

# An MPLP Model for Description

University of Kentucky Libraries  
Special Collections Research Center

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## **Project Team:**

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## **Background:**

University of Kentucky Libraries Special Collections Research Center (SCRC) received a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant in 2014 to process records relating to the post War on Poverty era in the Appalachian Region. The project, *Action in Appalachia: Revealing Public Health, Housing, and Community Development records in the UK Libraries Special Collections Research Center*, ended in 2017 and resulted in online access to seven collections (749 cubic feet of records). All inventories generated by the project are available on the University of Kentucky Libraries digital library, ExploreUK.

As a part of the *Action in Appalachia* project, the SCRC proposed to develop a model aimed at producing more detailed and more keyword-searchable collection descriptions for researchers, yet also compatible with the MPLP model of processing. Dennis Meissner and Mark Greene's 2005 *American Archivist* article "More Product Less Process" (MPLP) proposes applying more or less physical processing and description based on the individual collection, taking into account research value and available resources. This working process allows for faster and more efficient access to archival material by providing the minimum amount of description and physical processing needed to reveal hidden collections. However, the MPLP model places much of the burden of discovery on the researcher. Sometimes this comes at a cost to students and emerging researchers.

## **Description Worksheet:**

Prior to and during the *Action in Appalachia* project, the grant team developed a worksheet to speed up the creation of effective collection and series-level description. (Appendix A.) The worksheet breaks down archival description into several categories.

These categories include:

- date range
- extent
- significant people, names, places, or events
- formats
- significant gaps
- overall keywords

Additionally, the sheet asks the processor questions including:

- What does the "stuff" document?
- How does the "stuff" relate to the individual's, family's, or organization's life?
- What is exhibit worthy?
- What did you learn about the creation or acquisition of the material?

The grant team deployed this worksheet (Appendix A.) on seven large organizational collections. Quickly, the Project Archivist found that assigning the worksheet at a box-level was too much information to compile for student archives assistants. Additionally, with the routinized nature and volume of modern organizational

records the students found they were entering similar information for many boxes. Therefore, the Project Archivist made the determination to use the worksheet at the series level.

Students arranged individual series after initial rehousing and surveying. Upon arrangement, they filled out the worksheet to aid in description. The Project Archivist and the lead student intern then used the worksheets to generate the series-level and collection-level scope and contents notes.

The worksheet served as an effective communication tool to aid in the creation of robust description. It had the added benefit of formalizing note taking for archival description, which prevented loss of information if a student or volunteer left before the end of the grant. Finally, if used as a training tool the worksheet aids in training students and volunteers about what information goes into creating informative scope and content notes.

### **Model for Use:**

1. Choose step in processing to employ worksheet
2. Assign processor worksheet (Appendix A.)
3. Specify level (see Figure 1.)
4. Use sheets to generate scope and contents notes

### **Note:**

The worksheet is best used during the process of arrangement, but may also be used effectively during the steps of rehousing and/or surveying. Processors can employ the worksheet at different levels of description as appropriate to the collection and project (see Figure 1.)

**Figure 1.**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Project type</b>
Collection	Individual small collections
Series	Large organizational records
Addition	Small addition to main body of records or papers
Box	Large family papers and/or personal papers

### **Work Plan Overview:**

The grant team used the worksheet in the following overall process for each collection to efficiently and effectively process, arrange, and describe the large volume of records using the available grant staff:

1. Student assistants rehousing the contents of each original box and conducted a box-level survey.
2. The Project Archivist used the box-level surveys to develop an arrangement for each collection.
3. The Project Archivist assigned series to individual student assistants for full processing, using spreadsheets as intermediate data entry tools.
4. The Project Archivist encoded the spreadsheets in Encoded Archival Description and uploaded them into ArchivesSpace to create the finding aid.

5. The Project Archivist and lead student assistant used the description worksheets to create the series scope and content notes and then the collection-level scope and content note.

## **Future Development**

The *Action in Appalachia* project tested the MPLP model for description on large organizational records only. The grant team found the model to be an effective tool in the context of the University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center, however, every situation is unique. Therefore, model needs more testing in a variety of archival processing situations. Additionally, some way to assess the effectiveness of the description produced must be developed. The larger question of the effectiveness of archival description to users also needs to be investigated.

## Appendix A.

### University of Kentucky Special Collections Description and Analysis Worksheet: What does this stuff document?

Processor name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Collection name, accession no. \_\_\_\_\_ Unit described: \_\_\_\_\_

- What does this stuff document and how does it relate to the individual, family, or organization's life?
- Make educated assumptions and links based on document content, filing order, date, custodial history, and physical characteristics.
- Include description for a format, subject, event, person, or place that makes up 20% or more of the unit you are describing.
- Description serves patrons with different needs and levels of experience (see reverse).

Date range (earliest, latest, bulk):	Keywords (including formats)
Size of collection/series (number of boxes and/or number of items)	
Significant people/names:	
Major subjects:	
Significant events:	
Significant places:	
Types of records (formats):	What's exhibit worthy?
Significant gaps:	
What did you learn about how the creation or acquisition of the papers?	

- Patrons have different needs and levels of experience. Our description is attempting to serve them all
  - "My paper/presentation/board report is due tomorrow; give me the one item I need, fast; I don't care where it comes from;" or
  - "My dissertation is due in two years; I want to poke through everything and thoroughly understand the collection;" or
  - "I need to find a cool artifact for an exhibit;" or
  - "I'm preparing for a first-year history class;" or
  - "Where do I find this item in the stacks"

<b>Researcher type</b>	<b>Project Length</b>	<b>Search/Browse</b>	<b>Interested in context of collection?</b>
Experienced academic	Longer	Browse	Yes
Emerging academic	Shorter	Search	No
Campus administrator	Shorter	Search	No
Genealogist	Shorter	Search	No
Library staff/colleague	Shorter or longer	Browse and search	Yes

Summary

Analysis

Evaluation

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Interpretation

Critique

The process of writing narrative notes for collections involves the first 3 activities. The process of learning how to be a scholar and use primary source material involves all 5 activities. The line between evaluation and interpretation is difficult to maintain.