

# Policy Writing and Engaging Stakeholders

After completing your assessment and setting your goals, it is time to write a digital preservation policy. Depending on where you are in your journey toward a sustainable digital preservation program, just beginning or several cycles of maintenance in, you will have a more or less detailed policy. Your digital preservation policy document should affirm your organization's commitment to a digital preservation program and provide an avenue by which to create a business case for your creating or improving your digital preservation program. This document is not about implementation, so it will not be necessary to go into detail about how you will accomplish your digital preservation goals.

A successful digital preservation policy will consider your organization's institutional context. Write your policy to mirror your organization's strategic priorities and goals. Include the language of your organization's mission and strategic plan to link the policy to your leadership's agendas. You need to remember when writing your policy that this document will be read by multiple audiences, including internal departmental or unit stakeholders, organizational leadership, partner institutions, and potential and existing donors. With this audience diversity, it is important to keep the language of the policy high level, with limited jargon, and the length relatively short.

At the most basic level, your policy should have three sections:

1. **Rationale**—Why you have a digital preservation program.
2. **Scope**—Not only what you hope to preserve but also what is beyond your ability and desire to preserve. Your scope section should also include a definition of what your organization considers a “record” or the “original” to be. Depending on your organization, the legal definition of a record in your area may be what you use. In other cases, it may be an institutional definition of what constitutes an “original copy” that provides a

transparent explanation of what *original* means in a digital context where everything is technically a copy.

3. **Roles and Responsibilities**—Those positions, departments, and units that will be participating in the digital preservation program and how they will be contributing.

It is possible, and in some cases necessary, that your policy will be only three paragraphs long, one paragraph each for rationale, scope, and roles and responsibilities. Ideally, these sections will be the main headings under which you organize the document, with each subsection describing in plain language more granular aspects of your current or proposed digital preservation program. The following policy outline is based on Daniel Noonan's “Digital Preservation Policy Framework: A Case Study”:<sup>1</sup>

## Digital Preservation Policy Outline

- **Summary:** The summary is the very first section in the policy and should be no more than two or three sentences long. It should state what the digital preservation program does and why the program is important at an organizational level.
- **Rationale:** The rationale section is the high-level heading that covers why your organization should have a digital preservation program. According to how complex your policy is, this may simply be a header, or it could be the entire *why* section of the document. However, either in one large text block or in smaller subsections, this part of your policy should include purpose, mandate, objectives, principles, and challenges.
  - **Purpose:** Purpose is a single sentence that provides your reader with a clear statement of what the digital preservation policy is meant to do for your organization.
  - **Mandate:** Depending on the complexity of

your organization and where the digital preservation program lives in the institution's hierarchy, the mandate section will either be department/ unit-focused or institution/ organization-focused. The mandate addresses the legal, institutional, and unit requirements for preserving digital objects. If your institution is small enough that you are writing the mandate section with an institution or organization focus, it will also cover a description of the intentions of your organization's digital preservation program, and you will not have an objectives section. Be sure to include parts of your institution's mission statement verbatim and then provide a direct link to how digital preservation helps the organization meet its mission.

- *Objectives:* If your organization is large enough that you wrote the mandate section from a department or unit perspective, your mandate will include only a statement that addresses legal and organization-imposed requirements for preserving digital materials. The objectives section will be separate and describe the intentions of an organization's digital preservation program. This is, again, where the institution's mission statement should be included in some way to clearly display that the digital preservation program is an essential component of meeting the institution's larger goals.
- *Principles:* The principles section, like rationale, can be one section or several subsections depending on your audience. This section is important because it allows you to directly address your organization's values and how the digital preservation program will operate according to those values. This section also allows you to connect your digital preservation program to international standards and best practices. Some possible subsections include *sustainability*, *collection management*, *technical infrastructure*, *preservation activities*, and *metadata*.
  - The *sustainability* subsection makes clear that your organization is committing to the long-term funding required to keep a digital preservation program running. This subsection can also be where you include how collaboration efforts between organizations to pool preservation resources can help to support long-term preservation efforts.
  - The *collection management* subsection addresses how your organization will follow standards and best practices for creating, receiving, processing, and providing access to authentic digital materials. If you have internally produced content that

will be included in your digital preservation program, the collection management subsection could include a statement about your digital preservation program's commitment to working with internal content creators to have them create digital materials in a digitally sustainable manner.

- In the *technical infrastructure* subsection, you acknowledge, at a high level, the importance in investing in technology for the preservation of digital materials and the fact that your organization is committed to making this investment not just initially, but in an ongoing manner. As with all other aspects of this document, this will be specific to your organization. Your technology commitment could be an investment in internal hardware systems, or it could be an investment in storage as a service.
- The *preservation activities* subsection includes broad statements about what the preservation program does, with an emphasis on these actions being tested, evidence-based, and documented.
- Finally, the *metadata* subsection acknowledges that digital preservation has unique metadata creation requirements and that your organization is committed to creating and maintaining this specialized metadata.
- *Challenges:* Digital preservation is an exercise in risk management. There are no guarantees, only carefully managed workflows that are intended to prevent as much loss as possible and to allow users to access the informational content of digital materials well into the future. When possible, the look and feel of the original digital objects should also be made available to users. The challenges section of your digital preservation policy should cover the risks unique to your organizational context and how the digital preservation program will address these risks. Depending on the maturity of your program, your policy may very well not have a way to address all of the risks associated with digital preservation in your organization. In those cases, acknowledging that the risks exist and that your program is not developed enough to meet the risks effectively yet is a viable approach to this part of the policy.
- *Scope:* The scope section is the second *absolute* requirement for a digital preservation policy. I have found that it is easiest to have two clear lists in this section: collection content covered by the digital preservation policy and collection content not covered by the policy. This clearly lays out to your stakeholders what you are and are not committing resources to preserving.

Your organization's collection development policy should drive what digital materials are included in the scope of your preservation program. Remember, metadata created during the digital preservation process is also digital material and therefore should be explicitly included in the scope section of your digital preservation policy. When listing what is and is not included your program, use categories of digital materials: published digital collections, unpublished digital collections, research data, administrative records, digitized collections, and so on. Those categories will make more sense to your stakeholders than more granular statements about file format types. There are two additional subsections that could be included in your scope section: *selection and acquisition* and *access and use*.

- *Selection and Acquisition*: The selection and acquisition subsection covers how and why you acquire those digital materials within the scope of your digital preservation policy. Generally, it will include a link to your organization's collection development policy.
- *Access and Use*: The access and use subsection describes how your organization deals with who has access to your collection materials and how materials may be used, with a specific emphasis on intellectual property rights.
- *Roles and Responsibilities*: The roles and responsibilities section is the final required section in your digital preservation policy. This is where you will list who is responsible for the digital preservation program and what those responsibilities are. The roles should be either position titles or the names of departments and units so that the policy has continuity even as specific people join and leave your organization.

When writing your digital preservation policy, include those people and departments that will be doing the actual work of digital preservation so that you all agree to the high-level commitments and goals the policy is enumerating. That way, there are no surprises later when you are asking for help developing an implementation plan or actually doing the work of digital preservation. Working on the policy together is also a way to build internal knowledge of and support for the digital preservation program so that your colleagues can become advocates for digital preservation to others in your organization.

## Engaging Stakeholders

There are five major categories of stakeholders who are crucial to a digital preservation program's success: resource allocators and institutional leadership,

content creators, internal collaborators, external collaborators, and end users. Often, the same person will be a part of multiple stakeholder categories. In those cases, craft your argument toward the stakeholder category that has the most sway with that person in the moment. You can use some common talking points to engage and inform all of these groups and some slightly more focused strategies for resource allocators and institutional leadership and content creators.

By this point you should have already engaged your internal collaborators through the assessment and policy-writing processes. Your external collaborators, in most cases, already believe that digital preservation is important and necessary because they are developing and implementing their own digital preservation programs. Finally, your end users provide the evidence of *use*, which is one of the critical assessment measures resource allocators require when evaluating how successful a program is. Another piece of the assessment puzzle provided by end users is qualitative evaluations of the final product of your digital preservation system—access to the digital content. If end users have a positive experience and are willing to communicate this to leadership, your users can become some of your strongest advocates for sustaining your program. This is especially true if you make clear to your users that the materials are available in part due to digital preservation efforts. This can best be accomplished with your common strategy *elevator pitch*.

At work, my title is Digital Archivist, and very few people I interact with outside of the cultural heritage sector fully understand what an archivist is, much less a digital archivist. I rarely have more than a minute to provide a coherent explanation of what digital preservation is and why it is important. In this type of situation, it helps to have a prepared set of talking points, or an elevator pitch, that can be relatable for any type of audience. This pitch needs to be short, to the point, with little professional jargon, using examples of digital content that everyone can relate to. While the examples provided in this report assume knowledge of archival practice, not all audiences will have this knowledge. When you are talking to an audience unfamiliar with archival practice, you will first need to describe what an archivist does. Without the contextual piece of what an archivist does, any discussion of digital preservation will rarely make sense. What follows are some suggested talking points that you can use to develop your own elevator pitch. There are many more examples in the Digital Preservation Coalition's "Executive Guide on Digital Preservation."<sup>2</sup>

- Digital preservation is a never-ending effort to maintain access to digital materials over time.
- Digital preservation requires careful planning because, as computers change, so do the ways you access older content.

- Digital preservation is *not* digitization. If you digitize something, that digital object will, in most cases, become something to preserve.
- Digital preservation involves more than a few backup copies of your digital content because, over time, those backups will no longer work with more advanced computers currently being developed.
- Digital preservation is a necessity, not a luxury, because it helps to prevent deliberate and accidental loss of digital content over time.
- Digital preservation allows you to view older versions of websites and websites that have been deleted.
- At this moment, artists are creating works that are digital only. For you to be able to experience this art in the future, digital preservation is essential.
- Digital preservation is a critical safeguard for the digital-only reports and data you are required by law to maintain.

While the elevator pitch will get you started talking about digital preservation, more in-depth conversations are necessary to achieve the kind of support required for a sustainable digital preservation program. One of the most effective ways to gain and maintain this support from your organization's leaders is through presenting a business case for digital preservation. Depending on where you are in developing your digital preservation program, this business case may be more or less formal. The document should address how digital preservation benefits your organization beyond the tried-and-true arguments of ongoing access to content. I suggest putting particular emphasis on the return on investment supplied by digital preservation programs through cost efficiencies, such as new storage mechanisms and centralized workflows for processing and providing access to digital content. You can include examples of how digital preservation reduces the risk of litigation and can support grant applications because a data management plan is now required by many funding institutions, and what is data management but another aspect of digital preservation?<sup>3</sup>

After you have provided these arguments as to how a digital preservation program can improve your organization, suggest specific scenarios of how you would like to implement or improve your digital preservation program. It is important to include multiple potential strategies for your digital preservation program in the document so that your leadership can better understand the different risks, resource needs, and benefits associated with different levels of digital preservation. You should always include the baseline level of no digital preservation program so that your organization's leaders can fully understand and compare the risks and benefits of having a minimal digital

preservation program against not having one at all. The other options you provide should address the specific needs of your organization and the goals you defined for your digital preservation program determined by the assessments I discussed in chapter 3. If one of your strategies is to suggest building your digital preservation program in an iterative way, make sure to emphasize that the first stage of the program is not a pilot. A digital preservation program cannot be effective as a series of project cycles. It requires a sustained allocation of resources for the potential benefits you discuss in your business case to become reality.<sup>4</sup>

After you have developed your business case, carefully consider the best time to present it to leadership. The most impactful time to make the case for a new digital preservation program or an upgrade to an existing program is before a major change occurs or after a catastrophic event. These situations present you with the perfect answer to "Why a digital preservation program *now*?" If your organization is preparing to relocate to a new building or introduce new technology, if a major change is forthcoming in regulations, and so on, you can craft your argument to include digital preservation in the changes already being planned. If your organization has just experienced a major data breach or has been fined for non-compliance, you can introduce a digital preservation program as a way to prevent these things from happening again. If none of these situations are likely to occur soon, one other major aspect of timing is to ask for resources for a digital preservation program when leadership is starting to plan a new budget so that you can start negotiating with leadership as part of the regular budgeting process. You may have to delay your presentation of your business case to leadership if your organization is not in the position to support a digital preservation program. In this situation, it is still important to maintain a business case that you can present when the time is right. The Digital Preservation Coalition provides a *Digital Preservation Business Case Toolkit*, which is a great resource that will guide you step by step through the process and has a template you can use when writing your own business case.<sup>5</sup>

The other major category of stakeholder for whom you need to tailor your digital preservation discussions is your content creators. You will have internal content creators who produce organizational materials that will eventually need to be preserved and external content creators who donate materials to you for preservation and access. To support digital preservation becoming embedded into your organization, the key is to constantly communicate with and provide training for your internal content creators. Training these content creators on what types of file formats to use, how to name and organize their files,

and to add contextual information within files and folders whenever possible makes for a more efficient transfer and processing of these files when it is time for the materials to be moved into the digital preservation system. For external content creators, you could provide community trainings similar to those you provide for your organization's content creators and have online guides available for them to access, but it is more likely that you will communicate with these external donors only at the point of transfer, not at the point of creation. The next chapter will go into detail about how to tease out the vital contextual and technical information a donor can provide to you at the point of transfer.

## Notes

1. Daniel Noonan, "Digital Preservation Policy Framework: A Case Study," *EDUCAUSE Review*, July 28, 2014, <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2014/7/digital-preservation-policy-framework-a-case-study>.
2. Digital Preservation Coalition, "Executive Guide on Digital Preservation," licensed under the Open Government License v3.0, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://www.dpconline.org/our-work/dpeg-home>.
3. Charles Dollar and Lori Ashley, *Digital Preservation Capability Maturity Model (DPCMM)*, v. 2.7 (San Francisco: Tournesol Consulting, July 6, 2015), 35–36, [www.securelyrooted.com/dpcmm](http://www.securelyrooted.com/dpcmm), under "DCPMM Background and Performance Metrics v2.7."
4. Dollar and Ashley, *Digital Preservation Capability Maturity Model*, 35–36.
5. *Digital Preservation Business Case Toolkit*, v. 1.1, SPRUCE Project, May 2014, Digital Preservation Coalition Wiki, [http://wiki.dpconline.org/index.php?title=Digital\\_Preservation\\_Business\\_Case\\_Toolkit](http://wiki.dpconline.org/index.php?title=Digital_Preservation_Business_Case_Toolkit).