

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

NLGL Goal 3.2: Improve the ability of libraries and archives to provide broad access to and use of information and collections with emphasis on collaboration to avoid duplication and maximize reach. Support innovative approaches to digital collection management including... improving cataloging and inventory practices.

**Summary:** Driven by a shared commitment to change the way 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 UCLA Film & Television Archive, respectfully submits a \$600,000 three-year implementation grant request to support the consortium project *In Frame: Centering the Underrepresented in Moving Image Archives*. The goal of the project is to **reassess and change how underrepresented films and filmmakers are identified in the nation's film collections—located in public, private, and academic libraries and archives across the country**. Led by the Academy Film Archive, the consortium will use the implementation phase to develop, test, launch, and promote **a free public online search tool and data sharing platform** to access a dataset that uses secondary sources, such as subject-focused texts, to identify films and filmmakers from marginalized communities related to disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, and other social and cultural identities. Access points will include secondary source quotations and a controlled vocabulary of identity terms and related concepts. Film titles encompass independent and studio features, documentaries, animated and short films, ranging from early 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).

**Project Justification:** Historically, available information on films and filmmakers from underrepresented communities has been limited in scope across the nation's film archives. During the past century, subjective decisions 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. Several recent projects aim to address these inequities by focusing on [specific communities](#) and [time frames](#). However, scholars and archivists must [collaboratively work through](#) broader systemic questions of why certain materials continue to be under-archived in significant ways.

Before the Academy Film Archive conceptualized the project's initial dataset in 2018, the organization and its consortium peers struggled to respond to increasing research inquiries about films and filmmakers from specific communities and marginalized identities. In 2019, the Academy Film Archive began to hire part-time researchers and graduate students with specific subject specializations to gather data from credible secondary sources across ten broad focus areas, known as Focus Categories: 1) Asian/Asian Diaspora, 2) Black/African Diaspora, 3) Indigenous Peoples, 4) LGBTQIA+, 5) Latina/e/o/x, 6) Middle Eastern or North African/MENA Diaspora, 7) Multiracial, 8) Pacific Islander/PI Diaspora, 9) People with Disabilities, and 10) Women. These secondary sources include essay collections (*Chicanos and Film: Essays on Chicano Representation and Resistance* edited by Chon A. Noriega, 1992), scholarly texts (*New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* by B. Ruby Rich, 2013), film festival catalogs (Superfest International Disability Film Festival), and more. Texts are analyzed, and dataset records are created for relevant individuals and film titles, independent from consortium partner collections, along with a quoted source excerpt to explain each individual or film title's connection to underrepresented communities. The dataset currently comprises 22,450 citations from 65 secondary sources.

**Project work plan:** The project was further developed with an [NLGL planning grant](#) that ends in July 2023, and the consortium is perfectly positioned to begin the implementation phase in August 2023. At the time of writing, completed consortium activities include development of a controlled vocabulary that reflects and responds to evolving community language; expansion of secondary sources to include websites, film festival and distributor catalogs; continued investigation into authority control and universal identifiers, such as EIDR IDs, and linked data strategies to facilitate data interoperability among archives; and ongoing testing using internal collections. Activities on track for completion by the start of the implementation phase include: a **completed proof-of-concept dataset search tool** in [Airtable](#); next steps to migrate the dataset into a permanent database; launch of paid community consultant focus groups comprising cultural and activist leaders; and incorporated copyright consultant advice for open access to the dataset and its secondary source quotations.

The **implementation phase** will begin with an initial consortium and advisory meeting to establish quarterly milestones for the three-year implementation phase. This will keep the project's work plan on track and ensure a timely public launch. This will be followed by three activities to: **(18 months)**

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- Migrate the dataset and hire a web developer to use the project's proof-of-concept prototype to build the public search tool and data sharing platform. The prototype was developed using a data subset of 1,700 film titles and individual names across eight of the ten preliminary focus categories. The Academy Film Archive will write and distribute the Request For Proposal for the web developer and designer, using the Academy's supplier diversity best practices.
- Increase the number of paid community consultants to work across all ten focus categories. Launched during the planning phase, community consultants provide feedback on the use of descriptive language—ensuring that controlled vocabulary considers cultural nuances and the lived experiences of people represented by the dataset's films and filmmakers—and advise on public search tool needs. Consultants representing national Black/African Diaspora, Latina/e/o/x, LGBTQIA+, and People with Disabilities communities were hired during the planning phase through consortium and advisor recommendations.

The next step during the implementation phase will be to: **(6 months)**

- Test the public search tool using community consultant focus groups and members of the project's **primary audience** of scholars, researchers, archivists, curators, programmers, cultural producers, educators and students, recommended by the consortium and their networks, as well as the project's **secondary audience** of peer libraries, archives, and film institutions. Search tool testing will comprise pre-written search questions and user-initiated searches. Academy Film Archive staff will work with the web developer to incorporate all testing feedback.

Three activities with longer and overlapping timelines will be to: **(24-36 months)**

- Establish a strategy to link data to consortium collection holdings, using a roadmap developed during the planning phase in collaboration with Academy IT, an information systems strategist, project advisors with metadata expertise, and consortium collection managers. This will ultimately help to identify cultural, social, and historical gaps in collections and address them collaboratively across institutions.
- Continue to hire part-time researchers to grow the dataset by adding new scholarly source texts. By the end of the implementation phase, it is estimated the dataset will double in size to 50,000 citations from 120 secondary sources.
- Incorporate mechanisms for ongoing community feedback. The consortium will create a workplan to regularly solicit community consultant feedback on descriptive language and vocabulary gathered from additional secondary texts.

Project advisors will meet twice yearly and include metadata specialists Melissa Adler, Western University, Rahul Bhargava, Northeastern University, and Raymond Drewry, principal scientist at MovieLabs; cultural and social scholars Maryam Kashani, University of Illinois and Safiya Umoja Noble, UCLA; archivist Catherine H. Phan, University of Wisconsin-Madison; filmmaker Yvonne Welbon; and Jacqueline Stewart, director and president, Academy Museum.

Final activities during the implementation phase will: **(6 months)**

- Present findings and outcomes in conference papers and organize a planned symposium to be held in 2025-26 at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles with the project's primary and secondary audiences.
- Create a sustainability plan for long-term maintenance and upgrades of the public search tool and shared data platform for both the project's IT infrastructure and new dataset records from additional source texts and materials.

**Project results:** When publicly launched, this unprecedented collaborative effort will make a significant national impact on the field of libraries and archives by 1) accelerating research and discovery of individuals and films that are underrepresented or excluded from the American film canon across 130 years of film history and 2) identifying and addressing gaps in film representation, collecting, description, and access across intersectional underrepresented communities. As its long-term impact, it is hoped that national institutions and organizations will use the dataset to collaboratively share metadata—and individually or collectively strategize on new acquisitions, preservations, and programming of films and filmmakers that have been previously excluded from archival collections. The consortium has met regularly since 2019 and continues to develop the project with considerable momentum and enthusiasm.

**Budget Summary:** Requested funds will support consortium costs of external and internal web development, testing, and design (\$250,000); shared data platform development and launch (\$150,000); final copyright consultant review (\$10,000); community consultant stipends (\$20,000); advisor honoraria (\$12,000); advisor and consortium meeting travel, partial part-time researchers for new dataset entries, outside conference costs (\$68,000); and temporary Academy Film Archive staff consortium support (\$90,000). The Academy Foundation will contribute an equal cost share comprising Academy Foundation film archive, IT, library, and museum permanent staff salaries that include source text and archival input and data entry review; part-time researchers; server costs; and additional consortium support.