Records Transparency/Accountability Interest Group
Meeting: February 17, 2017 1:00-2:00 pm EST

AGENDA

Introductions. Present: Cynthia (U. Baltimore), Andrew (Computer History Museum), Joshua (MSU), Sarah (Florida State), Bonnie (Data and Society), Patricia (Mellon Foundation), Noah (UC Riverside), Lindsey (Public Library), Cassie (Kent State U.), Erik (U. Arizona), Rachel (La Mama), Bethany (DLF). And others who couldn't be here but are supporting this effort.

Discussion: Why are we here and what do we dream of doing in/with this group?

Question from Rachel, to kick off discussion: What kinds of projects do you envision? What ideas or dreams do you have for this group/effort?

Responses:
1. Noticed a lot of information issues swirling around in wake of election and they're interconnected. Issues around open data sets, accountability, availability of records. What distinguishes records and record keeping from some of these information management issues. Likes signal boosting and other mechanisms putting out clear descriptions of record keeping and record keeping evidence.
2. Realm around discoverability and accessibility of government records. These things aren't necessarily available in our current infrastructures. Raises question of digital technologies or access as one direction - talking about and providing digital resources around what kinds of technologies exist to gain access to government records. Also: how usable are government records in the first place, and how readable are they (how do you read them)?
3. FOIA practices rely on antediluvian technologies - e.g., FBI says they'll respond to faxed requests instead of emailed ones.
4. What is the relationship between records access and open data? Not a lot of context given to these things. What is the relationship between records, data, and different practices? Implies something about judging what data sets might be useful for what kinds of purposes.
   a. How might we look at the opening of data critically, in particular considering usability. Think about how would people use these records (even how they'd like to be able to use them). Use cases would be important here.
   b. Data has become such a buzzword that we don't think about what it actually is. Perhaps look at the Sunlight Foundation and how they went from FOIA requests to focusing on data dumps and data visualization. Would be helpful to go beyond celebrating the fact that we have open data.
   c. Government puts up open data as example of transparency and openness but the real information is often locked away.

5. Questions of authenticity with records - is there a way to emphasize it or surface it better, as a counteracting force against claims of inauthentic information?
6. How do we address the disappearance of government records - **when** they disappear, too.
7. Note: DLF is keeping an eye out for connector roles to make in this area - e.g., data refuge events.
8. Another area of potential work: how to read a government record, what can you do to promote accountability wherever you're situated. This relates to authenticity - testing it via metadata and other mechanisms.
9. As informational professionals, what can we offer that helps people who make requests for information know what to make out of what they get back.
   a. What are the needs of requestors?
   b. Are there things we could provide to help them make sense of the information they receive upon request?
   c. This might be helpful in terms of deciding where/how to start.

Timelines and next steps.

First step is establishing what the needs are - maybe collaboratively create a document that summarizes and brings together what resources are out there?

Build on the work that's been done on the brainstorming page, synthesizing the resources - digging into what these various organizations are doing.

Information sharing and distilling it down - might help us get to the messages we want to promote, crystallizing them.

How? Assign some folks in the group a set of materials to look at and summarize/evaluate.

A lot of what potentially could help clarify certain areas we're interested is outlining the trajectory for record creation for various agencies and seeing the path for how this gets funneled into information that's made available or not.
- But agencies don't make this easy. Record keeping is contingent.
- But perhaps break it up into broad areas: standards for records creation, transformation of data into other forms (give examples).
- This would be documenting the gaps in our understanding of the process of record creation - identifying these might help illuminate potential directions we'd like to take.

Another idea: Documenting all the ways that an investigative journalist was told no. Seeing all the dead ends can be useful.

Rachel proposes that we meet again on **March 3 at 1 PM EST.** She will continue to facilitate.

Next steps:
1. Continue to contribute to the [brainstorming doc](#).
2. Create a Google Group (Rachel) for this interest group.
3. Additional efforts:
   a. Cassie volunteered to write a "brain spill" on authenticity.
   b. Andrew, Lindsey, and Cassie will collaborate on a combination of: Documenting how a record is made or a request is processed (or not processed). Figure out scope, such as of how FOIA plays out - does the group focus on the state level or national level?
   c. Noah: interested in digging deeper into the resources document, doing research on what the different organizations do and summarizing/synthesizing.