

Dear FDGA Grants Committee,

Thank you for granting me the FDGA grant for Research, Scholarly, Creative, Pedagogical and Industry-related Activities. The funds were requested for a launch activity, a focus group for the "The Ruth Finley Collection: Digitizing 70 Years of the *Fashion Calendar*" digitization and digital humanities project, funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources [CLIR]. The project, which is a collaboration between the History of Art Department and SPARC, will create an online platform for FIT's Ruth Finley Collection.

The focus group, which was held virtually on August 11th, 2021 at 10am-11am proved invaluable in the early development of the project and platform and enabled us to gain insights and ideas from a sample of potential end-users of the platform. The funds were used to pay participants an honorarium of \$100 for their time.

I led the focus group discussion, along with my co-PI Karen Trivette (SPARC) and Joseph Anderson, Digital Lead and Digital Humanities Librarian, with the purpose to seek advice from a broad range of scholars (internal and external), library specialists and potential end users on non-traditional uses, applications and perspectives that the project team could include in the construction stages.

In the pursuit of our project's aim to create a platform that will broaden the historical record and expand methodological approaches to include diversity and inclusion strategies, the focus group convened 10 invited participants from a range of diverse and inter-disciplinary backgrounds to assess a sample of material from the Ruth Finley Collection (*Fashion Calendar*, *Fashion International* and *Home Furnishings Calendar*).

The results of the questionnaire and the focus group session will greatly inform the continued development of the platform as well as metadata creation which will begin this Fall. The insights and information gleaned from the focus group will be critical in how we can make the project the most robust and helpful research tool for scholars, students and the public. The live discussion enabled us to bring up important and timely questions about inclusion and diversity within archives, how to negotiate and develop the metadata creation process and potential challenges that may come up along the way.

Additionally, the project team sought advice on: optimal indexing to reflect BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ participation and appropriate indexing language; non-fashion related perspectives on the material and its value for culture, labor, gender and economic historians; search optimization tools and digital humanities approaches, among others.

The outcomes of the focus group include: a broader understanding of the material and previously unknown inter-disciplinary uses, broader understanding of end-user preferences, user-experience data, and potential pedagogical uses. The insights, advice and perspectives resulting from the focus group have already impacted and inspired this already very dynamic project further by integrating insights from a sample of potential end-users into its design.

Importantly, the timing of the event worked well as it will enable us to use insight from the launch event into our plans and platform development which will be continuing and gaining momentum in September 2021.

The focus group has positively impacted my professional growth since it has taught me the value of a well-organized and diverse focus group as well as the nuances of questionnaire and discussion session preparation. Additionally, findings and insights from the focus group will inform and help develop additional research outcomes, including scholarly articles for which I am seeking publication (*The Journal of American Culture* Theme Issue: Fashion early 2023, among others), and conference/symposia presentations that relate to the development of the platform, archival practices and critical cataloguing.

Thank you again for the support for this event.

Natalie Nudell