Community Collaboration Model

Our grant team offers this **Community Collaboration Model** as a suggestion for research-based engagement with comics and community partners that can be adapted for use in other regions of the country. What decisions did we make to propel our project forward? What worked? What didn't? How can libraries throughout the country lead similar community engagement sessions for librarians in their area who work closely with comics?

We held three forum discussions: San Diego Area Librarians (our local community), Academic Librarians Nationwide, and Academic higher ed disciplinary faculty Nationwide. We used the same structure and format for each forum. This document will focus on the first forum with our own local community with noted changes we made for our forums with academic librarians nationwide and academic higher ed disciplinary faculty nationwide.

About San Diego County
San Diego County is the second most populated county in the state of California and in the top ten for most land area (4261 square miles). The county has approximately forty K-12 school districts, four 4+ year universities, and five 2-year public community college systems. The county includes the San Diego Public Library system (City of San Diego) with 36 branches, the San Diego County Library System with 33 branches, and six independent city-specific public libraries (Carlsbad, Chula Vista, Coronado, Escondido, National City, Oceanside).

Our Model: What We Did Before the Forum

Identifying Participants
For "Forum 1: San Diego Area Librarians," we invited librarians from all regions of San Diego County. In our experience, academic librarians who work with comics were easier to identify than public or K-12 librarians.

For academic librarians, we searched university websites for librarians named as a subject expert for comics and library news announcements about comics collections or exhibits that named specific librarians. In some cases, we searched the university's course catalog to identify classes that work with comics and then invited the librarian assigned to the subject area (most often found in the Humanities).

To identify public librarians, we relied on a combination of already-existing connections to help get the word out to those librarians who may be interested and "cold calling" reference services for referral to whichever librarian they thought best. For example, SDSU's Comic Arts Librarian had previously presented at a local comic book convention with three public librarians so knew to invite them, and two librarians at SDSU have familial connections to librarians in the public library systems so we reached out to them to learn the best way to share our invitation.

They were able to forward our call for participation on internal listservs, sending respondents to us.

Identifying K-12 librarians who work with or have a keen interest in comics proved more difficult. Not every school in San Diego has a librarian and it's often difficult to confirm who the correct professional may be from school staffing lists, when such lists are made publicly available. San Diego has a vibrant comics community with numerous local non-profit organizations who work with K-12 schools, and our local grant team knows a number of parents with children in the K-12 system. Because of that, we were able to partially rely on our own prior knowledge about which schools to target for inclusion. We also contacted the main county librarian listed at the Board of Education website.

We also included one representative - a recently-former librarian - from a local comics non-profit who had advanced expertise on building comics collections in our local public libraries.

In all categories, we asked invited librarians to share with us the names of any other librarians in the county they think would be a good fit for our forum discussion and were able to do a small, second round of invitations based on that feedback.

Graphic Notetaking
We hired a graphic notetaking service to attend the forum and create a graphic representation of our discussion. We tasked a graduate student with researching possible organizations for this role and requesting quotes. After viewing work samples of 4-5 finalists selected by our graduate student and comparing quotes, we chose *A Visual Approach*. An unplanned benefit to holding forums online via Zoom is that the graphic notetaker need not be local to your area.

Invitation and General Timeline
We scheduled a 2-hour meeting on Zoom on a Friday morning from 10am - noon. As an aside, we found this time to work well for national discussions as well as it provided us with the most accessible start times for mainland locations (apologies for the 7am start time, Hawaii!).

We sent an email invitation conveying our enthusiasm and desire to create a community of librarians who work with comics. In our email, we told participants what to expect: a 2-hour forum, a general idea of who might attend, and that they could expect a Pre-Forum Survey to arrive in their email during a specific week. Since we gave ourselves a month in between the RSVP deadline and the email of the Pre-Forum Survey, we knew there would be a gap in between our communication to participants so we felt it was important to stick to a pre-planned schedule. We gave invitees two weeks to RSVP.

One week after our RSVP deadline, we sent the Pre-Forum Survey to librarians who agreed to attend the forum. We gave participants 4 weeks to complete the survey and sent two reminders, including the day it was due. Behind the scenes, our true deadline for the survey was set for an additional week after the due date in case

there were late additions. For the first forum, the deadline for completion of the survey was set 6 weeks before the actual forum itself. This gave the grant team ample time to analyze the survey results and prepare for the forum conversation.

Ten days before the forum, we emailed participants the Introductions Slide Deck. The deadline for the Introductions Slide Deck was the day of the forum.

Pre-Forum Survey
Our forum goals were: to understand what librarians are currently doing with comics; what types of collections they have; what characterizes their patron base; how they are engaging with comics and their communities; what successes and struggles folks have faced; and what they dream of being able to do with comics in libraries. To start that conversation, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire via Google Form before the forum discussion. Their answers helped guide our discussion during the forum and allowed us to see patterns to deploy in-forum activities.

Introductions Slide Deck
One of our forum goals was: "1) We think it will be valuable for comics-minded academic librarians to get to know each other! Exciting opportunities surrounding comics regularly arise and it is our hope that building a community will help us all." We employed an icebreaker that Dr. Elizabeth Pollard (co-PI) uses in her classes and that we had successfully used in 2020 with instructors throughout the California State University system that teach with comics. The Introductions Slide Deck serves the purpose of a digital business card. Participants were given an opportunity to personalize their own slide in the deck to introduce themselves to other participants. We ask for their name, affiliation and contact information; a photo; and a page or cover from a comic of their choosing and a brief explanation of why they chose it. Then we asked participants to answer 3 questions: Why Comics? What are you hoping to discuss in this forum? Favorite comic, comics genre or superhero and why? Alternately, what comics are you reading right now? (Not everyone enjoys picking a favorite so we elected to broaden the last question to be more inclusive or varying levels of comics readership and fandom).

The Introductions Slide Deck was shared in Google Slides with our own slides serving as examples and enough template slides in the deck to accommodate all attendees. Template sample available in the Appendix D.

Our Model: What We Did During the Forum

Forum Agenda
We set a very strict timeline and it largely worked, however, we made some slight modifications for the national forums.

> Agenda/Schedule for Forum 1: San Diego Librarians
> 10:00-10:10 Welcome/Overview/Demographics (10 minutes)
> 10:10-10:40 Introductions (30 minutes)
> 10:40-10:55 Brief report out on remaining survey results (15 minutes)

10:55-11:00 Short Break (5 minutes)
11:00-11:50 Discussion (50 minutes)
- 11:00-11:05 Intro to Breakout Groups
- 11:05-11:20 Work in Breakout Groups
- 11:20-11:50 Forum-wide Discussion

11:50-12:00 Wrap-Up/Next Steps (10 minutes)

Welcome/Overview/Demographics
To convene the meeting, we introduced the grant team and our graphic notetaker. We then discussed the granting agency and our grant project before moving into a brief presentation about the aggregate demographics of forum attendees (type of institution, core job duties, conferences/conventions regularly attended, characterization of user base, and strengths of their institution's comics collection). We also reported their answers to the survey question: What does "comics and social justice" mean to you?

Introductions
In Forum 1, we gave each attendee 60 seconds to introduce themselves using the Introduction Slide Deck. In the corner of each slide was a timer that counted down to zero as soon as that slide was clicked. This was an engaging way to build community and get to know each other. In hindsight, we think 90 second introductions would have been better. However, this activity also took a considerable amount of time and would not have been successful in our larger group forums.

For Forums 2 and 3, we broke participants into Break-out Groups of 4-5 people each. Groups were given 10 minutes to introduce themselves and get to know each other in their small groups. We found this method more successful, allowing a few people to make meaningful connections rather than asking for surface-level hurried introductions forum-wide.

Break
Because this was only a 2-hour meeting, we still thought it wise to take a 5-minute pause in the middle for a brief break.

Brief Report Out on Remaining Survey Results
As a conversation starter, we presented an overview of the remaining Pre-Forum Survey results to participants using slides generated from Google Forms. This gave us a reasoned and data-based starting point and helped us ground small-group conversation in a shared set of data drawn from them in the aggregate.

Break-out Rooms
We analyzed the Pre-Forum Survey results and grouped questions for further discussion to create our breakout rooms. To accommodate the number of attendees while keeping the break out rooms small enough for fruitful conversation, we organized it so that multiple groups discussed the same topic. For Forum 1, we created three different topics to discuss and assigned two groups to each topic. For the national forums, we gave each group the same set of topics and questions to

explore. Upon completion of the three forums, our team preferred the method used for the national forums.

We created a Breakout Rooms Slide Deck to which all participants had edit access that included slides where they could record their notes and refer back to the Pre-Forum Survey questions assigned to their group to spark discussion.

Our Break Out Rooms were split as follows:

Forum 1: San Diego Librarians
Breakout Groups 1 and 4 were labeled "Enhancing Engagement/Programming" and were focused on Pre-Forum Survey questions 18, 20, 24, 28.
> 18 and 20. What synchronous (live, in-person or via web-conferencing) or asynchronous programming focused on comics do you or your institution provide?
> > ● Tips? What's worked and what hasn't?
> > ● Ideas for how best to share tips with the library community?
> > ● What do you want to do that you can't (and why)?
> 24. What do you need to enhance your institution's engagement with comics?
> > ● How to make this happen?
> > ● What exists already?
> > ● What can we work together to create?
> 28. What do you think can be done to spotlight the importance of comics for understanding social justice issues?
> > ● Share/Expand on discussion from survey

Breakout Groups 2 and 5 were labeled "Resistance to Comics" and were focused on Pre-Forum Survey question 22.
> 22. What, if any, resistance to comics do you encounter as a librarian?
> > ● What kinds of challenges from parents/community do you experience and how do you handle them?
> > ● What can the profession do to mitigate these issues?
> > ● In what ways is this amplified/impacted when we are talking about social justice-related comics?

Breakout Groups 3 and 6 were labeled "Acquisitions/Location" and were focused on Pre-Forum Survey questions 14 and 16.
> 14. Where are comics located at your Institution?
> > ● What are the considerations that go into that location?
> > ● What are the impacts of that choice (stigmatizing comics? Getting them "out there"?)?
> > ● Do these decisions have an impact for social justice around and in comics?
> > ● Are you satisfied with their location? Where would you put them if the choice was yours alone and why?
> 16. What factors influence your institution's comics acquisitions? In other words, how are decisions made about how many and what comics are acquired by your institution?

- How does the comics publishing and distribution model impact acquisition decisions?
- How does patron demand come into this? Are patrons able to request/suggest new comics and are you able to respond positively to those requests?
- Are there ways (with the exception of more money, of course) that can help with the lack of resources? How can we collaborate to strengthen regional collections? Opportunities for consortia purchases?
- Perhaps more for librarians working under a liaison/subject speciality model - How well does your library support "off-book" specialities that may not specifically support a degree-granting program? Are comics unique in this?

Forum 2: Academic Librarians Nationwide
Based on your surveys responses, these are areas we thought you'd like to dig into further as a group:

24. What do you need to enhance your institution's engagement with comics?
- How to make this happen?
- What exists already?
- What can we work together to create?

26. Describe the themes/topics of your comics programming/materials (synchronous or asynchronous). (For example, does your programming address social issues? Are there ties to local city reading programs?)
- What are you doing to engage your communities with comics?
- What do you want to be doing and what do you need to make that happen?

28. What do you think can be done to spotlight the importance of comics for understanding social justice issues?
- Share/Expand on discussion from survey

Forum 3: Academic Instructors Nationwide
Based on your surveys responses, these are areas we thought you'd like to dig into further as a group:

Institutional Support
- What has worked and what has not? How did you get support for it or what challenges have you faced in getting support? How can your successes be replicated? How can we avoid pitfalls? What can we work together to create?

Book Challenges and Culture Wars
- How are the challenges in K-12 education filtering up to higher ed? How are we facing those challenges? What can we do to help ourselves, K-12 and libraries face them?

The Comics Industry
- How can academics influence the comics industry to be more diverse and engaged with social justice issues (broadly defined)? How can we make visible the work of diverse creators?

Academic Seriousness of the Comics Medium
- 14 of you noted a concern that comics are not taken seriously on your campus.

Whether you have faced this challenge or not, what can be done to bring administrators and colleagues along?

While 15 minutes may not sound like a long period of time, we know it can feel like an eternity in a Breakout Room. We felt that 15 minutes would require participants to mostly stay on task while still allowing time for pleasantries and to build community. After the small group discussion, we came back together to discuss the topics as a larger forum group.

Our Model: What We Did After the Forum
After the forum, the PIs met to review all of our notes and capture the main ideas discussed by participants. We considered what worked and what did not to improve the subsequent forums and revised our interactive portions and agenda for future forums. We updated our grant advisors and discussed the identification of possible White Paper Working Group members to join us in drafting the White Paper.