

## Gifts of Art Interview Annotated Notes

### Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Corina Kesler

Note taker: Chong Li

**Role:** This protocol is for the Visual Arts Coordinator at the Gifts of Art who also has substantial data management duties.

### Overarching Question

Based on your dual-roles at the Gifts of Art Program what are the three most important changes you would like see happen in the near future with the submission process? What is your overall vision for attracting higher-quality new artists?

### Key Questions

#### Interviewee roles descriptions within the organization

During our first meeting, you mentioned that, in addition to being the Visual Arts Coordinator for the Gifts of Art Program, your duties also include managing the data/artist applications entering the system.

- Could we go over the distribution and responsibilities inherent to these different managerial roles?
- Who else worked on the online application submission process and when? When was this process last updated and what were some of the updates/changes performed?

#### Data input, flow, and management:

Next, could you walk me through the process of accessing, downloading, and managing the submission data?

- What are the main complaints from this perspective/the back end of this process?
- What are the main complaints from the users/submitting artists?
- When it comes to getting help with data flow, input, and management who else in the organization could step up and assist you?

#### Problem Areas/Opportunity for improvement:

If I remember correctly, during our first interview you mentioned two instances when the system fails to work properly: one, it does not include siloe-ing capabilities for previously input data and two, there are size limitations to the data artists can upload.

- Could you go over some specific examples and explain how such instances impacted the smooth operation of the submission process?
- Does the present management system include a filing system for the artists bios/contact information, artwork type, and number of past submissions?
- From your perspective as a data manager and a liaison with the artists, would such a distinct filing system be helpful?

#### Shifting Target Artist:

In our initial meeting, you also mentioned wanting a more diverse pool of artists.

- What did the last pool of artist look like?
- What types of artists do you look for and what would you like to see?
- Have there been any changes to strategies used this past call to solicit more artists like the ones just mentioned?
- What kinds of restrictions are there on artists you accept?
  - What are some of the reasons you declined artists whose art you enjoyed?

#### **Concluding Questions**

##### Expectations:

Looking forward, how do you see the organization and its programs change?

- From our initial conversation, I understood that there were some recent changes pertaining to the exhibition rotations cycles, namely, extending the time period artwork is exhibited in the hospital galleries. Is this likely to change again in the near future?
- What other institutional art programs similar to Gifts of Art do you find inspirational and successful and why?

## Interview Notes

[This interview is conducted by Corina Kesler (interviewer) and Chong Li (note taker) on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The interviewee is Kathi Talley, the visual arts coordinator of Gifts of Art.]

**Comment [CL1]:** Blue notes require follow-up interviews. Red notes are new insights.

[When we met Kathi, she was opening the local software for downloading application information. She showed up the process of using this software]

**Comment [CL2]:** This working process was repeated for several times later in the interview. Kathi seemed quite proficient in this workflow.

**Comment [IG3R2]:** Is this important software?

**Comment [CL4R2]:** This software is quite important in downloading and managing data, while it is so antiquated that it becomes cumbersome and hard to use.

### Introductions

I (Interviewer): Hi Kathi, it's great to see you again. Just to reintroduce ourselves, I am Corina and this is Chong. To start off, I'll just review what this project is about and what we are trying to accomplish. So our team is building a recommendation for you to help streamline your current Call for Exhibits online-submission process. The intention for today's interview is to get a holistic understanding of the Call for Exhibit cycle, its organization, and your role with respect to submissions and its data.

So today, I will be conducting the interview and Chong will be taking notes - this should take about 1.5 hours. We'd like to spend part of this interview observing how you work on the Gifts of Art. To get this data, we are simply going to observe you as you work on the data and talk us through your process. Please feel free to check your messages or take phone calls, as you would naturally do while working. And for the other part of the interview, we will be asking questions more generally about the processes of the call for exhibit cycle.

**Comment [CL5]:** We did not manage to observe Kathi work contextually. When she was operating on the data or management software, we were talking with her all the time.

We can better conduct the observation part later by asking the interviewees to work in a relaxed state, and observing them quietly (only disturbing if necessary).

**Comment [IG6R5]:** Were you able to take notes about how she was using the software, even if you continued the interview throughout?

So before we get started, if at any point during this interview you feel uncomfortable, please feel free to stop. And once this interview is complete, I will share my overall understanding of your process and confirm we are on the same page.

**Comment [CL7R5]:** As a result, the notes focused more on the talking part rather than how she used the software.

Lastly, to backup our note taking, could we record this interview? Our team will only have access to the audio and will be used solely for the purpose of this project.

**Comment [CL8]:** The confirmation process helped us clarify what we did understand and what we were confused about. However, we did not manage to check some important figures like the number of applicants, acceptance rate, and commission percentage.

K (Kathi): Of course.

I: Great, let's get started. We understand that your duty is visual arts coordinator, and you also have substantial data management duties.

K: Yes, that's true. I have been working here for 16 years. And I also manage the database of artists and art organizations.

### Overarching Question

I: Based on your dual-roles at the Gifts of Art Program what are the three most important changes you would like to see happen in the near future with the submission process?

K: I would like the following three changes:

1. Change the dated website which looks like 1999 style
2. The reach: More reaching to artists for CFE
3. Better quality of artists

[Kathi opened the excel sheet of applications, and showed how the cumbersome database looked like]. In overall, a better functioning for the three, the data and application process is really cumbersome. In this sheet, it starts from this year, but last year's data is also included. And the data is not sorted.

I: [repeated the three main points]

### Key Questions

I: Could we go over the distribution and responsibilities inherent to these different managerial roles, perhaps the visual arts coordinator, what does that title mean? And also the data management, do you have to do it everyday, or only in application season?

K: In the application season, it's pretty much updating the CFE database. We have two main databases, one for individual artists, one for organizations. Before we even start, we have to update this. Because throughout the years, the database has become too large.

I: Since this is new to me, you mentioned the submissions are from both organizations and artists?

K: Yes. So they can be listed in the same database, but it's easier to manage them in two databases [Kathi showed the organization's database]. For organizations, I try to find the contact of each organization, and email them individually. There are 274 contacts for

**Comment [CL9]:** This answer to this question is slightly out of interview flow. Part of the answer is biased by the previous question about the dual duty. Kathi broke down the answer into two parts: arts coordinator part, and data management part.

Instead, we should have guided the question to incorporate both art side and data side. The answer to this question should have balanced both artist solicitation and data management, because Kathi did address data a lot in the following interview.

**Comment [CL10]:** This part of the answer was not closely related to the question due to the above reasons.

**Comment [CL11]:** This question was more related to the 'dual duty' question. Therefore, the overarching question should have been asked before the 'dual duty' question.

**Comment [CL12]:** These two questions should be asked separately.

**Comment [IG13R12]:** Why's that?

**Comment [CL14R12]:** When we asked these questions together, Kathi only answered to the latter one. And the role of arts coordinator was not responded. We should ask about the role of arts coordinator in the follow-up interviews.

**Comment [CL15]:** Our client care more about easy usability as they do not have data specialists to manage the data.

**Comment [IG16R15]:** By 'we should' do you mean GOA should?

**Comment [CL17R15]:** Therefore, we should provide different data management and solicitation solutions for our client to better manage the data of both artists and art organization.

organizations, and about 900 individuals [Kathi showed the long list of organization/artists information].

**Comment [CL18]:** The numbers match with the cumbersome data mentioned above.

A way of categorizing them should help with data management.

I: So everyone in the lists will be emailed?

K: Yes, that's true. The emails sent to them are very simple, and I simply blind copy the email to everybody [Note taker took pictures of the emails GoA sent to artists and organizations]. And everyone is labeled rejected or not. And someone might ask for mailing, but it's getting less and less. So I try to email whenever I can.

**Comment [CL19]:** This way of sending emails lacks target, which may lead to ignorance of the email.

**Comment [CL20]:** Our client sought to transfer to a fully online platform for both calling for artists and submission process.

I: So how many submissions do you estimate receive throughout the years?

K: I would say about 120 every year. But the number is not many considering the number we reached out to. Half of them are contacted online. But the the other half, I call them or reach out in person. For organizations, I ask them whether they would like to post ad on their website [Kathi showed some websites posting ads of GoA]. Literally, I also send basic emails to organizations [Kathi showed the email correspondence with one organization]. Luckily, I got this back, but not everyone replies.

**Comment [CL21]:** This seems contradictory to our clients' wish to change to a fully online process, as they still get half of the submissions by phone calls or personal reach-out.

**Comment [CL22]:** This message, as well as the number of submissions stated above, indicates the inefficiency of the art solicitation process.

I: Did you mention GoA spent money on recruiting artists?

K: Yes, we used paid ads [showing one ads on one website]. We have to pay for this one. I don't remember how much it is. But actually it was very successful, we got quite a few people through this website So that's basically what I do electronically for organizations.

**Comment [CL23]:** Kathi mentioned one site worked very well. It might be helpful to find websites which are similar to this site, and target at these websites to post ads.

I: Do you have to type in everyone's email address manually?

K: Yes [Kathi found documents of the artists' database]. So I had my work-study students to type in the email addresses. We start the new cycle every year in January, so we have to type all the information at that time.

I: Who else worked on the online application submission process and when is switch, I am assuming there is a switch, from hard copy to online submission?

K: We have the database from the beginning, and we just keep adding to it. I don't remember when it was established. We used to look at, before we got online, the mails and used slides or CD to accept applications [Kathi went to someone else for the time of stopping receiving slides]. So it was 5 years ago when we stopped receiving slides and started online process.

**Comment [CL24]:** We should have asked more information about the format of previous submissions, and if they worked well.

We could conduct follow-up interviews about how the previous formats worked.

I: So has the online submission been changed?

K: The only thing that changed was to enlarge the acceptable file.

*Data input, flow, and management:*

I: Next, could you walk us through the process of accessing, downloading, and managing the submission data?

K: It's a two-step process for every artist [Kathi showed a printed file of instructions for downloading data, and showed the downloading process on computer - opening excel - data - external data - using SQL to access GoA data - importing data]. This is the data for two years, so the data is not cleared out.

**Comment [CL25]:** The understanding of this process helped with providing suggestions about cleaning and organizing the database.

We should provide suggestions about automated data downloading and categorizing software or excel formulas.

I: So the data is organized by date?

K: So the data just comes in this way. If I want to dump and manage the data, I can sort the data [Kathi sorted the data by name]. It would be nice to sort things more easily. The other data is more problematic. Because what I need to do with the other data for the images, I have to go through all the names for each of these person [Kathi showed the folders she made for the submissions this year]. So what I usually do is to download the pictures, and select the download to the folder I created for each one. It's very time-consuming.

**Comment [CL26]:** The images are the main pain-point of collecting and managing data. Since the images are downloaded and categorized manually.

I: So how are these folders used for judge?

**Comment [CL27]:** Should have asked more detailed information about the judge criteria. For example, some artists' cases of why they are accepted or declined.

K: Elaine and I are the judge. So I organized the folders according the type of artists. For example, we add 3d in front of the folder names. To do a quick review, I just look at the icons. Because I am not going to print everyone's resume or reference sheets. If I am interested in their small icons, I will print out their information.

**Comment [CL28]:** Some hints of how to organize the data when develop automatic data download process in the future. Keeping these rules will help our client better adapt to the new system.

I: How many artists are accepted every year?

K: This is the schedule for this year [Kathi pointed to a schedule sticker in front of her]. So we have 9 shows at the same time every year and rotates them every 3 months.

I: So how many artists would you say submit every year?

**Comment [CL29]:** We have got the answer to this question in the previous interviews. This question is not necessary. Alternatively, we could ask how the number of submissions change during the recent years?

K: Our call is for the whole calendar year. The CFE begins in March and ends in mid May but we always extend two weeks to the end of May. And we will notify every artist by July 15th. When we have openings, we start to call people.

I: So what would artists do if they encounter problems during submission?

K: Usually, I get calls from them because my name is listed. Some people will submit several times because they are not sure if they have submitted successfully. And some people will email me submission in the end because they can not succeed in the online submission. This year, I got 7 people emailing me, which is fine. For some people, it is a browser issue, and they cannot fill in the form on iPad. If people call me saying they are having problems with the application, I ask them to change browser or check picture size. If they still cannot make it, I will tell them to email me.

**Comment [CL30]:** This suggested some common problems of the online submission process. According to the answers, we can get a general sense of the existing problems. It seems like a simple guide to the online submission process will be very helpful.

I: Is there any automated confirmation for successful submission?

K: I thinks there is, at least I do. I suppose they do, too. But I got 3,4 people this year submitting multiple times. There are also people calling if we have received their application. I would tell them we have not started the reviewing process yet and will call them if there is any problem.

**Comment [CL31]:** We need to check with artists about auto-confirmation.

I: In terms of data manipulation, is there anybody else who help you with this process?

**Comment [CL32]:** This question seemed to be out of flow. There should have been a transition questions. This is a bad instance of strictly following the interview protocol.

K: No, I only have the work-study students to help me with the data manipulation process.

*Problem Areas/Opportunity for improvement:*

I: If I remember correctly, during our first interview you mentioned two instances when the system fails to work properly: firstly, it does not include capabilities for previously input data, and secondly, there are size limitations to the data artists can upload?

**Comment [CL33]:** This question is repetitive with the question asked earlier about 'the biggest three changes'. Besides, it is better for us to analyze the problem and provide improvement suggestions rather than asking our client directly. As a result, the answer to this question is not very useful.

K: The jpeg they submitted can be too big. That's part of the limitations of the software.

### Concluding Questions

I: Looking forward, how do you see the organization and its programs change? From our initial conversation, I understood that there were some recent changes pertaining to the exhibition rotations cycles, namely, extending the time period artwork is exhibited in the hospital galleries. Is this likely to change again in the near future?

**Comment [CL34]:** The 'changes' question was repeated again. And the answer to this question was more related to data, which was very different from the answers to the similar questions above. We should have better organized the questions, using more general descriptions to introduce this overarching question.

K: So I would like to have an ideal way of organizing data. A more efficient way of merging images and information, creating automatic folders without the two steps.

**Comment [CL35]:** According to these questions about 'changes', the changes our client would like to see were:

1. Change the dated website look.
2. More reaching to artists.
3. Better quality of art works.
4. Efficient data management tools.
5. Efficient online submission process.

I: What other institutional art programs similar to Gifts of Art do you find inspirational and successful and why?

K: Nobody does this in hospital. GoA is the benchmark of this kind. And now we see some other organizations copying our work flow. When it comes to hospitals, we are the standard. I think the Institute for Humanity has a similar program in one space.

I: Just to confirmed, as we heard about this in the initial meeting, is it true that Gifts of Art only take 15 percent of commissions?

**Comment [CL36]:** It was a good choice to use the concluding questions to confirm the commission rate, as our client client mentioned the main mission of gifts of art is not to sell the artworks.

K: No, we take 35 percent commission, and most traditional galleries take 50-60 percent. It's always good to make confirmations.

I: Thank you very much for your time. I think we are doing great scheduling all the interviews for the artists. We will probably conduct all the interviews with other artists by the end of next week. Is there anything else we didn't discuss that you had some thoughts on?

K: Everything looks good.

I: Again we appreciate your time and please feel free to reach out to us. I'll follow up with an e-mail to make sure you have our contact information. Hope to see you again.



## Reflection

In general, this interview was well-conducted, and we were able to catch meaningful insights into the overarching question of *‘what changes our client would like to see to their submission process and platform’*. Before the interview, we studied the interviewee’s background, job roles, and wrote a useful interview protocol which helped to guide the content and pace of the interview. However, there were some inappropriate questions in the protocol, among which some were repetitive, and some were out of scope and interruptive to the interview flow. For example, the *‘what changes would you like to see’* question was asked three times, and there lacked transitional questions or guides between *‘artist solicitation’* process and *‘data management’* process.

For the skill of the interviewer, Corina (the interviewer) did a great job in conducting the interview effectively. She was using appropriate language and tones. She also kept the interview in the right direction without digressing too much. In addition, she could come up with follow-up questions which were not listed on the protocol based on interviewee’s answers. However, some of the follow-up questions were not closely related to the purpose of this interview. For example, the question *‘In terms of data manipulation, is there anybody else who help you with this process?’* was not necessary. Generally, Kathi (the interviewee) enjoyed the interview and provided useful information.

As the note taker, I also took pictures of important screenshot of the interviewer’s computer, and took some copies of related files. There were basic interactions among the interviewer, interviewee, and me, which helped me better engage with the interview, and catch meaningful insights. In addition, I checked with the interviewer about some vague answers and notes at the end of the interview. However, I found the notes slightly unorganized as there was too much information and some of the information was too similar. I should have printed the interview protocol and left blank space for notes under each of the questions.

To conclude, we conducted a good interview, which helped us understand the aspirations of our client and the main problems they encountered. We kept a good pace of the interview and gained meaningful insights. We also took helpful notes during the interview and brought artifacts from the interviewee. To make our interview better, we could improve from the following aspects. Firstly, we should have checked the protocol about repetitions between questions and their relevance. Secondly, we should have provided more scenarios for follow-up questions and checked how they fit the purpose of this interview. Thirdly, we should have prepared better note-taking materials and format of taking notes.

**Comment [IG37]:** So in general do you think it’s good to follow the protocols more closely or add follow-up questions as you think of them?

**Comment [CL38R37]:** I think it is better to think of more follow-up question scenarios, and adjust (choose one, delete follow-up, or come up with a new one) the follow-up questions according to the interview context.