Addressing Harmful Content in Collections

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A Report for the Oregon Heritage Commission to understand the scope of harm, trauma, and triggering that can occur to visitors, staff, and volunteers when engaging with institutional records and collections and how organizations are addressing harmful content in their collections.

OREGON HERITAGE
oregonheritage.org

About the Oregon Heritage Commission

Founded in 1995 by the Legislature, the Oregon Heritage Commission is comprised of nine gubernatorial appointments and nine ex-officio members who function as the primary agency designated with the task of coordinating heritage activities in Oregon. This group of leaders from across the state of Oregon works collaboratively to champion resources, recognition, and funding for preserving and interpreting Oregon's past.

About this Report

The 2020-2025 Oregon Heritage Plan asks heritage organizations to move four goals forward: Include more Voices, Increase Access to Heritage, Promote the Value of Heritage, and Pursue Best Practices. The Commission uses these goals to prioritize initiatives, resources, technical assistance and support for heritage organizations. The Commissioner's involvement with the Northwest Digital Heritage initiative has led to the creation of resources related to creating and cleaning up collection information and awareness of the impact, trauma, and triggering that can occur to visitors, staff, and volunteers when engaging with institutional records and collections. The Commission wanted to understand the scope of this trauma and identify recommendations, guides, resources, toolkits, and case studies related to addressing harmful content in their collections.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the country, organizations of various sizes are recognizing bias in cataloging and taking reparative steps to address harmful or offensive content in collections. Such efforts are, for example, taking place at the National Archives, university libraries, as well as public libraries, archives, and museums. In addition to institutional-specific work, collaboratively coordinated efforts to compile information, resources, and examples on the topic have proliferated across the LAM (Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector over the last few years. These projects vary from being of a grassroots nature (e.g., A4BLiP's Anti-Racist Description Resources)[1] to being led by professional organizations (e.g., Inclusive and Conscious Editing Resources by the Sunshine State Digital Network Metadata Working Group).[2] Many of these efforts are organized by or conducted in consultation with those experiencing harm and trauma (e.g., Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources by the Trans Metadata Collective).[3] This report reviews:

1) the scope of harm, trauma, and triggering that can occur in institutional records,

2) examples of research and remedial projects taking place on a national level, including contemporary language guides, resources, and case studies, and

3) Oregon-specific efforts to address harm.

The conclusion provides recommendations for how the Oregon Heritage Commission (OHC) can promote reparative measures in LAM organizations statewide.

1. CONTEXT AND SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

1.a Background

Over the last few years, many public institutions have been reckoning with harm embedded in their holdings and practices, as well as their harmful pasts. This reckoning gained traction as a result of the hyper-visibility of harmful language and content afforded by recent digitization projects and intensified after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May of 2020 (Cray, 2023; Muñoz, 2021; Odumosu, 2024; Sutherland, 2020; Tai, 2024). At that time, protests erupted around the world calling on public institutions, including LAMs, to be more transparent and accountable for the ways in which they have benefited – and continue to benefit – from, for example, legacies of colonialism and slavery (Decolonize this Place; Moore, Paquet, and Wittman, 2022; Wittman, 2023). LAMs, cities, and other institutions were also asked to address how these legacies are publicly memorialized (e.g., statues, street and building names, and public records). As a result, many LAM organizations across the country released Equity Statements that, at best, made transparent benefit from harmful legacies, communicated current values and commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and delineated concrete action steps to demonstrate commitment to address harm (Chevalier, Jennings, and Phalen, 2023). This context, along with workplace reconfigurations resulting from the covid-19 global pandemic increased efforts that were already under way in many LAM institutions to address bias in cataloging, as well as the impact of harmful language and content present in collection holdings.[4];[5]

It is now widely recognized that much of the bias and harm present in contemporary records has its roots in, and is an accumulation of "old forms," or past iterations and practices of these record-keeping institutions (Frick and Proffitt, 2022; Wittman, 2023). This includes the paradigmatic background of Enlightenment to Colonial era archival and collection practices that have deeply shaped the information management systems and structures used today.[6] These early practices stemmed from Western systems of encyclopedic knowledge creation and colonial agendas, and were thus steeped in a positivistic worldview that posited the existence of a definite and true reality. According to this worldview, reality could be known, measured, and categorized to tell a definitive and neutral narrative that reflects a supposed natural and universal order. As such, archivists were understood as objective and neutral subjects organizing and preserving documents following this singular,

1 https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf
2 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1APavAd1p1f9y1vBUudQIuIsYnq56ypzNYJYgDA9RNbU/edit
3 https://zenodo.org/records/6686841#.YrZaCZPMJH0
4 For example, staff at the Clements Library at the University of Michigan have been involved in redescription projects since the mid-2000's (Sutherland, 2021).
5 It should be noted that reparative archival work builds on the legacies of, for example, Black librarians who adapted, amended, and iterated on narrow and racist classification systems to suit their needs and those of their library patrons. Through these 'countercataloguing' practices they created "an intellectual infrastructure that made Black materials visible–and findable" (Schuessler, June 19, 2024, para. 20).
6 The Enlightenment to the Colonial era covers a time span of roughly 150 years, from approximately 1650-1800.

true, and external reality (Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, 2015; Paquet, 2021; Tai, 2023).

However, these past knowledge producing and organizing activities were never neutral and reflect the ideals of race, citizenship, class, and gender of the time (Frick and Proffitt, 2022; Jules, 2016; Patterson et al., 2017). In fact, and more broadly, it is now accepted that knowledge producing and organizing activities reflect, for better and worse, the values and beliefs of the era in which they are taking place, the institution overseeing these activities, as well as the person conducting them (Cook and Schartz, 2002; Duff and Harris, 2002; Drabinski, 2019; Imarisha, 2017; Sutherland, 2020; Tai, 2018; 2023). In other words, institutions and archivists are not neutral, and contemporary records hold harmful traces from the past that are either perpetuated or interrupted in the present (Moore, Paquet, and Wittman, 2022).

"How we structure our knowledge shapes who, what, and how we can know."

(Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, 2015, p. 684)

1.b Scope of Harm

Harm is thus embedded in the collections, archival practices, and information infrastructures used in LAM and other record-keeping institutions today. Harm exists in the language used to catalogue and describe cultural items and records (i.e., metadata information), the content of these items themselves (e.g., photographs, digitized written documents), and in the lack of information provided to properly contextualize this harmful language and content.

In its Statement on Potentially Harmful Content, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) (2022) explains that items may be harmful in that they:

- "reflect racist, sexist, ableist, misogynistic/misogynoir, and xenophobic opinions and attitudes;
- be discriminatory towards or exclude diverse views on sexuality, gender, religion, and more;
- include graphic content of historical events such as violent death, medical procedures, crime, wars/terrorist acts, natural disasters and more;
- demonstrate bias and exclusion in institutional collecting and digitization policies."

Members of the public, staff, and volunteers can encounter harmful language and content while searching a collection, and in some cases, must even use harmful and in-

"Describing archival collections from marginalized and oppressed communities is hard work for archivists. It's emotional and triggering when we are confronted with racist ideologies baked into the language used in historic materials, especially for those of us who identify with marginalized groups we see in the collections."

(Riley, 2023, para. 1)

appropriate language to access institutional records (Frick and Proffitt, 2022; Sutherland, 2021; See Appendix A). Needless to say, encountering harmful language and content can be traumatic and triggering (Laurent and Wright, 2020; Riley, 2023; Sutherland, 2021). It also perpetuates experiences of exclusion and oppression normalized in contemporary society (Sutherland, 2017; 2020; 2021). In what follows, examples are used to illustrate the scope of harm associated with archival description and content.

Harmful Language in Archival Description

Harmful language is outdated and/or inaccurate. It can:

- Be offensive
- Misrepresent
- Cause invisibility and erasure
- Compromise access
- Result in emotional and/or physical harm
- Trivialize people's lived experiences
- Perpetuate inaccurate ideas and historical narrative
- Reinscribe oppression [7]

A powerful example of the impact of harmful language in library catalogues comes from the 2019 documentary ***Change the Subject***. In this documentary, Dartmouth student Melissa Padilla comes across library items orga-

"Word choice matters. Words communicate cultural meanings and values, and can influence attitudes and actions. On an individual level, words can hurt or affirm us. On an institutional level, the presence or omission of certain words can help people—or make them feel excluded."

(Paquet, Middleton, and Moore, 2016, p. 58)

7 Note that this list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. There are many nuances in how various stakeholders can experience and perceive harm.

nized under the Library of Congress Subject Heading "illegal aliens" while conducting research for an independent study on undocumented youth organizing. She states:

> My gut reaction to seeing the subject heading, here at Dartmouth was disgust and also perplexed, I was like 'Why? I thought this place would know better or do better. Wow, I can't believe you think these things. I know there are undocumented students here on campus and you recruit them, and you still subject them to this sort of thing and it's not okay. (5:06)

This quote demonstrates *emotional harm* through the use of *offensive and oppressive language* to organize content. It also illustrates a tension present in many record-holding institutions: that of wanting to be inclusive and welcoming, and yet being confronted with inequities and bias embedded in institutional systems (Paquet, Middleton, and More, 2016). Rachel Frick and Merrilee Proffitt (2022) echo this tension in their report on reparative and inclusive practices, stating:

> The values expressed by libraries, archives, and related fields of knowledge aim to affirm the desire to welcome and embrace all peoples. The information communities of practice have embraced this set of values while continuing to operate using systems and structures that were developed during the nineteenth century and reflect a Western white male hegemony. (p. 9).

The story of Melissa Padilla also illustrates *misrepresentation* in that the language used by the institution does not match that of members of the public. She explains that the term 'illegal aliens' is neither what she uses nor what she believes anyone should use; it is inaccurate. As such, and in addition to perpetuating harmful and offensive ideas, misrepresentations can lead to problems of *access and discoverability* of records. Connecting again with Frick and Proffitt, they share that by using inaccurate and inappropriate language,

> there is the risk of hiding knowledge in plain sight. A user familiar with terms based in their communities' culture and knowledge may never connect to objects described using terms based on the dominant culture, effectively silencing these diverse voices in collections (ibid).

Unfortunately, many groups have had to 'make do' with the inaccurate and inappropriate language used by the dominant culture. This is the case for many Indigenous Peoples and their cultural collections around the world (Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, 2015; Mathé, 2014). For example, the A:shiwi A:wan Museum in Zuni New Mexico conducted a survey of how Zuni holdings were described across other institutions and found that 82% of these descriptions were incorrect (Mathé, 2014).

Another example of how misrepresentation can lead to issues of access and discoverability is related to past gender norms, and how it was common for women to either be left out of archival descriptions altogether or be solely identified by their husbands' name (e.g., "Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt."). This practice has created *erasure and invisibility* of women in archival records (Brewer, 2020; Clemens, Coggins, Peralra, and Tai, 2022; Olson, 2023; see Figure 1). Moreover, when projects are undertaken to restore women's names in archival materials, the process is made more complex if they are not of wealthy or socially prominent backgrounds. For instance, in detailing the process of identifying married women by their full names at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Celeste Brewer (2020) explains that "while this project increased the visibility of archival records of some women, it reinforced the marginalization of records of working class

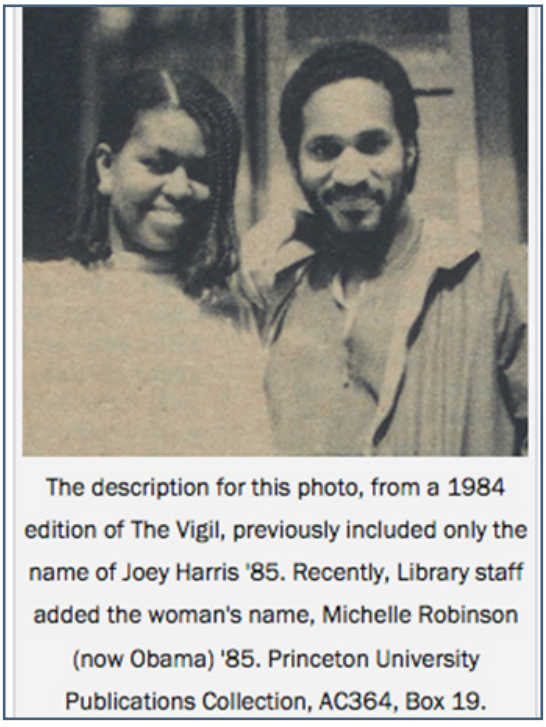

Figure 1. Example of a reparative description at the Princeton University Library. This photo and caption is included in a project report of the Inclusive Description Working Group published on the Princeton Library's blog and reflects past gender norms of omitting women's names from archival records. Since 2019 this Working Group has been using a reparative framework to describe collections and people with greater accuracy and respect. As a result, records are more discoverable and voices and stories of marginalized groups are brought to light.

and poor women, women of color, and people in non-heteronormative relationships" (para. 9).

In addition to problems with access and discoverability, misrepresentations can also pose risks of p*hysical harm and violence*. For example, the ***Trans Metadata Collective explains in their Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources*** (2022) that:

> Often, metadata is created about us, our communities, and/or our works by people who aren't familiar with trans and gender diverse issues. Commonly used controlled vocabularies and classification systems under-and mis-represent trans and gender diverse people and subjects. Furthermore, trans and gender diverse people can be misnamed or misgendered in metadata. This can out trans and gender diverse individuals and put them at risk of harm or violence (p. 2).

The risks of harm or violence associated with misnaming and misgendering can happen in different ways. For example, recording someone's gender and former names in a library system's name authority records, as well as juxtaposing current and previous names in a public display can out this person as being trans. This can create harmful repercussions for the person, "including online harassment, employment discrimination, in-person assault, and even state sanctioned incarceration and violence in some regions" (Tanenbaum et al., 2021, para. 12). As a result, how a trans author appears in a system should reflect their wishes.[8]

Another way in which misrepresentation can create harm is through the use of *euphemisms*, which *diminish people's lived experiences and perpetuate inaccurate historical narratives*. This is the case with many collections pertaining to the treatment of people of Japanese American ancestry during WWII. At that time, the U.S. government developed a practice of using euphemistic language to control public perceptions of the forced removal and mass incarceration of Japanese Americans in concentration camps (O'Neill and Searcy, 2020; Tai, 2018; 2021; 2023). As the Japanese American Citizens League explains in ***The Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in WWII*** (2020):

> The public was told that Nisei (citizens of Japanese ancestry) and Issei (non-citizens) were being "evacuated" to "relocation centers" and "internment camps." Terms like "evacuation" of people sounded like they were being rescued from some kind of disaster (like an earthquake). To obscure the unconstitutional nature of these forced removals, the government referred to the Nisei victims as 'non-aliens' instead of 'citizens', which might provoke public inquiries like: "Why is the U.S. imprisoning citizens' without due process of law?'" (p. 7).

This quote illustrates how euphemistic language used in national narratives and in collection descriptions has the potential to skew perceptions of harmful events away from an accurate and just representation towards a more benign and disempowering one.

"Uncomfortable information can be hidden behind inappropriate subject headings: for example the use of terms like ABORIGINES, AUSTRALIA – TREATMENT for works which might more appropriately receive the heading GENOCIDE."

(Moorecroft, 1992, p. 40)

Harmful and Triggering Content

Beyond harmful language encountered in collection holdings are harms associated with the content of collection items, such as digitized photographs, book titles, and oral history transcripts. Photographs in particular can be especially triggering due to their graphic nature. As previously mentioned, this graphic content can include "historical events such as violent death, medical procedures,

Digitization Reinscribes Racism

In her 2020 presentation ***Redescription as Restorative Justice***, Tonia Sutherland shares that now-digitized era slavery records tend to mirror the description practices as they already existed, that is, they adopt and reproduce the destructive practices used by slave traders, slave holders, and colonial officers. This has the impact of reinscribing racist ideologies in the present.

"Redescription is worth the effort. (...) Redescription is reparative work, it is reparations work, it works to repair harm, to heal past offenses, and to help us all move forward. It is the work of justice" (45:06)

8 Consult the Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources for more detailed information on how to properly proceed: https://zenodo.org/records/6686841#.YrZaCZPMJH0

crime, wars/terrorist acts, natural disasters and more" (NARA, 2022). Without proper metadata information or content warnings, photographs of a traumatic origin can continue to dehumanize those depicted and perpetuate the oppressive power dynamics that produced them (Mallea, 2023; Sutherland, 2017; 2020; 2021). In some cases, it might be best – that is, most respectful to those in the photographic material and to the surviving community or family – to omit certain photographic content from an online repository (Mallae, 2023; McCraken, 2024; Sutherland 2021). The same goes for documents containing sensitive and personal information collected in dehumanizing ways (e.g., medical records, see Weiss, 2024).

Problematic digitized photographic material can also include seemingly more innocuous content with a nevertheless corrosive and oppressive impact. This is the case, for example, of digitized yearbooks of predominantly white schools and universities. Older volumes in particular can "depict cultural appropriation or re-creation of violent or demeaning events for entertainment, for example blackfaced minstrel shows, Native American dress and dancing, hazing activities, slave auctions as fund-raising events, 'scalp the Indians' as a sports cheer, hobo parades, and others" (Recollection Wisconsin, 2020; see Figure 6). If left unaddressed, such content not only perpetuates historical harm, but also gives the impression that the record holding institution continues to be aligned with such practices.

Finally, harm can also derive from content that is culturally sensitive in that it, for example, violates customary laws or established practices of a cultural community. Such is the case for many Indigenous Peoples' cultural material. Consulting source communities, existing protocols for working with Indigenous Peoples and their cultural materials, as well as ensuring NAGRPA compliance is recommended (Mallea, 2023).

Lack of Information

As Tonia Sutherland (2020) states, "titling files accurately, but failing to provide contextual description is dangerous and assumptions of neutrality creates biases in favor of historical racism" (42:53). As such, a lack of information to contextualize harmful language and/or content is itself harmful. This can include a lack of descriptive metadata, content or trigger warning statements, and other general contextual information. More will be said about this below.

1.c Remedial Action: Reparative Archiving

To address the scope of harm discussed above, LAM professionals and scholars have called on the field to adopt a new paradigm and set of *reparative archival practices* capable of tackling the legacies of bias and harm present in contemporary records. As such, approaches of *critical librarianship*, as well as a relational *feminist ethics of care* with its focus on enacting *radical empathy* in archival and collection work have shaped the conceptual basis of the examples discussed in this section (Caswell and Cifor, 2016; 2018; 2021; Drabinski, 2019; Farmer et al., 2022; Rowell and Cooksey, 2019; Figure 2). From this new foundation, archivists are no longer seen as detached, objective, and neutral subjects organizing and preserving records according to a singular, true, and external reality. Rather, they are understood as "caregivers, bound to record creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility" (Caswell and Cifor, 2016, p. 24). These relationships should be "marked by radical empathy" (ibid, p. 25) in which structural power inequities are questioned, addressed, and repaired (ibid, 2019, p. 159).

Figure 2. Critical Librarianship visual from the University of Washington.

Radical Empathy:

"A willingness to be affected, to be shaped by another's experience, without blurring the lines between the self and the other" (Caswell and Cifor, 2016, p. 31).

"Such empathy is radical if it critically and consciously shifts existing power relations in favor of those who are marginalized" (ibid, 2019, p. 160).

This reformulation of the profession as a non-neutral, caring, relational, and empathic one has engendered remedi-

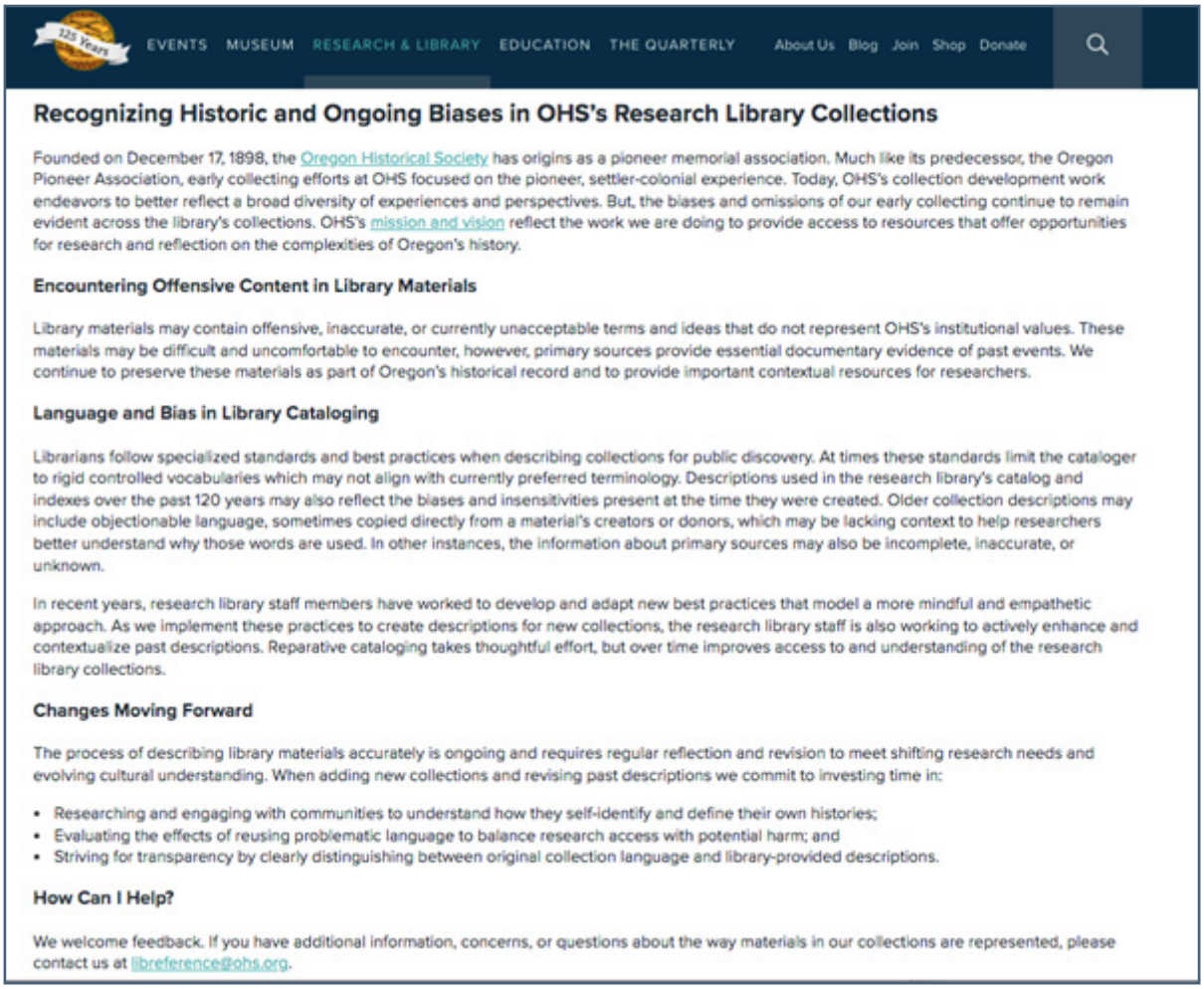

Figure 3. Example of Harmful Language and Content Statement from the Oregon Historical Society.

al actions to deal with harmful language and content that exists in archival spaces. These reparative archival practices can include:

1) *Harmful language and content statements* to contextualize and warn users of problematic language and holdings, and

2) *Reparative description* practices that aim to assess and amend existing descriptions, provide more context to collections, and make material more discoverable.

Harmful Language and Content Statements

Record-holding institutions craft harmful language and content statements to acknowledge the presence of harmful language and content in catalogue records and holding. These also serve to warn users that they might encounter language and content that reflects racist, sexist, ableist, xenophobic, homophobic, or other forms of biased views. These statements are usually published on the institutions' website and often include an invitation for users/visitors to provide feedback.

Crafting and sharing harmful language and content statements is important and is usually the first step an institution makes in taking remedial action. As Cataloguing Librarian Adrian Schuba (2022) states in ***Writing and Implementing a Statement to Remediate Harmful Language in the Library Catalog,*** "by explaining harmful words, patrons may be less likely to feel unwelcome in the library after seeing an offensive word in the catalog" (para.1).

Based on her research on harmful language statements, Lindsey Loebig (2022) found that these statements include the overall following elements:

- **Acknowledgments that archives are not neutral** or that descriptive practice is biased.
- **Mention of iterative practice**; that this work is ongoing.
- **Action items** of the remedial steps repositories are taking to mitigate harm and improve their practices.
- **A form of contact** to allow members of the public to flag harmful content or provide feedback.
- **Resources** consulted in the process of crafting a harmful language statement and that may be useful to other entities.

Figure 4. Example of a short Harmful Language Statement from the University of Maryland

The screenshot in Figure 3 from the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) is a good example of a Harmful Language and Content Statement. It provides information to contextualize the institution's past and the legacies it has inherited from that historical context, including harmful content and language. It alerts users/visitors that they might encounter such content, and establishes that these legacies do not reflect present-day values, that the institution is taking steps to transparently address this situation, and that this work is ongoing. Finally, the statement concludes with an invitation for users/visitors to provide feedback and be in touch if they have any concerns.

Harmful Language Statements can also be short, such as the one in Figure 4 from the University of Maryland Libraries.[9] This statement opens with a sentence about intent regarding the use of inclusive language and then moves on to explain that, despite this intent, harmful language may be encountered in the catalogue. It provides concrete examples of where harmful language may be encountered and why this content has not been censored, making a direct connection to the inherited legacies of past historical contexts. As with the statement from OHS, it concludes with an invitation to provide feedback and be in touch, and closes with a sentence that signals an institutional commitment to transparency and accountability.

Note that if a harmful language and content statement invites users to provide feedback and report occurrences of offensive language, it is important that there be internal mechanisms in place to:

1. respond to users and
2. take remedial action. Establishing such procedures helps to ensure institutional accountability, which is especially important when dealing with harmful language and content. Users deserve to be acknowledged and to know what will happen with what they chose to share.

Reparative Descriptions

Reparative descriptions are action steps to address harmful language, content, and incomplete records. These steps are often mentioned in the harmful language and content statement described above and can include:

- Auditing collections for harmful language and content (i.e., language and content that is oppressive, euphemistic, or misrepresentative);
- Flagging harmful content (e.g., "trigger warnings");
- Amending harmful or incomplete archival description;
- Implementing new metadata practices to eliminate harm.

This remedial action work falls under the umbrella of critical cataloguing and metadata justice, and is referred to in

9 Note that the University of Maryland provides a more in-depth statement on harmful language in finding aids under the library's tab "Request Onsite Use of Special Collections." See: https://www.lib.umd.edu/find/request-special-collections/harmful-language-finding-aids.

Critical Cataloging:

"The act of examining the descriptive language we use through a social justice lens: what inequities are being upheld within the Library of Congress subject headings? What narratives are we perpetuating through our use of outdated and harmful subject headings? How can we repair the inequities that exist in our metadata, and how can we establish a practice that upholds our dedication to equity and inclusion, without erasing an uncomfortable history?" (The Art Institute of Chicago, 2023)

Metadata Justice:

"Refers to the use of accurate and appropriate language in metadata systems like library catalogs. When we describe people, places, and events, the words we use matter. Using accurate and appropriate language helps us communicate. It can also promote justice for groups of people who historically have experienced systematic inequality." (University of Oklahoma Metadata Justice Working and Learning Group, 2022)

Reparative Description Work:

"Aims to remediate or contextualize potentially outdated or harmful language used in archival description and to create archival description that is accurate, inclusive, and community-centered" (Yale Library, n.d.). This reparative work "is a matter of truth-telling, accountability, negotiation, redistribution, and redress" (Adler, 2016, p. 631) that can be understood as a form of metadata justice.

different ways, including reparative descriptions, inclusive descriptions, and conscious editing and anti-oppressive metadata practices.

Auditing Records for Harmful Language and Content

Auditing records for harmful language can be a good place to begin and can help scope a project. An audit can be centered on a specific topic. For example, the collection descriptions of material pertaining to the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II can be audited for euphemistic and misleading language not in line with the preferred terminology promoted by members of the Japanese American community.[10] After the problematic language has been identified through this audit, next steps can take place (e.g., trigger/content warning or record amending; see below).

An audit can also be broader to reveal the occurrence and extent of harmful language across topics and collections. In this case, a list of problematic language is determined and records are then searched using these terms. Problematic language lists can be generated in different ways. For example, in an effort to ascertain harmful language in finding aids at the University of California Santa Cruz's Special Collections and Archives, archivists first utilized a ground-up approach, analyzing a couple different batches of finding aids identified as potentially problematic. From this first phase of work, they generated a list of locally-occurring harmful terms that was then added to through the consultation of five reputable sources of a more general nature. These were the Diversity Style Guide, the AP Stylebook on Race Related Coverage, the Cataloging Labs' list of problematic LOC subject headings, and the University of North Carolina Libraries Archival Procedures manual. As a result, their final list was composed of over a hundred terms that they utilized to search and analyze the language of all finding aids. From this analysis, they formulated a plan with prioritized action steps for addressing the harmful language that had been uncovered (Pillsbury, 2021).[11]

Flagging Harmful Content

Beyond general harmful language and content statements are trigger or content warnings that can be added to finding aids, specific collections, and/or specific items within a collection. Flagging records in such a way allows users to decide whether or not they want to access the collection or item, and to be prepared if they choose to proceed. This method is especially useful for items that cannot be amended, such as photographs, book titles, and oral history transcripts.

For example, and as discussed above, older yearbooks from predominantly white schools and universities can contain harmful and oppressive content that, if left unacknowledged, is perpetuated through contemporary digi-

10 Please refer to The Japanese American Citizen's League's Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II; and the Densho project's Preferred Terminology in Section 2 below.

11 See also Muñoz, 2021 for another example of auditing finding aids.

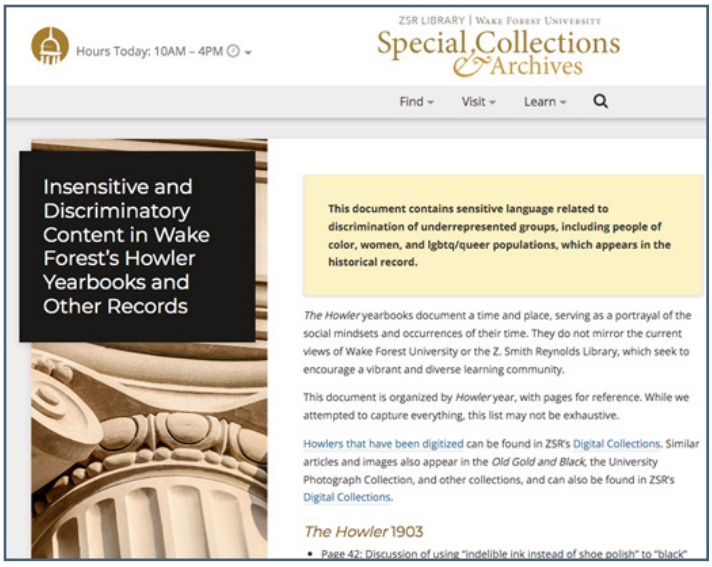

Figure 5. Statement warning of the presence of insensitive and discriminatory content in Wake Forest University's Yearbooks.

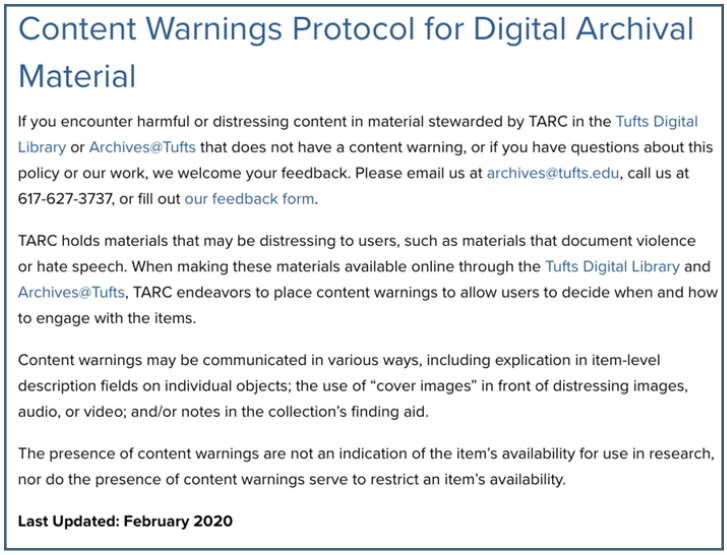

Figure 7. Content Warning Protocol at Tufts University.

tizing initiatives. Below is an example of a content warning added to Wake Forest University's Special Collections and Archives page, alerting users of insensitive and discriminatory content in the school's yearbooks and other records (Figure 5).

At The Center for the History of Medicine at the Francis A Countway Library of Harvard Medical School, guidelines have been developed for dealing with "challenging content". Through these guidelines, staff members are requested to add a content note "with a clear and straightforward description of the challenging material" (see Figure 6). At Tufts University, harmful content is either explicated in item-level description fields on individual objects, hidden from view through "cover images", and/or annotated in the collection's finding aid (Figure 7).

Amending Harmful or Incomplete Archival Description

Amending harmful or incomplete records can result from topic or collection-specific audits, as well as collection-wide audits, as those described above. It can also be motivated by a digitizing initiative. Additionally, institutions choose to integrate redescriptive practices within the scope of their collection processing workflows. In all cases, redescription efforts center on updating outdated or offensive descriptive terms balanced with a commitment to preserve the historical integrity and original context of the material through, for example, descriptive notes.

To return to the topic of euphemistic language in collection description of material pertaining to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the archival staff at the UCLA Library Special Collections (LSC) conducted an audit of their finding aids for such language. As a result of this audit, the archivists decided to amend the harmful language with terminology that is accurate and preferred by members of the Japanese American community. Two important values guiding their work were community consultation and transparency. To meet the need for community consultations, the archival team utilized guidelines published in the Japanese American Citizens League's Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II. As archivist Jessica Tai (2023) recounts: "given that developing preferred terminologies in collaboration with communities is a la-

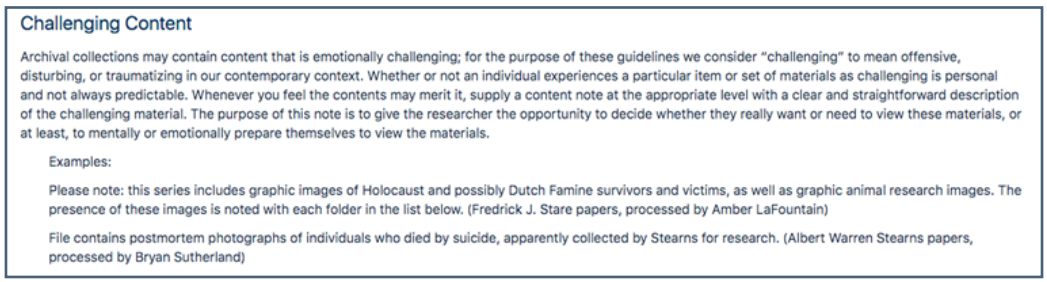

Figure 6. Guideline for dealing with "challenging content" at The Center for the History of Medicine at the Francis A Countway Library of Harvard Medical School.

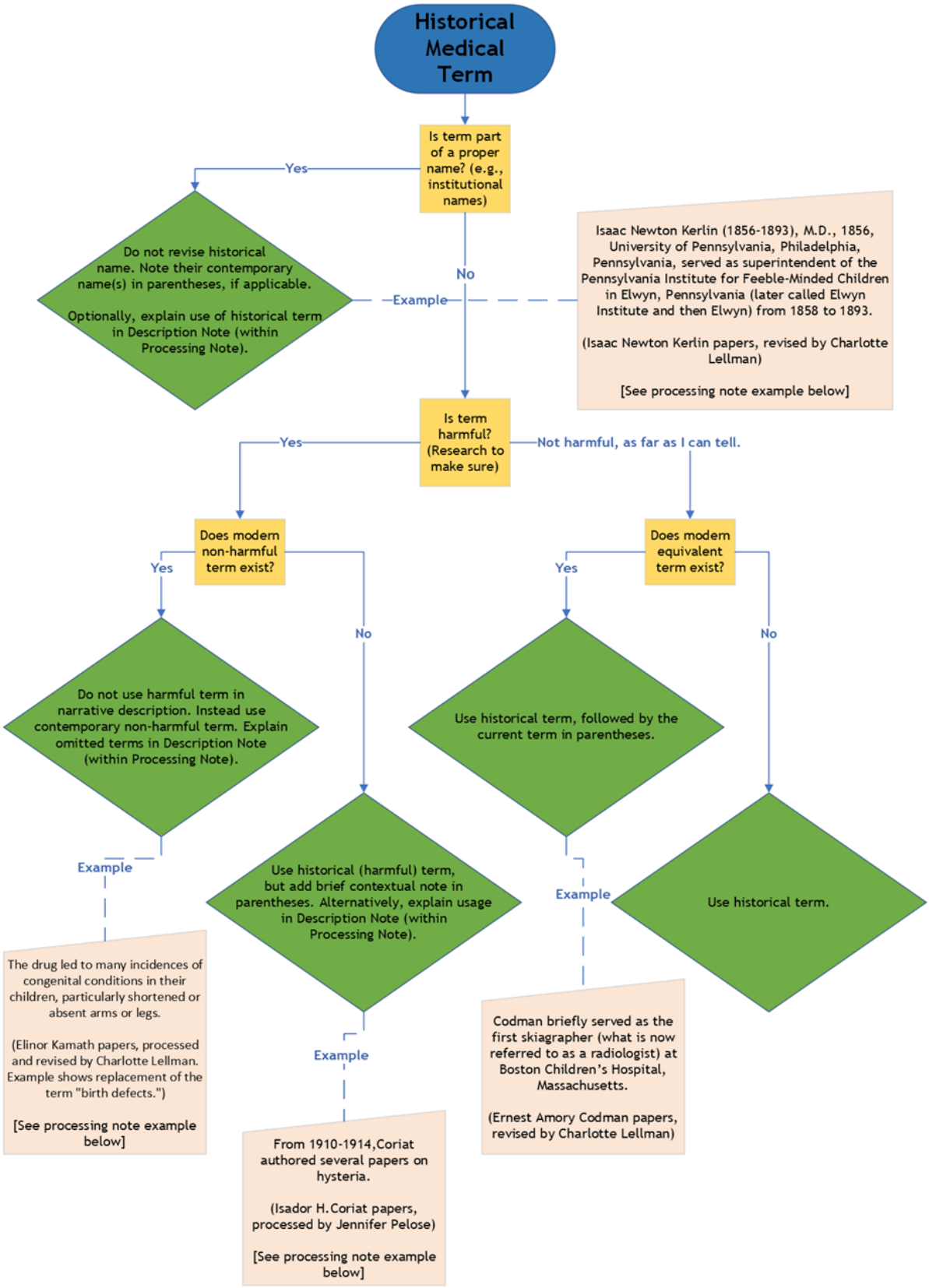

Figure 8. History of Medicine at the Francis A Countway Library of Harvard Medical School decision tree

bor- and time-intensive process, the accessibility of guidelines that had already been formulated and published by a community group was a necessary requisite" (p. 357). Additionally, the archival team leveraged their access to academic specialists from across the university, inviting the librarians in the Asian American Studies Center and Indian American Studies Center to consult on the project.

To honor the need for transparency in this project, the archivists detailed their interventions on the outdated language in descriptive notes and retained the previous versions of the finding aids on GitHub, a code-posting platform for version control. As Tai explains, the goal was not to "simply erase legacy archival description but to offer proper contextualization, and if necessary, revise language that may be harmful, inaccurate, or euphemistic in describing marginalized communities and their experiences as portrayed in the archival records" (ibid). In addition to demonstrating transparency, such practices emphasize the iterative nature of this work; it is dynamic and ongoing.

Implementing New Metadata and Cataloguing Practices to Eliminate Harm

Finally, and in addition to the examples discussed above, new metadata and cataloguing practices can be implemented to help eliminate harm moving forward.

These include:

- Developing and/or implementing new internal style guidelines to ensure that archival description practices are anti-oppressive and in line with how people portrayed in archival material describe themselves,[12]
- Developing and/or implementing workflows to support decision-making in archival description terminology.

For example, to guide accurate collection (re)description work, the Center for the History of Medicine at the Francis A Countway Library of Harvard Medical School has implemented a decision tree that can be adapted to other institutional contexts (Figure 8).[13]

Through the reparative archival work described above, it is important to adopt a position of *cultural humility*, which relies on a life-long process of continued willingness to learn and grow. In her article ***Cultural Humility as a Framework for Anti-Oppressive Archival Descriptions***, Tai (2023) explains that cultural humility "emphasizes the need for process-oriented approaches that are iterative, flexible, and acknowledge the inherent biases that impact both our everyday work and the structures from which that work is carried out" (p. 350). This perspective fosters mutually beneficial, non-paternalistic, respectful, and authentic locally based partnerships (p. 352) and centers transparency as a guiding value.

Additionally, in all the examples discussed in this section, from the publishing of harmful language and content statements to reparative description work, there is a need for *institutional buy-in*, clear *guiding principles and values,* as well as *specific processes and procedures* in place. It is wise to recognize that centering equity and an ethics of care in reparative archiving will necessitate a rebalancing and reprioritizing of how and on what time is being spent (Cray, 2023). This work takes time and is ongoing.

"Problems that took years to build are not often dismantled in an hour."

(Berry, 2021, para. 21)

2. GUIDANCE, LANGUAGE GUIDES, CASE STUDIES, AND RESOURCES

Over the last few years, there have been many collaborative efforts to compile information, resources, and examples pertaining to reparative descriptions. These range from grassroots and ad-hoc to institutional and centrally coordinated efforts. There have also been many collaborative efforts to develop guidelines and recommendations, as well as alternative guides to support professionals in reparative and equitable practices. Communities impacted by harmful language, content, and practices developed many of these resources, or were consulted in the process.

At this time, university libraries and archives are leading the helm of reparative archival work. This work is often prioritized under university-wide inclusion and equity mandates and strategic plans, and is often backed by necessary resources including funding and staff. Of course, this does not mean that this work should be limited to universities and other well-resourced institutions. As Frick and Proffitt state (2022), "all institutions (and individuals working within institutions) can and should consider the power they hold and their ability to dream and enact change. Not taking any action perpetuates the status quo" (p. 15).

A recommendation from LAM professionals involved in reparative description work includes the consultation of resources pertaining to inclusive language developed

12 See for example: https://www.lib.umd.edu/find/request-special-collections/harmful-language-finding-aids

13 This institution is an archival center specializing in medical history; collections include personal and family papers, departmental and organizational records, and artifacts, including human remains.

in other disciplines such as journalism and media. These style guides apply to those carrying out descriptive work in the LAM sector and are included below.

What follows is an annotated bibliography that highlights guidance on harmful language and content statements, followed by several guides for inclusive description and cataloguing. Some of these guides are general and others are, for example, more community-specific; they are organized accordingly. Again, note that community-specific guides were either developed by or in consultation with members of these communities. This section concludes with reparative description case studies and other pertinent resources on the topic.

Taken together, the resources gathered below can be viewed as tools and as a starting point to develop local approaches to deal with harmful language and content in collections. For example, they can be used to craft a harmful language or content statement and (re)description guidelines, and/or to scope a project and write a grant. An important consideration is that culture and language are dynamic and ever changing – preferred terminology, in many cases, will evolve. It is advised to:

1. verify the continued preference of terminology presented in the resources below, and
2. develop flexible, local approaches that account for local particularities and for the dynamic nature of culture and language – this work is ongoing.[14]

> ***"Making decisions about language is iterative, and best done in collaboration with colleagues in and across institutions, and in consultation with source communities. Moreover, it is important to be flexible. A term that is considered accurate and sensitive in 2023 may be considered problematic in 2033."***
>
> ***(Riley, 2023, para. 2)***

2.a Guidance on Harmful Language and Content Statements

- **Cataloguing Lab. (last updated February, 2024). *List of Statements on Bias in Library and Archive*. Cataloguing Lab.**

  Compilation of American, Australian, and Canadian cultural heritage institutions' statements on harmful and offensive language. https://cataloginglab.org/list-of-statements-on-bias-in-library-and-archives-description/

- **Loebig, L. (2023, May 5). *Understanding Harmful Language Statements*. The New Archivist.**

  Content analysis of twenty-seven harmful language statements of U.S. university archives from the Cataloging Lab list mentioned above. https://aranewprofessionals.wordpress.com/2023/05/21/understanding-harmful-language-statements/

- **Recollection Wisconsin. (2020, December 4). *The Toolkit: Content Statements*. Recollection Wisconsin.**

  Includes tips on writing a harmful content statement for cultural heritage organizations in the process of digitizing collections. https://recollectionwisconsin.org/the-toolkit-content-statements

- **Schuba, A. (2022, December 6). *Writing and Implementing a Statement to Remediate Harmful Language in the Library Catalog*. Library Journal.**

  Offers advice on how to write and implement a harmful language statement. https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/Writing-and-Implementing-a-Statement-to-Remediate-Harmful-Language-in-the-Library-Catalog-Peer-to-Peer-Review

2.b Language Guides

General Guides

- ***Problem LCSH*. (n.d.). Cataloging Lab.**

  List of problem LoC subject headings and proposed alternatives. https://cataloginglab.org/problem-lcsh/

- **Kanigel, Rachele (ed.). (n.d.). *The Diversity Style Guide: Helping Media Professionals Write with Accuracy and Authority*. The Diversity Style Guide.**

  Brings together preferred terms and phrases related to race/ethnicity; religion; sexual orientation; gender identity; age and generation; drugs and alcohol; and physical, mental and cognitive disabilities. These terms are pulled from more than two-dozen style guides.https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/

- **Lellman, Charlotte, et al. (Last modified May 3, 2024). *Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description. Center for the History of Medicine: Policies and Procedures Manual*. Center for the History of Medicine, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Mass.**

14 Note that all digital resources included in this report were accessed between March and June 2024.

Living document created to help guide Center archivists in developing descriptions that are respectful, just, accurate, and clear. https://wiki.harvard.edu/confluence/display/hmschommanual/Guidelines+for+Inclusive+and+Conscientious+Description

- **Oregon Library Association Technical Services Round Table. (2020). *Critical Cataloging Repository.* Oregon Library Association.**

  Open-source repository "to help institutions identify subject headings and language within their catalogs that should be either added, removed, or changed to better enhance discovery of diversity titles within our catalogs." https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1it7SI9nrkH5V-jC6U9QSr1lZ-A45LybmPVrbha0kDz7g/edit#gid=0

- **Wilson Special Collections Library. (2022). *A Guide to Conscious Editing at Wilson Special Collections Library*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill University Libraries.**

  Compilation of practices used to update, edit, and create new archival finding aids. Includes examples of redescription in practice. https://library.unc.edu/project/conscious-editing-initiative/

- **Yin, Karen. (2015-2024). *Conscious Style Guide*.**

  A living website that provides access to different style guides pertaining to such topics as ability and disability; ethnicity, race, and nationality; socioeconomic status and more. Includes the latest news and observations on these various topics as well. https://consciousstyleguide.com/

Indigeneity-Related Guides

- **Berkley Library. (January, 2022). *Local Practices for Digitization of and Online Access to Indigenous Materials*.**

  Provides guidelines and rationale for the library's digitizing practices pertaining to Indigenous Materials.https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mfrpUudv2XHTcB9k2dT515MiYmuXM2B51eRPFpj3AY4/edit

- **First Archivist Circle. (2007, April 9). *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*.**

  Developed by a group of 19 Native American and non-Native American archivists, librarians, museum curators, historians, and anthropologists, this resource identifies "best professional practices for culturally responsive care and use of American Indian archival material held by non-tribal organizations." https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/index.html

- ***Intersectional Indigenous Identities: Afro-Indigenous and Black Indigenous Peoples: A Starting Guide of Terminology*. (2022, February 1). Native Americans in Philanthropy.**

  General guide on terminology and concepts related to Afro-Indigenous identities. https://nativephilanthropy.org/blog/2022/02/01/intersectional-indigenous-identities-afro-indigenous-and-black-indigenous-peoples

- ***The Impact of Words and Tips for Using Appropriate Terminology: Am I Using the Right Word?* (n.d.). National Museum of the American Indian: Native Knowledge 360.**

  General advice for using accurate terms when speaking about Indigenous Peoples' cultures. https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/information-al/impact-words-tips

- **Native American Journalists Association (NAJA). (2018, November). Reporting *and Indigenous Terminology*.**

  Provides some key terminology to support accurate phrasing when it comes to the reporting of Indigenous People. https://najanewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAJA_Reporting_and_Indigenous_Terminology_Guide.pdf

- ***The American Philosophy Society Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials.* (2014, December). Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 158(4).**

  These protocols were developed over three years and in consultation with the Society's Native American Advisory Board. https://www.amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/attachments/APS%20Protocols.pdf

Race, Ethnicity, and Anti-Racism Guides

- **Antracoli, A. A.; Berdini, A.; Bolding K.; Charlton, F.; Ferrara, A.; Johnson, V.; Rawdon, K. (2019, October). *Anti-Racist Description Resources*. Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (A4BLiP).**

  Provides best practice recommendations for an anti-oppressive approach to creating and remediating archival descriptions. These include recommendations for Voice and Style, Community Collaboration and Expanding Audience, Auditing Legacy Description and Reparative Processing, Handling Racist Folder Titles and Creator-Sourced Description, Describing Slavery Records, Subjects and Classification, and Transparency. https://archivesforblacklives.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf

- **Bolding, K. (2018). *Reparative Processing: A Case Study in Auditing Legacy Archival Description for Racism* [PowerPoint slides].**

  This is a presentation slideshow that provides advice and strategies for auditing legacy archival description for racism in finding aids at Princeton University. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1MhOXx5ZlVjb_8pfvvFquMqLsUUlOHFF-MT4js5EP4qnA/edit#slide=id.p

- **Grimm, J. (2019, May 4). *Associated Press Changes Style on Race, Gender*. Bias Buster: Cultural Competence Guides.**

  Highlights some of the most recent changes to the AP Stylebook (56th edition) on race and gender-related entries. https://news.jrn.msu.edu/cultural-competence/2019/04/05/associated-press-changes-styl-on-race/

- **Japanese American Citizens League. (2013). *The Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II, Understanding Euphemisms and Preferred Terminology.***

  Provides context to understand the use of euphemism to describe the Japanese-American experience during WWII, as well as preferred terminology.https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8e0d3e848b7a506128dddf/t/5ffc861741448928cd131066/1610384921163/POW-Handbook-Rev2020-V4.pdf

- ***Terminology*. (n.d.). Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project.**

  Provides appropriate terminology to remediate the persistent use of euphemism to describe the Japanese-American experience during WWII. https://densho.org/terminology/

Gender and Sexuality-Related Guides

- ***Homosaurus: An International LGBTQ+ Linked Data Vocabulary.***

  "The Homosaurus is an international linked data vocabulary of LGBTQ+ terms. Designed to enhance broad subject term vocabularies, the Homosaurus is a robust and cutting-edge thesaurus that advances the discoverability of LGBTQ+ resources and information." https://homosaurus.org/

- ***National Glossary of Terms*. (n.d.). PFLAG.**

  Glossary of terms pertaining to LGBTQ identities and experiences compiled by PFLAG (Parent, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). https://pflag.org/glossary/

- **The Trans Metadata Collective; Burns, J.; Cronquist, M.; Huang, J.; Murphy, D.; Rawson, K. J.; Schaefer, B.; Simons, J.; Watson, B. M.; & Williams, A. (2022). *Metadata Best Practices for Trans and Gender Diverse Resources (1.0)*. Zenodo.**

  "Set of best practices for the description, cataloguing, and classification of information resources as well as the creation of metadata about trans and gender diverse people, including authors and other creators." https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6686841

Ability and Disability-Related Guide

- **National Center on Disability and Journalism. (Revised, August 2021). *Disability Language Style Guide*. National Center on Disability and Journalism.**

Recommendations for Voice and Style
from the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia:

- Decenter "neutrality" and "objectivity" in favor of "respect" and "care";
- Avoid passive voice when describing oppressive relationships;
- Use active voice in order to embed responsibility within description;
- Focus on the humanity of an individual before their identity/ies;
- Refrain from writing flowery, valorizing biographical notes for collection creators; - Use accurate and strong language such as lynching, rape, murder, and hate mail when they are appropriate;
- Describe relationships of power when they are important for understanding the context of records. Racism, slurs, white supremacy, colonialism, and histories of oppression are important context (2019).

Covers dozens of words and terms commonly used when referring to disability. https://ncdj.org/style-guide/

2.c Sample Case Studies[15]

- **Brewer, Celeste. (2020, September 9). *Eleanor Roosevelt Speaks for Herself: Identifying 1,257 Married Women by their Full Names.* News from Columbia's Rare Book & Manuscript Library.**

  This blogpost details how an archivist and a public service assistant from the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Columbia identified 1,257 women previously referred to in finding aids by their husbands' names. https://blogs.cul.columbia.edu/rbml/2020/09/09/eleanor-roosevelt-speaks-for-herself-identifying-1257-married-women-by-their-full-names/

- **Hughes-Watkins, L. (2018). *Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices*. Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies 5(1), 6.**

  This article presents a theoretical and practical framework for creating a "reparative archive" and includes as a case study the Black Campus Movement (BCM) Collection Development Project Initiative at Kent State University. https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1045&context=jcas

- **Johnson, B. (2023, November 1). *Princeton University Library Advocates for Reparative Description for Indigenous Collections through Working Group*. Princeton University Library.**

  This blog post discusses reparative descriptive work being conducted at Princeton University's Special Collections and centered on material pertaining to Indigenous communities of North America. https://library.princeton.edu/news/general/2023-11-01/princeton-university-library-advocates-reparative-description-indigenous

- **Mauro, S and Pruitt, A. (2021, January). *Content Warnings and Harmful Description Remediation: A Scalable, Iterative Approach*. NEA Newsletter 48(1), pp. 4-5.**

  Example of implementing content warnings and conducting descriptive work at Tufts University. https://www.newenglandarchivists.org/resources/Documents/Newsletter/2021/NEA%202021%20January.pdf

- **Moretti, A. (2021). *Describing Disability in Houghton Library's Collections*.**

  Describes librarian's process for developing guidelines for reparative processing and future processing of materials pertaining to disabilities in the archives. Article in the November/December issue of Archival Outlook (pp. 8-9, 21): https://mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?m=30305&i=728963&p=10&ver=html5 PowerPoint slides: https://files.archivists.org/research-forum/2021/Platform/1-5-1_Moretti.pdf

- **Muñoz, G. (2021, April 22). *Reframing Reparative Description Initiatives through Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism*. Descriptive Notes.**

  Example of auditing finding aids across collecting areas at UCLA Library Special Collections. https://saadescription.wordpress.com/2021/04/22/reframing-reparative-description-initiatives-through-critical-race-theory-and-black-feminism/

- ***Mukurtu CMS: An Indigenous Archive and Publishing Tool*. (n.d.). Humanities for All.**

  This is an example of a "content management system and digital access tool for cultural heritage, built for and in ongoing dialogue with indigenous communities (...) Mukurtu offers the ability to provide differential access to community members and the general public and to create space for traditional narratives and knowledge labels that foreground Indigenous knowledge in the metadata of digitized cultural heritage materials." https://humanitiesforall.org/projects/mukurtu-an-indigenous-archive-and-publishing-tool

- **O'Neill, S., & Searcy, R. (2020). *Righting (and Writing) Wrongs: Reparative Description for Japanese American Wartime Incarceration*. The Back Table: Archives and Special Collections at New York University.**

  This blog post discusses the curator's and the accessioning archivist's process for amending euphemistic language present in collections' finding aids. https://wp.nyu.edu/specialcollections/2020/12/11/righting-and-writing-wrongs-reparative-description-for-japanese-american-wartime-incarceration/

- **Riley, E. (2022, August 8). *Rewriting the Past: The Problem with Historic Language in Museum Collections*. Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnography Blog.**

  Riley, E. (2023, August 7). *The Marshall IMLS Grant and Resources for Reparative Description*. Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnography Blog.

15 See also the References section for other examples of current research, case studies, and perspectives on the topic.

These two blog posts detail the Peabody Museum's discovery of the need to address outdated language while digitizing The Marshall Family Archives, and shares their process and guidelines. While this collection came with a thorough catalogue, the museum decided it needed to amend display titles and descriptions for outdated languages, retaining the original titles in the database and making them available upon request. https://peabody.harvard.edu/blog/rewriting-the-past & https://peabody.harvard.edu/blog/marshall-imls-grant-and-resources-reparative-description

- **Weiss, A. (2024, May 3). *Toward Equity in Metadata: How Sandy Spring Museum Adopted Restorative Cataloguing Practices*. American Alliance of Museums: Alliance Blog.**

  This blog post details the ongoing practices that the Sandy Spring Museum implemented to make Black history more discoverable in its digital collection. Presents a discussion on the collection team's process, including partnering with descendant communities and confronting ethical questions when deciding what to make public, and why (e.g., sensitive information like medical records). https://www.aam-us.org/2024/05/03/toward-equity-in-metadata-how-sandy-spring-museum-adopted-restorative-cataloguing-practices/?utm_source=American+Alliance+of+Museums&utm_campaign=6941e9367b-FieldNotes_2024_May6&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-6941e9367b-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D

2.d Additional Resources

- **Broadley, S.; Baron, J.; Cásares, O; and Padilla, M. (2019). *Change the Subject*.**

  Documentary about a group of Dartmouth students who challenged anti-immigrant language in the Library of Congress subject headings. https://www.library.dartmouth.edu/digital/digital-collections/change-the-subject#host-screening

- ***Descriptive Notes. Blog*.**

  The blog of the Description Section of the Society of American Archivists has a category on Inclusive Description with many examples and case studies of Reparative Description work. https://saadescription.wordpress.com/category/inclusive-description/

- **Frick, R. L., & Proffitt, M. (2022). *Reimagine Descriptive Workflows: A Community Informed Agenda for Reparative and Inclusive Descriptive Practice*. OCLC.**

  A report on reparative and inclusive descriptive practices, tools, infrastructure, and supportive workflows in libraries and archives. https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2022/oclcreseach-reimagine-descriptive-workflows.pdf

- ***Inclusive Descriptive Practices Zotero Group Library*.**

  This Zotero group first started as a part of the UC Libraries Forum 2021 session called "Community Conversation: Collaborating Towards Inclusive Descriptive Practices" on October 27, 2021. It provides references to research, presentations, and case studies of reparative description work. https://www.zotero.org/groups/4403443/inclusive_descriptive_practices/items/43SZTHB8/item-list

- ***Metadata Justice in Oklahoma Libraries and Archives Symposium*. (n.d.). The University of Central OK.**

  UCO hosts this annual symposium. Each year's proceedings are summarized and presented in a report archived on the symposium's website. Provides many examples of Metadata Justice in practice with advice for others wanting to engage in this work. https://library.uco.edu/mjoklasymposium

Figure 9. *Change the Subject* movie poster. Image source: Change The Subject | Dartmouth Library (https://www.library.dartmouth.edu/digital/digital-collections/change-the-subject)

- ***Reparative Description and Digitization at the National Archives.* (Last reviewed December 21, 2023). National Archives.**

  Reparative description work was initiated at after the Biden Administration passed Executive Order 13985 Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government. The website includes a timeline of updates on reparative description work at NARA, NARA's statement on potentially harmful content, and guiding principles. https://www.archives.gov/research/reparative-description

- ***Reparative Archival Description Working Group.* (n.d.). Yale Library.**

  Includes the working group's guiding principles, recommendations for implementing reparative descriptions, sample standardized descriptive notes, a couple examples of projects undertaken by this group, instructions for MARC versioning, as well as presentations, publications and a blog. https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=1140330&p=8319098

- **Society of American Archivist Description Section. (n.d.). *Inclusive Description Resources*. Society of American Archivists.**

  Resources on inclusive description including: manuals and guidelines, research and theory, resource lists, and sample statements on harmful language in archival description.https://www2.archivists.org/groups/description-section/inclusive-description

- **The Sunshine State Digital Network Metadata Working Group. (2020). *Inclusive Metadata and Conscious Editing Resources*. Sunshine State Digital Network.**

  Curated list of resources related to conscious editing and anti-oppressive metadata practices. Includes research and theory-oriented work, case studies, sites incorporating inclusive descriptions, tools, and resources lists. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iNo2ys7GRZIw5b7bGwSN6yJeQaoMp7JZ/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs

3. OREGON BASED WORK

There are a few examples of reparative work taking place in Oregon's record-keeping institutions. Other examples might exist, but have not yet been documented online.

- ***Statement on Harmful and Bias Language in Archival Description*. (n.d.). City of Portland.**

  Includes contextual information for triggering or harmful content in city archives, steps that are being taken, and an invitation to provide feedback. https://www.portland.gov/archives/harmful-and-bias-language-statement

- ***Special Collections and Archive Research Center Anti-Racist Actions.* (Last updated March 14, 2024). Oregon State University.**

  Includes links to SCARC blogposts that document their reparative and enhanced description efforts, along with a timeline of activities. https://guides.library.oregonstate.edu/scarc-anti-racist-actions/completed-projects?ssp=1&setlang=en&cc=US&safesearch=-moderate

- ***Inclusive Language in the Catalogue*. (n.d.). State Library of Oregon.**

  Includes a brief explanation for reparative work at the Library and lists of preferred terms. https://ccrls.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/oslpublic/?rm=VOCABULARY+CHA0%7C%7C%7C1%7C%7C%7C3%7C%7C%7Ctrue

- ***Our Collections*. (n.d.). The Oregon Historical Society.**

  This page includes a section called "Recognizing Historic and Ongoing Biases in OHS's Research Library Collections" that details contextual information on the founding of the organizations, a warning that offensive content may be encountered in library materials, steps the organizations is taking to address these issues, and an invitation to provide feedback (see screenshot in Figure 3). https://www.ohs.org/research-and-library/about-the-library/our-collections.cfm

  OHS has been addressing harm in its collections and practices through an explicit commitment to the lens of radical empathy and practices of reparative archiving. In 2020, the organization formed an internal working group called Embracing Radical Empathy in Library Descriptions (ERELD) to help guide this work. Their focus has been on:

  1. providing support to staff processing collections in view of better identifying those collections that might need more cultural care and empathy,
  2. reframing how collections are described, and
  3. rebalancing what collections are selected to work on informed by the need for equity and ethics of care (Cray, 2023).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The OHC's decision to commission the present report demonstrates their placing value on reparative archiving. It is an important step in the process of addressing harm and bias embedded in LAM collections and archives in the state of Oregon. Based on its mission to champion resources, recognition, and funding for preserving and interpreting Oregon's past, the OHC has a unique opportunity to continue to position itself as strategic partner in supporting reparative archival work in the state. For this, the OHC can especially leverage its role as a convener of people and resources.

This report provides a springboard for further research and multi-layered action for both the OHC itself and LAM professionals statewide. Therefore, recommendations include dynamically fostering and supporting at all levels:

1. Adoption of a Position of Cultural Humility

This is the foundation for reparative archival work and relies on a life-long process of continued willingness to learn and grow. A position of cultural humility:

- Understands the context and scope of harm embedded in collections and archives,
- Remains open to the nuances of how various stakeholders perceive and experience this harm,
- Is responsive to the above points and embraces a new paradigm for the profession that is based on a relational ethics of care and radical empathy,
- Favors process-oriented approaches that are transparent, flexible, and iterative,
- Engages in mutually beneficial, non-paternalistic, respectful, and authentic locally based partnerships (Tai, 2023).

2. Formulation of Guiding Principles and Values

Guiding principles and values formalize and set the tone for how institutions approach their reparative archival work (see Appendix B). It is ideal for staff to develop these as a team, since these documents will set the course for the work ahead.

3. Setting Realistic Expectations

It is important to set realistic expectations for reparative archival work, as this work takes time, is ongoing, requires rebalancing and reprioritizing, and looks different across institutions. Advice from LAM professionals involved in reparative archiving includes:

- Imagining new possibilities while focusing on what can be done in a particular institutional context, [16]
- Breaking the work into small, manageable chunks,
- Documenting the process and decisions to support continuity,
- Adopting a spirit of iteration,
- Being aware of and being guided by the tensions and contradictions inherent in this work, rather than being inhibited by them (e.g., this work is urgent / this work takes time). [17]

"We have to be honest with ourselves and say, this is about the long term, the long game and set those expectations initially. And if we don't do that on the front end, then we can end up causing more harm to just rush through that process."

(Hughes-Watkins, 2024, 39:26)

4. Consultation of Existing Resources

As the saying goes: "don't reinvent the wheel." Many resources have been developed to support reparative archiving, including the ones shared in section 2 above, as well as those cited throughout this report and compiled in the references section below. Become familiar with these resources; this is a way to gain inspiration and knowledge on the topic. It is also a way of being in relation with colleagues in the field, as well as community groups carrying out this work in their particular contexts, and who then took the time to share about it.

5. Relationship Building

Building relationships is a crucial part of reparative ar-

16 As Duarte and Belarde-Lewis (2015) explain, "few catalogers can imagine a world, practice, and bibliographic universe parallel to, much less prior to, the innovation of Library of Congress, Dewey, and the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR)" (p. 681). The first step is thus to be able to imagine that other structures and sets of practices are possible before being able to enact them.
17 Frick and Proffitt (2022) emphasize five tensions inherent in reparative archival work; see p. 8 of their report. They note that "tensions are inherent in complicated work and should not inhibit, but rather guide actions" (ibid).

chiving and can include relationships with:

- Colleagues in a specific institutional context in the form of, for example, a reparative archiving working group,
- Community stakeholders through, for example, conducting community consultations, forming community advisory boards, connecting with community archives, and consulting existing resources and guidelines already developed by community groups,
- Colleagues across the state interested and/or involved in this work (including those in LAM and academic institutions) to share experiences and seek funding opportunities. In particular, the OHC can support forming this type of state-wide "Constellation of Partners"[18] for collaborative learning and action.

Relationship building demands attention and care. Note that this is especially the case when working with community stakeholders who experience exclusion and marginalization from LAM institutions, including those whose exclusion from these spaces spans generations. As discussed above, this oppression is baked into the information infrastructures and many of the professional practices still used across the field today. As such, working with community stakeholders should always be done in non-extractive ways and, again, with cultural humility.

An aspect of a statewide "Constellation of Partners," could be a coaching program for organizations interested in undertaking reparative archiving. Such support could extend to all stages of the process from helping to develop institutional buy-in and capacity building, to developing relationships with community stakeholders, and advice for aligning with state mandates to leverage funding.

"All institutions (and individuals working within institutions) can and should consider the power they hold and their ability to dream and enact change. Not taking any action perpetuates the status quo."

(Frick and Proffitt, 2022, p. 15)

18 This terminology is borrowed from Moore, Paquet, and Wittman, 2022.

A NOTE FROM OREGON HERITAGE:

Oregon Heritage is interested in hearing about more of this work being done in Oregon!

If your organization is doing this important work, consider contacting Oregon Heritage at heritage.info@oprd.oregon.gov so that the Commission and staff can help highlight this work and suggest funding opportunities to help support this work. We are especially interested in projects that are being driven by or in partnership with impacted communities and/or projects in volunteer-run organizations.

To learn more about Oregon Heritage, visit www.oregonheritage.org.

Appendix A: NARA Equity Action Plan Item #1

Action Item # 1 — Reparative Description

Barrier to Equitable Outcomes: Members of the public within underserved and underrepresented communities are sometimes required to use harmful language in order to search and find the records that they need in the National Archives Catalog that are pertinent to their research. NARA does not alter original records; however, we plan to perform reparative description to replace or supplement harmful language that is in the descriptive data of our online Catalog. The Catalog provides access to archival records that document the rights of citizens, records that provide a record of government decisions and actions, and some digital copies of the permanent records of the United States Government. Our current description program focuses on archival standards that do not address reparative description, which contributes to this barrier.

Populations most impacted by barrier: We have assessed an initial universe of communities and have identified and begun working with three underserved and underrepresented communities most impacted by this barrier: African American communities, Puerto Rican communities, and Native American communities.

Evidence indicating that this barrier meaningfully impacts full and equal participation: Members of the public from underserved communities will no longer be required to type in or submit harmful and inappropriate terms in order to perform research for pertinent records in the Catalog.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier: NARA is taking the following actions to eliminate harmful terminology in the Catalog:

- Engage and collaborate with underserved and underrepresented communities to identify harmful terms.
- Develop and publish agency-wide Guiding Principles for Reparative Description.
- Develop and publish agency-wide standards for replacing harmful terms in the Catalog. The standards will be developed through engagement sessions with underserved and underrepresented communities, benchmarking, and identifying best practices.
- Develop Catalog reports identifying descriptions with harmful terms and the units across the agency that are responsible for updating those terms.
- Train description archivists across the agency on the new reparative description standards, and develop processes for description archivists across the agency to update harmful terminology in the Catalog.

Reasons for prioritizing the actions: NARA has received complaints from the staff and members of the public about the harmful terms in the Catalog. These actions are the most direct methods for our reparative description work, and they ensure that the work is handled at the agency level. By creating new standards to enhance descriptions and eliminate harmful terms, we ensure that the agency is working with one voice on this effort. We will promote equity by making it easier for members of underserved communities to search, discover, and use archival records to exercise their rights of citizenship, ensure government accountability, and illuminate the struggles and contribution of underserved communities in American history.

Reducing or eliminating the barrier to equitable outcomes: We will be able to identify the total number of times a harmful term is included in the descriptive metadata of our Catalog and will be able to track the reparative description efforts against the total number. In this way we can ensure that harmful terms are not required for anyone to find pertinent records in the Catalog.

Tracking Progress

- **Near to mid-term (2–4 years out):** NARA will check in with communities annually to confirm terms to be updated and discuss our progress. NARA will quantify the number of terms, the number of instances of the harmful use of the term, and the reparative description used to update the term across the Catalog.

- **Long term (5–8 years out):** Members of the public will be able to find pertinent information in our Catalog without having to use offensive or harmful terminology.

Accountability: In accordance with our new FY 2022–2026 Strategic Plan goal 1.3, NARA will collaborate with traditionally underserved communities to correct at least 1,000 outdated descriptions in the Catalog and prioritize citizen engagement projects that increase access to records that are important to underserved communities.

NARA has launched a public-facing web page to provide transparency for our reparative description efforts. See "Reparative Description at the National Archives." The web page will be updated as milestones are completed and will be reviewed annually.

Appendix B: Guiding Principles Example from Yale University Libraries' Reparative Archival Description Working Group

Guiding Principles

1. **Cultural humility:** Cultural humility is a concept that emphasizes three central tenets: institutional accountability, life-long learning and critical self-reflection, and to recognize and challenge power imbalances. In our work, we ensure that our own positionalities are always forefronted, especially when we do not belong to the communities we are describing. This also involves this concept of normalizing not knowing, by embracing humility and allowing other forms of expertise to inform our decision making, particularly through community consultation.

2. **Slow archiving:** Slow archives is a methodology that Kimberly Christen & Jane Anderson have proposed to counter the colonial paradigms rooted in much of traditional archival practice. We embrace slow archives by pursuing flexible practices that allow for changing course, and for prioritizing collaborative relationships with community stakeholders.

3. **Dismantling white supremacy:** Inspired by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun's resource, Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, we seek to actively depart from characteristics of white supremacy culture. Specifically, the tenant of "a continued sense of urgency," which prohibits us from democratic and thoughtful decision-making.

4. **Transparency:** We aim to center transparency in multiple aspects of our work. One way that we do so is by creating standardized reparative descriptive notes for finding aids and MARC records. These include a processing information note and revision statement supplying dates of revision and standardized language providing information on the harmful language that was remediated. We also retain and provide access to previous versions of records. Ultimately, our goal is not to simply erase previous archival description, but to offer proper contextualization, and if necessary, revise language that may be harmful to users.

5. **Iteration:** We frame the work we do as iterative, drawing attention to the need for resources and workflows to be assessed for impact and omissions over time.

6. **Collaboration and consultation:** We place emphasis on developing and maintaining mutually respectful and dynamic partnerships with communities. This is by no means the easiest way to conduct reparative work, but it is important to acknowledge that reducing harm to marginalized communities takes time, effort, and establishing and reinforcing trust with collaborators.

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