

Introduction

In Montana, we have the Treasure State Academic Information and Library Services (TRAILS) consortium. Its main purpose is to leverage collective purchasing power and facilitate collection sharing of library resources. However, TRAILS has provided a platform for other professional collaborations, one of which is the Digital Preservation Committee (DPC). In the DPC, librarians from various academic libraries around Montana meet and discuss issues related to digital preservation. We try to start our conversations with an update about the current state of digital preservation at each participating institution. Often, most of the librarians don't have an update; they don't consider what they do to be digital preservation. However, when we delve deeper, each individual has taken concrete steps toward preserving at least some digital material. This disconnect between what my fellow librarians and archivists see as digital preservation and what they are already doing can often be attributed to the fact that there is a continued misconception of what digital preservation is and what it takes to do the work of preserving digital objects.

These misconceptions can be, in part, attributed to the fact that digital preservation is still a relatively young field and is constantly evolving. There are no clearly established pathways and formulaic processes to follow as there are in other library and archives practices, such as cataloging. A further complicating factor is that what is currently available to guide digital preservation practitioners has been purposefully written to be high-level and general so that the guidance can be followed by as many different types and sizes of institutions as possible. However, for many librarians and archivists who have had digital preservation responsibilities added to their existing workloads, translating general guidance into step-by-step actions has been a difficult endeavor. Helping librarians and archivists make the transition from theory to practice is what workflow documents are meant to do. These workflows are some of the missing puzzle pieces that institutions, like my fellow TRAILS members, need to

understand that what they do *is* digital preservation and to help move their digital preservation efforts into a more robust and sustainable program.

Digital preservation workflows are, in their simplest form, a list of steps taken to preserve digital materials and their accompanying metadata for future researchers to access. The act of documenting what steps you are taking to do these processes performs several functions. The first is to create a living document that provides a set of instructions for those working with digital materials to use so that the processes are done in a consistent manner. The workflows guide users through a set of decision points allowing the same document to be used regardless of the format the digital material takes. This streamlines processes and provides clear guidance on who to contact when problems occur. Second, these workflows are a way to document institutional memory so that work does not stop if key personnel leave the institution. Finally, documenting a workflow as it currently exists illuminates the current priorities and biases of an institution. Carefully examining existing workflows will allow you to reprioritize efforts and actively address those institutional biases.

Recently, the digital preservation community has encouraged institutions to document and share their existing practices to help make this translation from theory to action into a viable process for libraries of all types and sizes. In this report, I will discuss how to document your existing practices, examine that documentation for gaps and biases, and provide examples of digital preservation workflows for common stages in the digital curation life cycle—from donor engagement, accessioning and stabilization of digital materials, and processing these materials to providing researcher access and maintaining the digital content over time. While these workflows are based on the current workflows used at my institution, I will also provide tools and strategies for you to adapt these workflows to be useful for your particular institutional context.