BACKSTAGE AT ICPSR: SUPPORTING USERS OF ICPSR ON-LINE SERVICES

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Overview

- Background
  - User Support in a Digital Archive
  - User Support Over Time

- ICPSR Experience
  - Data Holdings
  - Impact of Technology
  - User Population

- Looking Toward the Future
  - The more things change, the less they change

- Conclusion
  - User support is both visible and invisible but vital for a successful archival operation
Background

- User Support Over Time
  - Interaction for every order
  - Customer needs part of every step in the process
  - Visible and invisible efforts

- What Impacts User Support in Digital Archive
  - Diverse holdings
  - Service or product requirements
  - Diverse access requirements
  - Standard of service defined by organization
  - Diverse user population
ICPSR Experience

- **Nature of Holdings**
  - General Archive
  - Topical Archives
  - Historical Collections
  - New and Unique Collections

- **Web-based Delivery System**
  - Complex process heavily driven by nature of holdings
  - Dictated to some extent by user population

- **ICPSR Direct**
  - Deliver directly to user on user’s time table
  - Users with varying levels of knowledge and expertise
  - Requires salient and timely on-line assistance
  - Creates expectations for instantaneous responses and solutions

- **Nature of Users**
ICPSR Experience (cont)

User Support Characteristics

- Traditional and Visible
  - email
  - phone consultation
  - removable media service

- Invisible and Subtle
  - drives all archiving activities
  - built into holdings
  - requires efforts of all the staff even if its not uppermost in all of their minds
  - built into delivery system
Looking Toward the Future

- The More Things Change, the Less They Change

  - Direct contact will continue and is vital
  - Privacy and confidentiality demands will grow
  - Continuing development and evolution of on-line support
  - Greater emphasis on high level of support that’s consistent, complete and courteous since less direct contact time with any one user and users expect immediate answers.
  - The longer an archive is in existence, the more its older holdings will require more direct support of their users.
  - As archival holdings age, the legacy files will require more user support
Conclusion

User support is a critical part of a digital archive

- Visible Components
  - need to be easy to reach in an organization
  - need to have knowledgeable and resourceful staff
  - need to stay abreast of and be integral part of archival organization since frequently first and only contact for many users

- Invisible Components
  - is part of the archival process from the moment a collection is acquired
  - extensive resources and efforts to support a web presence