Records of Refuge: Supporting Refugee Communities' Archival Needs | University of North Texas (UNT)

<u>**Project Summary:**</u> Records of Refuge: Supporting Refugee Communities' Archival Needs (RoR) is a three-year research project conducted by Dr. Ana Roeschley, an Assistant Professor in the College of Information at the University of North Texas. This Early Career Development project proposal requests $494,966 from the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program, addressing Goal 2, Objective 2.3: "Support the research of untenured tenure-track library and information science faculty, furthering the faculty member's long-term research agenda, career trajectory, and professional development." This research project will serve refugees, public librarians, archivists, records managers, community memory workers, and other individuals working with refugee communities through an investigation of best practices and protocols in the use and care of vital records upon entry into life in the United States and the creation and long-term preservation of personal digital archives of refugees.

Inspired by the PI's own experiences as a child refugee in the United States and her research on personal and participatory archiving practices, this project aims to close research gaps on the documentary and archival needs of refugees in the United States. Additionally, RoR serves as a crucial foundation for future work to implement new archival practices for refugee communities and the people who work with them. Using grounded theory and user-centered design approaches, data collection will occur through 20 focus groups with refugees and individuals who work with refugees and through an investigation of personal digital management software and archival repositories. To ensure that results are widely broadcast, the dissemination of findings will occur via several channels including online webinars, a white paper, articles, and workshops. The project team will organize a virtual symposium on findings and best practices that will be open to refugee communities, individuals who work with refugees through refugee service agencies, and archivists and librarians. Project results will also be disseminated through conferences and journals that are aimed at the refugee services sector as well as the library and archives sectors.

<u>**Project Justification—Statement of Broad Need:**</u> Whether we stay in one country for generations or experience migration, our lives are shaped by our personal records. These records—including passports, birth certificates, marriage certificates, citizenship papers, and educational diplomas—all act as evidence of our identities. There are also personal records that do not act as official documentary evidence of our identities but define who we are, nonetheless. From family memorabilia to personal photos and diaries, our most intimate records link us to our pasts. Our treasured personal collections are cared for and handed down from generation to generation. Whether they end up in a family member's home or an institutional archive or museum, personal record collections matter.

The importance of personal records is abundantly clear for refugees in the United States. While the current Ukraine and Afghanistan refugee crises have made the plights of refugees more visible recently, there is a long history of refugees settling in the United States with the aid of sponsors, refugee services, and multiple agencies (including public libraries) in United States federal, state, and local governments. With or without media and public attention, refugee families have faced and continue to face a barrage of challenges upon entering the United States. A primary obstacle to many refugees is a lack of access to vital records necessary to accessing essential services and establishing their new lives in the United States. As they are often displaced without their personal records, the already-challenging integration into their lives in the United States can be made more difficult due to a lack of records.

While refugees establishing their new lives in refugee resettlement processes are aided by their sponsors and refugee services, many of the processes occur in compartmentalized sections without clear understanding of which records will be needed from step to step. This leads to piecemeal solutions that are applied on an individual basis, rather than clear protocols. There is a serious need for investigation into best record-keeping and record-use practices in refugee resettlement that provide answers to questions including: Which records can substitute for others when establishing new lives, how can vital records be created in the United States, and how can vital records be preserved and easily accessed throughout the resettlement processes? In-depth studies about refugees' personal vital record needs upon entry into the United States are needed to investigate the nuances and complexities of this aspect of refugee life. To understand how archivists, librarians, and others can best help refugees in the United States, we first must understand the documentary burdens they experience through a robust study of their experiences.

Additionally, when refugees are forced to flee their home countries due to conflict or disaster, they are often forced to do so without bringing their personal archives. Due to the proliferation of social media and mobile technologies, many refugees entering the United States do have digital records that can be accessed in their new lives. Nonetheless, many more of their personal records that documented their lives before displacement are often lost to refugees. This too is a type of

displacement. It is important that refugees in the United States have an opportunity to memorialize not just their experiences as refugees, but their whole selves. It is vital that information professionals who work with refugees can help them find, access, and preserve their existing digital records. Additionally, it is also important that refugees are provided with resources to create personal archives that both document their lives in the United States and allow them to document their memories of the past. Whether these personal archives stay in their homes or are shared with institutional archives and museum, refugees deserve to have access holistic personal documentation of their lives. From silly family pictures to oral histories about the past, these records matter.

Background and Previous Research: Grant projects and other existing research examine library resources for refugees as well as the ties between refugees and archival records. However, too few focus on protocols for both immediate records-use in refugee resettlement and the preservation of long-term personal digital archives of refugees. Current work on refugee rights to records by Carbone, Gilliland, and Montenegro shows that "it is important to increase knowledge among refugees about how they can, within the limits of their own circumstances, best manage their own documentation (p.14)."

Vital personal records are relied on as tokens that allow individuals and families to live their lives and travel through the world. Individuals who do not live in conflict zones are usually able to access and use their vital records to move, start new jobs, enroll their children in school, and access healthcare. Though at times convoluted, these processes are a routine part of the resettlement process. However, these standard processes become filled with questions and hurdles when the resettlement process occurs due to the forced displacement, which leaves many refugees without their vital records. Despite their unique situations, the demand for vital records does not go away as refugees go through the resettlement process. This demand is, in fact, key to the refugee experience as Gilliland Carbone (2020) explain:

> Documentation is central to and threaded through every facet of the life of a refugee even before the moment of forced displacement or flight and certainly from then on for the rest of their lives and those of their immediate families and descendants. (p. 485)

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, refugees are often forced to leave their home countries without the records that document their identities and their ties to their families. While the UNHCR does work to register refugees to allow refugees to establish their identities, it points out that "host countries in all regions of the world [are] increasingly assuming registration responsibilities" (UNHCR, Guidance on Registration and Identity Management, Introduction, para. 3). Additionally, the UNHCR advocates for the "inclusion of refugees in national registries and the subsequent issuance of nationally recognized ID documents, which represent a powerful tool of protection, enabling refugees to access rights and pursue social and economic opportunities that can help rebuild their lives" (UNHCR, Guidance on Registration and Identity Management, Introduction, para. 3). However, there is a need for rigorous investigation into the identity management processes of refugees in the United States. Refugees entering the United States are prompted to fill out forms upon entry that allow them to enter as individuals. However, bringing their children and spouses to United States requires refugees to provide both photographs of their family members and birth or marriage certificates (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Family of Refugees and Asylees). Even if refugees settling into the United States gain national identifying documentation for themselves and their families, the process is complicated as refugees settle into individual states with their own laws that dictate the documentation needed for resettlement.

Thus, a simple process—like enrolling a child in school—can feel like an impenetrable bureaucratic feat for refugees. This challenge is referred to as "documentary burden" by Jimenez (2019), who explores the issues faced by refugees in Turkey. Jimenez explains how the documentary burden on refugees can be remedied:

> [A] pressing need for archive-to-archive collaboration to increase accessibility of records; to lobby those who make policy, adjudicate asylum cases and vet refugees for resettlement to consider alternate forms of documentation that might be presented by a records advocate working on a case; and to develop new forms of certification for relevant digitized documents. (p. 69)

Though Jimenez explores a setting other than the United States, her findings are applicable for refugees in a variety of settings, including in the United States. While international research on the documentary burden of refugees is present, it is vital that more research is done to understand the experiences of refugees in the United States specifically. While the documentary burden transcends nations, the specific documentary burdens faced by refugees in the United States can only be remedied with solutions that are created with the laws and practices of the United States in mind.

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In addition, while the loss of vital records like birth and marriage certificates can create a painful documentary burden for refugee families, the loss of intimate personal records and artifacts like family photo albums, personal journals, and other heirlooms can be even more crushing. The loss of records through forceful displacement compounds feelings of loss for individuals who have lost not only their homes but their home countries. This secondary documentary burden too needs to be investigated and addressed.

While there is a need for more in-depth research on the personal records of refugees specifically, there is established research on the role of personal archives. Personal archiving in some form is a universal practice that connects families and individuals to their pasts (Cox, 2009). Ashmore, Craggs, and Neate (2012) explain that personal archives can reflect a life's experience through an intimate relationship between an individual and their personal records. As Hobbs (2001) argues, personal records are reflections of one's very soul:

> Personal fonds contain the documentation of individual lives and human personality. While these fonds certainly often reflect the recorded evidence of the functions of the creator, in the same way as do fonds of organizations, personal archives also contain traces of the individual character of the record's creator. There are here glimpses of the inner soul as well as its outer manifestation in public activities. (p. 127)

As the above research shows, personal records act as connections to the past, making the loss of personal records for refugees a secondary act of displacement in both time and place. With the shift toward digital cloud technologies over the past twenty years, refugees can come to the United States with some access to their personal digital records and also the ability to create new digital family archives. Additionally, as Halilovich (2014) explains, personal digital archives and refugee community digital archives can be created after displacement. Halilovich provides the example of Žepa Online, a (no longer active) website created by survivors of the Bosnian Genocide from the Bosnian town of Žepa:

> Žepa Online is more than a resource for people with origins in a village in eastern Bosnia; it is a communal archive, but also a place where Žepa identity is asserted and performed in a variety of ways. No less importantly, by recreating collective memory about and for themselves, the survivors from Žepa have created an archive including the records of the grave human rights violations and of the suffering of their village that would otherwise have gone unrecorded. (p. 245)

While Žepa Online has migrated to Facebook since the publication of Halilovich's research, members of the Žepa community in the diaspora continue to interact and add their personal photographs and stories—showing how the personal digital records of refugees can connect them to each other and to their communities of origin.

However, as we see above, these records are often saved on websites and social media sites that were designed "for social networking and not for personal documentation or long-term preservation of personal information" (Sinn and Syn, 2014, p. 100). To support refugees' personal digital archives, it is vital to establish protocols for record-keeping practices in refugee resettlement and create best-practice digital preservation protocols for assisting refugees with preserving their personal records. Because refugee communities are not a monolith, it is important to ensure that a variety of options for preservation of personal archives are explored.

Additionally, while protocols for personal archival practices are necessary, it is also important to connect refugees and those who work with them in the United States to archival resources that already exist. Archival resources include international initiatives like the Living Refugee Archive, as well as US-based ones—including the Computational Resource for South Asian Languages (CoRSAL), Records & Rights In Displacement & Diaspora Network, and the Immigration History Research Center, among others. From identifying community and participatory archives to investigating personal digital management software and tools—a holistic investigation of refugee personal digital archives is necessary.

RoR and the PI's Long-term Research Agenda: This project is aligned with the PI's wider research agenda and activities. In addition to her role as an early career scholar, she is the Director of Archival Studies at the University of North Texas and is the founder and co-director of the Archives Learning Lab, where she initiated the RoR project. She also serves on the Board of Directors for CoRSAL, a digital archive for minority language preservation of South Asian communities—including refugee communities.

The proposed project builds off the PI's experiences as a war refugee and previous research with immigrant participants in community-based archives (Roeschley, 2023). The PI's previous findings showed that immigrant participants felt deep affective connections to their records and that the archival preservation of these records brought forth feelings of validation

and affirmation of their roles in their new communities. In particular, the PI's previous research on archival participation by immigrants in the United States shows "the affective power of participation in a community-based archival initiative, particularly for individuals who have not had easy access to family records and stories" (p. 8).

Project Work Plan: Occurring over three years, the proposed project will incorporate two phases with three years of graduate student support. Two graduate research assistants will be recruited from University of North Texas graduate students who study archives, cultural heritage, and/or digital records management. The research assistants will serve as key personnel along with the PI, who will lead the project team. The research will address the following questions:

1.0 What are the record-keeping roadblocks to successful refugee resettlement in the United States?

1.1 What protocols can be created to allow refugees, archivists, refugee sponsors, and others working with refugees to fulfill the documentation requirements of resettlement activities in the United States?

2.0 What are the record-keeping and digital preservation concerns of refugees living in the United States?

2.1 What are the infrastructural, technical, and descriptive requirements to meet these needs?

2.2 Which existing archives, archival resources, open-source tools, and practices can be adapted and modified for assisting digital preservation of refugee personal archives, where are the gaps, and how can they be filled?

Throughout the Project: An advisory board will provide advice and guidance for the project team for the duration of the project. The project team will meet with advisory board members on Zoom twice a year to receive feedback on the project's progress and development. The project team will also send monthly updates of project activity the advisory board during the end of each month. Individual meetings and correspondence with advisory board members will also occur as needed during the project.

The advisory board will include individuals who have experienced forced displacement, archival scholars and practitioners, records management experts who deal with immigration records, data management and digital curation experts, sociologists, and individuals who work directly with refugees. The advisory board members will be compensated for their time with an annual stipend of $500. The advisory board members who have committed to the project include:

Khalid Mohamed: Language Service Coordinator for the City of Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. Mohamed, who came to the United States as a refugee from Yemen when he was a child, has both experienced life as a refugee in the United States and works with refugees in his daily life.

Krystell Jimenez: Archivist at the Museum of Ventura County. Jimenez has a background in community archives practice and has published foundational research on refugee experiences as related to their personal records. Her seminal research on the experiences of refugees in Turkey introduces the concept of the archival "documentary burden" faced by refugees during their resettlement experiences.

Shobhana Chelliah: Professor at Indiana University Bloomington. Chelliah is the founder of Computational Resource for South Asian Languages (CoRSAL), a digital archive for the preservation of endangered South Asian languages and culture. She has worked extensively with refugee communities who work to preserve their languages in culturally appropriate contexts.

Kenneth Van Bik: Assistant Professor at California State University, Fullerton. Van Bik, who was born in Burma (Myanmar) is a Chin community leader with strong ties to Chin refugees throughout the United States—including the Chin community in Indianapolis. In addition to working with members of the Chin refugee community on language preservation, Van Bik has also worked as an immigration court interpreter for Burmese, Hakha Lai, and Falam Chin refugees.

Tara Zimmerman: Assistant Professor at Texas Women's University. Zimmerman is an information behavior expert who works closely with public and school libraries. She has extensive experience as a volunteer who works closely with Afghan refugee families during the resettlement process in Oklahoma City.

Deborah Fessenden: Doctoral Candidate and Teaching Fellow in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Texas. Fessenden is a researcher and advocate whose work and research are focused on how refugee

service organizations may enforce, understand, and/or contest policy mandates in the organizational fields. She runs the Advocacy and Education Program at BeKinder Coffee, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing continuing education and job skills for refugees in Texas.

Mark Phillips: Associate Dean for Digital Libraries at the University of North Texas. Phillips maintains several digital archives, including CoRSAL and the Portal to Texas History, which includes materials related to refugee life in Texas. An expert in web and digital archiving, Phillips has managed several post-custodial archive initiatives that allow individuals and families to retain control of their personal records while ensuring the records are preserved according to archival standards for the long term.

Edward Benoit III: Associate Director and Associate Professor in the School of Library & Information Science at Louisiana State University. The founder of the IMLS-funded Virtual Footlocker Project, Benoit has conducted extensive research on the preservation and use of personal digital archives.

Morgan Gieringer: Head of Special Collections at the University of North Texas. Gieringer's work as a special collections archivist has resulted in several collaborations between the University of North Texas Special Collections and community groups, including immigrant groups, in the North Texas region.

Jeonghyun Kim: Associate Professor at the University of North Texas. The PI of the IMLS-funded Oral History Forum, Kim is an expert in digital curation and data management who investigates the digital curation lifecycles of community histories.

In addition to regular communication with the advisory board, the project team will provide dissemination of project updates throughout the duration of the project. The project website will be hosted by University of North Texas' College of Information. The project team will host online forums via University of North Texas's Zoom software and publish project blog posts on the project website to keep both the wider public and the project focus group participants aware of and engaged with the progress of the project. The blog posts will begin at the project's outset while the online forums will begin in November 2023. The forums and blog posts will present both project updates and ongoing study results as the project progresses. Additionally, the team will create social media pages to advertise the work of the research team during the RoR project. In addition to hosting the recordings of the forums and blog posts on the project website, these will also be preserved and accessible on the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository.

Research Methods: Primarily using a qualitative approach to research, this project will rely on user-centered design and grounded theory approaches to data collection and analysis. Both methods that utilize iterative approaches to research, user-centered design and grounded theory allow researchers to center people, their experiences, and their needs. Through a series of qualitative focus groups, the two approaches will be integrated into focus group design and the analysis of study data. Wildemuth and Jordan (2016) explain that focus groups are an ideal for a nuanced study of issues faced by various members of a group:

> One of the core strengths of focus groups is that participants can compare their views with those of other participants in the group, rather than simply reporting their views to an interviewer. In this process, group members will make their differences of opinion explicit and will voice their agreement with others' views. Thus, rather than having to infer similarities and differences in the participants' views from their individual statements, you will be able to directly observe them in your data. Because the group members challenge each others' views, the discussion in a focus group has often been found to reveal a more nuanced perspective on a topic than could have been discovered through individual interviews. (p. 258)

Such a dynamic approach is necessary for the study of documentary burdens faced by refugees in the United States as these may be experienced in a variety of ways by refugees—even refugees who belong to the same community. As the documentary burdens faced by refugees in the United States are largely unexplored, using a focus group approach will allow for previously under-investigated nuances of refugee experiences to be highlighted.

As all of the project's research questions rely on an understanding of how refugees and the people who work with them experience the documentary burden, user-centered design will be utilized for the development of focus group protocols. Centering participants' experiences with a product or a system, user-centered design allows research participants to describe their needs, interact with products and systems, and evaluate their experiences in their own words (Matusiak, 2022). This

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approach will allow the research team to develop and adapt questions about refugees' vital record needs, personal digital archiving practices, and possible solutions.

The iterative user-centered design of the focus groups will also utilize grounded theory, which will act as both a method of data collection and analysis. Charmaz (2014) states, "Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis" (p. 1). Grounded theory allows researchers to construct their findings from the ground up as they emerge through initial and recursive coding of the data. Charmaz explains that because grounded theory allows findings to emerge from the ground up, as it involves an iterative and interactive process of analysis of data through qualitative coding:

> [The grounded theory method] prompts you to keep interacting with your data. Grounded theory can bring you back to some research participants while going forward with fresh ideas to check with new participants (or with new texts or settings depending on your sources of data). As you conduct grounded theory coding, you enter an interactive space that pulls you deeper into the data and keeps you involved with them far more than casual reading fosters. (p. 115)

The interactive analysis in grounded theory is based on constant comparison of data throughout the data analysis process, meaning that different parts of the data are constantly being compared to other parts of the data—allowing the researcher's understanding of the data to change and evolve as they analyze further and gather more information. Charmaz also stresses that grounded theory analysis codes for actions and processes rather than topics or themes (p. 15). Analyzing for actions and processes will allow the project team to analyze how refugees and individuals who work with them interact with, use, and are challenged by vital records in the resettlement process. It will also allow the team to understand how refugees interact with their intimate records and create new personal digital archives in their new lives. Using this method, after the first two focus groups, the PI and research assistants will develop an initial codebook based on open coding of the transcribed data. Subsequently, they will conduct inter-coder validation testing to verify the codebook and begin applying it to the data using the qualitative coding software Dedoose.

Phase One: Years One and Two will fully address questions 1.0, 1.1, 2.0, and 2.1, while partially addressing question 2.2. The Phase One investigation will occur through grounded theory and user-centered design approaches, mainly a series of comprehensive focus groups with refugees and individuals who work with refugees.

For the purposes of this project, the term "refugees" refers to individuals who came to the United States as due to forced displacement. Both individuals who have been in the United States for decades and individuals who recently arrived will be recruited to participate. To ensure that recently arrived refugees can participate, the focus groups with refugees will be open to non-English speaking refugees. To ensure their needs are met, translators will be provided.

Additionally, because resettlement experiences are shaped by both refugees and those who work with them, it is important to ensure the project team gathers data on experiences of wide-ranging communities of refugees who have gone through the resettlement process and individuals who have gone through these processes in the aid of refugees as part of their careers or community volunteer experiences. "Individuals who work with refugees" refers to any individuals who work to help refugees at any point of the resettlement process—from early stages like volunteers who work with refugees as they search for employment to later points like public librarians who serve refugee patrons who have accessed the library for years. This group includes but is not limited to social workers, community volunteers, members of refugee service groups, teachers, public librarians, and immigration attorneys.

Together with the graduate research assistants, the PI will create focus group protocol, including researching and purchasing recording equipment, as well as methods to ensure privacy and confidentiality of all participants. The project will be submitted for Institutional Review Board approval in August 2023.

The focus groups will be recorded and transcribed for grounded theory coding analysis. The grounded theory and user-centered design methods will allow the research team to respond to findings as they arise in initial focus groups and incorporate them into future focus group protocols. Participants in the focus groups will be compensated for their time and will be selected based on the process detailed below.

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Ten focus group locations have been strategically chosen for this study to both cover a wide array of refugee populations and to allow the PI to utilize existing connections to refugee communities in the United States. Each focus group location will include separate sessions for refugees and individuals working with refugees to ensure candid answers. The focus groups will occur in person, rather than virtually, to eliminate the risk of technical difficulties like lagging internet connections. Focus groups will have a minimum of four and a maximum of five participants per group to ensure that individual participants are both given room to speak and to have other participants to react to. With two focus groups in each location, this study will utilize 20 focus groups total.

It is vital that multiple locations are addressed as there may be different resettlement procedures and documentation challenges based on a refugee's resettlement location. Beyond regional differences, the resettlement process may vary based on type of settlement location. Thus, the focus groups will be held in both urban and rural areas with comparably high refugee populations. Finally, it is important that a variety of refugee communities are recruited for participation in the study as the refugee experience may vary from group to group.

Because of the considerations for focus group sites listed above, this project's focus group sites include Houston, Indianapolis, San Jose, Seattle, Oklahoma City, New York City, Minneapolis, Barron County, Wisconsin, Salt Lake City, and Morgan County, Colorado. This variation of sites ensures that the study does not focus on any one region or one population group. The reasons for each study site are as follows:

> According to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), **Houston** has one of the [largest and most diverse refugee populations](#) in the United States. According to [Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative](#), the Houston metroplex is home to over 70,000 refugees.
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> **Indianapolis** was chosen as a focus group site because of the active presence of the [Chin community in the city](#). Unfortunately, due to the continuing conflicts in Burma (Myanmar), members of the Chin community continue to experience forced displacement—including to Indianapolis. Additionally, the PI and members of the project board of advisors have existing connections to the Chin Community of Indiana organization.
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> **San Jose** has long been a site of refugee resettlement in the United States. Members of the PI's own refugee communities from Bosnia and Croatia settled there in the 1990s—including members of the PI's own personal network. More recently, San Jose has been a resettlement site for refugees from [Afghanistan and from Ukraine](#).
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> **Seattle** has been a resettlement for several refugee communities over the years—including refugees from Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as refugees from Afghanistan and Syria in more recent years. Seattle's city government has a history of [supporting and advocating for refugees](#)—something that is not replicated in all resettlement sites.
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> **Oklahoma City** was the location of the PI's own refugee resettlement in the United States in 1995. Oklahoma City has welcomed refugees from Vietnam, the Balkans, and Afghanistan, among other locations. [Over 1,800 refugees from Afghanistan have resettled in Oklahoma since September 2021](#). In addition to being a site where the PI has connections to various refugee services agencies, Oklahoma City is an ideal site for the exploration of both urban and rural experiences in refugee resettlement as refugees are placed in both urban and rural communities in by Oklahoma City refugee service agencies like [Catholic Charities](#).
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> **New York City** is the largest city in the United States and a site of refugee resettlement for many communities, including [refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Eritrea](#). In addition to refugee communities, New York is home to many immigrant communities, with [37.2% of the city population classified as foreign-born.](#)
>
> **Minneapolis** has a rich history of welcoming refugees from all over the world. Notably, Minneapolis and Minnesota at large have sizable communities of refugees from [Somalia, Laos, and Vietnam](#).
>
> **Barron County, Wisconsin** was chosen as a rural location to ensure that refugee experiences across an array of settings are studied during this project. Though Barron has a population of 3,000, [approximately 13% of its population is comprised of refugees from Somalia](#).

Salt Lake City is home to many refugee communities, with the most populous groups of refugees in Salt Lake City coming from [Somalia, Iraq, Burma (Myanmar), Uganda, and Sudan](#). Due to past resettlements of refugees in Salt Lake City being from Asia, much of the refugee services in Salt Lake City are provided by the Asian Association of Utah. As such, Salt Lake City includes diverse groups of refugees and people who work with refugees.

Like Barron County**, Morgan County, Colorado** is another rural site with a substantial refugee population. Furthermore, Morgan is worthy of investigation because the majority of the Somali refugees living there moved from another location in the United States—[a process known as secondary migration](#). Though not newly arrived in the United States, refugees experiencing secondary migration also face documentary burdens during moves to new locations in the United States. It will be important for the project team to investigate how these do and do not differ from the documentary burdens study participants faced in their initial settlement locations.

A key aspect of focus group implementation will be the recruitment of participants and local logistics. The project team will utilize [snowball sampling](#) for the recruitment of refugees and people who work with refugees—all over the age of 18. The use of study participant stipends will act to draw participants to the study. In cases where more than the maximum number of participants volunteer for the study, the project team will work to ensure that members of different genders, age ranges, and ethnicities are selected for participation. However, there may be reasons for some of the focus groups to include only members of one group. For example, in cases where a translator is needed, only members of one community will participate in order to facilitate easier conversation between project team members, study participants, and the hired translator.

RoR will partner with refugee service groups, local libraries, community faith groups, community centers, and other non-profits to recruit participants and to find locations for focus groups in each location. Once Institutional Review Board approval is secured, the PI will begin reaching out via email to local refugee service groups, faith organizations, and public libraries in each location to recruit participants and secure locations for focus groups. The PI will utilize her connections with refugees and people who work with refugees in Indianapolis, San Jose, and Oklahoma City for these purposes as well. Participant recruitment will also occur via targeted advertisements placed on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

The 20 focus groups will occur over a series of seven trips (three of which will include multiple locations). To ensure that the focus groups occur successfully in a consistent manner, the focus group team will always include the PI as the focus group facilitator with assistance from one of the research assistants on each trip. Table 1 lists the individual locations and focus groups for each trip.

Table 1 Focus Group Divisions

Year	Trip	Location	Focus Group	Participants
Year 1 (January 2024- July 2024)	A	Houston	FG 1	4-5 Refugees
			FG 2	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
	B	Indianapolis	FG 3	4-5 Refugees
			FG 4	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
	C	San Jose	FG 5	4-5 Refugees
			FG 6	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
		Seattle	FG 7	4-5 Refugees
			FG 8	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
	D	Oklahoma City	FG 9	4-5 Refugees
			FG 10	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
Year 2 (August 2024- February 2025)	E	New York City	FG 11	4-5 Refugees
			FG 12	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
	F	Minneapolis	FG 13	4-5 Refugees
			FG 14	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
		Barron County	FG 15	4-5 Refugees
			FG 16	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees
	G	Salt Lake City	FG 17	4-5 Refugees
			FG 18	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees

			FG 19	4-5 Refugees
		Morgan County	FG 20	4-5 Individuals Working with Refugees

As this study will utilize a grounded theory and user-centered design approaches, data analysis will begin at the outset of Trip A. As data sets from each focus group are added, codes will be added and refined. Based on the coding analysis, the PI and research assistants will map the challenges faced by refugees due to the documentary burdens of resettlement, the solutions they and the people they work with utilize to overcome the documentary burden, and the roles that archivists, librarians, and other information professionals could play in helping refugees during the resettlement process. The project team will also use grounded theory to analyze the relationships refugees have with their personal archives and to understand how refugees create new intimate records after record loss and the ways in which archivists and other information professionals can assist them in this process.

Because this project design is iterative, it allows the research team to begin disseminating early results immediately after the data set from Trip A is analyzed. Throughout the duration of Phase One, emerging results will be presented via an online forum and blog posts hosted on the project website. This will allow interested parties—including past focus group participants, members of refugee communities, refugee service workers, librarians, and archivists—to see how the project progresses and provide feedback throughout the process. This ongoing dissemination strategy will not only allow the PI to present the study results as they emerge, it will also provide the graduate research assistants with the development and honing of valuable research presentation skills over the first two years of the project.

Phase Two: Phase Two will occur in Year Three to fully address question 2.2. The PI and graduate research assistants will conduct an investigation of archival repositories in the United States to create and publish a database of archives for members of refugee communities who wish to preserve their personal archives in community or institutional archives. This database will be published on the project website and in the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository. The project team will mark the publication of the database with an online forum and blog posts hosted on the project website. The publication of the database of archival repositories will also be advertised via news releases from University of North Texas College of Information, the Department of Information Science, and the Archives Learning Lab. The project team will also advertise the publication of the database via university-wide and departmental graduate student list-servs, as well as college, department, and lab social media pages. Finally, the project team will publicize the news via Society of American Archivists Announcements and the Archival Education and Research Institute listserv.

The team will also investigate existing open-source tools, such as APIs, that could be adopted to meet the technical requirements for personal record management and preservation. Subsequently, the project team will analyze digital curation models and emerging research for additional methods to fill the areas without existing support. Based on this analysis and the Phase One analysis, the PI and graduate research assistants will update and finalize the best practices and protocols to fully address questions 1.1, 2.1, and 2.2. The findings will be used to develop a workshop curriculum for archivists and public librarians that focuses on working with refugees throughout various phases of resettlement.

These workshops will be presented at a virtual symposium that will be organized and led by the project team. The one-day virtual symposium will be hosted via University of North Texas' Zoom webinar software. The symposium will include presentations of findings, workshops on best practices for vital records in resettlement, workshops on personal archiving practices, and workshops on post-custodial archiving for refugee records with an overview of archives that serve refugee communities. The project team will invite study participants, refugees, individuals who work with refugees, and the wider library and archives community to attend the symposium. The symposium will be advertised via the project website and social media pages, websites for Archives Learning Lab, the University of North Texas Department of Information Science, and University of North Texas Libraries. The project team will also advertise the symposium via scholarly and professional networks, including the Jesse Listserv, Society of American Archivists Announcements, and the Archival Education and Research Institute listserv.

The project findings will also be shared at several national and international conferences, including the Association for Information Science and Technology, Society of American Archivists, the Archival Education and Research Institute, the Personal Digital Archiving Conference, the annual meeting of the Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, and the Roundtable of the Refugee Highway Partnership - North America; multiple journal articles; and an open report. Finally, and most importantly, protocols for best practices will be available via the project website, which will be hosted by

the University of North Texas College of Information Science. They will also be preserved and accessible via the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository. The protocols will be designed so that they are easily accessible via mobile technology to ensure individuals who do not have regular access to computers can have an easy user experience using the project resources.

Phase Two will also include a critical step toward future work—the identification and securing of funding for further research and implementation of RoR results. The need for the current project is largely present because there is little understanding of the documentary burdens faced by refugees in the United States. However, it is not enough to understand these burdens—action is necessary. Starting in October 2025, the project team will investigate funding opportunities for the implementation of the best practices, development of possible tools, establishment of refugee archives, the creation and implementation of personal digital archiving workshops, and other possible study results. Then in 2026, the PI will create a funding application for an implementation project.

Diversity Plan: The proposed project focuses on refugee communities and individuals who work with refugees. Additionally, the PI has used the UNHCR Refugee Data Finder reporting of refugee demographics to ensure proportional and equitable gender and ethnic representation in the focus groups and advisory board. The PI has purposefully chosen focus group sites that represent a wide range of refugee communities in the United States. These include the Chin, Somali, Afghan, Lao, and Ukrainian refugee communities, among others. These groups represent a diversity of ethnicities, racial identities, and religions. Additionally, the focus group sites were chosen to show a diversity of populations and regions in the United States. The PI's own background as a refugee will allow the project team to foster an inclusive environment during focus groups. Furthermore, to ensure that refugees feel welcome to participate regardless of their English proficiency, translators will be provided for focus groups.

Finally, refugees and members of other underrepresented groups will be specifically recruited and encouraged to apply for the project's graduate research assistant positions. Targeted marketing for the research assistant positions will occur via news releases from University of North Texas College of Information, the Department of Information Science, and the Archives Learning Lab. Additionally, university-wide and departmental graduate student listservs, as well as college, department, and lab social media pages will be utilized for recruitment. In addition to targeting students in Archival Studies and Information Science, the PI will also directly reach out to faculty in other departments—including Linguistics, Learning Technologies, History, Education, Journalism, Visual Arts, and Anthropology—to recruit refugees and members of other underrepresented groups whose academic focus includes archives, cultural heritage, and/or digital records management.

Project Results: The Records of Refuge project both builds on the PI's previous research and acts as a foundation for vital work to provide archival support for refugees in the United States. Through the use of user-centered design and grounded theory approaches, this project will center the voices of refugees and those who work closest to them. As outlined in the sections above, RoR will serve refugees, public librarians, archivists, records managers, community memory workers, and other individuals working with refugee communities through an investigation of best practices and protocols in the use and care of vital records upon entry into life in the United States and the creation and long-term preservation of personal digital archives of refugees.

The anticipated study results will contribute to several key groups including refugees, refugee service workers and volunteers, archivists, and scholars. The findings from the focus groups will illuminate both the information needs and the information practice behaviors of refugees. The proposed project will bring forth much-needed answers to questions regarding the archival needs of refugees—both in the short term as they experience resettlement and in the long term as they create and preserve their personal archives. The project deliverables, including protocols for best practices, will aid refugees and those who work with them to overcome their documentary burdens and meet their archival needs. The developed best practices and protocols will provide archivists and refugees with the tools for the creation and long-term preservation of personal digital archives.

This project's anticipated findings will be used to secure additional funding from governmental and/or private sources to develop and implement workshops, toolkits, and archival initiatives that focus on vital records in resettlement and personal digital archiving for refugee communities, individuals, and organizations that work with refugees. Though this project aims to address the specific needs of refugees, its findings could easily be adapted for personal information management (PIM) and personal digital preservation needs of other communities—including other immigrant communities in the United States.

Records of Refuge: Supporting Refugee Communities' Archival Needs | University of North Texas (UNT)
Schedule of Completion

Tasks	Year 1												
													July
Project Startup													
Hire graduate research assistants	X												
Go through IRB approval	X	X	X	X	X								
Create project website and social media pages	X	X											
Hold first advisory board meeting		X											
Host first virtual forum				X									
Phase One													
Ongoing focus group recruitment efforts				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Purchase recording equipment					X								
Finalize focus group protocols					X	X							
Trip A data collection and analysis							X	X					
Trip A results dissemination via blog posts and online forum									X	X			
Meet with advisory board										X			
Trip B data collection and analysis										X	X		
Trip B results dissemination												X	
Trip C data collection and analysis											X	X	
Trip C results dissemination													X
Trip D data collection and analysis												X	X
Ongoing iterative data analysis							X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Records of Refuge: Supporting Refugee Communities' Archival Needs | University of North Texas (UNT)
Schedule of Completion

Tasks	Year 2												
													July
Phase One contd.													
Ongoing iterative data analysis	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Ongoing focus group recruitment efforts	■	■	■	■	■								
Trip D results dissemination	■												
Meet with advisory board		■											
Trip E data collection and analysis		■	■										
Trip E results dissemination				■									
Host virtual forum to provide a project progress update for the wider public					■								
Trip F data collection and analysis						■	■						
Trip F results dissemination								■					
Meet with advisory board									■				
Trip G data collection and analysis									■	■			
Trip G results dissemination											■		
Begin manuscript writing of Phase One results												■	■
Begin preparation of Phase Two (Including compiling research of archives in the United States)													■

Records of Refuge: Supporting Refugee Communities' Archival Needs | University of North Texas (UNT)
Schedule of Completion

Tasks	Year 3										July		
Phase Two													
Continue writing manuscripts for submission to various publication venues	■	■	■	■	■	■	■						
Create and publish a database of archives	■	■	■	■									
Meet with advisory board		■											
Ongoing submissions of papers and presentation proposals		■	■	■	■	■	■	■					
Investigate existing open source tools and analyze digital curation models and emerging research		■	■	■	■								
Present project results at relevant conferences (based on their calendars)		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Investigate and pursue funding for further research and implementation of RoR results				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Develop workshop curricula				■	■	■	■						
Host virtual forum to provide a project progress update for the wider public					■								
Plan & advertise virtual symposium						■	■	■					
Host virtual symposium										■			
Meet with advisory board										■			
Prepare and publish final project report as a white paper										■	■	■	■

Digital Products Plan

I. Type
What digital products will you create?

Focus group data: We will create 20 digital audio recordings (which will be saved as .wav and .mp3 files) of focus group sessions which will result in 20 subsequent transcripts (in .docx file formats). The research data will be analyzed using the qualitative analysis software, Dedoose. Dedoose file types created during the analysis phase of a project include .txt, .xml, .xls, and .csv.

Zoom recordings: Over the course of the project, the project team will create a number of anticipated Zoom recordings which will be saved as .mp4 files with .vtt file type transcripts. These will be created as products of the biannual meetings with the project advisory board, periodic virtual forums that will be open to the public, and a virtual symposium to be held in the third year of the project.

Blog posts and other website materials: The project website will be an HTML site, hosted by the College of Information at the University of North Texas. The website will include periodic blog posts, news releases, and other components of the project that will allow the project team to communicate their progress and disseminate ongoing project results with interested stakeholders and the wider public.

White paper, archives database, and workshop curricula: To disseminate project findings, the research team will create a white paper (which will be saved as both .docx and .pdf), a database of archives serving refugee populations (which will be preserved and accessible in .xls, .csv, HTML formats), and workshop curricula (which will be downloadable in .pptx and .pdf formats and available on the project website in HTML format).

Research publications: Peer-reviewed articles and proceedings papers will be hosted by their respective publishers in their specified file types. They will also be hosted (in .pdf format) by the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository.

Project emails: Emails related to the project (in .eml file formats) will be archived and saved by the project team in a secure folder in the University of North Texas' OneDrive.

II. Availability
How will you make your digital products openly available (as appropriate)?

Materials that do not include private or protected information will be shared and promoted widely, as described more thoroughly in the project narrative. Zoom recordings from the virtual forums and symposium, the white paper, archives database, and workshop curricula will all be hosted on both the project website and by the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository. The research publications will be linked on the project website and drafts of the publications will be freely available at the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository.

III. Access

What rights will you assert over your digital products, and what limitations, if any, will you place on their use? Will your products implicate privacy concerns or cultural sensitivities, and if so, how will you address them?

Our goals are to disseminate our research widely while protecting the privacy of our project participants. Therefore, the focus group data will not be accessible to the wider public. Additionally, as members of the project advisory board include members of vulnerable populations—including refugees—the Zoom recordings of advisory board meetings will only be shared with the advisory board and members of the project team. Additionally, as project emails contain sensitive information protected by IRB, these will not be shared beyond the project team.

However, many of the digital products created during this project are meant to be shared widely. Thus, the project team will widely use the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 Creative Commons license to provide both access to and protection of their work. The products that will be licensed with a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license include recordings of virtual forums and the virtual symposium, project blog posts and news releases, the white paper, archives database, and workshop curricula. The copyright of research publications will be investigated to ensure that the project team complies with the policies of research publishers. In cases where they cannot utilize the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license, the authors will retain copyright of the published materials.

IV. Sustainability

How will you address the sustainability of your digital products?

As this project stresses the importance of the preservation and dissemination of project results, sustainability of the project's digital products is a key goal. All public-facing materials will be deposited with the [University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository](#). This will provide long-term care and stewardship of the digital products with a permanent URL for each item.

The materials that will not be accessible by the public will be housed in a secure OneDrive folder that will only be accessible by the project team. These materials will be preserved for a period of time that will be determined by the PI in accordance with the recommendations of the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board.

Data Management Plan

Identify the type(s) and estimated amount of data you plan to collect or generate.
Project data includes *focus group data* which will include 20 digital audio recordings (which will be saved as .wav and .mp3 files) of focus group sessions which will result in 20 subsequent transcripts (in .docx file formats) as well as focus group protocols (in .docx file formats). The focus group data will be analyzed using the qualitative analysis software, Dedoose. Dedoose file types created during the analysis phase of a project include .txt, .xml, .xls, and .csv. Additionally, over the course of the project we will create an anticipated minimum of 20 *Zoom recordings* which will be saved as .mp4 files with .vtt file type transcripts.

To disseminate project findings, the research team will create *a white paper* (which will be saved as both .docx and .pdf formats), a *database of archives* serving refugee populations (which will be preserved and accessible in .xls, .csv, HTML formats), and *workshop curricula* (which will be downloadable in .pptx and .pdf formats and available on the project website in HTML format). *Peer-reviewed articles and proceedings papers* will be hosted by their respective publishers in their specified file types. They will also be hosted (in .pdf format) by the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository.

The project website will be an HTML site, hosted by the College of Information at the University of North Texas. The website will include periodic **blog posts, news releases, and other components** of the project that will allow the project team to communicate their progress and disseminate ongoing project results with interested stakeholders and the wider public. Finally, all **emails** related to the project (in .eml file formats) will be archived and saved by the project team in a shared folder in the University of North Texas' OneDrive.

Will you collect any sensitive information?
This project will include the collection and protection of sensitive and private information. This includes the focus group data which will not be accessible to the wider public to ensure that participant privacy is protected, and the project team adheres to Institutional Review Board protocols. Additional protocols to protect participant data include anonymizing the focus group participants by removing their names and other identifying information from the transcript data, and keeping all human research data secure according to Institutional Review Board protocols.

Furthermore, as members of the project advisory board include members of vulnerable populations—including refugees—the Zoom recordings of advisory board meetings will only be shared with the advisory board and members of the project team via a shared folder in the University of North Texas OneDrive. Team members and advisory board members will need to be invited to access the folder. Finally, as project emails contain sensitive information protected by IRB, these will not be shared beyond the project team.

What technical (hardware and/or software) requirements or dependencies would be necessary for understanding retrieving, displaying, processing, or otherwise reusing the data?

Where possible, this project utilizes a combination of open or near-universal file types along with industry standards. This includes digital audio recordings (which will be saved as .wav and .mp3 files) and database of archives (which will be preserved in .xls and .csv formats).

The focus group data will only be accessed by the project team. It will include the audio recordings mentioned above, .docx transcripts and data created during analysis which will be in .txt, .xml, .xls, and .csv. formats as generated by the software Dedoose. As these formats do not need Dedoose to be accessible, components of the data will be easily exported as needed. Additionally, project emails saved as .eml files can be opened using Microsoft Outlook.

Dissemination materials including the project white paper, workshop curricula, and research publications will be preserved in .pdf format and accessible for the long term via the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository. The .mp4 Zoom recordings will also be hosted by the North Texas Scholarly Works Repository with captions created from associated .vtt files. These will be accessible by anyone using contemporary internet browsers.

What documentation (e.g., consent agreements, data documentation, codebooks, metadata, and analytical and procedural information) will you capture or create along with the data? Where will the documentation be stored and in what format(s)?
Focus group documentation, including consent agreements, emails with participants, focus group protocols, codebooks, metadata, and all other data generated in Dedoose will be stored in a secure folder in University of North Texas' OneDrive. This folder will only be accessible by the project team. The project team will work with the Institutional Review Board to assess if the anonymized research data can be contributed to the University of North Texas Data Repository.

Other documentation including Phase Two research notes, metadata, and research drafts will be evaluated by the project team on an ongoing basis. While all of these data will be stored in a shared folder accessible by the project team, the team will also select data for contribution to the University of North Texas Data Repository.

What is your plan for managing, disseminating, and preserving data after the completion of the award-funded project?
Dissemination materials and research data that does not include sensitive materials will be made accessible for the long term via the University of North Texas Scholarly Works Repository and University of North Texas Data Repository.

Private and sensitive data will be stored in a secure folder in University of North Texas' OneDrive. The term of preservation of this data will be in accordance with Institutional Review Board requirements.

When and how frequently will you review your Data Management Plan? How will the implementation be monitored?

The PI will work with the graduate research assistants to develop and manage data management protocols. The project team will dedicate the first team meeting of every month to assessing the team's progress and effectiveness, including of the project data management.

Organizational Profile

The University of North Texas

The University of North Texas (UNT) is a four-year public Doctoral University with a Carnegie Classification of Highest Research Activity (R1). The institution was founded in 1890 as a normal and teacher-training institute; its name changed from North Texas State University in 1988. UNT is in Denton, Texas, a town of over 151,219 in the Dallas/Fort Worth area of over 6.4 million. The University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees. UNT is the 6th largest university in Texas, and among the 30 largest in the United States, with a combined enrollment of over 42,000.

The mission statement of UNT: "At the University of North Texas, our caring and creative community empowers our students to thrive in a rapidly changing world."

The responsible party for the mission statement is the Office of the President; it was revised and approved in February 2020.

The College of Information

The UNT College of Information (CI) is a member of the iSchools organization and is comprised of three departments: Department of Information Science, Department of Linguistics, and Department of Learning Technologies. Faculty and graduate students are highly productive in a wide variety of research efforts related to human information seeking, learning, and use behaviors; human-computer interactions; development, delivery, and evaluation of information and education systems and services; information and education policies and ethics in public and private sectors; computational linguistics; and the study of endangered languages. The CI has multiple research centers and labs and a record of success in obtaining research funding from sources such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Texas Education Agency, and others.

The Department of Information Science

The Department of Information Science (DIS) faculty is currently comprised of 26 full-time faculty, including 20 tenure-system faculty. As of the Fall 2021 semester, the Department of Information Science (DIS) had 1,923 students enrolled in its graduate and undergraduate programs. The DIS master's degree programs in Information Science and Library Science are accredited by the American Library Association and ranked 20th nationwide by U.S. News & World Report. A new master's degree program in Data Science was added in 2018. The DIS Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Information Science offers seven concentrations created and implemented jointly with other academic units, in addition to a general program of study. The DIS faculty are diverse and, through residential and distance learning programs, proudly serve a diverse student population from across the state, nation, and world.