



NORTHEAST  
DOCUMENT  
CONSERVATION  
CENTER

**Surveying Digital Assets in Museums**

**Northeast Document Conservation Center**

**Six Month Project Activity Report**

**July 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006**

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## **Northeast Document Conservation Center Surveying Digital Assets in Museums**

### **Purpose**

The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) is working with the Museum Computer Network (MCN), Heritage Preservation (HP), the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), and the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) to develop a methodology for assessing the preservation needs of digital collections in museums, libraries, and archives. The goal of the Research and Impact Study is to create and disseminate practical assessment procedures and tools that will help institutions address longevity issues and adhere to standards and best practices as they develop significant digital assets.

In August 2006, NEDCC requested and received an extension of the grant period to December 31, 2007 in order to carry out additional activities, especially drafting a Digital Surveyors Handbook, as well as completing the current activities of the grant.

### **Project Activities**

#### **July 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006**

During the reporting period, project consultants performed an additional digital survey of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and wrote a report that focused on procedures for preserving digital works of art purchased by the Museum. This was the only institution in the pilot survey sample that was actively engaged in preserving digital art, and the site visit provided a good case study for some of the complex technical and rights issues relating to born-digital materials.

The principal goal for the six-month period was to draft and revise written tools based on the experience of the pilot surveys. NEDCC worked with an outside market research firm to review and revise the pre-survey questionnaire, which was reshaped and modified in response to comments by participating institutions and surveyors. Questions from the RLG/National Archives' "Audit Checklist for Certifying Digital Repositories" were mapped to the questionnaire for future reference.

Project surveyor Tom Claeson worked with NEDCC staff member Rebecca Hatcher to develop an outline for the Digital Surveyor's Handbook, based on the model of Heritage Preservation's *CAP Handbook for Assessors*. A preliminary draft of the handbook was then written by Tom Claeson and reviewed by other members of the project team. This draft will be reviewed by the project review committee in the next six-month period and made available as one of the products of the project. In addition, a Digital Preservation Readiness Webliography was prepared by project surveyor, Liz Bishoff, and will be available on the project Web site.

After the project surveyors completed editing of the reports for the final test-bed site visits, post-survey evaluation questionnaires were administered. Maxine Sitts, the evaluation

consultant, analyzed the responses to the questionnaires from the first set of surveys and prepared a written analysis. Eighty percent of respondents said that all three parts of the survey, the pre-site visit questionnaire, the site visit, and the report were quite a bit useful or very useful. This evaluation report was reviewed in detail at a meeting of project team at NEDCC in October 2006. A particularly positive outcome of the surveys was that all institutions report beneficial interdepartmental discussions, with internal meetings continuing after the visits. All institutions also indicate that the site visit has helped them identify digital readiness needs and work on a preservation plan – crucial first steps to developing an institution-wide approach to applying standards. The site visits and reports were also particularly helpful in increasing institutional commitment for investing in infrastructure to provide better long-term storage for digital materials.

Sample comments from evaluation questionnaires include the following:

- “We will definitely use the document to “force” attention on this issue and as a guide for making changes and improving our digital preservation knowledge, policy, and practice.”
- “Including many people in the process created ‘buy in’ amongst the departments within the library.”
- “We have shared the report with the entire staff and administration.”

In order to disseminate project findings, NEDCC organized and presented program sessions on the project at annual meetings of the New England Museum Association (NEMA) and the Museum Computer Network (MCM). The MCM session drew a standing room only crowd of 100 people and elicited a great deal of discussion. A talk about the project was included on the program of NEDCC’s IMLS-supported conference, *Persistence of Memory: Stewardship of Digital Assets*, presented in Tucson, Arizona in December 2006, which attracted an audience of 200 people.

### **Project Outputs and Outcomes July 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006**

- Survey performed for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art including observations on preservation of art.
- Pre-survey questionnaire reformatted by market research firm.
- Surveyors submit final survey reports to surveyed institutions.
- Talks about the project presented at annual meetings of NEMA and MCM
- Project presented at NEDCC’s *Persistence of Memory* conference in Tucson, AZ in December
- Post-survey questionnaires administered
- Evaluation consultant analyzed the post-survey questionnaire data and prepared a report.
- Meeting of project surveyors and staff at NEDCC to discuss draft manual and review evaluation data
- Digital Preservation Readiness Webliography completed
- Digital Surveyors’ Handbook drafted
- Three additional surveys scheduled during the next six months, at institutions that are leaders in implementing good practices for preserving digital assets

## **Additional Comments**

During the next six months of the project, the project team will survey three additional institutions that are leaders in implementing good practices for maintaining and preserving digital assets. The purpose is to collect data on state-of-the-art practices and to add comments on current good practices to the trends report, which has so far documented primarily the deficiencies in institutions' digital readiness. The Digital Survey Trends Report will be revised to include positive observations in order to provide a balanced report and identify possible models for institutions to follow.

Liz Bishoff will report on the project to the ALCTS-PARS Digital Preservation Discussion Group at the ALA Mid-Winter Meeting in Seattle in January 2007. Ann Russell will give a presentation about the project at IMLS' WebWise conference on March 1, 2007.

The draft Digital Surveyors' Handbook will be reviewed by the project review committee in April 2007. The draft products of the project, including the Digital Preservation Readiness Webliography, the Surveyors' Handbook, a sample survey report, and the Digital Survey Trends Report, will be mounted on the NEDCC Web site.