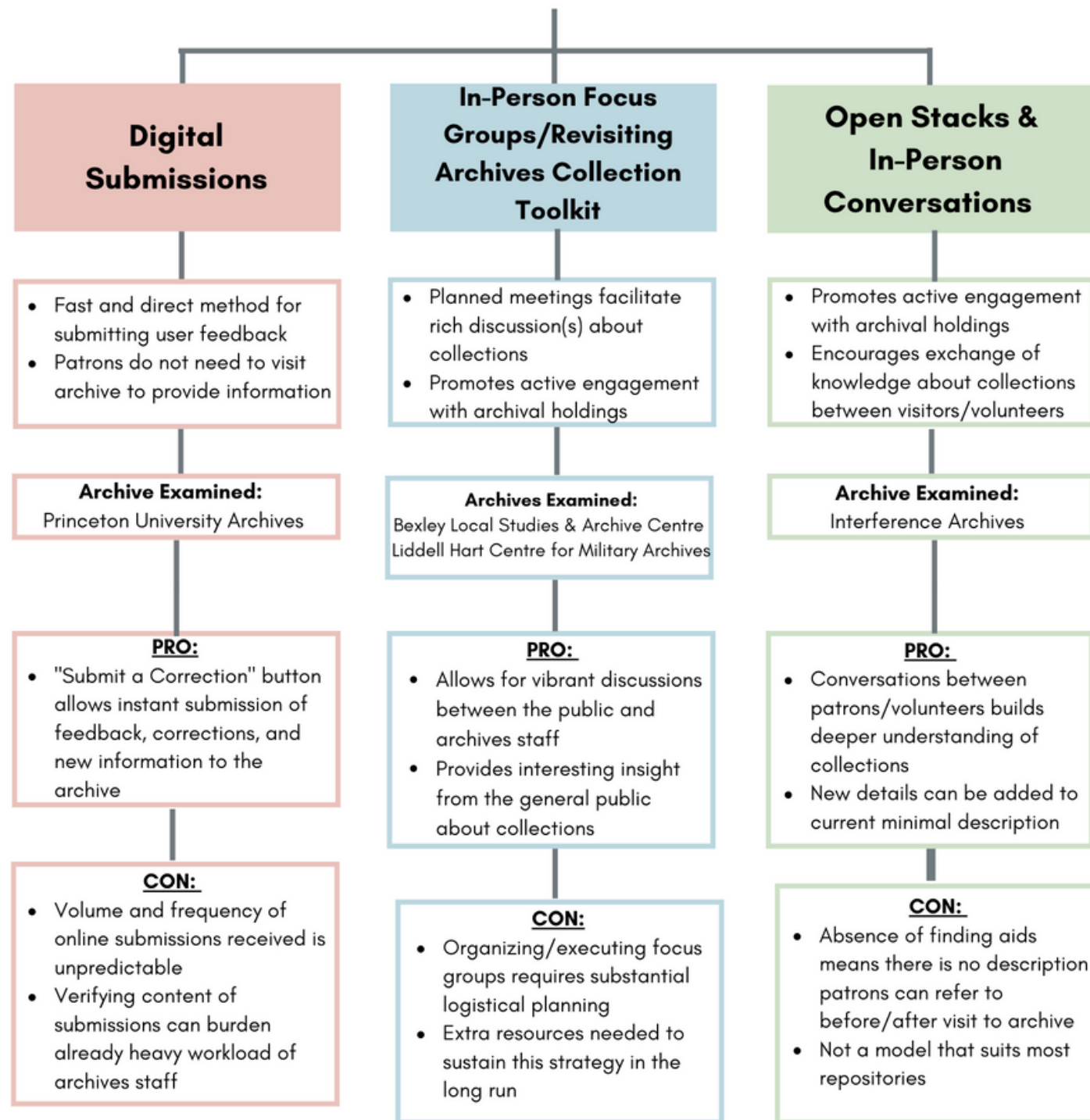


# How User Feedback Can Help to Improve Current Finding Aids and Archival Description: An Examination of Three Participatory Archival Strategies

## CASE STUDIES



### BENEFITS FOR DESCRIPTION AND FINDING AIDS:

- 1) Corrects grammar, spelling, and date/information errors.
- 2) Provides up-to-date terminology and keywords.
- 3) Expands archival description by providing more details/expert knowledge.
- 4) Reduces archivist bias in description; diversifies perspectives
- 5) Makes the language of finding aids easier to understand; reduces professional jargon.

### HOW ELSE WILL THE ARCHIVE BENEFIT?

- 1) Provides transparency between the public and archives.
- 2) Alleviates processing backlogs.
- 3) Builds positive relationships with the public.
- 4) Gains a better understanding of what patrons need.
- 5) Increases access to and use of collections.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS:

- 1) Identify sources of extra funding to hire new staff member(s)
  - They will focus on gathering user feedback and updating archival description/finding aids.
- 2) Re-evaluate existing budget resources
  - See if allocations can be made to support process of updating/improving finding aids.
- 3) Re-deploying archives staff to aid in outreach, reviewing user feedback, re-evaluation of finding aids, and updating archival description.
  - Allot time specifically for these tasks
  - Assign certain activities in advance to specific archives employees

### CONCLUSIONS:

- 1) No one size fits all perfect system for updating archival description/finding aids based on user feedback; the participatory system an archive chooses will depend upon their mission and resources.
- 2) Of the three strategies examined, in-person focus groups may provide the richest feedback and therefore benefit archives the most.
- 3) A worthwhile investment of staff time since it will:
  - Update finding aids' language and content
  - Provide a liaison between the archive and the general public, which can build goodwill
  - Eliminate extra work for other archive staff who juggle their own workload with additional task of reviewing user feedback and updating finding aids
- 4) Incorporating user feedback will enrich archival description, make finding aids easier to use/navigate, and make collections more accessible.