

Card Sorting Exercise and Resulting Information Architecture

Process:

Sets of cards and topic headings developed by five card sorting volunteers were laid out and diagramed as a graphic hierarchy ("tree"). The resulting layouts were written down and then analyzed. For Result Set 1, the highest-level categories (first sort) used by each participant were written down and tabulated, resulting in a list of unique categories and a count of "uses" for each (Matches). As a second phase, these same results were reclassified based on the reviewer's thoughts on how similar categories could be grouped -- that is, categories which were technically unique, but fairly similar to others, were regrouped. These "Proximate Matches" were then also tabulated. Note that because some Proximate Match groups were aggregates of Match groups, total scores for any one may exceed 5.

This Process was repeated using the 2nd Level Categories, which were the results of sorting card within each Top Level Category (in other words, the results of sorting each group resulting from the first sort.) This brought out a finer granularity of categories than the Top Level analysis, and also showed some convergences that occurred between sorters who may have grouped cards differently at the top level. Note here that because there is a much larger number of 2nd level categories than of top level categories, aggregate numbers in the Proximate Matches may grow quite larger than 5.

Collation:

Result Set 1: Top Level Category Convergence

Matches: [Hits/5 Category]

5	Mississippi River Info and Resources
4	FMR Organizational Info
2	Past Projects
2	Present Projects
2	Projects
2	Site Updates
2	Citizen Action Opportunities
2	Events and Participation Info
2	Birding/Ecology/Phenology
2	Membership/Supporting FMR

Proximate Matches: [Hits/5 Category]

8	Mississippi River Info and Resources
7	Individual Involvement/Volunteering/Participation
6	FMR Project Work

- 5 FMR Organizational Info
- 3 Communications: Web Site and Mississippi Messages

Result Set 2: 2nd Level Category Convergence

Matches: [Hits/5 Category]

- 4 Past Projects
- 4 Current Projects
- 4 Current Action Alerts
- 4 Volunteer Events
- 4 Educational Events and News
- 4 Donate/Make a Contribution
- 3 Media - FMR and Mississippi River News
- 3 "Service Center" - Event Signup, Membership Info, Questions
- 3 Links
- 2 Cultural History of River
- 2 Volunteer Profiles
- 2 Organizational History
- 2 Flora and Fauna
- 2 Board/Staff/Contact Info
- 2 Financial Info/Annual Reports
- 2 Site Updates
- 2 Photos
- 2 River History and Info
- 2 Mississippi Messages
- 2 Contact Us
- 2 Press Releases
- 2 Collaboratives/Partnerships
- 2 River Ecology
- 2 What you can do to protect the River
- 2 Activities
- 2 History/Mission/Financial Reports

Proximate Matches: [Hits/5 Category]

- 16 Mississippi River Info and Resources
- 30 Individual Involvement/Volunteering/Participation
- 12 FMR Project Work
- 12 FMR Organizational Info
- 5 Communications: Web Site and Miss Mess
- 3 FMR and Mississippi River News
- 2 Press Releases
- 2 Photos
- 2 Contact Us

Analysis:

Looking at the highest scoring categories in the (full) Match level for Top Level Category Convergence, we see 'Mississippi River Info and Resources' and 'FMR Organizational Info' with by far the strongest scores. Project work is split between three categories, and 'membership' and 'volunteering' are similarly split. Taking the bold move of aggregating similar categories as Proximate Matches, we get four or five well-scoring categories: 'Mississippi River Info and Resources,' 'Individual Involvement/Volunteering/Participation,' 'FMR Project Work,' 'FMR Organizational Info,' and 'Communications: Web Site Updates/Miss Mess.' Note that by aggregating, 'Project Work' and 'Individual Involvement' moved up above 'FMR Organizational Info' in the rankings.

When we move down to 2nd Level Category Convergence (scoring and grouping information based on the categories below the top level categories, i.e. looking at I.A., I.B., 2.A., and 2.B. in an outline), we get an inverted dynamic: Highest scorers for (full) Matches are various groupings of Projects (Past Projects, Current Projects) and "Individual Involvement" (specifically, Current Action Alerts, Volunteer Events, Educational Events and News, and Donate/Make a Contribution).

Moving to Proximate Matches of the 2nd Level Category groupings, we get four very strong clusters: Mississippi River Info and Resources, Individual Involvement/Volunteering/Participation, FMR Project Work, and FMR Organizational Info. interestingly, these scored in the same relative rank as they did when cards were grouped at the Top Level categories.

Recommendations:

Certainly, the four top-scoring topic groupings by Proximate Matching in both Top- and 2nd Level categories should be key content groupings for the web site. These would be:

Mississippi Info and Resources
Individual Involvement/Volunteering/Participation
FMR Project Work
FMR Organizational Info

Some items ranked strongly in the initial tabulations (before grouping "Proximate Matches"), but are already planned as highlighted items/feature boxes in the main and back page designs, specifically:

Sign up for the Mississippi Messages e-newsletter
Make a Donation

(Note: also planned as feature boxes are: Mississippi River Field Guide, Featured

Photo)

Some categories that were strong in the (full) Match analysis got subsumed in the Proximate Match analysis. A few of these may be worth bringing to the top level for the sake of clarification/distinction. They are singled out as feature items/highlight boxes in the page design, but may be worth including in standard menus as well, using the same name, to accommodate different browsing styles. I would thus recommend:

Membership/Donation

To stress our events and activities, it may be worthwhile to include a more explicit channel than "Get Involved." to that end, I'll add:

Events & Activities

Some items did not rank highly, but are regarded as good form or a best practice in the web design world, and should be included for that reason - when people do want them, they *really* want them:

Contact Us

Site Map

Contact Webmaster

Terms of Use

Recent Updates

Privacy and Security Statements

Of these, only "Contact Us" warrants inclusion in the main menu. The others are generally relegated to a secondary navigation at the bottom of each page. This is also recommended for FMR's site.

A small subset of cards presented a particular challenge. The cards for "News Items in the media featuring FMR staff," "News items in the media about the Mississippi River," "FMR Newsletter Archives," and various cards pertaining to Press Releases had no categorization convergence among the card sorting participants. To make them readily accessible, a creative solution would have to be found. A brief visit to the McKnight Foundation's web page shows one alternative: a top level "News & Views" section. McKnight uses it for press releases and reports from other media. We could steal this idea, throw in the Newsletter archives, and have possibly elegant solution (pending user testing, of course.) I've rolled this into the recommendation.

Collating all these lists, we get a topical content menu for the top level of:

Mississippi Info and Resources

Individual Involvement/Volunteering/Participation

FMR Project Work

FMR Organizational Info

Membership/Donation
Events and Activities
Media Stories/Newsletters/Press Releases
Contact Us

These should be renamed for public presentation into more engaging yet informative titles. Might I suggest:

The Mighty Mississippi	<= Mississippi Info and Resources
Get Involved!	<= Individual Involvement/Volunteering/Participation
Support our Work	<= Membership/Donation
Events & Activities	<= Events (as distinguished from volunteering)
Our Projects	<= FMR Project Work
News & Views	<= Media stories, Newsletters, Press Releases
Our Organization	<= FMR Organizational Info
Contact Us	<= Contact Us

This concludes the scope of this document. For further work on subsection navigation and the ordering of menu items, see "Draft Navigation Scheme for FMR Web Site Redesign October 2005."

Comparison to current site [Current => New]:

What's New	=> Prominent "News" will be featured on main page. Schedule of updates will be included from secondary navigation link at bottom of page.
Become a Member	=> Unchanged
About Us	=> Unchanged
FMR in the News	=> Rolled into "News & Views"
Calendar of Events	=> Rolled into "Get Involved!" and possibly "Events & Activities"
Resource Library	=> Materials will be featured in "Mighty Mississippi"
Newsletters and Reports under "Our Organization."	=> Newsletters rolled into "News & Views." Annual Reports
Staff and Board	=> Work this content into "Our Organization" section
River Related Gifts	=> Under "Support our Work"
Interesting Links	=> Materials will be featured in links collections in specific areas.
Contact Us	=> Unchanged