**Survey on “Next Steps for FAST”: Summary of Results, Conclusions, and Next Steps (February 8, 2018)**

**Background**

In summer 2017, a small group of librarians from five large research institutions in the U.S. participated in informal discussions with OCLC about the future of Faceted Application of Subject Terminology (FAST). To better gauge interest in the current features of OCLC FAST, as well as potential enhancements to the existing product, OCLC and the “FAST Five” developed and conducted a survey in late 2017. The group envisioned this survey as a more broadly distributed follow-up to a round-robin question on FAST discussed in the OCLC Research Library Partners Metadata Managers Focus Group in June 2016 and later summarized by Karen Smith-Yoshimura in a [Hanging Together blog post](https://hangingtogether.org/?p=5739).

**The Survey**

The OCLC / FAST Five group distributed the “Next Steps for FAST” survey, using SurveyMonkey, broadly through a number of listservs. The target audience was not solely catalogers, but staff “who apply subject terminology to their metadata,” including personnel who work with institutional repositories, in management, and in a few cases library system vendors. Participating institutions and organizations were encouraged to distribute the survey liberally among their staffs.

The survey consisted of 14 questions, some encouraging free-text responses and others using a multiple-choice framework. These questions were divided into four categories, as follows:

Demographics

1. Institution or organization name
2. Unit [within the organization]
3. Your position in your organization

Current Usage

1. How familiar are you with FAST and the purposes it’s meant to serve?
2. Is your institution/company currently using FAST?
3. If no, why isn’t your institution/company using FAST?
4. If yes, how is your institution/company using or planning to use FAST?
5. Also if yes, what are the benefits of using FAST for your institution/company?
6. Are you currently using Uniform Resource Identifiers (URIs) for subject term management for at least some of your metadata?

FAST Features and Functionality

1. Please rate the following existing features and potential enhancements in terms of their importance to your institution or company.
2. What other FAST features or functionality would you like to see?
3. Would OCLC’s long-term commitment to sustain and maintain FAST influence your adoption or increase use of FAST?
4. Would you advise your institution or company to pay for the features or functionality you indicated were important or critical?

**Summary of Results**

By encouraging participating institutions and organizations to distribute the survey to “all staff … who apply subject terminology to their metadata,” the survey results revealed two problems. First, larger institutions and organizations generally submitted more responses than smaller institutions. Second, the results exhibited inconsistencies among responses from staff not only within the same institution or organization but within the same work unit – even in regard to whether the institution or organization currently uses FAST or not. Thus, the results are not as precisely calibrated as the team would have liked. For some of its analysis, the group arbitrarily selected one individual set of responses from each participating institution or organization and focused only on those institutions currently using FAST (e.g., see Question #8 below). While this approach is not ideal, the team believes the aggregate results of the survey are still directionally valid enough for the purposes of the project: “to better gauge interest in the current features of OCLC FAST, as well as potential enhancements to the existing product.”

*Question #1: Institution or organizational name*. There were 586 individual responses to the survey, chiefly from the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (95%).

*Question #2: Work unit.* The majority of responses (85%) came from individuals who identified themselves, at least in part, with metadata / cataloging / technical services departments. A significant percentage of responses came also from staff involved in: digital collections (23%), archives (15%), institutional repositories (11%), and public services (10%).

*Question #3: Position of respondent*. The majority of responses came from staff who identified themselves as metadata librarians or catalogers (57%). Administrators or supervisors also contributed significantly (21%) to the results.

*Question #4: Familiarity with FAST*. A majority of respondents (60%) indicated they were “somewhat familiar” with FAST. Twenty-seven percent (27%) indicated they were “very familiar” with FAST. Of those who also indicated that their institution was already using or planning to use FAST, 47% asserted they were “very familiar” with FAST, with less than 1% indicating they were “not at all familiar” with FAST.

*Question #5: Current or planned usage of FAST?* Thirty percent (30%) or respondents from 113 institutions indicated that they are currently using FAST. Seven percent (7%) responded “not yet, but we plan to.”

*Question #6: If not using FAST, why not?* The most common response to this question (58%) was “our institution or organization prefers using pre-coordinated subject headings.” Twenty-two percent (22%) responded that “our systems don’t currently provide FAST as an option.” Twenty-one percent (21%) indicated that they were “unsure of the stability and/or maintenance model of FAST.”

*Question #7: If currently using or planning to use FAST, how are you using it?* There were a number of categories of responses to this question that bear mentioning:

* 74% accept records with FAST headings applied by others
* 45% add FAST to records describing digital collections
* 31% apply FAST to records for new resources added
* 24% add FAST to records for previously cataloged materials
* 24% apply FAST to records that the institution is publishing or planning to publish as linked data
* 21% add FAST to records for materials in institutional repositories
* 21% add FAST to records for items in special or distinctive collections
* 20% apply FAST to records to help reduce backlogs of items lacking subject headings
* 18% add FAST to records describing archival collections
* 17% use FAST for prototyping alternate ways of creating, displaying, or managing metadata
* 14% use FAST for theses and dissertations
* 8% apply FAST to records for material in languages in which the institution lacks expertise

*Question #8: If currently using or planning to use FAST, what are its perceived benefits?* There were a number of categories of responses to this question that bear mentioning. Out of all responses:

* 57% cited more subject access in records that would otherwise lack it
* 55% cited improved discovery in faceted environments
* 51% cited more efficient workflows (FAST is easier to apply)
* 45% cited better support for linked data implementation
* 38% noted that FAST web tools and authority file were freely available
* 36% cited reduced time needed for training staff
* 34% cited a wider pool of staff who can apply subject terminology
* 31% cited easier authorities maintenance based on identifiers rather than string matching
* 19% cited reduced costs
* 19% cited reduced backlogs
* 18% cited crowd-sourcing to apply subjects beyond library staff

The team chose to break down further the responses to this question to include only those institutions or organizations that are currently using FAST and counting only one response per institution (see first paragraph in this section). Of these responses:

* 49% cited more subject access in records that would otherwise lack it
* 40% cited improved discovery in faceted environments
* 35% cited more efficient workflows (FAST is easier to apply)
* 32% noted that FAST web tools and authority file were freely available
* 30% cited better support for linked data implementation
* 25% cited reduced time needed for training staff
* 24% cited easier authorities maintenance based on identifiers rather than string matching
* 22% cited a wider pool of staff who can apply subject terminology
* 18% cited crowd-sourcing to apply subjects beyond library staff
* 15% cited reduced costs
* 12% cited reduced backlogs

*Question #9: Is your institution or organization currently using URIs for subject term management for at least some metadata*. Forty-seven percent (47%) of respondents answered no, 38% yes, and 15% didn’t know.

*Question #10: Ranking of features and potential enhancements*. The following figures refer to the number of responses that ranked the features/enhancements as important or critical to using FAST:

* Mechanism to support ongoing maintenance: 121
* Production tool for FAST heading look-up and seamless addition to record at point of cataloging: 108
* Ability to request new FAST headings: 89
* Ability to generate FAST from LCSH strings automatically when doing original cataloging or enhancing a record in Connexion: 87
* Current SearchFAST (the search interface that simplifies heading selection): 86
* Current algorithmic addition of FAST headings with the identifier in the $0 to WorldCat records with LCSH: 81
* Ability to create and submit new FAST headings: 80
* Current FAST converter (a web application that converts LCSH to FAST): 74
* Batch conversion of local LCSH to FAST: 70
* Current functionality in OCLC WorldShare Record Manager to add FAST with the “text” view in editor: 38
* More robust FAST headings for medical areas: 30

*Question #11: Other FAST features or functional you’d like to see*. There were 43 separate free-text responses to this question, which this summary report will forgo (but can be made available to interested parties on request).

*Question #12: Would OCLC’s long-term commitment to sustain and maintain FAST influence your adoption or increased use of FAST?* Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents said yes, 18% weren’t sure. Fewer than 2% said no.

*Question #13: Would you advise your institution or company to pay for the features or functionality you indicated were important or critical?* Fifty-one percent (51%) responded yes, 49% no.

**Conclusions**

The project team drew the following conclusions from the survey results:

1. Although not yet fully supported by OCLC, there is already considerable use of, or interest in, a production version of FAST (see Question #5).
2. Although OCLC originally envisioned the chief benefits of FAST would be greater efficiencies and lower labor costs in processing, the survey indicates that the two highest ranked perceived benefits of FAST relate to discovery: more subject access and improved discovery in faceted environments (see Question #8). These were followed by a number of benefits that would could indeed increase efficiency and lower labor cost on the supply side, which in turn could also translate into increased support for user services.
3. The most cited reasons for not using FAST are: a preference for pre-coordinated subject headings, library systems don’t currently support FAST, and a lack of confidence in the future of FAST as a supported product (see Question #6). This last concern was sharply reinforced by the aggregate response to the question regarding the influence a long-term commitment by OCLC to support the product would have on adoption or increased use of FAST. Eighty-one percent (81%) replied yes, with fewer than 2% responding no (see Question #12).
4. Leading the ranking of critical features and enhancements were: a mechanism to support ongoing maintenance and a production tool for FAST heading look-up and seamless addition of FAST to records at the point of cataloging (see Question #10).

**Next Steps**

Influenced, in part, by the results of this survey, OCLC intends to release FAST in production this summer. As a minimum, this means that the current version of FAST will be moved to a production server with 24x7 support. OCLC has adjusted staffing to keep support for this initial production release cost-neutral. However, the business case for further enhancements to FAST will depend on how widely the service is adopted.

To prepare for this summer’s initial release, OCLC has been interviewing staff from several libraries that are currently using, or interested in using, FAST to verify and better understand use cases for the tool. These institutions include: the British Library, Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Harvard University, the Ohio State University, RMIT University Press, and the University of Connecticut.

Representatives from OCLC and the FAST Five will be providing preliminary reports on the “Next Steps for FAST” survey at ALA Midwinter in Denver. They plan to provide fuller reports at ALA Annual in New Orleans in 2018.

Promote the routine use of FAST through organizations such as the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC); as adoption increases, encourage system vendors to provide greater support for the use of FAST, especially in regard to making their systems linked-data-ready.