PUL Digitization Strategy

Executive Summary

This digital strategy describes a lean digitization program that is both proactive and intentional. It aims to shape collections of digitized material on a large scale while also being responsive to the immediate needs of the communities we serve. We accomplish this by specifying four types of projects, each of which maps to a set of well-understood use cases. The vetting and approval processes associated with each type of project are scaled appropriately to their size and scope, thus ensuring a curated and accountable program that is timely and streamlined.

This document does not dictate content. Instead, it outlines criteria for the appraisal of proposed projects, the processes by which they will be declined or fulfilled, and the roles staff play in these processes. Any staff member may make a proposal based on any of PUL’s holdings.

Objectives

PUL has recently renewed its commitment to meet our patrons wherever they are and democratize access to knowledge as a core component of our mission. The pandemic of 2020-21 forced us to rethink how users interact with library resources and propelled us to work under the assumption that so often, and for so many people, digital access is the only access. We have been agile as we have responded to new demands, and we must now extend this agility into reconsidering our workflows and approaches to our digitization program.

Moving forward, we will:

1. Become ever more timely and responsive to immediate needs that reach us through routine requests
2. Seek to engage in and contribute to larger digital projects that transform digital access to material in which PUL has or is developing particular strengths or can contribute to the strengths of other libraries

Size and Scope

Projects can be of a variety of sizes and scales but will fall into one of four categories:

- Large projects
- Small projects
- Exhibition projects
- Evergreen projects

We will aim to allocate approximately two-thirds of our digitization program to large projects and exhibitions and one-third to smaller projects and evergreens. We will assess this ratio over time. As an additional guideline, no single project should regularly consume more than one-quarter of the digital imaging studio’s resources. These allocations should generally allow for at least two large projects plus exhibition work to be underway in-house at any time while still leaving time for small and evergreen projects.

Large Projects

Large projects may span one or more years but should be complete or achieve significant milestones in less than three. Working at this scale allows us to plan and allocate resources in a manner that ensures that the project’s impact justifies the effort it entails. This also makes room for considering supplemental staffing, outsourcing, and potential sources of additional funding.

Large projects should also satisfy as many of the following criteria as possible:

- Improve access to areas of PUL’s collections that are unique or especially strong
- Advance PUL’s mission to make diversity, equity, and inclusion the cornerstone of our culture
- Foster collaboration and partnerships with other research and cultural heritage institutions (see Digitization, Borrowing, and Lending)
- Be open-access and unconstrained by copyright or donor agreement
- Preserve access to important content that is fragile, deteriorating, or on obsolete media

Anyone from the Library staff can propose a large project—on their own or in collaboration with faculty—at any time, to a member of the LSC Digital Strategy Group (DSG) for sponsorship. Such projects will require the submission of a detailed proposal and will be subject to a rigorous vetting process, which includes endorsement by the entire DSG and final approval by the University Librarian.

Specifically, large projects should have a fully formed work plan, which incorporates temporal constraints imposed by collaborators, grants, anniversaries, or other planned PU events, and includes:

- An executive summary
- The name of the proposer (Project Owner)
- One or more LSC sponsors
- A general description of the project
- The immediate impact and long-term significance of the project
- A description of constraints (funding sources, deadlines, requirements of stakeholders and collaborators)
- A description of the items to be digitized, including an estimate of the number of images that the project will generate
- Conservation and Metadata considerations, assessed and documented in the Conservation and Metadata Assessment Form
- Target audiences
- A draft work plan, including
  - The duration of the project
Staffing resources (existing, contract, consultants, advisors)
Any non-standard digitization considerations.
A data management and delivery plan, where applicable
A list of deliverables, including to 3rd parties
Potential sources of additional funding, both internal and external
A dissemination plan that demonstrates continued stakeholder engagement, including the designation of a digital curator who will be responsible for the organization and maintenance of the digital collection in Digital PUL and any other distribution platforms

Once approved, the project owner will work with the DPOG to develop a Statement of Work and any other necessary supporting documents. The project owner will work with the Digital Projects Operations Group (DPOG) throughout the project.

Small Projects

Small projects react to immediate needs, including, for example, patron requests, teaching needs, and digitization of new acquisitions. While every digital initiative, whatever its scale, requires some degree of consideration, including a conservation review as appropriate, it is intended that we can execute small-scale digitization projects with minimal vetting and process. If in doubt, DPOG representatives will determine whether a project requires further review.

Fundamentally, small projects provide just-in-time access for patrons—both locally and globally—and staff in support of their teaching and research. Internal requests, whether from Princeton faculty, students, or staff, will always be the highest priority. Curators and selectors may initiate small projects without Digital Strategy Group sponsorship. Rare materials must be assessed for physical stability before imaging.

Digitization in Support of Gallery Exhibitions

PUL’s Milberg exhibitions will have an online component. This will democratize access to information, extend the return on investment and effort that went into the exhibition, and preserve the experience for the future. Digital PUL will be the primary platform of record for these exhibitions, but the exploitation of other non-web digital platforms (e.g., kiosks, virtual reality) in addition is encouraged. Digital exhibitions to accompany exhibitions in other spaces are also encouraged, but the process can be less formal and will vary case-by-case.

DPUL can be customized to match the look and feel of the physical exhibition experience, but the physical environment’s constraints should not limit the online exhibition. The content need not match one-to-one: online exhibitions can expand themes and take advantage of the virtual environment to augment and add to the physical exhibition. The digital exhibition can include, for example, additional curatorial content, digital access to the exhibited materials that allow for the viewing of other pages and details, and additional objects that are in keeping with the theme of the exhibition. Items may be added after the digitization proposal is submitted, but the timeline for inclusion in the exhibition is not guaranteed.

While LSC governs and the Exhibitions Operations Group manages the exhibition proposal process, a digitization proposal, including a list of items to be digitized, is required and is due 18 months before the exhibition opens. This proposal must be included in the Phase II proposal to the Exhibition Operations Group and include:

- The title, date, and curator(s) of the physical exhibition
- A one-page abstract presenting the vision for the digital exhibition and its relationship to the physical one
- An appointed online exhibition manager who is responsible for the creation of the online exhibition and liaises with content, IT, and communications specialists; they are also responsible for ensuring the inclusion of label copy in the online exhibition
- A list of items to be digitized, including their IDs in the online catalog or finding aid
- A list of items that cannot be digitized due to, for example, condition, copyright, or donor agreement concerns and potential alternatives where appropriate
- Any non-standard digitization or metadata considerations identified in consultation with CAMS or the Digital Studio
- A list of materials to be borrowed from 3rd parties, that includes, for each item:
  - The title of the item or other identifying information
  - The lending institution
  - A memorandum of understanding granting permission to digitize the item and make it available as part of the online exhibition. This MOU may use PUL’s template or one provided by the lender.
  - The date by which the item will be available for photography
- Sources of funding that are supporting the exhibition and can potentially support digitization for the exhibition

The following elements of the digital exhibition should be included in the overall exhibition schedule as negotiated and coordinated with the Digital Projects Operations Group and Exhibitions Registrar and Gallery Operations Manager:

- A coordinated schedule for transfer of items between Conservation and the Digitization Studio
- Deadlines for reviewing and creating, as necessary, descriptive and structural metadata for the digitized items
- Deadlines for IT to complete any custom development that is required, including design implementation
- Deadlines for exhibition copy and label text, which may be the same as or different from that of the copy for the gallery exhibition

The designated online exhibition manager must work with DPOG to build the proposal and submit the plan as the digital component of the Phase II exhibition proposal.

Note: The PUL Exhibitions Program Manual specifies other important deadlines, such as submission of the final phase II proposal to LSC (18 months before the opening date) and checklists of items to be included in the exhibition (12 months before the opening date). These are important to the digital exhibition as well but not specified here because they are included in that document.

Evergreen Projects

Evergreen projects, which have no timeline nor otherwise-dedicated capacity, use the same resources set aside for small projects. These may be proposed to the LSC Digital Strategy Group at any time using similar criteria and processes as large projects and will fill gaps between other commitments. A clear but not time-sensitive objective agreed by the Digital Projects Operations Group and backed by a set of criteria or a predetermined list of items provides the basis for evergreen projects.
There are three types of evergreen project:

- Those based on a fixed list, potentially in priority order
- Those based on items determined by a set of criteria, e.g., important new acquisitions, important content newly out of copyright, and the Brittle Books program
- Those based on incremental and growing lists, created as the proposer assesses collections or discovers items that match the project’s criteria. This category is essentially a hybrid of the previous two and will be useful for preservation-oriented remediation projects, e.g., the digitization of newspapers, tape, and other fragile media

Evergreen projects leverage time and resources that remain between other priorities. They may also provide a useful means for spending down certain earmarked funds. As such, an evergreen project should always yield a list of items that are ready to go on short notice. Depending on the nature of the material, additional staff may need to be involved in the digitization process, such as Preservation and Conservation or Cataloging and Metadata Services. Evergreen projects require a commitment to see the project through from the leadership of any department or unit involved.

Evergreen Projects will be listed in a master roster and will each have worksheets. The roster and these worksheets will be available to all relevant staff and stakeholders in a shared folder. The worksheet will include a list of items to be digitized and specify a workflow that ensures all appropriate units’ involvement.

The DSG will review the roster of evergreen projects annually and reprioritize, cancel, revise, or recategorize them to align the projects with the Library’s needs, capacity, and mission.

**Preservation and Access**

**Preservation**

We will ingest all digital objects into PUL’s digital repository architecture in order to ensure long-term digital preservation, use, and re-use.

PUL’s distributed repository architecture comprises multiple loosely connected applications and preservation storage systems. This modularity helps us avoid creating a monolithic repository that will eventually age and require an arduous migration. We have seen many of our peers make this mistake. Library IT and the **Digital Projects Operation Group (DPOG)** are responsible for maintaining and documenting these applications’ functions and prioritizing new feature development.

**Access**

**Online Delivery**

With few exceptions, such as ephemera projects, we will present all digitized objects through either the library catalog or PUL Finding aids web applications. Records to support broader discovery will also be disseminated and promulgated through other aggregative platforms as appropriate, e.g., OCLC and HathiTrust (note that this is a new practice). IT will maintain features that encourage search engines to crawl all discovery and exhibition platforms. Most items digitized for large projects, exhibitions, and evergreen projects will belong to one or more Digital PUL exhibitions. Selectors and curators should assess small project items for inclusion in existing digital collections as well.

**Value-Added Work**

Except for most archival materials, the majority of digitized items will have additional pagination and structural metadata to support navigation. Subject specialists and Figgy-proficient staff from all Library Departments, including Cataloging and Metadata Services (CaMS), will contribute to pagination and structural metadata for small projects. Team leaders will coordinate work based on project or item needs and expectations. However, some access is always better than no access. Generally speaking, items should go online as soon as they are available, with any metadata enhancements, including pagination and structural metadata applied iteratively according to agreed prioritization and timelines.

**Digitization, Borrowing, and Lending**

Projects should seek to emphasize existing collection strengths where possible. However, there will be cases where PUL’s collections could supplement digitization or exhibition efforts taking place elsewhere. Participating in collaborative digital projects is encouraged where possible, as contribution to existing projects, as opposed to creating our own, reduces silos while helping realize our goal of “meet[ing] patrons wherever they are, and democratiz[ing] access to knowledge”.

Similarly, there may be times where PUL wishes to build a local digital collection that is stronger or more complete than its physical collections. In this case, incorporating resources from other cultural heritage institutions, either by borrowing items for digitization or requesting digitization from third parties, is encouraged. CaMS should catalog these as electronic holdings. An **MOU template** is available to help facilitate the hosting of digital images of third-party items at PUL.

Note also that items from PUL collections that are to be loaned for exhibitions at other institutions should be digitized as small projects prior to being sent.

**The Roles of the LSC Digital Strategy Group and the Digital Projects Operations Group**
Large, evergreen, and exhibition projects require a sponsor from the LSC Digital Strategy Group (DSG) who will work with their DSG colleagues to review and prioritize projects. Small projects may proceed without a DSG sponsor.

The LSC Digital Strategy Group

The LSC Digital Strategy Group is a subset of LSC, including the leadership of IT, Imaging and Metadata Services (ITIMS), Special Collections (SC), and Scholarly Collections and Research Services (SCRS). This group is responsible for:

- Approval of large projects, evergreen projects, and exhibition project plans
- Articulating the criteria used for prioritizing projects
- All aspects of the Library’s digital strategy
- Communicating the Library’s digital strategy via this document

The LSC Digital Strategy Group takes advice from the Digital Projects Operations Group and works closely with them to review large and evergreen projects annually.

The Digital Projects Operations Group

The Digital Projects Operations Group (DPOG, formerly DPSG) is responsible for operations related to the execution of the entirety of PUL’s digital project portfolio. The group’s responsibilities are described below under Appendix: Digital Projects Operations Group Charter.

The Assistant Director of IT will chair DPOG, and the membership will include staff responsible for digitization, metadata, project management, conservation, software development, and workflows. They will liaise with the Exhibitions Operations Group specifically and other groups, committees, and departments as necessary to ensure policy, strategy, and workflow alignment.

Note that there is no formal pre- or post- proposal review of projects by DPOG. Instead, they will be involved in the development of proposals as the project is being conceived. Similarly, they will work with the project owner to draft a Statement of Work and other supporting documentation for approved projects.

About this Document

The LSC DSG members prepared this document with assistance from Alexis Antracoli, Jennifer Baxmeyer, Brenna Campbell, Esmé Cowles, David Jenkins, Thomas Keenan, Steven Knowlton, Kimberly Leaman, Sara Logue, Roel Muñoz, Emma Sarconi, and Eric White. It will be reviewed at the end of August 2021 and then annually each July.

Appendix: Digital Project Operations Group Charter

The Digital Project Operations Group (DPOG) replaces the Digital Projects Steering Group (DPSG, active from 2017-2021). DPOG advises the LSC Digital Strategy Group (DSG) and is responsible for the following:

- Planning and controlling capacity for in-house work, including photography, metadata creation, conservation needs, digital preservation, relevant software development, and any outsourced work
- Facilitating the creation of digital project proposals to help ensure that they are timely and operationally viable
- Setting and documenting best practices related to preservation and delivery file formats, and details such as how many preservation copies are necessary and where they are stored
- Working with public services staff to maintain the small project process and queue
- Maintaining the evergreen Projects worksheets and lists
- Maintaining any MOUs related to digitization and hosting
- Designing and, where necessary, documenting project workflows
- Managing contracts for outsourced work and ensuring adherence to appropriate standards. DPOG must oversee all contracting for outsourced digitization work.
- Documenting and enforcing a clear scope for each of PUL’s digital repositories
- Selecting and administering tools used to manage projects and workflows
- Assessing and making recommendations regarding equipment, software, training, and staffing needs
- Advising IT Operations on infrastructure needs related to digitization, e.g., storage capacity planning
- On an annual basis, facilitating review of all large, evergreen, and exhibition projects, an assessment of capacity and workflows for small projects, and a revision of all relevant documentation

LSC Sponsor

Jon Stroop, Deputy University Librarian and Director of Library IT, Imaging, and Metadata Services

Membership

- Esmé Cowles, Assistant Director of Library IT (Chair)
- Alexis Antracoli, Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections, Technical Services
- Peter Bae, Assistant University Librarian for Scholarly Collections Services
- Jennifer Baxmeyer, Assistant University Librarian for Metadata Services
- Annalise Berdini, Library Digital Archivist
Additionally, all project owners for large projects will serve on the committee for the duration of their project.

As with all PUL committees, DPOG will occasionally organize working groups to implement or oversee special projects, write reports, or carry out other specific tasks with a predetermined goal or lifecycle. These groups may involve additional staff.

**Priorities for 2021**

DPOG will need to accomplish the following to implement this digital strategy:

- Work with public services staff and other stakeholders to develop and document a “small project” workflow and tracking system that is used consistently across general and special collections
- Finalize a third-party Digitization and Hosting MOU
- Create worksheets to support evergreen projects
- Finalize the Conservation and Metadata Assessment Forms
- Retrofitting the large project framework onto the ongoing set of ephemera projects
- Assess and choose workflow tools as appropriate

Additionally, DPOG will:

- Consolidate documentation from the website and Google Drive and move it to Confluence
- Develop “Digitization on Acquisition” and “New to the Public Domain” evergreen projects for use as models for future projects