



Digital Preservation Readiness Assessment: Guide for Clients

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Overview

The Need for a Digital Preservation Readiness Assessment

As libraries, museums, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions digitize cultural heritage materials, best practices that ensure the quality and sustainability of digital collections are developing. The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), together with an advisory committee and consultants specializing in digital program development and management, has developed a methodology to assist cultural heritage institutions in assessing their digital programs and developing plans for improvement.

For more than a decade, cultural heritage institutions have been building digital collections by digitizing their collections and/or creating born-digital resources. In many organizations, these early project-based initiatives have evolved into digital programs, while other organizations are still operating on a project-by-project basis. This guide describes a methodology for helping institutions build a cohesive digital collections program with an ongoing commitment as demonstrated by policies, standards, and best practices that are implemented institution-wide, across a number of projects and digital collections.

In a Digital Preservation Readiness Assessment, consultants review a number of aspects of an institution's digital efforts. These key factors can help determine the quality, usability, and sustainability of a digital program. They include the general background and demographics of the institution, administration and management of the digital program, policies for selecting material to be digitized or acquired in digital format, issues of access to the digital materials, digital preservation, and rights management for digital materials. These programmatic elements are evaluated through a pre-visit questionnaire, an on-site visit by consultants, and a resulting consultant report to the institution. Consultants will have practical experience in digital collection policies and procedures, content selection and creation, access, preservation, and rights management.

A Digital Preservation Readiness Assessment provides a snapshot of digital practices and policies at the institution at one point in time. An institution can use the assessment to determine necessary improvements in their digital collection program and to assist in planning. The information can also help make a case for additional human or financial resources and support development of grant proposals.

About the Consultants

NEDCC will assist in identifying consultants based on the specific needs of the institution. NEDCC's recommendations are based on the consultant's knowledge of the various aspects of the digital lifecycle, digital preservation, digital asset management systems, and relevant digital program standards as well as skills in project/program management. Résumés of the available consultants will be provided to the institution.

Estimated Cost for Assessment

The average cost to a client for a Digital Preservation Readiness Assessment can range from \$8,000 – \$10,000 plus travel expenses. This includes one day for pre-visit preparation (questionnaire review), 1 – 2 days for conducting the on-site visit, and 2 – 4 days for developing the final report. Currently assessments involve two consultants to assure coverage of all aspects of a digital program; however, NEDCC is experimenting with single-consultant engagements, which would reduce the cost of the assessment.

Estimated Time for Assessment

Once the scope of the assessment is agreed to and a contract is signed, the assessment process can take up to 16 weeks to complete.

- Pre-visit questionnaire (up to eight weeks, depending on the client)
- Site visit (1 – 2 days on-site, generally scheduled 2 – 3 weeks after the questionnaire is returned)
- Post-visit final report (up to eight weeks after the on-site visit, depending on the client)

Contract

The contract is between either NEDCC or the consultant and the contracting institution (client). Both parties must sign a contract specifying the schedule and time frame, cost parameters, and scope of the assessment before any work can begin.

Client Responsibilities

Assessment Coordinator

The client is required to appoint an assessment coordinator who will serve as the client's primary contact for the duration of the assessment. It is recommended that the assessment coordinator have or be charged with enough decision-making responsibility within the organization to ensure that all requirements are met in accordance with the agreed-upon schedule.

Before the Site Visit

Goals and Objectives

The assessment coordinator should work with the consultants to establish agreed-upon goals and objectives of the survey.

Questionnaire

The assessment coordinator is responsible for assembling a staff team to complete and return the pre-visit questionnaire to the consultants in accordance with the agreed-upon schedule. In general, the pre-visit questionnaire will be sent to a client 6 – 8 weeks before the site visit. The completed

questionnaire must be returned to the consultants at least two weeks before the scheduled site visit to ensure sufficient time for review. The assessment coordinator should feel free to contact the consultants at any time with any questions regarding the questionnaire.

Documentation

The assessment coordinator should arrange to have the following types of documentation sent to the consultants via hard copy, electronic format, or links at least two weeks before the scheduled site visit.

- Digital Project/Program Plan – This document, or set of documents, includes a narrative overview of the digital projects and programs at the institution, mission and vision statements, purpose of the institution’s digital program, and the content of the digital projects.
- Digital Policies and Practices – These documents include written policies and processes the institution has developed for its digital activities, including standards and best practices for the production of the digital materials.
- Institutional Policy Documents – If the institution has included digital efforts in its overall organization-wide policies, then it should send review copies of any of the following policy statements that include information about the digital program: mission and goals, collection development, emergency preparedness, exhibition development and maintenance, preservation, strategic planning, public services, and rights and licensing.

Agenda

The assessment coordinator will work with consultants to develop a draft agenda. The agenda should include individual and group interviews and meetings with administrators and digital team members, tours of digital lab areas, and other logistics to ensure that the visit is as complete and efficient as possible.

Areas where the assessment coordinator should schedule interviews and meetings with key program personnel include:

- Administrative/financial planning and funding
- Selection of materials
- Digital scanning/imaging and production
- Metadata creation
- Information technology
- Access/public service/reference and curatorial functions
- Digital preservation
- Rights management activities related to the digital projects

A sample site visit agenda includes the following details:

- Meeting with administration and assessment coordinator (30 minutes)
The consultants’ initial interview with the assessment coordinator and key administrators to verify expectations, gain further insight about the institution, and finalize logistics

- Discussion with digital team (2 hours)
This discussion includes an in-depth review of the pre-visit questionnaire.
- Working lunch – discussion of current digital projects (45 minutes)
- Discussion with IT staff and related groups (90 minutes)
This discussion includes a tour of digital lab, a presentation about the digital projects, or something similar.
- Discussion with content managers/collection curators (90 minutes)
- Digital team wrap-up meeting (30 minutes)
The client and consultants discuss the assessment process.
- Preliminary findings with assessment coordinator and key administrators (30 minutes)

Depending on the size of the digital initiative, the agenda can span 1½ – 2 days to cover all the units involved in the initiative.

During the Site Visit

A successful site visit is dependent on the involvement of both the assessment coordinator and staff team. The assessment coordinator will administer all activities of the staff team and serve as the liaison between the staff team and the consultants. It is recommended that high-level administrators be involved throughout the site visit and at the very least for the initial session and wrap-up meeting.

The assessment coordinator will be responsible for arranging both individual and group interviews with the staff team. Interviews should be arranged to minimize the disruption in a staff member's schedule. For example, it is not recommended that the entire staff team be required to assemble for 1 – 2 days in a conference room waiting for their respective turn to talk.

Finally, it is important to remember that most digital preservation programs are at a very early stage of development. Because of this, many policies and practices are only beginning to be developed and documented in cultural heritage institutions, and digital preservation is just now evolving as a profession. The bottom line is that the consultants are there to assess your existing program and make recommendations and not to judge your program harshly.

After the Site Visit

The client should expect to receive the first draft of the digital preservation readiness report around two weeks after the site visit. The first draft contains factual observations only. It is the responsibility of the assessment coordinator to organize the review and “fact-check” of the first draft by the appropriate staff in accordance with the agreed-upon schedule (usually about two weeks).

The second draft of the report will contain consultants' comments and recommendations and should be expected around two weeks after receiving the first draft back from the client. It is the responsibility of the assessment coordinator to organize the review of the second draft by the appropriate staff in accordance with the agreed-upon schedule (usually about two weeks).

The final digital preservation readiness report will be issued to the client around two weeks after receiving the second draft from the client.

Summary

This Digital Preservation Readiness Assessment, which was developed by the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) with the assistance of numerous digital preservation professionals, was designed to facilitate improvements in your institution's digital collection/preservation program, including program management, resource planning, and fund development. Remember that a Digital Preservation Readiness Assessment provides a snapshot of digital practices and policies at the institution at one point in time. If some of the tasks recommended in this report seem overwhelming, it is important to remember that this is a long-term planning tool. It will be possible to implement some actions soon, but others may require diplomacy, education, and funding efforts over several years. We hope that our comments and recommendations prove helpful as your digital programs evolve.