

# Notes on Operations

## Holistic Collection Development and the Smithsonian Libraries

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*As part of a larger collections analysis study, this project outlines why a particular, underserved museum unit at the Smithsonian Institution is underutilizing the Smithsonian Libraries' facilities and resources, and how the library can better support this unit's unique research needs. Using a holistic methodology that weds quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study highlights the unit's distinct research profile that includes the various logistical, emotional, and collection-related barriers that impede their usage of the Libraries. Findings from this study signal the utility of a holistic, user-centric methodology to gather pertinent data and facilitate ongoing, interpersonal dialogues between the Smithsonian Libraries and its diverse internal users.*

As part of a larger collection development study being undertaken by the Smithsonian Libraries (SIL), this project seeks to demonstrate how a holistic collection development methodology can promote stronger, inter-disciplinary collections while increasing library usage among smaller, “underserved” Smithsonian units. The project proposes alternatives to relying exclusively on quantitative strategies such as checklists or circulation statistics by employing interpersonal approaches that emphasize local research needs.<sup>1</sup> Semi-structured research interviews with Smithsonian curators, researchers, and directors at a distinct research and education unit were undertaken, along with subject analyses of un-accessioned materials, from which the necessity of micro-level collections assessment was concluded. A holistic methodology, the sum of quantitative and qualitative tools used to develop and assess collections, had the potential to uncover multifaceted findings formerly undetected by singular, data-driven assessment strategies.

Historical and contemporary reliance on systemic, data-driven tools among collecting institutions is partly the result of the complex processes of collections assessment. While quantitative findings, such as usage statistics, present a seemingly direct and efficient way for research libraries to justify their collections amid ever-shifting technologies and budget constraints, and formal evaluation strategies help circumvent the labor-intensive process of reviewing collections using an item-by-item approach (referred to as the Conspectus method), exclusively quantitative systematic approaches fail due to their one-dimensionality when evaluating collecting institutions such as museum library networks.<sup>2</sup> Without discrediting the utility of quantitative tools, this study demonstrates that relying on them solely overlooks what exists at a micro-level, such as the quality of a collection's holdings, or weaknesses therein.<sup>3</sup> On their own, circulation statistics and checklists are ill equipped to assess collection omissions as they tend to focus on the number and use of items that encourage uniformity and overlook inter-unit distinctions.

Macro-level collections assessment challenges are exacerbated when applied to an institutional behemoth like SIL. With twenty-one specialized branches, each nested within the disciplines of History & Culture, Art & Design, Natural & Physical Sciences, or Special Collections, SIL's more than two million items

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represent a multitude of disciplines and subjects. SIL's numerous programs and services include: online research tools; K-12 educational outreach; an array of digital collections; online and physical library exhibitions; interlibrary loan (ILL); and the Smithsonian Research Online (SRO), an aggregate of publication data of works created by Smithsonian staff and affiliates. Across the Smithsonian, each physical museum has a dedicated library branch to serve its research and curatorial needs. However, some Smithsonian units do not fit neatly into this corresponding museum/library pairing. While SIL provides some support to these units, they do not have the luxury of a dedicated library space. For units that do not belong to this museum/library pairing, quantitative strategies fall short because their research profiles are complicated by their lack of proximity to a staffed physical library.

One SIL branch that is uncharacteristically multi-disciplinary is the Smithsonian Libraries Research Annex (SLRA), out of which this study's research team is based. SLRA is not a branch dedicated to one museum, but is instead dedicated to all. As SIL's most subject-diverse unit, it houses materials from each of the Smithsonian's branch libraries. The Annex, located off-site in Landover, Maryland, housed over 35,000 monographs and 250,000 periodical holdings when this project was conducted. Originally established as an off-site storage facility for legacy materials, SLRA's holdings are comprised of materials across all areas of study at the Smithsonian: history and culture, applied science and technology, natural and physical sciences, and art. Materials housed there have been culled for fifty years from the many research-specific museum-branch libraries. More recently, due to overcrowded shelf spaces and loss of physical space due to renovations across the Smithsonian network, SLRA's purpose has expanded to include actively used collections. As such, SLRA is an inherently cross-disciplinary collection and operates as a library branch, an institutional legacy collection, and off-site storage.

This study examines the benefits of a holistic collection development methodology between SLRA, a multi-disciplinary off-site library branch, and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH), a research unit without a dedicated, physical Smithsonian Libraries branch. It seeks to demonstrate the efficacy of holistic methodology to bring inclusiveness and representation among disenfranchised library users within a large network of research disciplines. The study's findings promote the adaptation of holistic principles by similarly marginalized units in establishing collections that represent the cross-disciplinary interests of their users.

For the purpose of this discussion, a "holistic methodology" refers to a process that "enable[s] a comprehensive approach to organizing the library," whereby various perspectives are accommodated.<sup>4</sup> It is the sum of two composite

parts: quantitative assessment—including, but not limited to, evaluating circulation statistics and administering structured surveys; and qualitative assessment—including semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The authors argue that the application of a holistic methodology accomplishes the following: it situates qualitative data by providing a broader overview of the unique institutional context in which they exist; it expands on findings outlined by quantitative assessment data, which does not account for subject omissions; and, finally, it personifies the library, providing an in-person interface that allows library staff to engage directly with collection users, which, in turn, enables library staff to better understand and accommodate users' research interests.

CFCH was deemed an optimal organization to apply a holistic collections methodology for several reasons. Like SLRA, it is also a cross-disciplinary organization. It produces and manages the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, and their respective exhibitions, documentaries, symposia, publications, and educational materials related to cultural heritage and sustainability. Further, CFCH is considered a small unit (it employs eighty members) but still provides an opportunity for several inter-departmental assessment interactions. Finally, CFCH, like SLRA, does not have a typical Smithsonian museum-to-library relationship, as it has neither its own SIL branch nor its own physical museum space to serve its research and collection needs. By conducting an analysis of ongoing discussions between SLRA and CFCH, this project promotes cooperative collection assessment strategies. It also signals the importance of iterative, sophisticated dialogs with underserved stakeholders, and illustrates the benefits of holistic, personified collections assessment (a holistic methodology) for identifying gaps and areas for growth in SIL's collections, specifically at SLRA.

This project found that CFCH is a diverse organization in both its staff and research profile. Driven overall by the goal of cultural sustainability, its curatorial output is the sum of a variety of interrelated fields, such as language revitalization, ethnomusicology, and folk history. A foundational component to CFCH's research output is that their research goes beyond cultural "preservation," and moves to "more dynamic and ecological models of sustainability" whose findings "support individuals, communities, scholars, policymakers, and other stakeholders around the globe in their efforts to shape cultural futures on their own terms."<sup>5</sup> CFCH staff thus require materials—both print and electronic—to support their work in these areas. Nearly all staff members consulted for this project noted that SIL collections are lacking in cultural sustainability materials, and that their existing research affiliations with external institutions preclude their engagement with the Libraries. Further, this

study uncovered an expanding group of uncataloged materials housed within the CFCH offices, gifted by their various partners and affiliates. Upon assessment, these uncataloged materials were deemed essential to the history and research output of the organization. Further, the materials begin to fill many of the subject gaps in SIL's collections, and serve as a foundation for further subject expansion. These findings were uncovered using a holistic methodology.

## Literature Review

Compared to the larger body of collections assessment literature, less inquiry has been applied to museum libraries. This discrepancy may be a result of their complex structure. A 1972 collections development study conducted by Smithsonian visiting researcher Elaine Sloan implies that because museums are multi-disciplinary organizations whose collections are shaped by their individual units, assessment approaches for museum libraries are more complicated than assessments geared towards single institutional entities. Sloan evaluated how curators at the National Museum of Natural History and the former National Museum of History and Technology (now the National Museum of American History) interact with the Libraries' collections. Specifically, Sloan outlined user perceptions of the Libraries and how curators assessed SIL collections in relation to their specific research needs.<sup>6</sup>

Using multiple approaches, including structured observations of library operations, administering a self-completion questionnaire to curators, and conducting interviews with librarians, Sloan provided a holistic set of findings that illustrate how opinions of and engagement with the Libraries can vary among its users. For instance, at the time of the study, most curators at Natural History used SIL collections for their research and relied almost exclusively on their corresponding museum branch. Conversely, those at History and Technology consulted more branches outside their own, and primarily relied on personal collections and external institutions.<sup>7</sup> This discrepancy, Sloan concluded, reflects the diverging nature of each research discipline. Natural History curators who rely exclusively on their branch library reflect the centralization of natural science research, which often does not require them to consult outside disciplines. However, for fields like history, research is inherently cross-disciplinary, and necessitates attention to multiple fields.<sup>8</sup> It is thus necessary to recognize the heterogeneity of research needs among Smithsonian units. Furthermore, this study is indicative of the effectiveness of mixed-method collections assessment strategies in uncovering rich, multi-disciplinary perspectives.

Since the publication of Sloan's pre-integrated library system study, holistic collection development strategies have

gradually increased in popularity, particularly in academic institutions. This increase is reflected in recent collections literature, wherein special attention is given to multi-tool assessment approaches. These studies assert that a holistic collection management approach is an effective means of weeding and building collections. Despite their context in academic institutions, considerable overlap in this body of literature exists with museum libraries, namely in the goals, considerations, and results of collections assessment projects. In particular, the process of acquiring, selecting, storing, and refining collections is fundamentally the same between these two collecting bodies.<sup>9</sup> As such, this project addresses evidence gathered from holistic assessment projects conducted within select academic institutions.

As part of its commitment to flexible collection developments, the James Madison University (JMU) Libraries implement "collection practices that encompass the variety of forms that constitute today's scholarly record."<sup>10</sup> This practice is detailed in a 2015 study by Duncan and O'Gara who argue that engaging in "collaborative selection" across library departments allows the libraries to better meet the needs of increasingly interdisciplinary fields and embody shifting curricular needs.<sup>11</sup> By comparing data-driven tools to qualitative findings, JMU engages in flexible collections assessment that allows the libraries to better serve JMU's goals.<sup>12</sup> Such qualitative approaches include, "a literature review, internal and external conversations, several collections pilot projects, and a variety of other investigative mechanisms."<sup>13</sup> Duncan and O'Gara argue that this combined, holistic strategy can help libraries meet the expanding range of library users. The approach is flexible, agile, and can be adapted to meet the goals of rapidly changing learning environments.

Another example of an academic collections project that incorporated a holistic approach is Kelly's 2014 study on the strength of George Mason University's library collections in relation to researcher needs. Kelly emphasizes the necessity of applying holistic assessment strategies in uncovering comprehensive usage patterns. Within the study, Kelly applied a "cumulative or multidimensional approach," whereby collections are qualitatively divided based on the subjects represented by its items.<sup>14</sup> The identified subjects are then systematically assessed using quantitative tools such as peer comparisons, list-checking, and circulation statistics. Cumulative findings generated from this multi-tool analysis uncover usage patterns within a particular collection. Kelly stressed that this cumulative qualitative and quantitative approach can be applied to modify collections that better reflect current demands and engagement.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Zainab and Maidaino proposed a "house model" in their 2012 collections study, whereby an instrument was constructed to assess collection security at several university libraries.<sup>16</sup> The instrument was comprised of five

measures, including “collection security governance; operations and processes; people issues; physical and technical aspects of collection security and the security culture in the libraries.”<sup>17</sup> Results from this test indicate that “the assessment instrument is reliable and can be used to assess the collection security management in libraries in a more holistic approach.”<sup>18</sup> Zainab and Maidabino’s results for security assessment can be correspondingly mapped to the governance, process, users, culture, and space of collection assessment in research libraries.

Following the merging of two library departments at Loyola Marymount University into the Acquisitions and Collection Development Department, the libraries began to rethink existing workflows.<sup>19</sup> As departmental conversations began to examine such workflows, the acquisition of e-books emerged as a crucial concern. By creating and employing a multi-tier flowchart diagram that visualized the e-book acquisition process, the library sought to standardize the assessment of e-books. As noted by Lewis and Kennedy in their 2019 study, by employing this flowchart visualization the e-book acquisition process was presented from a holistic perspective.<sup>20</sup> Staff who created the flowchart did so by reviewing pertinent literature, engaging in process mapping, and “highlighting the changes currently taking place in the landscape of e-acquisitions.”<sup>21</sup> In so doing, they compartmentalized complex acquisitions processes into more manageable portions. Staff also provided a broader overview of how their department “contribute to the whole of the acquisitions process” and the institution at large.<sup>22</sup>

Griffin, Lewis, and Greenberg argue that the need to “identify a comprehensive, integrated assessment strategy to better focus diminished resources” is necessary in light of shrinking library budgets and reduced staffing, particularly within the context of special collections repositories.<sup>23</sup> Their 2013 study examined the University of South Florida (USF) Tampa Library, wherein Special & Digital Collections developed a holistic, systematic, assessment strategy “to improve a range of services in the Department.”<sup>24</sup> By applying several quantitative and qualitative assessment tools, including *Desk Tracker* statistics and Reading Room Patron Surveys, they argued that library staff uncovered findings to propose user-centric modifications, including shifting reading room hours to meet patron needs, and continuing targeted outreach efforts.<sup>25</sup> Such findings signal the potential for holistic assessment to uncover logistical data that hinder user engagement with library resources.

A similar process is echoed by Wiemers et al. who argue for multi-tool assessment strategies that support subject-by-subject analyses.<sup>26</sup> They refer to this assessment as the “ultimate test of the quality of a library collection” that can detect the extent and mode of its use.<sup>27</sup> They contend that comprehensive methodologies can signal

subjects that are underutilized and infrequently used while also highlighting those which are used in particular. Data collected from these strategies indicate areas for growth or reduction within a collection that reflect its usage patterns.<sup>28</sup> Hibner and Kelly reiterate this notion in *Making a Collection Count*, wherein they stress the importance of applying holistic methodologies in uncovering a collection’s utilization rates. Cross-checking circulation statistics along with information gathered from research interviews can help pinpoint user attitudes towards a particular collection, and indicate the extent to which a collection relates, or not, to a library’s overall vision.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, the growing body of holistic assessment literature advocates for in-depth, comprehensive assessment strategies, particularly in the context of multi-disciplinary institutions such as museums. The user perceptions and unit distinctions indicated by Sloan; the flexible and collaborative approaches endorsed by Duncan and O’Gara; the cumulative qualitative/quantitative approaches emphasized by Kelly; Zaiab and Maidabino’s stress on the analysis of governance, work culture, and usage patterns; Lewis and Kennedy’s recommendation to be mindful of the contributions of individual units within a larger network; Griffin, Lewis, and Greenberg’s reminder that comprehensive, integrated, flexibility is useful when analyzing unit’s research trends; and Wiemers, Baldwin, Kautz, Albrecht, and Lomker’s recommendation to cross-check quantitative data with qualitative, are all particularly relevant to holistic museum library collection assessment.

## Method

This study consisted of two phases. The first (henceforth referred to as Phase 1) began during a six-week internship appointment at SLRA in April and May 2017. During this initial stage, the intern, in collaboration with SLRA’s branch librarian, applied a holistic collection development methodology by combining quantitative and qualitative assessment tools to determine how SLRA, and SIL in general, could better support CFCH’s research needs. The research team determined that CFCH was underutilizing SIL services based on a statistical analyses of CFCH borrowing and ILL, and CFCH’s staff participation in Smithsonian Research Online (SRO).<sup>30</sup> Lack of use was determined based on the frequency and quantity of staff engagement with SIL proportionate to the Center’s total staff size. For instance, ILL usage was so sparse that data had to be recalled over an eight-year period (2010 to 2018) to uncover substantive findings. During that time period, about sixteen permanent CFCH staff members of approximately eighty full-time staff used the service. To situate this discrepancy, the intern conducted semi-structured interviews with CFCH staff.

These interviews sought to determine each interviewee's unique research needs, how SIL staff and services meet those needs, and where SIL services and collections could be modified to better support them.

Conducted during a second internship appointment at SLRA during April through June 2018, the second iteration (Phase 2) amplified the methodologies used within Phase 1 with additional quantitative and qualitative strategies. The data collection tool used in Phase 2 was a subject and format analysis of the many on-site research materials, including a reference collection, songbooks, zines, music guides, LP covers, pamphlets, festival programs, and monographs. Most of the materials identified were uncataloged and lacked finding aids.<sup>31</sup> The analyses revealed a broad range of research disciplines beyond the findings collected from the Phase 1 interviews, and contributed to a more robust understanding of the Center's research profile. Further strategies used during the second iteration included an analysis of CFCH's ILL statistics and participant observations of CFCH facilities and colleagues. Together, the tools used in Phase 2 demonstrated the dynamic range of research backgrounds, output, and interests that comprise the Center. Phase 2 findings further iterated the benefits of integrating holistic strategies into collections assessment.

### Phase 1: The Survey

CFCH was first approached by SIL as part of the Libraries' ongoing outreach to smaller Smithsonian units. "Smaller units" within the Smithsonian refers to any unit that employs less than one hundred staff members and/or lacks a designated museum space. Units that fall within this category in addition to CFCH include the Smithsonian Latino Center and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center. Based in Capital Gallery, an office building located south of the National Mall, these organizations are physically separated from the museum operations. Consequently, staff who are based in Capital Gallery are often excluded from the institution's oversight, which tends to focus on museum-based units, such as the National Museum of Natural History or the National Air and Space Museum. In Phase 1, quantitative findings on CFCH's relationship with the Libraries reinforced the existence of this chasm. It was discovered that CFCH's ILL usage was so infrequent that the research team was forced to recall data over an eight-year period to uncover usage patterns. This time-period indicated that CFCH's engagement with the Libraries was tepid at best.

Indeed, this quantitative data was partly what led the research team to CFCH. What the statistics omitted were the local factors that contributed to this usage discrepancy. Several research questions emerged from this gap: Were CFCH staff familiar with SIL collections and services? To what extent did the Libraries' collections support their

research needs? Were there other factors that determined their engagement with SIL? Semi-structured, in-person, on-site interviews were selected to apply this interpersonal, human approach to data collection. As Bryman notes, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to fully explore the contours of what they need to know and allow for new "concepts and theories ... [to] emerge out of that data."<sup>32</sup> They encourage conversations to flow freely, thereby allowing the interviewees to interject their own ideas otherwise unprovoked by the question list. This conduciveness to flexibility reinforces the holistic framework of this project by emphasizing individuals' perspectives by encouraging them to explore their own expert knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

Prior to scheduling research interviews with CFCH staff, interviewees were trained on SIL services and collections, with a focus on research support tools to ensure interviewees were familiar with SIL research presence prior to their scheduled interview. This training, which was delivered as a general orientation, covered the SIL online catalog, SRO, and ILL. The research team sought to ensure that participants had taken the time to reflect on SIL and its role in relation to their work at CFCH. Cross-departmental staff from the Ralph Rinzler Archives, Folkways Recordings, and Smithsonian Folklife Festival were contacted by email during the latter half of the intern's six-week internship appointment. In total, the intern interviewed five staff members from the Archives, five from Folkways, and two Festival staff.<sup>34</sup> Individual and group interviews with CFCH archivists, curators, directors, and researchers were scheduled. Group interviews did not exceed more than four interviewees at a time.

The twenty-one-question survey used in Phase 1, titled "SIL Outreach Survey (April-May 2017)" (see Appendix A), was developed specifically for the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. It sought to address five key areas: background information on the organization, including research interests and project output; research needs of staff, including engagement with print and digital materials and institutional affiliations outside the Smithsonian; research materials consulted onsite; engagement with SIL services, including the Research Tools page; use of external research services; and recommendations for SIL, including how the Libraries could help support CFCH's strategic plan. The research questions were adapted, in part, from the Smithsonian Libraries Research Tool Survey (2017) developed for the Smithsonian Libraries Research Tools and Subject Guides Feedback Project (appendix B). Because the Natural and Physical Sciences Feedback Project sought to uncover data including usage patterns, research needs, interviewee profiles, and areas for improvement many of the questions used in their survey were adapted to the SIL Outreach Survey used for these CFCH findings.

The Project, undertaken in early 2017, was created by

the Head of the Natural and Physical Sciences Libraries to determine interviewee status (i.e., staff, fellow, intern, etc.); frequency of engagement with the SIL's Research Tools page; findability of the Research Tools page; and comments, ideas, and suggestions for the Research Page. The adapted SIL Outreach Survey given to CFCH diverged from the Natural and Physical Sciences Feedback Project in its exclusion of multiple-choice questions. Following Bryman's assertion that open questions are conducive to unique perspectives, whereby "respondents can answer in their own terms," the research team sought to extend the research interviews into conversations by not imposing response choices.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the Feedback Project, which was delivered in the form of structured interviews and contained five multiple-choice questions, the SIL Outreach Survey was delivered as a semi-structured research interview, and included open-ended questions. The modified questionnaire was crafted so that SLRA could obtain an in-depth understanding of CFCH and its purpose, and its staff members and their research needs. Byron's approach allowed the research team to better understand the types of services and materials needed by the organization, and was conducive to rich, qualitative findings. Indeed, the interviewees' cumulative, respective responses to the qualitative questions provided a research profile of CFCH that encompassed a multiplicity of unique interests, disciplines, and expertise represented among the staff.

## Phase 2: Analysis

Prior to the onset of Phase 2 collection analysis, SLRA's branch librarian conducted a preliminary environmental scan of CFCH to evaluate staff in relation to their collections, additionally noting security, storage, and environmental conditions as Zainab and Maidabino's research implied. Information gathered would inform Phase 2 analysis. Phase 2 officially began with a quantitative assessment of CFCH's external ILL usage. Analyzing subject representation and user status through external ILL requests was essential to understanding the research and curatorial interests of CFCH established in Phase 1. Based on ILL usage from a five-year period (2013 to 2018), subject areas that were represented included folk art (including architecture, textiles, and paintings), teaching grammars, cultural sustainability in the context of museum studies, and ethnomusicology. The breakdown of staff statuses indicated in the ILL requests sample were as follows: 33 percent were temporary staff, including fellows, interns, and a contractor; the remaining staff were permanent. The research team compared recurring subject areas represented within CFCH's ILL to SIL's collections to illuminate subject gaps. The findings also indicated that subject representation could be further amplified by staff status. Analyzing status provided insight

into the intent and capacity at which materials were being used and by whom. For instance, while the majority of CFCH staff who utilize ILL are permanent staff, a significant portion (approximately one-third) of engagement came from temporary staff, including interns, fellows, and contractors.

Phase 2 continued with an in-depth subject analysis of CFCH's onsite print, project output, and designated collection spaces. Doing so indicated areas for growth and gap-filling in SIL's history and culture collections, specifically in relation to SLRA. The assessment revealed thousands of items including songbooks, folklore dictionaries, encyclopedias, songbooks, art books, music guides, zines, LP covers, pamphlets, and festival programs. After meeting with SIL's Head of Collections, it was decided that the monograph collection would be analyzed first. A subject analysis of CFCH's in-house research collection was deemed an optimal collection strategy because it allowed subjects "to be viewed from many angles, while gradually developing a picture of the broader collection as a whole."<sup>36</sup> To achieve this, the identified subject areas represented within CFCH's monograph collection were compared to SIL's collections. The intern conducted an environmental scan of the collection in situ, and engaged CFCH staff on the history and usage of the on-site materials. These conversations sought to confirm the immediate research value of the collection on both micro- and macro-levels, and to solicit staff input on the enduring value of the CFCH materials as a legacy collection.

For the published monograph collection, the branch librarian and CFCH archivists discerned three classifications and divided them accordingly. The first classification consisted of published works that were deemed either uniquely representative of CFCH's research history, scarce or valuable publications no longer in print, and canons in the field of folklore and cultural studies. Examples of titles from these aforementioned categories include *Sixty Patriotic Songs of All Nations*, *Good Old Songs*, *Kiwi Youth Songs- 1951 Student Labour and Progressive Youth League Songbook*, and *Songs Around the Table Z'Mirot*. These materials would be cataloged as non-circulating and would remain onsite with restricted use. The second grouping consisted of general collections materials currently used in the field. The last classification consisted of tertiary, ephemeral, or non-essential publications that could be offered as gifts or sold.

## Findings: Phase 1

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with CFCH cultural sustainability experts (three participants), researchers (four participants), archivists (four participants), and directors (two participants) across three research divisions

within The Center: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, and the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections. Cumulatively, the interviews revealed that CFCH's research interests are as diverse as the professional and educational backgrounds of its staff and various units. Because of their vast research scope, CFCH research staff argue that they require specific research materials directly related to their areas of expertise from a wide range of disciplines. They noted that they often encounter instances in which SIL collections both met and failed their research needs.

Project deliberation and output among CFCH units is contingent on several factors. In addition to logistical constraints related to budget, much of their work is "opportunistic." For example, while the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival features a predetermined theme, many of the Festival's featured programs are a result of individuals or groups approaching CFCH. Consequently, Festival programming is determined in the months preceding the Festival, and requires significant research preparation prior to the annual event. For other units, such as Folkways Recordings, there is also an element of contingency in their output due to the constantly changing music industry. As noted by the Folkways director, the record label must keep up to date with the state of current music to remain relevant and, in so doing, maintain a sustainable platform for their featured folk artists.

Nearly all CFCH staff interviewed during Phase 1 identified gaps in SIL's print and digital collections. Linguists and cultural sustainability researchers identified gaps related to language education, endangered language communities, bilingual education materials, and sociolinguistics. Linguists specifically noted two integral resources in the teaching grammars of American Indian languages were excluded from SIL's collections at the time of their interviews: *International Journal of the Sociology of Languages* and *Bilingualism and Education*. Other CFCH staff, including those from Folkways, noted that journals such as *Ethnomusicology*, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, and *Oxford Handbooks Online* were also omitted from SIL's collections at the time that Phase 1 was conducted. This further incentivized CFCH members to consult external research institutions or to purchase their own resources. Interviewers unanimously expressed interest in SIL acquiring pertinent titles, both print and electronic, to CFCH's research needs.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the interviews was that SIL and CFCH needed each other. In an institution as old as the Smithsonian, relatively newer units like CFCH got lost amid an institution that was expanding beyond its more formal museum mission with more programmatic units. The birth of CFCH and the centralization of SIL happened within less than two years of each other, in

1967 and 1969 respectively. CFCH had operated in relative autonomy from their inception, while SIL concentrated its efforts serving the museums proper, and then a decade later to concentrate their efforts on an all-consuming retrospective conversion. SIL never properly situated itself to serve programmatic units such as CFCH. Ultimately, Phase 1 revealed that SIL had research services that could benefit CFCH, and CFCH had research collections documenting an important facet of Smithsonian research history, making it clear that a Phase 2 was needed.

## Findings: Phase 2

The ILL statistics pulled for CFCH were not substantial enough to glean any definite findings. However, the statistics were indicative of patterns that could be verified through interviews. The statistics indicated themes (see table 1) related to language revitalization and education, ethnography, and teaching grammars. These topics, necessitating external ILL loans, echoed those areas underrepresented in SIL's collection noted by Phase 1 interviewees. Table 1 also reveals a significant research presence of temporary staff, including CFCH interns, fellows, and contractors, with temporary staff representing approximately 33 percent of the Center's total loans during the applied timeframe.

It is no surprise that the permanent staff interviewed for this study maintain research affiliations with external library systems, such as the Library of Congress, and the academic institutions and international research organizations to which they belonged to prior to being employed at CFCH. Many CFCH staff members noted that they never ceased using these external systems, and thus never transitioned to SIL. This lack of engagement, compounded with searching limitations and quirks of the Horizon integrated library system, accounted for the limited statistical data available on CFCH's SIL usage.

Environmental scans of CFCH's 1,500 monographs in the CFCH onsite research collection revealed that roughly two-thirds of the holdings were unique to SIL's collections. Materials housed on site at CFCH include topics that span a breadth of genres, time periods, languages, geographic regions, and formats. This includes folklore dictionaries, encyclopedias, songbooks, art books, zines, and programs from previous Folklife Festivals. Additionally, the Center accumulates an expanding collection of print materials provided by other affiliate persons or organizations who assist in festival planning. These materials reflect the festival's given themes and are used as resources to bring the theme to fruition. After a festival has concluded, these accumulated materials often remain at the Center as gifts. Thus, the Center's body of uncataloged materials grows on a cyclical basis and serves as a testament to the festival's

**Table 1.** Breakdown of Interlibrary Loan Statistics: Titles Borrowed from CFCH Staff over a Five-Year Period and the Position of Those Who Used ILL

Status	Loan Title
Contractor	Sauer's herbal cures : America's first book of botanic healing, 1762-1778 // translated and edited by William Woys Weaver.
Smithsonian Staff	Tibetan Paintings: A Study of Tibetan Thankas, Eleventh to Nineteenth Centuries
Smithsonian Staff	Who's asking? : Native science, Western science, and science education // Douglas L. Medin and Megan Bang.
Smithsonian Staff	Ethnography and Language Policy
Smithsonian Staff	Living languages and new approaches to language revitalisation research /
Smithsonian Staff	Family Language Policy: Maintaining an Endangered Language in the Home
Intern	Museums and communities : curators, collections and collaboration // edited by Viv Golding and Wayne Modest.
Intern	Museums in the Digital Age : Changing Meanings of Place, Community, and Culture // Susana Smith Bautista.
Smithsonian Staff	The White House chandeliers : my experiences while working for seven U.S. presidents // Stewart "Calvin" Stevens
Smithsonian Staff	Archival Science
Smithsonian Staff	Dancing from past to present : nation, culture, identities
Intern	The participatory museum /
Smithsonian Staff	Ethnomusicology in East Africa: Perspectives from Uganda and Beyond
Smithsonian Staff	Watewayéstanih : A Cayuga teaching grammar // Marianne Mithun and Reginald Henry.
Smithsonian Staff	On the repatriation of recorded sound from ethnomusicological archives : a survey of some of the issues pertaining to people's access to documentation of their musical heritage /
Smithsonian Staff	Safundi : the journal of South African and American studies.
Smithsonian Staff	Psychoanalysis, culture & society
Smithsonian Staff	Designs of Bhutan // David K. Barker.
Fellow	Making: anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture
Fellow	The subversive stitch : embroidery and the making of the feminine
Fellow	Female and male in West Africa

changing themes.

These materials are largely centralized in a secured access reading room in the Center's Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, though many more materials exist outside of this space in other staff offices. Currently, there is a culture of convenience surrounding these materials as staff can easily access, use, and move the materials between offices and departments. There is no formal method of tracking their whereabouts or duration of use. Discussions from both Phases 1 and 2 suggested that the pattern of use surrounding the materials is deep, but not wide; few staff members engage with the items regularly, while those who do use them do so extensively.

Due to the uncataloged materials' eclectic nature, many of the works present challenges when attempting to determine the kind of collection they could constitute. Two examples are the Center's body of songbooks, and various ephemeral materials. The songbooks are formerly part of Moses "Moe" Asch's personal collection and currently housed in the Archives, barcoded, and were produced between 1875 and 1967. The other items that complicate collection categorization are the Center's music guides,

zines, LP covers, pamphlets, and festival programs. The ephemeral materials tend to feature novelty subject areas or events, and are typically less than fifty pages in length. Their conditions range from intact to very poor condition. Staff members consulted during Phase 2 noted the ambiguity of both Asch's songbooks and ephemeral materials, which could belong in either a special collection or vertical file.

When Phase 2 was conducted, CFCH Archives staff divided their uncataloged print materials into three categories: those integral to CFCH's current research output, those that are important to the disciplines represented but no longer reflect CFCH's ongoing curatorial needs, and those that could be given away via gifts and exchange or sold. Of the works in the former category, CFCH staff indicate a strong desire for the materials to remain on site as a non-circulating collection. Converting these materials to a non-circulating collection required them to be moved to a secure, monitored space. For works not deemed essential to the Center's current mission or historically significant, CFCH staff are interested in creating an off-site legacy collection housed with SLRA's cross-disciplinary active

collections. This body of potential legacy materials is large (at the time of the study the Center filled thirty boxes of items for legacy consideration) and interdisciplinary in scope, featuring subjects that cover both global and local (i.e., United States) folk topics. Since the conclusion of Phase 2, the more than 1,500 volumes monographs housed on site at CFCH were shipped to SLRA for further consideration and processing. Of those, approximately 1,350 will be accessioned into SIL as the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage Research Collection. The non-circulating volumes to be re-housed at CFCH after cataloging include roughly 450 new titles, and 280 added titles. Circulating volumes to be housed on SLRA include 400 new titles, and 220 added titles. Cataloging this collection is considered Phase 3 of this project and is not discussed in this paper.

## Discussion

As the interviews revealed, CFCH's curatorial output is externally collaborative, requiring outside consultation with individuals, groups, and institutions. This research practice is in many ways unique to CFCH and explains one facet of CFCH's lack of engagement with SIL's research tools and collections. Consequently, SIL must consider how to create incentives to enable CFCH staff to consult SIL services. While much of the work that CFCH conducts involves field research, SIL, especially SLRA, can position itself as a supplementary resource, providing the pertinent materials that support this fieldwork. By emphasizing this supplementary relationship, SIL can encourage CFCH staff to use its resources, and rely on SLRA staff support, rather than external resources from affiliate research institutions.

Another variable that the research team had not considered was the annual influx of research materials in the months leading up to the Festival. This increase contributes to the Center's growing body of on-site, uncataloged materials. Gifts from stakeholders serve as a representation of the many individuals and organizations with which the Center engages. A subject analysis was conducted on these gifted items. This analysis consisted of the research team identifying through background research on the items or skimming their contents and recording the subjects represented by the materials. Upon conducting this analysis, the research team realized that the materials represent an important, encompassing body of knowledge on contemporary cultural sustainability research. This discovery affirmed the team's commitment to oversee the materials' addition to SIL's collections, making the items discoverable and available to those outside of the Center. The CFCH staff who were interviewed unanimously expressed a desire that their materials be used by those external to their own

organization. It would also serve to bridge collection gaps related to cultural sustainability, specifically materials on anthropology, folklore, ethnomusicology, and endangered language revitalization.

The mutual commitment between the research team and CFCH to catalog the organization's materials uncovered yet another finding. In analyzing the materials, the research team discovered that many of the unaccessioned items are eclectic, ephemeral, or rare, which complicated the item assessment process. These materials may constitute several potential subcollections, including vertical files or restricted use collections, in addition to the standard print collections. CFCH will require assistance from SIL to disambiguate the formats and types of collections constituted by the uncataloged items. Making clear distinctions between these materials was one of the recommendations inspired by this finding.

In response to the possibility of establishing a non-circulating collection for many of the uncataloged items, questions were raised about the management of these items. Specifically, the research team and interviewees speculated on where the non-circulating collection would be housed, how it would be supervised, and how often it would be made available for use. At the end of Phase 2, the materials were primarily located in the Archives reading room, though others are scattered among bookshelves and storage units throughout the remaining CFCH offices.<sup>37</sup> The collection would also require oversight by a SIL staff member who would be responsible for facilitating the organization and use of these items. Depending on the frequency of the collection's availability (at this time, it is uncertain if the items will be accessible daily or at set times throughout the week), it may require a part- or full-time SIL staff member to oversee the collection's management. These findings, and the considerations emerging therein, will help SIL and SLRA develop the collection's forthcoming policy plan.

CFCH's body of uncataloged materials has been deemed by both the research team and CFCH staff as integral to the Smithsonian's research profile. This holds true for both the on-site items and those sent to SLRA for active use or legacy consideration. Consequently, materials belonging to either category are representative of their mandate and are thus relevant to their current curatorial interests. The research team concluded that they must verify that materials in CFCH collections are not already in the SIL system. Alternatively, if the items are found to be in the system, the Libraries must determine if duplicate items are essential enough to merit multiple holdings.

While Phase 1 and Phase 2 did not overlap, the results of the former necessitated the latter. The semi-structured interviews conducted during Phase 1 revealed that CFCH is a subject-diverse, interdisciplinary organization, with curatorial and research needs that are equally

vast. Furthermore, these initial interviews introduced the research team to the collection of uncataloged materials that had lingered in the CFCH office. To assess these materials and determine how SIL in general, and SLRA specifically, could better support CFCH's curatorial output, the research team determined that ongoing investigations were required. This recognition inspired Phase 2, wherein the team sought to sort through the body of uncataloged materials, determine how they relate to CFCH's research mission, and to continue dialogues with staff to determine how the Libraries could better support their organization.

With the same attention to micro-level distinctions as Phase 1, Phase 2 both reaffirmed CFCH's diverse research profile, while also signaling the areas for growth in SIL's own collections. Indeed, CFCH's cultural sustainability materials will serve to enhance SIL's existing collections by filling gaps related to cultural heritage research and sustainability. They also signal a need for ongoing growth. CFCH expressed hope that the inclusion of these materials will inspire the Libraries to build on their collections by continuing to add, manage, and weed collections that support cultural sustainability research. The close of Phase 2 also confirmed that the omission of cultural sustainability materials within SIL's existing collections was, until then, undetectable by one-dimensional assessment tools.

## Conclusion

A holistic inquiry of Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage illustrated that there cannot be a

one-size-fits-all approach to collection assessment, particularly within large research networks like the Smithsonian where the needs of units are distinct and evolving. The process of applying a holistic methodology to research collections not only added an interpersonal dynamic to SIL's outreach, but also it provided direct engagement with marginalized library users and collections. Uncovering CFCH's research profile also afforded the Libraries the opportunity to communicate the extent of their resources to ambivalent or disenfranchised users. Conversely, study participants provided valuable input to the SLRA research team about SIL, indicating collection gaps and potential areas for expansion. This dialogue illuminated topics and research needs overlooked by strictly quantitative strategies that did not, for instance, account for collection omissions and service deficits. In sum, a holistic methodology strengthened the relationship between the Libraries and CFCH, and allowed the organizations to identify complementary interests and opportunities for future collaboration.

The success of this study demonstrates the elasticity of the holistic methodology and how qualitative assessment tools can be used in concert with quantitative tools to support unique institutional profiles. Iterative holistic approaches ensure that collections and services reflect current research needs and trends, especially for units with a dynamic research profile. As Phase 1 and Phase 2 findings show, applying multiple indicator measures can reveal the multifaceted perspectives of a research unit, and is an optimal strategy in determining the unique needs of library users in cross-disciplinary research environments such as museums.

## Notes and References

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5. "Cultural Sustainability," Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, <https://folklife.si.edu/cultural-sustainability-research-group/smithsonian>.
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17. Maidabino and Zainab, “A Holistic Approach to Collection Security Implementation,” 107.
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23. Melanie Griffin, Barbara Lewis, and Mark I. Greenberg, “Data-Driven Decision Making: A Holistic Approach to Assessment in Special Collections Repositories,” *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice* 8, no. 2 (2013): 225–38, 225.
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27. *Ibid.*, 72.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Holly Hibner and Mary Kelly, *Making a Collection Count: A Holistic Approach to Library Collection Management* (Witney, Oxford, UK: CP/Chandos Publishing, 2013), xv.
30. Smithsonian Research Online (SRO) is an expanding “collection of published research from Smithsonian scholars. . . . As a discovery tool for Smithsonian Research, SRO has two primary components: a bibliography of publication citations and a repository of full online editions” (Smithsonian Research Online, Smithsonian Libraries, n.d.).
31. Since this project began, SIL has collaborated with CFCH to accession their ready-reference and legacy collection of published monographs. Approximately thirteen hundred volumes of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage Research Collection will be findable in SIRIS, the Smithsonian’s online research catalog in 2020. Catalog records will trace the provenance of this collection to inform future research and collection management decisions.
32. Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 12.
33. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 492.
34. The call for participants had a high response rate. Of the fifteen research staff that were contacted, twelve responded, making the response rate 80 percent.
35. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 247.
36. Kelly, “Applying the Tiers of Assessment,” 585–91, 589.
37. In 2019, the print collections were removed to SLRA for pre-processing before cataloging.

## Appendix A. SIL Outreach Survey (April–May 2017)

### Background

1. What are the main research interests that define CFCH and the work it produces?
2. How does CFCH decide on which projects (such as exhibits or workshops) it will pursue?
3. When projects are decided upon, how do you typically conduct research and prepare for said projects?
4. How long have you worked for the Smithsonian?

### Research Needs

5. Do you perceive print or digital access more valuable in terms of CFCH’s research needs?
6. Are you currently affiliated with (or utilize the services of) other research institutions?
7. When you prepare/research forthcoming exhibits or other projects, does this research typically take place while you are physically onsite or offsite (i.e., not within a Smithsonian facility)?

### Print Collections

8. Do you have research materials on hand in your offices?
9. How regularly is your current book and print collection used by staff for curatorial projects?
10. How do you currently house this book collection? Do you ever encounter any issues in finding space to house this collection? Are they kept in a controlled environment?
11. Would you be interested in the Smithsonian Libraries cataloguing your collection and housing it at one of its branches? Would you be interested in turning it into a legacy collection if the books are not currently in use?

### SIL Services

12. Users of Smithsonian Libraries are able to recommend purchase of additional library materials (within budget constraints). Were you aware of this? Is this something you would be interested in taking

- advantage of?
13. What kinds of materials, in terms of both content and format, would you be interested in SIL adding for your purposes?
  14. Are you aware of/have you used SIL's electronic resources that are available to all SI staff on their desktop or from home via Citrix?
  15. Do you feel that the Research Tools page meets, exceeds, or fails your research needs? Please explain why this is the case.
  16. Is there a particular aspect of the Research Tools page that you feel is successful in meeting your re- search-needs?

- the use of library services? If so, which format would you prefer this training to take place through (i.e., in-person, newsletters, emails, updated pdf manuals)?
18. Did you come across any issues/concerns with the Research Tools page (<http://library.si.edu/research>) that hindered your experience on the site?
  19. Would video tutorials built into the site that address both general questions related to the Research Tools page and helpful search tips be useful to you?
  20. Having now been exposed to some of the SIL library facilities and tools, how valuable do you find them? Do you plan on using them in the future? Is there anything about CFCH that you feel the Libraries should know?
  21. How else can SIL help you fulfill your mission and strategic plan?

Recommendations/Comments on SIL Services

17. Would you be interested in receiving annual training in

### Appendix B. Smithsonian Libraries Research Tools Survey (2017)

#### Smithsonian Libraries Research Tools / Subject Guides Feedback Project

Use this form to record answers to the questions below

1. Name of SIL Staff Interviewer

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2. Name of SIL Branch or Location

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3. Interviewee Status

- Staff
- Fellow
- Research Associate
- Intern
- Emeritus
- Volunteer

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4. Show the interviewee the Research Tools page (<http://library.si.edu/research>). Has the interviewee used the Research Tools page before?

- Yes
- No

5. If no, find out why they don't use the page, but take a moment to show them what's on the page and ask them if they use it in the future.

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6. If Yes, how do they reach the Research Tools page?

- Through [library.si.edu](http://library.si.edu)
- Through their departmental page
- Through Prism
- Other (please specify)

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7. How often does the interviewee use Research Tools?

- nearly every day
- weekly
- monthly
- a few times a year
- N/A -- They don't use it.
- Other (please specify)

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8. What does the interviewee use the most on Research Tools? (let them point it out)

- OneSearch
- Siris catalog
- A-Z lists
- Illiad
- Smithsonian Research Online
- Smithsonian Collection Search Center
- N/A They don't use it
- Other (please specify)

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9. If they use the page, what does the interviewee use the latest? Why?  
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10. If they use the page, does the interviewee bookmark library pages? Which ones?  
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11. What would the interviewee expect to find on the Research Tools page that they do not find there?  
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12. Has the interviewee used Advanced Search in the databases? Which ones?  
-----
13. What would the interviewee improve on the pages if they could? What would be the most important change?  
-----
14. For this question, show an SIL subject guide. You can find the guides linked to from the library description pages (<http://library.si.edu/libraries>) or from the How do I? Find XXX Resources in your topic area. Has the interviewee ever used a Library subject guide at the Smithsonian? If so, why did they use it?  
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15. Show a guide at <http://guides.library.yale.edu> in your subject area or any other university research guide you admire. Ask the interviewee if they would be more likely to use a guide that is more focused on their research needs? What would be in that guide?  
-----
16. What would the interviewee put in a subject guide that would be the most useful to their work (if anything)?  
-----
17. Does the interviewee have a similar type of subject guide on their departmental web pages? Do they use it?  
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18. SIL has just updated its training pages. Show the interviewee the new How Do I? section under Learn on the Research Tools page (<http://library.si.edu/research/training>). Having they used the SIL training pages before? What did they use?  
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19. What (if anything) would the interviewee use in the new HOW DO I pages? Would they watch training videos? Do they expect to see PDF's, handouts, etc.?  
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20. What other comments, ideas, suggestions do they have?  
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