

## **Academy Foundation Consortium: *In Frame: Centering the Underrepresented in Moving Image Archives***

Driven by a shared commitment to change the culture of how film institutions work with materials by and about underrepresented communities, the Academy Foundation/Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, on behalf of a consortium of the Academy Film Archive, American Film Institute, Black Film Center/Archive at Indiana University, Library of Congress, National Film Preservation Board, and the UCLA Film & Television Archive, respectfully submits a \$100,000 planning grant request to support the consortium project *In Frame: Centering the Underrepresented in Moving Image Archives*.

**Statement of National Need:** Historically, available information on films and related individuals from underrepresented communities has been limited in scope across the nation's film archives. During the past century, subjective decisions made by film archives to prioritize the acquisition and preservation of certain titles over others has dramatically impacted available research material and shaped the historical understanding of American film history. Scholars and archivists must [collaboratively work through](#) larger questions of why certain material continues to be under-archived in significant ways. Several projects approach these questions with a focus on specific communities and time frames. These include consortium partner AFI's *Women They Talk About* survey on gender parity in feature films and the LGBTQ Digital Archives Project by the Smithsonian and the ONE Archives Foundation, among others. However, no single project brings together the nation's film institutions to address complex issues of identity, intersectionality, and representation. The *In Frame* project will contribute to the Community Catalyst category by collaboratively building a dataset of individuals and films relevant to underrepresented communities. This dataset will serve as a resource **to reassess and change how underrepresented materials are identified in the nation's film collections—located in public, private, and academic libraries and archives across the country.** The consortium has met regularly since 2019 and continues to develop the project with considerable momentum and enthusiasm.

**Project Design:** During the one-year planning phase, the consortium will research and design an online resource that will allow users to freely search and access a dataset of individuals and film titles, specifically with respect to social, gender, racial, ethnic, ability, sexual orientation, and cultural identities. When launched in a subsequent implementation phase, users will be able to search across thousands of names and titles—including independent and studio features, documentaries, animated films, and short films—using access points that include source citations and a thesaurus of identity terms.

The project gathers data from credible secondary sources, such as Chon A. Noriega's *Chicanos and Film: Essays on Chicano Representation and Resistance* (1992) and B. Ruby Rich's *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (2013), among others. Each text is analyzed, and dataset records are created for every relevant individual and film title, independent from any of the consortium partners' collections. Records also include a quoted excerpt used by these sources to explain each individual or film title's relevance to underrepresented communities. As part of the cataloging methodology, each record is assigned one or more broad areas of focus, referred to within the project as Focus Categories: 1) African Diaspora/African, 2) Asian Diaspora/Asian, 3) Indigenous Peoples, 4) LGBTQIA, 5) Latina/o/x and Latin American, 6) Middle Eastern or North African/MENA Diaspora, 7) Multiracial, 8) Pacific Islander, 9) People with Disabilities, and 10) Women. The project's initial dataset took shape in 2018 at the Academy Film Archive (AFA) and currently comprises 10,256 citations from 32 secondary sources. It will continue to grow throughout the planning phase.

Before the dataset's creation, a major concern was asking research staff to determine the identities of individuals and groups, along with the relevance of related works. This led to the development of a cataloging methodology that used secondary sources, including subject-focused texts, as a means of identification—and, most importantly, placed research staff in the role of **aggregators instead of arbiters**. In 2019, the AFA began to hire part-time researchers and graduate students with specific subject specializations to create the dataset that would form the basis for the *In Frame* project. Dataset records range from early cinematic depictions of people with disabilities in the silent film *The Miracle Man* (1919), to representations of African American, Korean, and Puerto Rican communities in *Do the Right Thing* (1989), to descriptions of gay life during Castro-era Cuba in *Before Night Falls* (2000). Completed consortium activities, among other ongoing work, include: 1) securing

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partner internal approvals for the consortium's formation, 2) in-depth review of the overall cataloging methodology, and 3) creation of two working groups to address the unique issues that arise from the cataloging methodology and to identify the project's advisors. Online resource design will be collaboratively established by the consortium and guided by its seven-member advisory panel from academia, peer archives, and the technology field, including Safiya Umoja Noble, UCLA and author of *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018); Catherine H. Phan, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives; and Rahul Bhargava, Northeastern University.

During the planning phase, the consortium will create a proof-of-concept model and will:

- consult the advisory panel to build a network of 20 scholars and community leaders to advise on cultural nuances and recommend end user testing strategies, with stipends offered for their time
- collaborate with this network of scholars and community leaders to solicit additional secondary source suggestions for each Focus Category to create a foundation of dataset entries and recommend part-time research staff
- hire a UI/UX Designer to design a discovery layer for ease of use by scholars and researchers and to identify points of interactions with potential linked data applications, widely used in the cultural heritage community to help contextualize identities for filmmakers and references to film titles, such as id.loc.gov, Wikidata, Getty vocabularies, ISAN and EIDR
- devise an automated strategy for identity management, incorporating dataset entries and informed by standards such as VIAF and Library of Congress name authorities
- organize end user focus groups to test and search the dataset and inform the work of the UI/UX Designer
- continue the work of the consortium's Cataloging Working Group to ensure that the aggregated metadata meets the needs of end users
- hire a legal consultant to advise on potential copyright issues related to dataset citations and offer best practice recommendations to make citations and quotes publicly accessible
- continue to hire part-time researchers to create dataset entries from additional secondary sources
- mobilize the UI/UX Designer's expertise to begin preliminary discussions for a shared digital platform to eventually allow peer institutions to integrate metadata into their Content Management Systems
- establish monthly milestones to hold the project accountable and inform the implementation phase.

**National Impact:** When launched, the online resource will support library and archival research to: 1) increase the visibility of individuals and films that have been historically marginalized or excluded from the American film canon, 2) identify disparities in representation in film content, 3) examine and address the evolution of terminology as it relates to film material descriptions, 4) study the intersectionality among underrepresented filmmakers and films, and 5) accelerate the discovery of underrepresented films and filmmakers over the past 130 years of film history. The project's immediate goal is to provide dataset access for a primary audience of scholars, researchers, archivists, curators, programmers, cultural producers, educators and students, and general users. Its long-term goal is to make the dataset available on a shared digital platform for a secondary audience of peer libraries, archives, and film institutions. It is hoped that national institutions and organizations will be able to collaboratively share metadata or unique holdings—and individually or collectively strategize on new material acquisitions, especially of those films and filmmakers that have been historically excluded from archival collections.

**Budget Summary:** Requested funds of \$100,000 will support consortium costs of community leader and focus group stipends (\$20,000); consortium and advisor meeting travel, part-time researchers for new dataset entries, legal consultant fees, outside conference costs (\$50,000); and dedicated AFA staff consortium support (\$30,000). The consortium and advisors will meet three times virtually and possibly once in-person. The AFA will contribute \$100,000 in cost share to include all server costs, IT and technical staff, other staff time for source text and archival input, data entry review, and consortium support. An NEH HCRR planning grant request was submitted in July 2020 to support the project's UI/UX consultant and project advisor fees.