



Recollection Wisconsin Gap Analysis: Report from Phase 1

October 2020

Overview

In September of 2019, the Recollection Wisconsin Governing Board and Steering Committee identified a priority to systematically develop the shared collection to foster diversity and inclusion, so that more Wisconsin residents can see their stories represented. To work towards this goal, it was recommended that Recollection Wisconsin undertake a gap analysis to understand current collection coverage and identify collection growth and partnership development opportunities. The first phase of this process worked to identify gaps while future phases might focus on filling the gaps. This report details the findings of that first phase and suggests pathways into the second.

A significant part of the process was identifying models for looking at the collection that revealed actionable insights. After exploring a number of models that were promising but ultimately not helpful, we identified three that gave us a picture of the full collection and of our content partners. These models also helped us see the gaps that will eventually become opportunities for growth.

First, we completed a **content partner analysis** to understand the reach of Recollection Wisconsin across the state. We looked, by county, at our potential partners and our current partners to find where partnership opportunities exist.

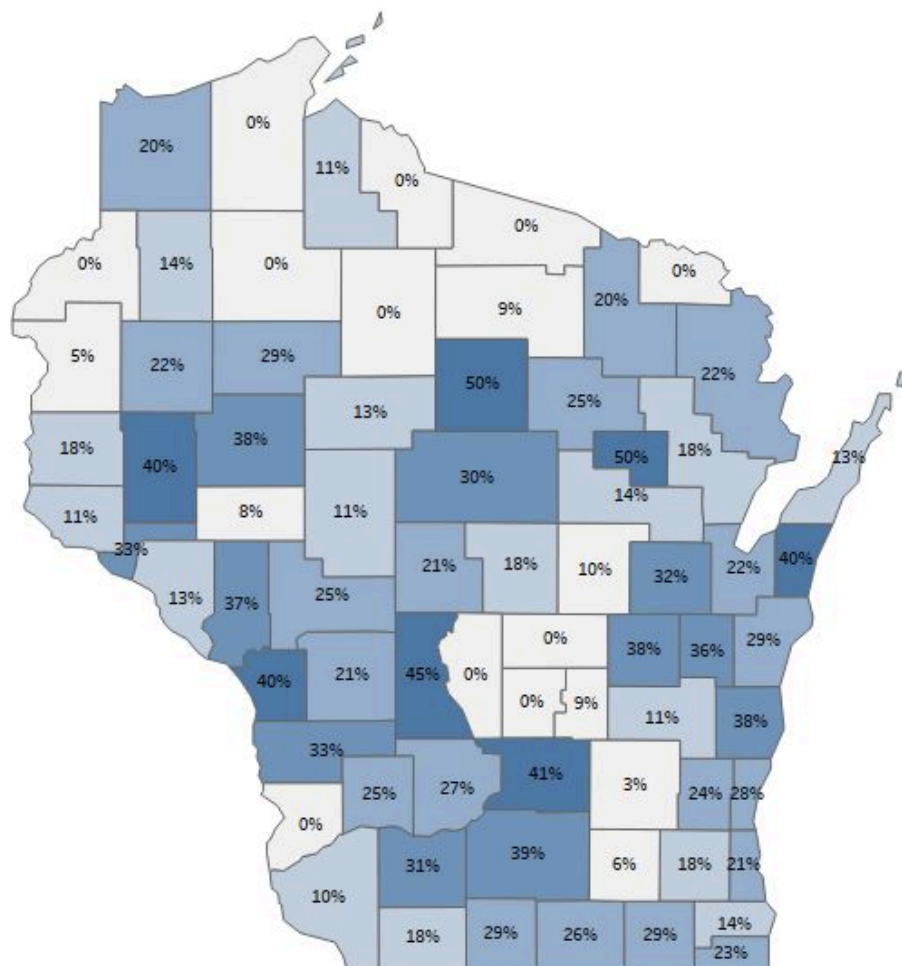
Second, we completed a **search expectation analysis**. An overarching challenge to our analysis was that, in order to find the gaps, we had to have a reasonable sense of the whole - an understanding of what the collection *should* have in it to know what it *doesn't* have in it. So, we asked educators already connected to Recollection Wisconsin to share search terms they would use in the collection to find classroom resources. We then ran those searches to find alignment of expectations among participants and where expectations were not met by the collection.

Third, we completed a **collection analysis** by looking individually at format, date, and subject metadata from each of the 270 Wisconsin-centered collections in Recollection Wisconsin. Using this more granular level of analysis, we were able to see both bounty and gaps in the collection in those three areas.

Content Partner Analysis

Recollection Wisconsin has 227 content partners from all corners of the state, comprising many different kinds of cultural organizations: public libraries and public library systems, museums, historical societies, archives, and academic libraries. In our content partner analysis, we looked at the county location of each partner organization against a list of likely content partners: all Wisconsin higher education institutions (88), public libraries and public library systems (397), and local history affiliates of the Wisconsin Historical Society (421).

By comparing our existing content partners against this list, we were able to see the reach of Recollection Wisconsin into the state and where that reach could be improved. The image below shows the percentage of organizations that are currently Recollection Wisconsin content partners and is color-coded to show where we already have significant reach (darker blue) and where we have opportunities for partnerships (lighter blue).



Interestingly, counties where we have the highest reach (Lincoln, Menominee, Juneau, Columbia) are not counties with the highest populations (Milwaukee, Dane, Waukesha, Brown). There are, clearly, opportunities for Recollection Wisconsin to partner with organizations both in the northern quarter of the state and the central corridor.

Search Expectations Analysis

Without doing a full-blown user experience analysis, we wanted to know from people who would use a collection or site like Recollection Wisconsin what they would expect to find in such a collection. We enlisted the help of the Recollection Wisconsin Education Advisory Committee, a governing body that guides our outreach efforts to connect educators with content partners' materials. The Education Advisory Committee is made up of individuals from a variety of education-focused organizations including PBS Education Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Historical Society, the Madison and Milwaukee public school districts, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, many of them with backgrounds and experience in K12 social studies education. The Committee members each shared with us up to 20 search terms -- things they would expect to find in a digital collection focused on Wisconsin history. We compiled and ran their suggested search terms through Recollection Wisconsin and documented the results. We organized these results in a simple spreadsheet documenting the term, the frequency that term was suggested by Committee members, the total number of results for that term, and the results broken down by format: image, text, sound, moving image, and physical object.

Insights about search terms suggested by the Education Advisory Committee

The search terms suggested by more than one member of the Committee were *Civil war*, *fur trade*, *underground railroad*, *black*, *First Nations*, *Ho Chunk*, *immigrant*, *Native American*. All other terms were suggested by only one Committee member.

- There was interest in content about historically underrepresented groups (*Muslims*, *tribal communities*, *Hmong*).
- There was interest in content about people and less interest about specific Wisconsin places or events.
- There was demand for content that supports Wisconsin elementary education social studies topics and standards, including lesser known characters from Wisconsin history (*Walter Bressette*, *Elizabeth Baird*) but also some expected broad topics (*lumber*, *dairy*).
- There was minimal search expectation overlap; few terms were suggested by more than one person.
- There were no requests for content related to Germans, brewing, the Mississippi River, river industry in general, or other "typical" Wisconsin topics.
- Both broad topics and very specific things (*dairy* and *Babcock separator*) were suggested.
- There was one request to search for *man* and *woman* + (any adjective or a profession), suggesting interest in understanding how gender is represented in the collection.

Insights about the search results

- Some terms resulted in surprisingly high numbers of results, such as *WWI* (32,496) and *maps* (33,059) or surprisingly low numbers such as *suffrage* (157), *immigrant* (101), and *social movements* (20).
- Some synonymous terms selected returned different results, for example: *Native American*, *Indian*, *First Nations*.
- Some terms returned imprecise or overly general results. For example, the term *black* returned both references to the color black (black clothing, black sky, etc.) and Black as a representation of race. The term *portage* returned results for both the location Portage, Wisconsin and portage, meaning to carry a boat.
- Contemporary terms used for historic content (*Latinx* instead of *Latino*, *Hispanic*, or *Mexican*) resulted in little or no content.

It would be useful to repeat this exercise with a larger pool of respondents including Wisconsin social studies and history teachers and/or students participating in Wisconsin History Day.

Collection Analysis

Recollection Wisconsin's success is due in part to the fact that participation is available to every organization in the state, regardless of their technical ability or expertise with metadata. There have never been strict metadata requirements beyond the existence of a few key fields nor have there been strict standards dictating how to enter that metadata. The project, from its inception, has been focused on meeting our diverse set of partners where they are and helping them have the confidence to share their historical riches with the world - to the benefit of the partner and the world!

This, however, means that the metadata was not built to be analyzed at an item level. We made multiple and varied attempts to look at the collection from that lens and, no matter which approach we took to the nearly 600,000 records, it was just too much data with too little standardization to meaningfully analyze in this fashion.

After much consideration and recruiting input from WiLS' Data Analyst Kim Kiesewetter, we landed on an approach that allowed us to see the collection as a whole along with potential gaps. Instead of looking at aggregated metadata across all collections at once, we examined the the following key metadata of each collection individually: collection size, geographic focus (if county or narrower), resource dates (to 1900, then in 25-year increments, after 2000), formats (still image, document, moving image, sound, physical object), and the top ten subject headings used. This method allowed us to arrive at counts for each metadata facet. Here is a snippet of that data:

Metadata Guidance for Content Partners

Recollection Wisconsin can offer more clarity and specific preferred standards on metadata for content partners describing their digitized content. Stopping short of requiring adherence to these standards, we can still help partners with the resources and motivation to improve their metadata practices through reference materials on the Recollection Wisconsin website, our blog Toolkit series of articles with straightforward advice for practitioners, and our monthly Office Hours for on-demand help for content partners.

Specifically, increased guidance is needed for how and in which Dublin Core fields to input geographic and date metadata as well as preferred use of subject terms.

Synonym Support in Searching

Natural language changes faster than controlled vocabularies are updated and metadata can be remediated by content partners. For that reason, Recollection Wisconsin should research and implement synonym support for searching that is invisible to the end user but helps return additional relevant or related resources. For instance, if a user searched the collection for *Latinx*, a synonym dictionary could be queried and results would be returned for related (or outdated) terms like *Latino*, *Latina*, *Latin American*, and *Hispanic*.

Surfacing Underrepresented Voices

Even in the small sample size of our search expectation analysis, it was clear that educators are hungry for stories about historically underrepresented Wisconsinites. Recollection Wisconsin should endeavor to surface those stories by:

- Identifying existing relevant resources and collections already in Recollection Wisconsin and working with content partners to improve and expand resource metadata for easier discovery.
- Identifying existing digital collections not yet included in Recollection Wisconsin and partnering with the content holders to bring them into Recollection Wisconsin.
- Identifying existing physical collections and working with the content holders to bring them online and into Recollection Wisconsin.

User Expectation and Experience Studies

Expanding the participants and scope of the search expectation analysis holds a lot of possibility for revealing insights on how to improve Recollection Wisconsin for researchers, educators, genealogists, and the general curious public. Recollection Wisconsin could find additional K12 educator participants through organizations such as the Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies (WCSS) and the Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association (WEMTA). Additionally, a traditional user experience study which closely watches how users interact with the portal and reimagines the interface, navigation, and metadata in ways that match those interactions would reveal a great deal about how the technology itself can assist in discovering resources that already exist in the collection.

A Call to Action

We welcome input from all people or groups who are invested in improving the diversity of representation in Recollection Wisconsin and in the Wisconsin historical record in general. If you have comments, suggestions, or reactions to share, or if you have historical resources of significance to contribute, let us know at info@recollectionwisconsin.org.