 respondents that indicated they did not use metrics or were not sure were eliminated, leaving 97 usable responses:

n = 97. Respondents were instructed to select all answers that applied; therefore, the total percentage exceeds 100.

While the quantitative responses gauge the relative prevalence of different practices among professionals, the qualitative responses provide deeper insights into how the metrics are valuable. Both managers and processors use metrics to manage priorities, personnel, workflows, and operations. One processor says, “Collecting my own processing metrics helps me understand how to prioritize my processing queue, plan out student projects, and set quarterly and yearly goals” (Q8, R68). Another processor explains, “Processing metrics allowed my processing team to more confidently redistribute labor hours during a grant project” (Q8, R110). Managers note how metrics help them “set standards for archival processing across processing units” (Q8, R24), assess “operational impact of acquisitions” and determine processing capacity (Q8, R8), and assess if time invested and methods used in staff training and development “were the correct choices” by “reviewing whether the metrics show any change in output, quality of work, etc.” (Q8, R175).

Many comments indicate that metrics are essential in forecasting time, cost, and personnel needs, with one respondent emphasizing, “I’m not sure how we would estimate project completion dates without them” (Q8, R88). Another respondent employs metrics to “provide accurate timeframes and financial/human costs associated with processing when [we] work with donors and [our] development officer” (Q8, R155). A respondent who uses metrics in a “wide variety of ways” claims that the “most frequent and most important uses are to accurately estimate the time and cost for specific projects, especially where grant/funding/additional staffing opportunities become available, and for planning our annual ‘roadmap’ of processing projects” (Q8, R136).

Many respondents underscore how metrics help them advocate for themselves or resources by demonstrating the extent and value of their work. One notes, “Personally, [metrics] have been helpful in demonstrating my own processing efficiency to a supervisor, stakeholder, or potential employer” (Q8, R166). Several respondents contend that processing metrics serve as an effective method of translating archival work into understandable terms for nonarchivists. As one lone arranger states, “It is important that my supervisor and her superiors understand all that is involved in processing collections to make them available to researchers. It all helps me build a case for another person in the archives so that I have sufficient help to deal with the workload” (Q15, R46). Another respondent insists that metrics help “justify our existence to corporate stakeholders who don’t usually understand the value of our work on its own” (Q8, R123). Although many respondents assert that processing metrics are critical to their advocacy efforts, some are also conflicted about it, as articulated by this respondent’s insight: “This is a sticky subject because at many institutions, it gets into a cold numbers game of how much work people do (and perhaps associate that number with their value to the organization). However, as a manager I do not know how better to advocate for staffing and resources than to demonstrate through statistics what is and is not achievable” (Q18, R66).

The survey did indeed raise a “sticky subject.” Generally, respondents exhibit a reluctance to associate processing rates with an individual’s productivity. Only one-third (33%) of respondents use processing metrics for this purpose (Q6), and several comments reflect the divide on this issue. Opposition to associating metrics with individual processors is clear in comments such as, “I would

never use processing metrics as a staff productivity tool” (Q13, R6) and “People should not feel as though collecting processing metrics is a performance review, or a competition between colleagues” (Q13, R68). On the other hand, voluntary use of personal metrics is seen as positive by responses such as, “I use metrics to document my successes related to yearly performance goals” (Q8, R84). Recognizing the complexity of the issue, one respondent explains, “Some staff are highly motivated by tracking their statistics. For poor performers, it’s very frustrating and they feel resentful of their ‘output’ being measured. However, it’s essential for someone’s annual review to know how much they processed, and also for the Program’s annual report” (Q18, R17).

Research question 2: What data points are important or essential?

When given nineteen processing data points to rate as essential, important, or not at all important, the responses offer little consensus (Q11). The top two data points that respondents rate as essential are extent (77%) and collection title and/or number/identifier (75%). Over 50 percent of respondents also rate total processing hours, predominant material formats, and level of processing performed as essential data points. Additionally, more than half of respondents rated the language of materials, historical/institutional/research value, collection creator type, and role of the processor as important data points.

Of those who report that they have collected metrics in some form ($n = 98$), less than 3 percent indicate that extent was not at all important and only 13 percent state that hourly processing rates were not at all important. The vast majority of respondents rate extent as either essential (78%) or important (19%) and total hours of processing as essential (59%) or important (28%), suggesting that the assessment method expressed by Respondent 103 is most common: “The processing speed (average feet per hour) is just a matter of doing the math—extent divided by hours—so the extent and total hours are the really important numbers” (Q13, R103).¹² Qualitative data from comments provide important context for the quantitative data in this area and reveal a bias of survey question 13, which did not provide options for those who measure time in units other than hours. Explanations for rating hours as not at all important surface in comments such as, “We think more in terms of how many weeks/months does it take for a processor to complete a project. We don’t monitor our time hourly” (Q13, R17). None of the respondents who rated extent as not at all important provided comments to explain their ratings.

It should be noted that the respondents’ ratings of data points (Q11) may be slightly skewed by misinterpretation of the question. A few comments suggest *potential* conflation between data needed to compute processing metrics and data needed to manage collections, or that respondents rated what processing *actions* they viewed important rather than what processing *data points* they viewed as important. This may be attributed to a lack of specificity in the question—the data points are meant to be evaluated in the context of processing metrics; however, the survey question does not make that clear. Given the guesswork involved in unraveling which responses to question 11

¹² The OCLC Research Blog, Hanging Together, cites this method as common in the post “Time Estimation for Processing Born-Digital Collections,” stating, “And thus (collection extent) x (hours per linear foot for processing level) has become a simple shorthand for general estimation of processing times.” Chela Scott Weber, “Time Estimation for Processing Born-Digital Collections,” Hanging Together, April 28, 2020, <https://hangingtogether.org/?p=7911>.

might have been based on misinterpretation of the question, the authors opted not to eliminate any of the responses.

When given the option to explain their rationale in rating particular data points as not at all important (1 on the scale), seventy-nine respondents (45%) left comments (Q13). The variety of comments reflects differences in each respondent's situation and their purposes for collecting metrics. Statements such as, "Frankly, for public library purposes, although I personally hold myself and my work to fairly high standards, nobody else here but me cares much about this kind of thing" (Q13, R61) and "Lone arranger and corporate archives have different needs/expectations of what needs to be known" (Q13, R64) imply that the repository type influences the kind of data they collect. Several responses confirm that goals determine which data points they collect. One notes, "As an administrator the collection specific details like date range, etc. don't matter as much to me as the level of processing we're applying to our collections. . . . For my purposes I'm interested in how we can maximize our efficiency" (Q13, R155). One respondent connects their data point ratings with their reasons for assessment, stating, "I believe the complexity of the collection, extent, and processing levels completed are the most critical to forming a holistic, comprehensive picture of a repository's processing efforts" (Q13, R87). Another respondent contextualizes their ratings: "The 1s are not necessarily unimportant, but might be of more interest to some repositories than others depending on their particular situations and the cases they need to make," and went on to clarify, "If the institution were to share this data for a regional or national compilation, then these data points would be valuable" (Q13, R103). Since standardized data is not collected by regional or national archival associations, archivists collect data for different reasons, from very precise workflow purposes to gaining comprehensive views of their programs; consequently, there is a lack of consensus on what data points are most important.

The lack of consensus is also strongly evident in the responses to question 14, which lists fifteen detailed processing actions and asks participants to assess how important it is to track these actions as separate data points. The opinions here are so disparate that not one of the proposed data points is rated the same by a majority of respondents. As might be expected, the subsequent comments vary widely. Generally, these comments highlight differences between those who favor granular metrics and those who prefer high-level metrics. A respondent favoring high-level metrics explains, "For physical records, in our experience, tracking 3 activities gives us sufficient labor estimates to predict the time needed to process most future projects: appraisal (macro- and micro-level), arrangement (including re-folding and boxing), description (at all levels)" (Q15, R85). On the opposite end of the spectrum, others favor collecting much more detailed metrics, such as reflected in the following response:

I rated most as essential, because this information helps us do two things—be more conscious about how we spend our time (and therefore more intentional in evaluating priorities and deciding what warrants more or less labor investment) and also how much time/resources/labor are really needed to meet the needs of end users. If we aren't realistic, we get into unrealistic expectations, inadequate resources, and pressure to do the impossible. If we become more realistic, we can make thoughtful management decisions and continue to iterate as we go and learn from our actual metrics. (Q15, R38)

One respondent grounds their response in the universal purpose of collecting metrics, which is to compile reliable data for assessment: “Everything I rated as 3 [essential] are the things that have to happen every time a collection goes through our workflows, so I would want consistent metrics on those data points to have a good data set for comparable analysis. Everything I rated as 2 [important] or 1 [unimportant] happen sometimes or never (situation-dependent), so those would be less useful as part of an aggregate data set” (Q15, R175).

Overall, the vast majority of respondents do not feel that granular data points are worthwhile. Survey question 11 lists nineteen fairly high-level data points with potential to inform processing metrics. Only thirty-one respondents (18%) recommend adding data points to that list (Q12). The recommendations differ but one pattern emerges—five respondents recommend tracking the time elapsed between the date of acquisition or accession and the date the collection is processed/discoverable/available for use. Question 14 presents fifteen data points that are even more granular than those in question 11. After rating these granular data points as essential, important, or not at all important, respondents were offered the opportunity to suggest still more granular data points. Only ten respondents (less than 6%) suggest additional granular data points (Q16) and only eight respondents (less than 5%) provide specific data points to add (Q17).

Responses hint that larger, team-oriented operations have the capacity to collect more granular metrics and find them helpful in managing processes, whereas smaller shops see detailed metrics as superfluous: “I think that, working as a lone arranger in a corporate archive, I’m already aware of all the work I’m doing. So while some metrics would be useful to give insight to my boss, the time spent tracking and documenting these actions is not necessary and would actually take time away from getting work done. I don’t think the trade-off is worth it” (Q18, R64). The time required to track granular metrics is cited as a deterrent by several responses, for example, “In my experience, creating granular data points makes it more time consuming for staff to document their work” (Q18, R24). Another barrier to collecting granular metrics is a failure to get staff buy-in, as noted in the comments, “We used to break down processing tasks into separate activity tracking, but got complaints from staff on having to track time that granularly, so now we only use the total number of processing hours” (Q18, R44) and “I think it would make things too complex to force our processors to try to break down their days so minutely. For us, it is enough to try and get people to track their time processing at all, so more granular collecting would disincentivize data collection” (Q16, R79).

Although most respondents do not favor granular metrics in general, those who mention born-digital processing in comments across the survey express a need for more detailed metrics in this area, suggesting that archivists “distinguish between rates for processing born-digital vs physical archives” (Q16, R75) and collect separate data points for “appraising, accessioning, processing, and describing born-digital” (Q17, R105). One respondent explains, “On the digital side, I’m interested in moving in a direction where we track the exact same set of functions/activities but as a separate digital activity (so I can clearly compare ‘arrangement’ stats for x cubic feet of papers vs x gigabytes of digital materials)” (Q15, R136). Comments express a shared conviction that collecting specific metrics for born-digital processing supports advocacy for the often-unrecognized labor and storage required to steward born-digital archival collections. As phrased by one respondent, “Articulating the time spent/required for born-digital processing is very important, as many curators/managers/etc. don’t always think about this work because of the

limited physical space this material occupies” (Q8, R32). As with paper-based archival work, translating digital processing into metrics can help others understand the extent and value of the work. In the words of one respondent: “I still see major misconceptions about digital content among administrators and even other archivists who have yet to spend much time with digital content. Working with digital content (particularly born-digital) is harder, takes longer, and costs a lot more than simply purchasing some Hollinger boxes and acid free folders. Better data here would help to continue moving this discussion from the known, but anecdotal, to the factual” (Q15, R103).

Processing metrics are helpful in garnering the support needed to build capacity for emerging born-digital processing programs: “We’re also still at a stage of advocating for more resources for our digital preservation program, so having a separate data point for born-digital processing helps us to emphasize the time commitment our (mostly manual) current workflows require” (Q15, R21). In many institutions, born-digital processing practices are still developing, and processing metrics in this area are in their infancy. Of the 104 respondents who state that their repositories collect metrics, or they were not sure, only 22 percent of them indicate that they actively collect metrics specific to born-digital processing (see table 2).

| Collecting born-digital processing metrics | % | n |
|---|----------|----------|
| No/not yet | 61 | 63 |
| Yes | 22 | 23 |
| Not sure | 12 | 13 |
| “Other” Planning/early stages | 4 | 4 |
| “Other” Individual yes, unit no | 1 | 1 |

Table 2. Does your unit/repository collect metrics specific to born-digital processing? (Q7); n = 104

Assessment of born-digital processing metrics fosters understanding and improvement of emerging practices. Comments reflecting use of metrics to support growth in this area include, “We are looking into improving and operationalizing processing rates/estimates for born-digital work—thus far we have used the time taken on previous [born-digital] processing work to make future estimates” (Q3, R32) and, “We currently track some of this information for born digital records processing because we are in the earlier stages of figuring out our needs and processes for that type of work” (Q15, R138).

Research question 3: For those who do not employ metrics, why not?

Of the 176 responses to the survey, 72 respondents (40%) indicate that in the repository where they work, they have never collected processing metrics or that they collect metrics as an individual but their metrics are not used by the repository (Q4). These seventy-two respondents were then asked to give their opinions on why their repository or unit does not collect processing metrics (Q5). The top three reasons for not collecting metrics are that the program is understaffed, there is a lack of established guidelines, and it is too time consuming (see table 3). These all-too-common

realities are reflected across the survey responses. Respondent 38 (who states they have never collected processing metrics) expresses the supposition that data must be tracked to the minute: “Running a timer is stressful and also we often do multiple things at once. Also, I tend to forget things like tracking my every minute of processing time. . . . It gets annoying, stressful, and challenging to provide accurate data” (Q18, R38). Survey responses and the various homegrown processing metrics guidelines shared by respondents (see appendix A) indicate that of those who do collect processing metrics, the smallest interval of time measured is fifteen minutes and that more often, respondents estimate time by the hour, week, or month. Ideally, future profession-wide guidelines would provide a tiered data framework, including baseline data points for repositories that strive to assess archival processing but have little time to spare.¹³

| Reasons for not collecting processing metrics | % | n |
|--|----------|----------|
| Understaffed | 61 | 44 |
| Lack of established guidelines/framework | 42 | 30 |
| Too time-consuming | 35 | 25 |
| Lack of institutional/administrative support, interest, or demand for metrics | 31 | 22 |
| New processing unit (10 years or younger) that aspires to gather data but hasn’t matured to that point | 24 | 17 |
| Processing manager recognizes value of assessment but it is not a priority | 18 | 13 |
| Staff turnover | 13 | 9 |
| Processing manager sees little or no value in metrics/assessment | 10 | 7 |
| Too complex | 10 | 7 |
| “Other” related to a small shop | 10 | 7 |
| Other | 7 | 5 |

Table 3. Reasons cited for not collecting processing metrics (Q5); n = 72. Respondents were instructed to select all answers that applied; therefore, the total percentage exceeds 100.

Only 10 percent of this subgroup of respondents are of the opinion that they do not collect processing metrics at their repositories because it is too complex. However, qualitative data from both those who have and have not collected metrics contain intimations that processing is too nuanced to be measured. Comments sprinkled throughout the survey allude to MPLP (More Product, Less Process), processing levels, and iterative processing methods, all of which add layers of complexity to processing metrics. Some responses express a desire to track details related to these nuances, such as “whether any work has been done on the collection before that needs to first be undone/re-done/etc.—or, will this be all brand new work?; Also: is this collection being processed at the time of accession . . . /processed as a part of digitization/processed as a part of

¹³ For examples of tiered processing data frameworks, see “Practice & Workflow Assessment,” Harvard University Library Joint Processing Guidelines, 2020, <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/jointprocessingguidelines/processing-guidelines>, and Shein et al., “Balancing the Art and Science of Processing Metrics and Assessment,” 27–30, 33–34.

any other workflow vs. processing as a stand-alone activity” (Q17, R175). One respondent reflects on the complexities of iterative processing methods: “We have the freedom to do what we can now to describe materials knowing that if user access or other factors compel us to rethink (and process more thoroughly) a collection in the future, we can do so” (Q13, R153). Another respondent plainly wrote, “Processing is non-linear so it is idiotic to try to break out these various tasks” (Q18, R6).

In addition, many responses cite the challenges borne of the unique attributes of each collection and processor. They acknowledge that every collection is different: “Some boxes are quick, some are frustratingly complicated” (Q13, R56). They note that “archival processing is not an assembly line. . . . The collections aren’t uniform, and neither is the work” (Q13, R128). They also emphasize the fact that processors are all different; one observes, “I expect to see pretty different metrics on the same data point if I have a student vs. an early-career vs. an experienced archivist take on the same task” (Q17, R175), while another writes simply, “We are not machines” (Q18, R109).

Conclusion

The survey responses echo the literature. Archivists largely recognize the value of metrics, but there is little consensus on how to record data, what data points are most essential, or how granular the data must be for it to offer value. Variations in data collection methods reflect many things, including differences in the maturity or size of each repository and their purposes for collecting data. For the most part, each repository’s intended use of the data determines the intensity of their assessment and the specificity of their data points.

High-level metrics focus on the outcome of archival processing—how much was completed during a period of time. In general, survey responses indicate that overarching metrics are sufficient, and often preferable, for external communications and accountability purposes, such as reporting annual statistics to administrators, managing stakeholder expectations, advocating for resources, and demonstrating achievement. As one respondent reflects, “Management prefers bullet point/summary style reporting and is overwhelmed by or uninterested in additional detail” (Q13, R93).

While high-level metrics measure output, granular data points aid in evaluating processes. Detailed metrics are valuable in determining division of labor on team projects, setting realistic benchmarks for units, identifying workflow efficiencies, and gaining a firmer grasp on emerging practices such as born-digital processing. Responses demonstrating the most granular and frequent data collection methods came from larger, more developed programs (as voluntarily self-identified). One respondent aptly describes the chasm between large and small operations: “Just as there is a huge economic divide in our country, there is a huge archival divide in our profession. People who work in large universities have no clue what those of us at small private colleges deal with. . . . We struggle for basic funding, for time, for everything” (Q18, R20). The same can be said for small or underfunded archives of every type, including archival programs in well-funded parent organizations that do not recognize the value of their own archives. As noted in the survey, metrics offer concrete support for advocacy, but staff in under-resourced archives are often too thinly stretched to develop local metrics practices. Given the absence of codified professional guidelines, what advice do the survey results offer those seeking to develop local practices?

The survey findings highlight well-known disparities in resources, personnel, and practices across the profession. They show that practices differ for good reasons, indicating that it is appropriate and effective to tailor assessment goals and efforts to suit the situation. Practices must be scaled to match the needs of the repository and the capacity of the workforce. The collective wisdom drawn from the survey responses is consistent with the literature. Daniel Santamaria advises repositories to carefully determine what data points will be most effective, stating, “Tracking all processing activities . . . can add substantial overhead.”¹⁴ Likewise, Paul Ericksen and Robert Shuster advise caution: “The danger is always present that the costs of the recordkeeping itself will exceed the benefit of analysis.” They recommend streamlining the assessment process to make it easier to integrate into everyday operations.¹⁵ Evidently, the key to sustainable data collection and assessment is finding its golden minimum. Survey comments touch on ideas related to streamlining metrics including, “We track at a fairly granular level and have been doing so for many years; at this point those workflows are fairly solid and our tracking categories could probably be folded into a shorter list of broader categories without sacrificing utility” (Q15, R136). Likewise, “When we first started tracking processing time, we counted at a more granular level. Comparing data from many projects by many people over many years led us to conclude that tracking fewer tasks required less effort and provided just as reliable data for planning future processing. The key to reliable planning is not more data, but consistent data over many projects” (Q18, R85).

Moving forward, the challenges surrounding processing metrics will remain. Archival processing will continue to be performed within collection management ecosystems of varying sizes and maturities, collection managers and processors will bring individual approaches to their decisions and processes, collection materials will present complexities borne of their unique attributes, and the many nuances of processing practices will persist. To develop efficient and effective assessments, archivists and repositories must identify their purposes for collecting metrics and determine at least a baseline of the data points that will serve their purposes.

Respondents express a desire to implement processing metrics. One writes, “I am one of three librarians in a tiny, independent library/archive and we don’t have the staff or time to collect and assess data—I would love to be able to someday. It is helpful to see how large organizations do it, even though our operations are vastly different” (Q18, R99). Another notes, “Different institutions collect data that measures [processing] differently. [It] would be helpful to have guidelines about the strengths of each reporting [method]” (Q18, R84). Unfortunately, there are no profession-wide guidelines to answer these calls for assistance. As a profession, we must develop guidelines for archival processing data collection and reporting that meet the diverse needs of the community. We must clearly define the measurable actions that constitute archival processing, standardize units of measure for time and outcomes, and create an extensible tiered framework of data points (from baseline to added value). Together, we must move our fractured community of practice toward a common understanding, address the needs of under-resourced programs, and lay the groundwork for cross-repository processing data aggregation.¹⁶

¹⁴ Santamaria, *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections*, 115–16.

¹⁵ Paul Ericksen and Robert Shuster, “Beneficial Shocks: The Place of Processing-Cost Analysis in Archival Administration,” *American Archivist* 58 (Winter 1995): 50.

¹⁶ Among those who advocate for aggregating processing data from across the profession are Gustainis, “Processing Workflow Analysis for Special Collections,” 127–28; and Jackie M. Dooley and Katherine Luce, *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2010), 10.

Meanwhile, although the profession has not yet established processing metrics guidelines, some of our colleagues are blazing trails for others to follow. The survey shows that over 35 percent of respondents have developed homegrown tools to meet local processing and assessment needs (Q2). Appendix A lists resources shared by respondents, including guidelines and tools for assessing collections, determining processing levels, creating processing plans, and estimating processing rates. Several of the resources include downloadable templates and worksheets for recording processing data. The authors are grateful to all the individuals who shared their opinions and practices via the survey. They are especially indebted to those who share their tools and allow others to use what they have developed. Such efforts and generosity move the profession forward.

Appendix A Community Resources

Survey respondents indicate that they use a number of resources and tools to support archival processing assessment. The top two resources cited are *Guidelines for Efficient Processing in the University of California Libraries* (n = 29) and the *Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections (PACSCAL) Surveying and Minimal Processing Manual* (n = 14). Eighty-three respondents say they use no resources of this nature, and sixty-three say they use locally developed resources (Q2). Some respondents shared information on the resources they have developed. The following list includes links to the most recent versions of the openly available online resources shared by respondents (Q3):

Columbia University Libraries Special Collections Materials Survey Instrument

https://library.columbia.edu/services/preservation/survey_tools.html

This collection survey instrument is based on the PACSCAL model and is shared as a downloadable Microsoft Access database.

Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries (Version 4), May 2020

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4b81g01z>

These guidelines present holistic practices related to accessioning, appraisal, and processing of analog and digital archival materials. They provide charts to assist in determining appropriate levels of processing and estimating processing rates (hours per linear foot) for different levels of effort and control. The “Processing Metrics” section (pp. 41–43) includes a template for collecting twelve “baseline” data points.

Harvard Medical School Center for the History of Medicine Processing Metrics Collaborative: Database Development Initiative, Spring 2009

<https://wiki.med.harvard.edu/Countway/ArchivalCollaboratives/ProcessingMetricsDatabase>

This project features a Microsoft Access database that provides a framework for capturing data related to time spent on administrative tasks, acquisitions, accessioning, arrangement, description, digitization, records management, and other activities (quarter hours per cubic foot). Instructions and blank versions of the downloadable Metrics Database are available at <https://wiki.med.harvard.edu/Countway/ArchivalCollaboratives/CHoMMetricsDocumentation>.

Harvard University Library Joint Processing Guidelines

<https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/jointprocessingguidelines/processing-guidelines>

These guidelines address archival accessioning, processing, and assessment. The “Assessment Toolkit” includes links to processing worksheets, templates, and other resources. The section on “Practice & Workflow Assessment” outlines three levels of recommended data points, tracking from six basic data points (in linear or cubic feet per week) to ten data points (optimal) to twenty data points (added value in quarter hours per cubic foot). See also <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/jointprocessingguidelines/processing-practice-workflow-assessment>.

Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) Project Manual

<https://hsp.org/sites/hsp.org/files/images/HCIPSAR/srpmanual.pdf>

This manual focuses on archival collections surveys. It includes worksheets that identify collection characteristics that can impact processing rates (pp. 22–24) and processing rate estimates (hours per linear foot) (p. 42).

New York State Archives Documentary Heritage Program Grant Application Guidelines and Resources, 2018–19

http://www.archives.nysed.gov/common/archives/files/grants_dhp_guidelines_0.pdf

This manual provides guidelines for creating a work plan for processing analog and born-digital records. It includes instructions on measuring cubic feet and processing rate estimates (weeks).

New York University Libraries Accessioning, Arrangement, and Description Manual

<http://bit.ly/nyu-aad-manual>

This manual offers guidance for a holistic approach to assessing, accessioning, arranging, and describing archival collections. It provides a chart to assist with time estimates (minutes/hours per linear foot) related to accessioning steps (pp. 15–16) and a chart with estimates for audiovisual and born-digital processing rates (minutes per item) (pp. 42–43).

Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries PACSCL/CLIR Hidden Collections Processing Project, 2009–12 Processing Worksheet

<http://clir.pacscl.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/Processing-Worksheet.pdf>

This downloadable PDF worksheet for tracking processing metrics includes fields for daily recording of six data points (including hours per linear foot).

Smithsonian Institute Archives of American Art Processing Guidelines: Chapter 2, Processing Levels

<https://www.aaa.si.edu/documentation/processing-guidelines-chapter-2-processing-levels-at-the-archives-of-american-art>

These guidelines address four levels of processing. They provide processing rate estimates for different levels (hours per linear foot) and include specific instructions for audiovisual material.

University of Michigan Archival Metrics Toolkit

<https://sites.google.com/a/umich.edu/archival-metrics/home/the-toolkits>

This toolkit provides a set of templates to support researcher/student evaluations of archival services and resources. It does not include processing assessments.

Appendix B

UNLV Special Collections and Archives 2019 Archival Processing Metrics Survey

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) Libraries Special Collections and Archives is studying how archival processing metrics (including the hours of labor required to process each linear/cubic foot) are gathered and used by our colleagues. We plan to publish our findings in an open access journal in 2020. This is an informal opinion poll. It seeks the perspectives of individuals (not their institutions). We encourage more than one person from an institution to individually complete this survey.

If you do not collect and/or assess processing metrics, your perspective is very relevant and important to our research. The survey will require only 5 minutes of your time. If you do collect and/or assess processing metrics, we greatly value your insights. The survey will require 10–15 minutes of your time (if you answer all optional free text questions).

In the context of this survey, “processing” is defined as: actions performed on archival material from the time of accessioning to the point it is described online (in any way) and available to researchers (in person or online), and any actions performed to further describe it or bring up to current standards (i.e., additional processing). It does not include acquisition or digitization. For the sake of simplicity, the survey uses the terms “collection” or “archival material” throughout. However, the survey questions apply to institutional records, manuscripts, and all other archival formats, including born-digital materials.

This survey is anonymous. The form does not automatically record email or IP addresses. You will have the option to manually add your institutional affiliation and/or contact information at the end of the survey.

Q1. Repository/institution type (*Select one*)

- Academic library/archives
- Cultural heritage institution (independent gardens, galleries, museums, etc.)
- Corporate archives
- Government library/archives (federal, state, county, city)
- Public library/archives
- Historical society
- Religious library/archives
- Medical library/archives
- Community archives
- Research facility (STEM)
- K-12 school library/archives
- Other (*free text*)

Q2. Archival processing metrics are often supported by preliminary surveys, guidelines for processing levels, and other tools that provide frameworks for assessment. What methods/tools/resources has your repository used to collect and/or assess archival collections data? (*Please check all that apply*)

- None
- Locally developed tools
- Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries
- Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL) Surveying and Minimal Processing Manual
- Archival Metrics Toolkit (University of Michigan School of Information)
- Processing Metrics Collaborative: Database Development Initiative (Harvard Medical School Countway Library)
- Other (*free text*)

Q3. Please comment upon and/or share links to any tools you have used that are freely available: (*Optional*)

Q4. In the unit/repository where I work, we . . . (*Select one*)

- Have never collected processing metrics
- Collect and assess processing metrics routinely as part of ongoing operations (including projects)
- Collect and assess processing metrics only for specific projects (including grant projects)
- Are in an early stage of collecting and assessing processing metrics as part of ongoing operations
- May have collected processing metrics in the past (not sure)
- Collect processing metrics on an individual basis, but we do not aggregate or assess them as a unit/repository
- Collected processing metrics as a pilot project, but did not sustain the effort

Q5. In your opinion, what are the primary reasons that your unit/repository does not collect and assess processing metrics? (*Please check all that apply*)

- Understaffed
- Lack of established guidelines/framework
- Too time-consuming
- Lack of institutional/administrative support
- Other (*free text*)

Q6. Metrics can inform various activities and decisions. In what ways are archival processing metrics used at your repository? (*Please check all that apply.*)

- Inform processing priorities
- Inform archival workflows/processes
- Forecast need and/or advocate for more archival staff
- Forecast need for archival supplies
- Plan and propose grants or other special projects
- Track and manage grants or other special projects
- Inform budget planning/management
- Inform strategic planning
- Demonstrate cost to process a single collection/donation/acquisition
- Inform which processing staff or teams are best suited for particular tasks/collections

- Demonstrate and articulate value of archival program to stakeholders (reports, outreach, etc.)
- Evaluate individual processors' performance
- Forecast and/or advocate for additional physical space
- Motivate/celebrate staff by demonstrating group/unit progress
- Other (*free text*)

Q7. Does your unit/repository collect metrics specific to born-digital processing?

- No
- Yes
- Not sure
- Other (*free text*)

Q8. Do you have any additional comments on how processing metrics have proven valuable in your experience? (*Optional*)

Q9. Approximately how often do you (or your unit) assess processing data for internal purposes (e.g., to inform operations, workflows, teamwork, priorities, project management, etc.)?

- Annually
- Quarterly
- Twice per year
- Every two months
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily
- Not sure

Q10. Approximately how often do you (or your unit) use processing data to support external reports or communications with administrators, stakeholders, donors, or funding agencies?

- Annually
- Quarterly
- Twice per year
- Every two months
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily
- Not sure

Q11. If you were to simplify data collection and assessment, reducing the focus to core data points, which of the following data points do you consider essential? (*Rate the importance of each data point using the provided scale of 1 to 3.*)

- Collection title and/or number/identifier
- Collection dates
- Collection creator name

- Collection creator type (corporate, university, family papers, personal papers, etc.)
- Extent (physical and digital, pre-processing and post-processing)
- Predominant material formats (textual records, manuscripts, visual/graphic materials, audiovisual, born-digital)
- Complexity of collection prior to processing (Disorganized? Wide variety of subjects? Conservation challenges? Uniformity vs. heterogeneity of materials?)
- Historical/institutional/research value of collection
- Project name or funding source (including grants)
- Level of processing performed (e.g., collection level, series level, folder level, item level, etc.)
- Type of processing performed (e.g., baseline processing at time of accessioning, re-processing legacy collection, iterative/extensible processing to enhance)
- Total processing hours
- Average processing rate (volume of material processed per hour)
- Date processing was completed
- Name(s) of processor(s)
- Role of the processor (professional archivist, paraprofessional staff, graduate intern, undergraduate student assistant, etc.)
- Solo or team effort
- Experience or skill level of processor (processing expert or novice, subject expert, etc.)
- Language of materials

Q12. Are there any other essential data points you would recommend adding to this list? Why? (*Optional*)

Q13. For any data point you rated not at all important (1), please explain your rationale. (*Optional*)

Q14. Some repositories collect detailed data on specific processing tasks. The actions below are important components that add up to “Total processing time,” yet the actions may or may not warrant individual assessment. In your environment, which of the following processing actions do you consider important enough to track as separate data points? (*Rate the importance of each data point using the provided scale of 1 to 3.*)

- Research the collection/creator
- Conducting preliminary collection survey
- Creating processing plans
- Performing appraisal and deaccessioning
- Reviewing materials for sensitive/restricted items
- Creating collection inventory
- Creating collection context (historical/biographical note, scope and contents notes, abstract, assigning names/subjects)
- Editing/revising new description (your own or that of your colleagues)
- Performing physical/digital arrangement
- Housing materials (routine sleeving, foldering, re-boxing, etc.)

- Intensive conservation treatment (creating preservation copies, removing damaging fasteners, repairing paper, humidifying, flattening, creating custom-made enclosures)
- Logistics (building boxes, labeling boxes, barcoding boxes, paging/retrieving and storing materials, managing locations)
- Distinguish between rates for processing born-digital vs. physical archives
- Reformatting (AV, digital files, etc.) to create access/service copies
- Performing actions that result in online discovery (e.g., creating/uploading EAD, MARC, blog posts, PDFs, or any action that places collection description online)

Q15. For any of the points you rated as essential (3), please explain how that data point would be useful to you. (Optional)

Q16. If you believe it is useful to break down any of these data points into still more granular points, please note the point/action, how you would parse it into more detailed data points, and how that information would be useful to you. (Optional)

Q17. Are there any other essential data points you would recommend adding to this list? (Optional)

Q18. Are there any additional comments you would like to share? (Optional)