

Digital Readiness and Cultural Heritage Institutions

**The New York Public Library
May 4-5, 2006**

Executive Summary

The Canada-United States Dialogue on “Digital Readiness and Cultural Heritage Institutions” was hosted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in cooperation with the Department of Canadian Heritage and the New York Public Library May 4-5, 2006. Participants included leading practitioners and educators in the museum, library and archival communities in the US and Canada. This meeting was a follow up to the Canada-US Dialogue on Digital Heritage held on August 30, 2005, in Gatineau, Canada. The meeting agenda and participant list are attached to this report.

The group was welcomed by David Ferriero, Andrew W. Mellon Director and Chief Executive of Research Libraries, New York Public Library, and Pamela Wallin, Canadian Consul General to New York. Anne-Imelda Radice, Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and Namir Anani, Director General of the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), made opening remarks emphasizing the need for national, international and professional cooperation to address the challenges and opportunities for cultural heritage institutions in the digital realm, including:

- Preservation of content for current and future generations;
- New means of engaging audiences; and,
- Innovation and sustainability of heritage institutions in a fast-changing world.

Participants heard and discussed presentations on the state of digital preservation in museums, libraries and archives today; on current research and development efforts in digital preservation; and on the impacts of these issues on education for the museum, library and archives professions. Discussions in general sessions and small groups identified common needs and interests that cut across disciplinary, institutional and geographic boundaries.

Key Findings:

- Other than cultural heritage institutions, no one is likely to take responsibility for long-term preservation of digital cultural heritage, especially those resources that lack commercial value even though they may have significant public value
- Digital preservation requires organizational transformation because it must be addressed not just as a technology issue but as a management issue requiring long-term planning—even before digital resources are acquired—and policies and procedures for ongoing maintenance

- Digital preservation of the cultural record at the national and international levels requires solutions beyond the resources of individual institutions
- Cultural heritage professionals need to develop a vision and message about digital preservation and disseminate them to creators and other key partners and stakeholders such as artists, filmmakers, conservators, collectors, vendors, and educators
- Library, museum and archival practice are in a state of flux, requiring changes in the professional education curriculum and ongoing continuing education

Key Recommendations:

- Digital preservation should be included as a fundamental strategy in collections management and stewardship
- Government agencies such as CHIN and IMLS, as well as the national libraries and archives of Canada and the US, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and others should play a key role in coordinating efforts, identifying funding, and developing coherent national strategies for massive digitization and preservation of cultural heritage content
- The needs of smaller institutions, which may hold extremely significant materials but lack the means to digitize and maintain digital resources, should be included in larger strategic plans
- Library, museum and archival educators should collaborate to develop a curriculum for convergent issues in the cultural heritage professions, including but not limited to digital asset management
- Funding organizations and professional associations should support and promote continuing education for library, archives and museum professionals to enable employing institutions to maintain and update staff skills required for the digital environment

Presentations and Commentary on Digital Preservation

Presentations:

Ann Russell, Executive Director, Northeast Document Conservation Center “Digital Readiness of Cultural Heritage Institutions”

Ms. Russell discussed the factors that can be evaluated to determine digital preservation readiness. Her presentation focused on the Center’s IMLS-funded survey of digital readiness in museums and the development of mechanisms for determining an institution’s digital readiness. Their preliminary findings show that many institutions are far from prepared for digital preservation, even though they may be engaged in various levels of digitization projects. Many institutions are in great need of long-term planning, digital preservation policy, and digital repository capacity. [See published report at http://www.rlg.org/en/page.php?Page_ID=20894#article1]

Bernard Reilly, President, Center for Research Libraries “Chains of Evidence: Digital Repositories and the Integrity of Cultural Heritage”

Mr. Reilly’s presentation focused on how new repositories of cultural heritage are being created outside of cultural institutions. Online companies such as Ofoto, Snapfish (photographs), Gmail

(correspondence), Myspace.com (diaries), Itunes (audio), and Youtube (video), are providing popular services where people document their lives and store their electronic content. It is imperative for cultural heritage institutions to clarify their relationship to this immense body of content as the online services become de facto repositories. This will require institutions to clarify their future preservation goals and prioritize their responsibilities for preserving online content.

Jean Gagnon, Executive Director, Fondation Daniel Langlois
“Conservation of Technologically-Based Artworks: Initiatives of the Daniel Langlois Foundation”

Mr. Gagnon described his challenging experiences in documentation and conservation of media and performing arts at the Fondation Daniel Langlois, and the Fondation’s work on the DOCAM project (Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage). Media arts present multiple challenges to preservation, and Mr. Gagnon emphasized the need to develop authenticity standards for preserving art on digital media. As technologies change, the physical recordings decay and playback methods become obsolete, requiring preservation efforts and migration of the work to newer media. In addition, the preservation of contemporary works raises the question of what are the current best practices in documentation and preservation. Media works also raise issues such as defining what counts as the definitive work, especially in multimedia and performance-based works. Because of these challenges, it is extremely useful for cultural heritage institutions to include the artist/creator in the documentation and preservation process to aid in preserving a work’s context and to ensure that the work is preserved according to the best available standards.

Commentary:

Normand Charbonneau, Director, Montreal Archives Centre, Bibliotheque et Archives nationales du Quebec

Mr. Charbonneau provided an overview of the changes and challenges in digitization as experienced by the Bibliotheque et Archives nationales du Quebec. He identified as a major problem the gap between long-time staffers, who provide continuity within the organization and profession but lack technology skills, and new staff members who are technically savvy but who lack traditional knowledge and experience and may be more transient. He emphasized that institutions must prepare to live with ongoing and rapid change.

Stephen Inglis, Director General Research and Collections, Canadian Museum of Civilization

Mr. Inglis outlined how the Canadian Museum of Civilization has gone from a few pilot digitization partnership projects in the early 90s to now developing digitization and support policies for the institution and large-scale digitization projects. He described the “creeping ubiquity” of digital media and how digital technologies have provided new opportunities for the Museum to serve the public. Digitization projects have also intensified issues of privacy and permissions. At the Canadian Museum of Civilization, particular issues have arisen regarding use of images of aboriginal Canadian remains. The Museum has had to develop policies and work to protect privacy for these types of collections. He stressed the need for flexibility and awareness of cultural context when planning digitization projects.

Ingrid Parent, Assistant Deputy Minister Documentary Heritage Collection, Library and Archives of Canada

Ms. Parent reported on the current planning for a national Canadian Digital Information Strategy. The Library and Archives of Canada is planning a series of four thematic meetings, followed by a national summit to develop the strategy. Their work is guided by five basic principles around how to make online resources available:

- If we make agreements with service providers, they should be non exclusive
- Digital images should be prepared to a suitable preservation standard;
- Public domain material should always remain in the public domain and free
- Online access will be multi-cultural and multi-lingual
- Integrity/authenticity of the digital material should be maintained

Ms. Parent stressed that planning for digital preservation should not be an afterthought but should begin at the time collections are created or acquired. [See additional information at <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/cdis/index-e.html>]

John Van Oudenaren, Senior Advisor, World Digital Library Initiative, Library of Congress

Mr. Van Oudenaren described the work and partnerships involved in the Library of Congress' World Digital Library Initiative. He stressed the need for larger institutions with more digitization experience to share their expertise with partners and other institutions. He cited a tendency toward "creeping homogeneity" of online content and noted that the goal of the World Digital Library Initiative is to ensure that the full range of the world's cultural heritage is available online. Mr. Van Oudenaren cautioned, however, that large-scale digitization partnerships inevitably involve questions of the ownership of the digitized content, so he urged that intellectual property issues be addressed up front.

Debra Steidel Wall, Senior Special Assistant to the Archivist and Deputy Archivist of the United States

Ms. Wall delivered the message that if we don't deal with digital preservation issues we risk losing our heritage. Preservation cannot be guaranteed simply by a technology solution but instead requires an archival solution made possible by technology. She described the need for digital efforts to be guided by four principles:

- Evolve-ability (if our policies change our system should change)
- Scalability (scale up or down)
- Extensibility (additional features can be added without major modifications)
- Availability (there is no single source of failure).

Presentations and Commentary on Educating and Training Digital Cultural Heritage Professionals

Presentations:

Brian Cantwell Smith, Dean, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto "Educating the Next Generation of Library and Museum Professionals"

Mr. Cantwell argued that the depth of the transformation taking place due to digitization is profound and cannot be understood only in terms of the idea of "digitality." These changes are

far-reaching and are affecting education in terms of both curriculum and pedagogy. The nature of scholarly research is also being affected, as things that used to be ephemeral can now be considered objects for preservation. All of this will lead to a reconfiguration of the intellectual landscape. There are generational differences in attitudes towards and use of digital resources—students now expect to be able to see everything at once from across archives, libraries, and museums. The reach and scope of digital media require planning and support beyond the boundaries of individual institutions.

J. Ritchie Garrison, Professor of History and Museum Studies, University of Delaware, and Head, Winterthur Program in American Culture

“Looking Over the Digital Divide: Young Professionals, Grayhaired Elders, and the iPod Generation.”

Mr. Garrison also built on the theme of generational differences regarding attitudes toward and use of technology. He recalled the generational history of recent technology and the ways that it affects institutions. University trustees and administrators, faculty, and students all come from different generations and have different expectations of technology and research. This affects pedagogy as teachers attempt to manage students’ expectations of transparency and immediacy of information, while still imparting critical thinking skills. Planners of digital libraries have to remember these user expectations, as well as the aesthetic appeal of the resources they provide.

Commentary:

Kristine Brancolini, Director, Indiana University Digital Programs

Ms. Brancolini described the challenges of identifying qualified staff for digital library programs and how these skill sets are often not part of traditional librarian training.

Since programs vary from university to university—academic digital library programs often hire new professionals primarily from their related schools where possible so that they know the background of the candidate. There is a need for continuing education in digital libraries to ensure that all staff have current knowledge and for standardization of digital library curriculum so that hiring institutions can have surer expectations of new professionals’ skills

Michele Cloonan, Dean, School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College

Ms. Cloonan suggested that a certain amount of social forecasting is involved in curriculum development. Library professional education has to provide skills to meet current needs, but also impart the adaptability necessary for professionals to keep up with changes in their work. It may be necessary now to shift the focus in library education more to the approach of archives and preservation as issues of life-cycle management, as these are becoming ever more important for both digital and traditional collections.

Marla Misunas, Collections Information Manager, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and President, Museum Computer Network

Ms. Misunas stressed the need for continuing education, and also noted that an individual’s needs for continuing education change over the course of one’s professional life. As a professional moves into more managerial roles, the need for hands-on technology skills decreases. Instead, broad knowledge of issues, trends and possibilities in the field is needed, along with an array of administrative skills. Continuing education has to take into account this

professional life-cycle. Library education curricula have to provide preparation for professional roles in addition to technical skills.

Discussions, Conclusions and Next Steps

Holly Witchey, Director of New Media Initiatives, Cleveland Museum of Art, Moderator

Ms. Witchey opened the meeting on May 5 by reviewing the main points of the previous day's presentations. She identified key challenges and posed questions for consideration during the final day's discussions, including the following:

- Can museums, libraries and archives work together to manage their information within larger information architecture frameworks?
- How can we strike a balance between immediate needs and the long-term public good?
- Who owns heritage, and whose responsibility is it to preserve it? What economic models exist for this preservation?
- Is educating the next generation of professionals our biggest collective challenge?

Finally, she noted that society's concepts of and needs for information and records are shifting in terms of digital abstraction; this changing environment also raises important questions and challenges, including:

- What are the consequences of the changing information landscape?
- What is information?
- What is authenticity?
- Who controls information?
- What is virtual reality?
- Where is the convergence among museums, libraries, and archives, and what are the limits to convergence?

Three working groups engaged in deeper discussion around two key questions: 1) What can we conclude about current trends and needs?, and 2) What next steps should be taken to address current needs and challenges? Many ideas and observations were discussed in small groups and presented in the final general session. The group as a whole agreed on a number of findings and recommended a set of next steps for further activity.

What can we conclude about current trends and needs?

- Other than cultural heritage institutions, no one is likely to take responsibility for long-term preservation of digital cultural heritage, especially resources that lack commercial value even though they may have significant public value
- Digital preservation requires organizational transformation because it must be addressed not just as a technology issue but as a management issue requiring long-term planning—even before digital resources are acquired—as well as policies and procedures for ongoing maintenance
- Digital preservation of the cultural record at the national and international levels requires solutions beyond the resources of individual institutions

- Digitization strategies could include different types of preservation activities for different centers of specialization, regional preservation centers with different specialties, and the creation of communities of practice
- Collaborative outsourcing of digital preservation should be explored, as well as cooperative digitization projects to achieve economies of scale
- Centers of expertise could be developed around areas such as intellectual property and new media
- Library, museum and archival practice are in a state of flux, requiring changes in the professional education curriculum and ongoing continuing education
- Cultural heritage professionals have common needs for subject expertise and critical thinking skills as well as the expertise to create, manage, preserve and present digital resources
- A new conceptual definition of “cultural heritage professional,” including but not limited to digital asset management, should be developed
- Libraries, museums and archives have particular areas of expertise that should be shared broadly across the cultural heritage professions—including issues such as standards, intellectual property and rights management, provenance documentation, and life cycle management
- Cultural heritage professionals need to develop a vision and message about digital preservation and disseminate it beyond their own institutions to creators and other key partners and stakeholders such as artists, filmmakers, conservators, collectors, vendors, and educators
- Strategic collaboration will have impacts on the cultural heritage professions and on individual professional development as well as on institutions

What next steps should be taken to address current needs and challenges?

- Digital preservation should be included as a fundamental strategy in collections management and stewardship
- Funding organizations such as CHIN, IMLS, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and private funders should scale up programs to address the full range of issues in managing digital resources from creation to preservation, presentation, discovery, use, and re-use
- Government agencies such as CHIN and IMLS, as well as the national libraries and archives of Canada and the US, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and others should play a key role in coordinating efforts, identifying funding, and developing coherent national strategies for massive digitization of cultural heritage content
- The needs of smaller institutions, which may hold extremely significant materials but lack the means to digitize and maintain digital resources, should be addressed through larger strategic plans
- Funding organizations should fund research on organizational structures, partnerships, and contracting practices to support digital preservation strategies, and should support development of guidance for museums and libraries on how to plan for and manage their digital assets, whether maintained in-house or outsourced to service providers
- Funding organizations should support the development of regional digital preservation repositories

- Library, museum and archival educators should collaborate to develop a curriculum for convergent issues in the cultural heritage professions, including but not limited to digital asset management
- Funding organizations and professional associations should support and promote continuing education for library, archives and museum professionals to enable employing institutions to maintain and update staff skills for the digital environment

In concluding comments, participants said they had been challenged and energized by the meeting and the opportunity to meet professionals whom they would not otherwise encounter but with whom they share professional interests and values. They agreed that the meeting itself reflected the profound impact that the digital environment is having on their professional lives and urged continuation of the conversation in future meetings.

Canada-US Dialogue on Digital Cultural Heritage:

“Digital Readiness and Cultural Heritage Institutions”

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AGENDA

Thursday, May 4

8:30 Coffee

8:45 Welcome:
David S. Ferriero, Andrew W. Mellon Director and Chief
Executive of Research Libraries, New York Public Library

Pamela Wallin, Canadian Consul General to New York

Opening Remarks:

Anne-Imelda M. Radice, Director, Institute of Museum and
Library Services

Namir Anani, Director General, Canadian Heritage Information
Network

Introductions

9:45 Ann Russell, Executive Director, Northeast Document Conservation
Center, “Digital Readiness of Cultural Heritage Institutions”

10:15 Break

10:30 Discussion on Digital Preservation:
Bernard Reilly, President, Center for Research Libraries, “Chains of
Evidence: Digital Repositories and the Integrity of Cultural Heritage”

Jean Gagnon, Executive Director, Fondation Daniel Langlois
« Conservation of Technologically-Based Artworks : Initiatives of the
Daniel Langlois Foundation »

11:30 Break

- 11:45** Commentary on Digital Preservation:
- Normand Charbonneau, Director, Montreal Archives Centre,
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
- Stephen Inglis, Director General Research and Collections, Canadian
Museum of Civilization
- Ingrid Parent, Assistant Deputy Minister Documentary Heritage
Collection, Library and Archives of Canada
- John Van Oudenaren, Senior Advisor, World Digital Library Initiative,
Library of Congress
- Debra Steidel Wall, Senior Special Assistant to the Archivist and
Deputy Archivist of the United States
- General Discussion on Digital Preservation
- 13:00** Lunch
- 14:00** Discussion on Educating and Training Digital Cultural Heritage
Professionals:
- Brian Cantwell Smith, Dean, Faculty of Information Studies,
University of Toronto, “Educating the Next Generation of Library and
Museum Professionals”
- J. Ritchie Garrison, Professor of History and Museum Studies,
University of Delaware, and Head, Winterthur Program in American
Culture, “Looking Over the Digital Divide: Young Professionals,
Grayhaired Elders, and the iPod Generation”
- 15:00** Break
- 15:15** Commentary on Education and Training of Digital Cultural Heritage
Professionals:
- Kristine Brancolini, Director, Indiana University Digital Programs
- Michele Cloonan, Dean, School of Library and Information Science,
Simmons College

Marla Misunas, President, Museum Computer Network, and
Collections Information Manager, San Francisco Museum of Modern
Art

Holly Witchey, Director of New Media Initiatives, Cleveland Museum
of Art

General Discussion on Education and Training of Digital Cultural
Heritage Professionals

- 16:15** Break
- 16:30** Concluding Discussion and Comments
- 17:00** Adjourn

Friday, May 5

- 8:45** Coffee
- 9:00** Moderator: Holly Witchey, Director of New Media Initiatives,
Cleveland Museum of Art: Summing Up and Looking Ahead
- 9:30** Small group discussions of previous day's program on:
What can we conclude about current trends and needs?
What are some next steps to address current needs and challenges?
- 10:30** Break
- 10:45** Reports from the Groups and General Discussion
- 11:45** Concluding Comments and Wrap-up
- 12:00** Adjourn

Canada-US Dialogue on Digital Cultural Heritage:
“Digital Readiness and Cultural Heritage Institutions”

New York Public Library
The Humanities and Social Sciences Library
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May 4-5, 2006

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