

Next Gen Finding Aid Website, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Photograph Finding Aid – Transcript of audio

Please stand by for realtime captions. Let's dive in. We came into this project first with really just the tech side in mind, not the records. The office of innovation, under which Jill works, wanted to feature records from a historically marginalized community and had zeroed in on the massive Bureau of Indian Affairs BIA holdings. This is the federal agency that manages all of the reservations nationwide under a series of agencies. That was when I was brought in. Shortly after, we went to the contract process for a web development firm to help build this thing. We did go external for that. It was some of the best money I have seen spent, having true professionals pour over everything and turn pipe dreams into reality. It was amazing. It worked for a while. We scaled the project, and even designed the project since it had never been done before. We finally narrowed down and settled on our photographic holdings from our BIA records. They had largely been scanned and put into our catalog by facilities nationwide, but they were sort of hard to access. They weren't really collected. They were spread all over the place depending on the location. Then we had to work on new avenues to explore the records, how to enter the records, location, tribal nation name, and topic became those three. The project goals. You have got to have goals. They were basic. They were simple. The site had to work. The site had to be useful. You had to be something new. We weren't going to sugarcoat things about what the records sometimes showed, the tortured history our government has had with natives in particular, the boarding schools, which are a big thing right now. Throughout the process, from the very beginning, we strove to collect external voices to help run things by, and discuss, the project. Largely made up of cells, it was very mixed with academics, artists, students, teachers, archivists. This became key, along with our own internal staff that we also consulted to use throughout the process to identify issues, improve the product, or just get feedback on what our work may be received as or what it really wanted, and here with some of the feedback our development team got from the many hours of interviews we had with these external voices. Let's just dive right in. I can explain more on the development as I show you the features. I mentioned earlier that we have what we call the national archive catalog. This is where one can browse all of our records, file units, individual scanned items. This massive site is where all the images live. It is huge and has limitations, many of which are being addressed in a new rollout this fall. We didn't want to just build a new catalog. We had to do new things. The ability to enter the records by tribal nation is one of them. Based on captions, in cases like where the BIA headquarters images had been collected, we would judge us, or by the agency that created them. We went through and assigned each -- the tribal nation to each photograph, where we could. Some are a mix of tribes, so we didn't specify that exactly. We instead use the official tribal nation name the both the nation and the Department of Interior uses. As a federal agency, we were sort of on the same page. This not only meant a lot of work to label each of them, but also to create those new authorities in the catalog. In many cases, these didn't exist. Not all 570 federally recognized tribal nations are here. Actually, there is a little over 100. That is simply because we don't have photographs yet for many of them. If the photos were to be scanned for a nation not presently on the site, it could be easily added. Also, we use the current nation name while records may use older outdated terms for tribal nations. That sort of information still exists, if you were to search via the site search feature by it, but we just went with the more modern recognized names. So when you enter in by tribal nation, here we have the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. You then see a breakdown of the photographs at the top. This is another one of the access points. By topic. Let's talk a little bit about the topics. You enter the site, but you can also dive right into topics. These took a while to workshop. We started with a basic list that the still pictures unit had been using for years. We got rid of ones that wouldn't have many images, ones that were sort of offensive. For example, they used costumes, and these are closing. We change the title. We added more that was

suggested. We consolidated some of them. For example, people have been using various different artworks which we rolled into one as art and artifacts. We ended up with a list of 28. Then came the project of assigning those to the 18,000 plus images we had in the catalog. A couple of us sampled 1000 images to test out. That is when we realize many photographs had multiple tags. The opposite of innovation then utilizing the catalog feature that you see on the left created a citizens ark advised mission -- archivist admission to engage the public at large. This one took about six months to get all the photographs basically tagged. Then they would get pulled in under the topic on the site. This was the only part of the project that was largely crowd sourced. While that can have problems, it has been two years, and I have yet to anecdotally find a bad tag. Lastly, by location. By state. Can see on the top that you can just click on state and you get this map. By state, we bunched up states using the BIA division of the country to break up the map as far as colors go. We worked on this map a lot. I had no idea how much work could go into something so basic. It turned out nice. You hover over each state, and the number of photographs in that state will pop up. And you click on estate to go further. Here is what you see. So you put down South Dakota. This will pop up. Now you can limit your results by the tribal nation or by topics. Or you can just simply browse all 12,000. I want to take a minute to say that dates are very prominent of a future. It wasn't one of the access points we ended up going with. That is because many of these photographs are simply undated, or they will fall under a broad range of dates. So when present, the date does show up at the top of each images page, but it wasn't something we ever enabled sorting by just because the results weren't very accurate. On the main page, if you continue to scroll down, there is an additional section where we have collected those photographs of famous notable folks, and we applied a very liberal definition of that. Here you see the examples. This is still rather limited. We don't have a lot of such photographs in the BIA holdings. And other record groups there are, but this one was limited to Bureau of Indian affairs photos. The inclusion is an automatic through the API, like others. For these we have to manually add to the section. Right off the bat, these photographs often documented a darker period in our history, the boarding schools, for example. The captions would often reflect the now, possibly, outdated norms of the times. We wanted to address that head-on and acknowledge that as a warning, of sorts. This probably doesn't look all that shocking. It is it nearly as strong as what I argued for, but we had to fight hard for this. There was considerable handwringing in leadership. Remind, this was a few years ago. This is one thing I came across with external voices, they really wanted acknowledgment of that. The beauty of the site is that with the API, there are new photographs going to the catalog as units continue digitization efforts nationwide. In the process, when they're putting those into the catalog, they now had the tribal nations that can use the tags and subjects. They automatically get populated into the site too. The site continues to grow. Same for tags. We worked hard in the performance. Says they are photographs, we wanted to be sure they displayed just right. We tested it on mobile and desktops. We rolled it out in November 2020 during the height of the pandemic. It has been going gangbusters ever since. A great resource. That is it for my part of the slides. I will now hand is off to my colleague, Jill. There she is.

Thanks everybody. Happy to talk with you about this today. I want to provide some details about the national archives catalog and how we leveraged it for this interactive products. We have an application program interface in API. We have been updating the findings dynamically as photographs are tagged. It is an interactive, continuously automated thing. This also allows us to pull in, on-the-fly, new photographs that are added to this record group as we go forward and add more content. The amount of digitized content continues to go. We continue to explore new digitization partnerships to work on this. It is great to have flexible and dynamic discovery experiences and be able to leverage our API to do that. The API is also publicly accessible. We continue to improve on and refine it. We have a new release of the catalog coming out this fall based on feedback and input from folks that use API. For the image viewer, we used IIIF, a standard for interoperability. It includes a lot of features for zooming in,

generating derivative files such as thumbnails and tiling on-the-fly. It loads faster and provides for a better user experience. The feedback on that aspect of the technical design has been really positive. I wanted to share some upcoming technical updates for our national archives catalog. We have been referring to it as our next Jen national archives catalog. It is coming soon this fall. In August, we will start to have a preview up of the new site. The old site and new site will then be gliding, overlapping, for a period of time. Then we will cross over in the fall to the new system. The NAC will have this new API . In the past, the old API had some limits on the number of records you could pull. There was kind of a cap. It was throttled for performance reasons in the past. One of the key features of NAC is the scalability of it and performance improvements in the way the architect the new system. The API will be able to provide comprehensive search results hits in those queries. We are excited about that. Will also be incorporating IIF into the knee Next Gen catalog. Other things that will be enhancements. For the tagging, our contributors annotate our digital objects, descriptions with tags, and the interface for that and the ability for contributors to see what they have added, any interactions, any other activity on catalog descriptions. They will have more of a dashboard experience to increase engagement. And help them see their progress too. Those are some key things. Also in the future, we started to plan for archives.gov updates and redesign. This will be enhancements to our [Indiscernible] infrastructure, the web content management system we use. That will open up more possibilities for Next Gen finding aids. We are planning to offer more focused around additional communities , BIPOC community's, LGBTQ, accessibility around women's records, other communities and groups. We are exploring that and doing collaborative work on the content end. Prepare for that in the future. So we will be able to build an offer more Next Gen finding aids in the future . This is a model for a reusable template. We can start to offer once we have archives.gov available. This is part of the future planning and roadmap. Other enhancement we have coming for NAC where planning for that will be particularly key for this BIA record finding aid relate to enhancements around different types of contributions. Right now we have tags, descriptions and comments, but we will expand on that. We're going to start to be able, in the future, was we have the new catalog released, it is in the roadmap to be able to have more fielded contributions like first and last name. Also, tags for geographic locations, occupations. We are exploring possibilities for contributors from communities to contribute traditional knowledge labels and traditional knowledge narrative comments that would really enhance and enrich the catalog records and provide community-based knowledge and expertise and perspective as an additional layer to really enhance access and discovery and be a collaborative effort. One of the key components to our strategy going forward, and where the national archives is going and working with BIPOC communities, black, indigenous, blue color and other special communities we want to build stronger relationships with, continue to collaborate with in deeper ways is to really focus around access and discovery. The conversations we have been having so far have really pointed to how much they value these Next Gen finding aids in new ways to discover and explore and highlight what is in the holdings and see their perspectives, help inform how we present that. These communities are going to be central to our strategy. The national archives strategic plan is 2022 through 2026 plan. You find it on archives.gov. Under our make axis happen goal number one, there is a goal that really focuses on serving these communities, offering Next Gen finding aids that serve them. This is aligned with our strategy and where NARA is going with this work. The community engagement and new models for that are so key. Listening and having continued loops of feedback and sharing and exchange of input are so critical to this work. This is that detail about the make access happen. I do have the link here. We are talking about the work we're doing with these Next Gen finding aids, conversations and engagement we are having with these different communities, and we are working with one or two communities per year. In addition to these finding aids, these projects, we are also doing citizen archivist transcription and tagging projects. Coming up with tagging, inviting the community to focus on certain groups of records or certain aspects of a group of records and inviting them to help contribute with us to increase access through tagging and

transcription work. And then, we are also looking at bulk downloads. In particular, some conversations with indigenous communities and certain nations who had asked us to explore downloads to make it easier for them to pull into other sites of their own. We are continuing to explore that and will be doing some pilots in that regard. This also dovetails with our reparative description work we're getting started on and getting ready to pilot. That work is first beginning with terms that we collaborated with an identified, along with stakeholders from the black community. Soon we will also work with other communities, Puerto Rican community, indigenous community, AAPI community. There is a path forward where we are really doing the work intensively. We're taking our time to work on this and collaborate. That takes time with each community. But we are moving forward and continuing collaboration. Work is focused on reparative description and making changes to terminology, to update it, and remove any terms that might be seen as harmful or insensitive. Sometimes not removing, but deemphasizing it, in the description. And then being transparent on what we changed. In the reparative description and digitization, working group has three charges. We have been asked to examine hurtful language and descriptions in the catalog, ensure historical records use language that is current and up-to-date and respectful and accurate and discoverable. Also, to start addressing concerns around under description and over description. When we are using those terms, it is very specifically related to subjective language and over attention to groups that historically have been in power, versus people whose contributions may have gone unnoticed, unacknowledged, and trying to balance that out. It is not in terms of, if we have a list or describing the records, to hold back in any description, but if we've gone off on a tangent, overly describing white representatives from the BIA and going into depth about those individuals accomplishments and not acknowledging what our other contributions from history and those tribal nations that we can learn about through those records and balancing that out related to over description and under description. It also relates to the person name files too. Is there the right balance for people whose contributions have not been acknowledged? How can we enhance their biographical notes to balance these things out?

We are also working to surface records that are pertinent to these communities that I have been mentioning. We're really focused on digitizing more and partnering in new ways with new types of digitization partners and exploring ways to prioritize certain groups of records with them, thinking about how to enhance access, leverage a variety of tools to explore ways for the community to contribute, ways to share those digital copies back and forth so we have a loop or round-trip for how we share that content. Especially sharing those user contributions from the community that might happen on that partners community platform. At my old so happen on our national archives catalog platform. How to explore new ways to sink that up as it relates to digitization efforts and contribution efforts. And then, the third piece of this is related to that consultation and deep engagement with the community partners. This alliance with the NARA activities around advancing racial equity, supporting underserved communities. There is an executive order related to that. We also have our guiding documents related to reparative description and digitization. We have worked really closely with the NARA equity team on this. I should also emphasize both internal and external stakeholders. The employee assistance groups, the national archives has groups like say it loud and other groups that represent special communities, different communities, at NARA. We have been talking with them and talking with subject matter experts that focus on communities and different types of records and emphasizing that. Also talking with folks from professional associations, from historians, librarians, archivists, and benchmarking with other national archives and state archives to see what they are doing to advance this work, follow best practices, and share lessons learned in this reparative effort. Here are some resources and links that are available on archives.gov. We have the link for the Next Gen finding aid that we have been highlighted today. We have these other links to our record group explore, donated collection explore, and presidential library explore. I'm going to go ahead and jump in and take a look at the questions right

now. Can we explain more about what we mean by Next Gen finding aid? What makes it Next Gen and not simply a digital collection? Does it have other metadata you would traditional find?

Thanks so much for this question. But we would say about it being a Next Gen finding aid is the way that it is dynamic and automated and how it is leveraging the national archives catalog API as its source material. So the content is not just statically loaded on a webpage, but it is being built in a way that is dynamic and always pulling the most up-to-date content in scope for the finding aid out of the catalogs. It is continuously updating on the fly whenever the catalog is updated. That is what we mean by it being Next Gen. What we may call the more traditional finding aids in the past would've been something that was like a Word document or something similar that we load onto a page and maybe go back and edit the text from time to time. These are dynamically updated and pulled from the catalog and interactive. I'm glad to see that that is being clarified. The other thing is that with the archival contexts in the hierarchy, really you will link through and explore and discover in an interactive way in the Next Gen finding aid, and then click through back to the catalog to get the archival context about the hierarchy. So it is different. You will not walk you through and that linear way. It is more of a multidirectional, not as linear, multipoint discovery and exploration. That is part of what we are trying to capture and share with these finding aids. Also, if we have a minute, I can click on and show some of the record group explore or one of these other ones. You will see how they are dynamic. There being pulled from a data set in a different way, but it is still layered on top of the catalog and taking you back to full details, more metadata, in the catalog itself. That is really a repository. These are new ways to explore and share that we are layering on top. We will have the slides to share. There will be a link that goes out tomorrow or the next day. These are hyperlinks here. To talk a little bit about those reparative descriptions . I have included links to guiding principles for reparative descriptions at NARA. I have a link to the statement of potentially harmful content. Cody did a great job of highlighting what we did to include some messaging around that in the Next Gen finding aid itself. We also have a banner everywhere in the national archives catalog that flags for potentially harmful content. We have a link to a fuller statement. We continue to explore ways to get those user advisory alerts or trigger warnings closer to the content, the most relevant content. Right now, we are starting to explore how to define requirements for future catalog development and enhancements. Were starting to leave ourselves notes so we know later, we start to have these new features, we can be tacking stuff that we think should be tagged or flagged for those harmful warnings. We will plan ahead for them. The last link is the updates on reparative description and digitization. Tomorrow we have coming out some updates related to the preferred terms and harmful terms that we will move away from and the preferred terms we will use for records descriptions related to the black community. There are more things coming. We will always post things on that page as we move forward working with other communities. We will share updates, and this will be the go to spot for getting updates on that. Do you have any other questions? If there is interest in going back to look at the other explorers or to explore anything in the Next Gen finding aid on the BIA photographs, we might have time to do that on the fly and do a live demo. Thank you.

If you have any questions, feel free to chat them in the chat box at the bottom of the page. Please use all participants so everyone can see them. While we are waiting for any questions to come in, I want to bring to your attention a couple of events coming up for FDLP Academy. On July 20, tomorrow, we have help at your fingertips by the VA mobile mental health apps. On July 21, we have MA information resources, introduction to economic maritime and national security information resources. On August 1, we have using science.gov to access U.S. government science information. Some again, feel free to chat your questions in the chat box. I will place a link in case you're interested in signing up for any of these webinars. If you have already asked a question and we have not seen it, chat it in again. Are the images

able to be downloaded at full resolution, or is it similar to Library of Congress where they have small thumbnails for some images? You are on mute.

I'm sorry about that. Great question. We provide the full download whenever possible. We don't have as many, you know, access and use restrictions, copyrighted content as LOC. So whenever possible, we provide the link to the highest resolution for download. As they continue to build capacity and storage of performance of the catalog, we are going to continue to provide higher and higher resolution. But we almost never have like a little fuzzy thing. It might be just more of a quick access copy, but we are making higher resolution available.

That brings up a good point. All these photographs were captured by government employees. They are in the public domain. Feel free to use them as you wish. We just asked that you cite that you got them from us.

Great point, Cody.

Any other questions? Ashley, you send out the satisfaction survey? The satisfaction survey has been posted. If you get a chance, please click on that and give us your feedback. What did you like about this session? What programs do you want to see GPO do? I see a question. Has there been any thought about a traveling exhibit?

That's a great question. I know we're looking a lot right now at what the future of exhibits are going to look like. Sometimes I have seen from other institutions that they may make a tribal exhibit available. I don't know. I don't know if you guys in Denver have had conversations about it.

There hasn't been much talk, but these photographs are often heavily used in other institutions. For example, down in New Mexico the state archives exhibit has some. But nothing at our facility.

If you want to message us later the best way to get in touch with me and my team is through email. We could share what your ideas would be with the exhibits team. I think there are ways for the original content to come as a traveling exhibit, and sometimes I have seen, when I was at Library of Congress, we did a traveling pop up display that libraries and others could borrow and host. It had nice reproductions of small content. The book and put it in their lobbies or different spaces. I think we did it for the Magna Carta exhibit. It was pretty popular. I would be interested in exploring some ideas. So shoot me an email. I'm happy to talk about what ideas you might have.

Another question. I know that some institutions are having issues where libraries are archives have images that descendants no longer want to see posted. Have you encountered anything like that were descendants asked for images to be withdrawn? If yes, what has been the response?

That's a great question too. I don't think at this point that there are requests that have come in related to that that I am aware of. Cody may know something more. We have been talking about future possibilities related to this as we expand digitization efforts and ways to be mindful and sensitive to that. I think it is that line around public access, and these are meant to be government documents. We try to do as much access as we can for them, and then balancing with those community needs or interests. We been talking in the abstract about potential partners that we have been talking to from different tribal and indigenous communities and discussing how we would address this. I know it was

part of the conversation and some other institutions too. Cody, do you know of any conversations, or have you been part of any conversations related to that?

It hasn't come up yet. We haven't had anybody request it, but it has been a point of concern. Anecdotally, it is actually been the opposite. The few photographs that do have names, people have been excited to discover that their ancestors were photographed. And came up in the design of the website because, not so much with the BIA, but the Army took a lot of photographs with gravesites. Some things are sacred. Luckily, the BIA photographs really didn't have any of those. There are a few scattered graveyard images up in South Dakota. When we spoke with external voices, we settled on not highlighting them. You have to really dig to find them. That is just a stopgap at this moment. It is still a big conversation of how to address this moving forward.

I know in this context we have been mindful of and talking about access to content related to burial sites and rules and policies around how we handle that content. There are absolutely sensitivities. We try to navigate it by talking with stakeholders and partners about it.

Okay. I am not seeing any more questions. Ashley, if you could please put in the chat box the satisfaction survey one more time. Thank you. I want to thank Jill and Cody for a wonderful presentation. We really appreciate you coming here and presenting. Thank you so much. I want to thank everyone for attending today's webinar. We look forward to seeing you at the next FDLP Academy webinar. Thank you everyone.