

iDigBio's Public Participation Platform Survey

Thank you for taking the time to consider and respond to the following questions. iDigBio will make your responses available to the natural history collections community, both as an online resource available to anyone, and as a reference specifically for participants in our upcoming Public Participation in Digitization of Biodiversity Collections course.

Please return your completed survey to Michael Denslow (michael.denslow@gmail.com). And thank you for your time!

Questions:

1. Name and email of person responding to this survey:

Emily Cain (caine@si.edu) and Caitlin Haynes (haynesce@si.edu)

2. Name of public participation platform:

Smithsonian Transcription Center

3. Website:

transcription.si.edu

4. Company or group responsible for maintaining platform:

Smithsonian Institution > Office of the Chief Information Officer > Library and Archives Support Branch

5. Long-term funding structure for maintaining platform (e.g., grants, membership, private):

This program is supported by federal funding appropriated to the Smithsonian Institution.

6. Brief summary highlighting the market niche for this platform:

Launched in 2013, Transcription Center is the Smithsonian Institution's largest crowdsourcing platform, enlisting the help of over 58,000 digital volunteers to transcribe and review over 946,000 pages of materials from across the Smithsonian's vast museum and archival collections. With projects ranging in content from currency proof sheets and historic audio recordings to biodiversity specimens and astronomical logbooks, Transcription Center draws curious learners around the world looking to contribute to accessibility and discoverability of knowledge in their spare time.

7. Types of biodiversity specimens most common on the platform:

Since 2013, the Transcription Center has supported and launched more than 85,000 pages of digitized collections related to biodiversity, including scientific field books, bumblebee specimen cards, and labels of Fossil Marine Invertebrates from the Department of Paleobiology. Most commonly launched on the platform are botanical specimen sheets from the National Museum of Natural History's Botany Department, of which over 52,000 have been transcribed to date.

8. Types of tasks supported by the platform (e.g., transcription, measurement, georeferencing):

Transcription

9. Other disciplines that utilize the platform (e.g., camera traps):

The Transcription Center is supported by archival, library, and museum staff from across the Smithsonian Institution who contribute digitized collections content related to many different topics and disciplines beyond biodiversity and citizen science, including art, history, culture, etc.

10. Example of the types of institutions/collections using your platform:

Transcription Center is available for use by all repositories within the Smithsonian Institution's 19 (soon to be 21) museums, 9 research centers, and the National Zoo. Current collections available for transcription include materials from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Archives of American Art, and many more. In special cases, the Smithsonian has developed MOUs with external repositories and organizations to make non-Smithsonian collections available in Transcription Center, such as the Freedmen's Bureau Records (held by the National Archives and Records Administration) and the William Ockleford Oldman Archive (held by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa).

11. Any restrictions as to who can use the platform:

In accordance with the [Smithsonian Kids Online Privacy Statement](#), volunteers must be 14 years of age or older to create an account on Transcription Center and other Smithsonian platforms.

12. Primary language(s) supported:

English is the primary language supported on Transcription Center, and most of our site content (instructions, resources, project descriptions, etc.) is available only in English. However, our volunteer community represents a range of language skills and has transcribed content in over 26 different languages.

13. Primary volunteer base or core users of the platform:

With an easy sign-up process, no minimum participation requirements, and 24/7 availability, Transcription Center has always been appealing to a wide range of people interested in history, art, and science looking for a flexible and educational volunteering option. During the pandemic, as the demand for digital service opportunities increased, our volunteer base expanded even further with notable upticks in participation from students and corporate team members. Our registered volunteer community currently numbers over 58,000, with the majority falling in the 18-35 age range. High school and college students, educators, retired and active librarians, editors, history enthusiasts, scientists, genealogists, and everything in between are an active part of our diverse community.

14. Brief description of method(s) for quality control/quality assurance available on the platform:

Review: As the second mandatory step in our process, each transcription must be Reviewed by a volunteer who did not contribute to the original transcription to check for accuracy and completion of the transcription data. Within 10 minutes of passing Review, transcription data is made fully text searchable across Smithsonian databases.

Approval: Optionally, representatives from the repository can Approve the transcription as an additional stamp of quality.

Always Editable: Because our platform is designed to deliver data directly to Smithsonian systems and databases, transcription data authored on our site is always editable. As we learn more about the collections and get more eyes on the data due to enhanced discoverability, corrections and updates can be made by site admins and those updates reflected across all systems within 10 minutes.

15. Types of media supported by the platform (e.g., image, video, 3D):

Image, Audio

16. File formats supported by the platform. Indicate both input and output as appropriate:

Content – as mp3 files or digital image assets - JPEGs / TIFFs – is imported into the Smithsonian Transcription Center through the Institution’s internal digital asset management or content management systems. Once transcriptions are completed

(meaning transcribed and reviewed by platform digital volunteers) public users can export completed transcribed data as a downloadable PDF. This PDF includes the transcription alongside the original digitized image asset or a time-stamped, captioned, webVTT file (for sound projects), and contains collections metadata information as well as Smithsonian terms of use. Internal Smithsonian staff contributing projects to the Transcription Center can export completed transcriptions of their collections by PDF (public-facing view) and/or as a plain text file, CSV file, XML file, or webVTT file (on the backend administrative side of Transcription Center).

17. Workflow customization available to the user:

N/A

18. Costs to collections to use the platform:

N/A

19. Representative for potential users to contact:

Emily Cain, Community Coordinator, and Caitlin Haynes, Program Coordinator, at transcribe@si.edu

20. Best resources for additional information about the platform (e.g., presentations, brochures, recorded webinars, peer-reviewed papers):

This 2016 focus issue of *Collections* serves as a good starting point for an overview of background information related to Transcription Center's development and programmatic approach: <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/cjx/12/2>

Additional resources, written for our volunteer audience, can be found at transcription.si.edu/tips.

Transcription Center's YouTube channel also contains assorted presentations, recorded webinars, and additional material:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwnTgRjfvijY7QUBOzAxH3w>.

21. Data ownership or usage policies (e.g., publication, sharing of data, public access):

All collections content – including digital assets and transcribed data - in the Smithsonian Transcription Center is subject to the Smithsonian Institution’s terms of use (<https://www.si.edu/termsfuse>).