Why Collaborate with Users?

Special Collections librarians often digitize and make accessible collections for which they have little domain expertise.

How We Collaborated

We used face to face interactions to gather our user community’s input. These interactions focused on two areas:

Collections

Two large group meetings to discuss future grant projects

1. Exploratory. Create a comprehensive list of possible collections and formats for inclusion in future projects

2. Structured. Get the advisors to prioritize collections from a pre-selected list so that project staff could make concrete decisions

Website Design

Before the meetings, we sent a link to the site and a list of questions to get people to interact with the site. The meetings were one of two formats:

1. Group (5-6 users, lasted approx. 2 hours)
   * Asked very open-ended questions of the group and allowed for open discussion rather than a pointed question and answer session.
   * Allowed for a broad spectrum of viewpoints to be shared
   * Created an open atmosphere for conversation

2. Individual (1 user, lasted approx. 1 hour)
   * Asked open-ended questions but was more focused on how this one person would use the site for their own research
   * Allowed us to go over the site in depth, since we had more time

Feedback received

* There was general agreement that several of the elements were confusing and needed to be clarified.

* Faculty wanted easy access to slide presentation images.

* Historians and preservationists were interested in seeing the location of buildings and the architects who design them.

* Librarians interested in our facets and suggested ones that would be most used for doing reference for students.

Benefits

“Thank you so much for asking me my opinion. It’s nice to be asked.” - One of our advisors

* Helped us prioritize and justify collections for digitization

* Facilitated decisions about functionality and features needed on website

* Raised awareness of the projects we are working on

* Our advisors felt an investment in the projects

* Built better connections between Special Collections and researchers in the university and outside community

Who’s Involved?

Our advisory panel consisted of people representing different use cases for the digital collections and tools we’re building.

* Architecture faculty and students
* Architectural historians
* Historic preservationists
* Design and architecture librarians