

OMB Supporting Statement A

IMLS Study of the Sustainability of Digitized Special Collections

Part A: Justification

A1 Circumstances Requiring Collection of Information

Over the past decade, public and private funders, universities, research libraries, archives, and other entities have invested tens of millions of dollars in the digitization of rare and unique holdings held by the nation's libraries and cultural institutions – sometimes referred to as “special collections” content. The Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) National Leadership Grants (NLG) program specifically supports projects that improve museum, archives, and library practices within the context of national strategic initiatives. Awards in the Advancing Digital Resources strand, for example, support “the creation, use, presentation, and preservation of significant digital resources as well as the development of tools to enhance access, use, and management of digital assets.”

While many grantees use these IMLS funds to digitize content (whether from print, film, or audio originals), and while the act of digitization itself constitutes a significant step toward ensuring the long-term availability of this content, much less attention has been paid to the ongoing activities and costs needed in order to keep this digitized rare and unique content up-to-date, accessible, and valuable to users once it has been converted. Past research conducted by Ithaka S+R, including the report *Sustaining Digital Resources: An On-the-Ground View of Projects Today* (2009), helped to identify a series of activities that universities, libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions have used to enhance the digital projects they have created. These activities range from intensive research on the needs of users of these resources, to developing creative cost management strategies and partnerships, to seeking external sources of revenue.

Ithaka S+R's and the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) past research on this topic has shown that a failure to engage in these activities puts the original investment in scanning rare and unique content at risk. In some cases, if universities, libraries, museums, and other entities cannot successfully support the ongoing costs and activities needed for digitized content, a project within the institution might be shut down altogether, leaving the digitized content inaccessible to users. A less dramatic, but equally wasteful outcome, is that a great deal of digital content is created, but without proper attention to ongoing investment, placed online in such a way that few users can easily find and access the content in digital form, and few users find the content to be meaningful for their research, educational, or other purposes (because of outdated contextual information, non-functioning interface components, or other factors).

ARL, in partnership with Ithaka S+R, will engage in a study, funded by IMLS, to understand the range of activities and costs that libraries and cultural institutions currently undertake to create, manage, enhance, and preserve digitized rare and unique content on an ongoing basis. By better understanding how sustainable projects are created and developed over time, we hope to identify trends that will be important to those in the academic and cultural heritage communities who manage digitized collections, as well as to those who fund them.

IMLS' support of this study is authorized by the Museum and Library Services act of 2010, which requires the Institute to conduct policy research, analysis and data collection in order to (1) identify

national needs for and trends in museum, library and information services; (2) measure and report on the impact and effectiveness of museum, library, and information services throughout the United States, including the impact of Federal programs authorized under this Act; (3) identify best practices; and (4) develop plans to improve museum, library, and information services of the United States and to strengthen national, state, local, regional, and international communications and cooperative networks. (20 U.S.C. § 9108)

This study will identify and examine 8 case studies of a specific type of digital resource, digitized special collections.¹ The project team will identify examples of digitized special collections that show evidence of being sustainability “success stories”, that is, projects that demonstrate the elements we define as constituting a sustainable project: longevity, financial stability, and evidence of a strong user base. By starting with “success” cases, we hope to be able to better understand the process taken to achieve these outcomes and to also provide useful models for the community to observe, emulate, challenge, and improve upon.

A2 Indicate How, by Whom, and for What Purpose the Information Is to Be Used

The Institute for Museum and Library Services will use the results from this study to gain a high-level understanding of the operations and sustainability efforts that libraries and cultural institutions employ for their digitized special collection and to identify trends in best practice that could be used to inform IMLS’ grant-making programs for digital resources, and to advise their current and future grantees.

Results from the case studies will be used to gain a nuanced understanding of the activities and strategies that libraries and cultural institutions use to sustain individual digitized special collections. The final case studies will be presented in the form of articles and be made freely and publicly available. Information collected from individuals as part of this phase of work will be shared only among ARL and Ithaka S+R staff members contributing to the study, unless otherwise required by law. In all cases, ARL and Ithaka S+R staff will inform interviewees of their intention to publish their findings and seek their consent prior to disseminating non-public information collected during this study phase.

A3 Use of Information Technology to Reduce Burden

All information gathered will be stored in password-protected data management environments.

A4 Identification of Possible Duplication, and Avoidance of Duplication

While there have been a number of studies that examine (1) the topics of the costs of general digitization, (2) the digitization activities of library, or (3) special collections holdings, none to date have addressed a confluence of these issues in a way that provides information to libraries and cultural institutions on the topic of supporting the costs of digitized special collections. *Taking Our Pulse: The OCLC Research Survey of Special Collections and Archives* (2010) addressed topics concerning special collections, but only touched briefly on digitized collections. The Primary Research Group’s *Survey of Library and Museum Digitization Projects, 2011 Edition* addressed some of the same types of questions, but used a small and very diverse sample, which will not significantly overlap with ours. Other studies have focused specifically on preservation of digital materials (including an ARL survey in 2011), but this is just one aspect of the topic we intend to study. Perhaps the closest study to the one we intend to conduct was

¹ These are collections of rare or unique content that libraries or museums have chosen to digitize.

carried out by the Association of Research Libraries in 2006. That survey, *SPEC Kit 294: Managing Digitization Activities*, addresses issues relating to the organization of digitization activities at major research libraries, and does delve into the costs associated with maintaining, enhancing, and preserving them. However, the study was limited to the ARL membership, and was completed over five years ago, a very long time ago in the rapidly changing world of digital media.

The studies mentioned above are for the most part surveys, and do not make use of the more nuanced, case study approach. This approach, of looking in great detail at the processes involved in sustaining digital resources, has been used before, but has not focused on digitization projects in particular, and the challenges they pose to the institutions seeking to support them. The Ithaka S+R Case Studies in Sustainability (funded by JISC, NEH and NSF) studied different tactics for sustainability plans, but did this through the lens of revenue generation, and without examining special collections in particular. Other reports have offered “case studies” that are written not by an objective third-party research team, but reported by the project staff themselves.² The current study will not duplicate earlier work, since this methodology has not yet been applied to this object of study.

A5 Methods to Minimize Burden on Small Entities

By virtue of the topic of our research – how institutions are managing the ongoing costs of large digitization efforts; while we will seek a range of sizes of institutions, it is unlikely that our subjects will be considered “small entities” in the sense intended by the RFA. The institutions that will participate in the case studies work are research libraries, museums, archives, and other cultural institutions of sufficient size to have conducted or contracted to conduct digitization activities. In addition, the burden per institution is very low, estimated at no more than 90 minutes for each of up to 4 individuals, and every effort will be made to gather information in the most efficient way possible, including research with publicly available sources in preparation for the interviews. Finally, there is no obligation for any entity to participate.

A6 Consequences of Not Collecting Information

The digitization of rare and unique special collections content is still a relatively new undertaking for many institutions, practice is still very much in flux, and there is consequently a lack of coherent practices for sustaining the value associated with these collections. This study will be the first to explore not just one aspect of “sustaining” a collection (cost, or preservation, for example); instead, by surfacing the range of activities needed to make these collections valuable in the long term, the study will provide much needed guidance for those managing digitization programs and those agencies, foundations, universities, and other entities funding their creation. Without this information, professionals in libraries and cultural

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See *Splashes and Ripples: Synthesizing the Evidence on the Impacts of Digital Resources* (2011). Available at <http://digitisation.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2011/05/23/splashes-and-ripples-impact/>

institutions may not be aware of successful tactics they could be employing to develop and maintain digital content in a way that is most valuable to their users.

A7 Special Circumstances

None of the special circumstances apply to this study.

A8 Consultation outside the Agency

Ithaka S+R will oversee the research and writing of the case studies.

A9 Payment of Gifts

No payments or gifts will be made to personnel who cooperate in the collections of materials for this study. Their participation is strictly voluntary and uncompensated. However, participants will receive a copy of the executive summary of ARL's final report to the IMLS.

A10 Assurances of Confidentiality

The identity of the institutions participating in the case studies will not be anonymous. However, information that participants designated as "confidential" will not be published, unless it is publicly available or required by law.

A11 Justification of Sensitive Questions

This study does not include questions of a sensitive nature with respect to individual privacy.

A12 Estimates of Respondent annual Hour and Cost Burden

For each case study, the project team will interview up to 4 individuals at each of the 8 digitized special collection projects we select to profile, leading to a total of 32 anticipated respondents. We anticipate that the interview process will require 90 minutes for each individual interviewed.

We estimate interviews with up to 8 archivists, up to 8 librarians, and up to 16 professors or curators. Estimated hourly salary for these participants is \$21.73, \$28.99, and \$85.00 respectively. This translates into an estimated annualized cost of \$32.59 to each archivist, \$43.49 to each librarian, and \$127.50 to each professor. The estimated total hour burden is 48 (12 for all archivists, 12 for all librarians, and 24 for all professors) for 32 anticipated participants. The estimated total cost burden is \$260.76 (for archivists) + \$347.88 (for librarians) + \$2,040 (for professors and curators) = \$2,648.64

A13 Total annual cost burden to respondents

We anticipate a total annual cost burden of \$2,648.64

A14 Estimates of Annual Cost Burden to Federal Government

This is a one-time study, with no ongoing costs.

A15 Program Changes in Burden and Cost Estimates

This request is for new information collection. No changes have yet been needed.

A16 Plans and Schedules for Tabulation and Publication

Findings will be presented as eight case studies and a summary report. Information gathered for this study will not be tabulated or published.

Pending OMB approval, the study will take place on the following schedule:

June-July 2012: Screening/identification of case study subjects

July – October 2012: Interviews

November –December 2012: Analysis and writing

Q1 2012: Final drafts and publication of case studies and final report.

A17 Expiration Data Omission Approval

Not applicable.

A18 Exceptions

Not applicable. No exceptions are requested.