

Title: Building a More Inclusive Community through Digital Preservation Peer Assessments**Type:** Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program: Project Grant, National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives**Summary:** Arizona State University Library will develop an innovative training program and community of practice that will bring together digital preservation experts, cultural heritage practitioners from under-resourced institutions, and Masters-level library science students to collaborate in the preparation of digital preservation peer and self-assessments. Over two years, 48 practitioners, 12 graduate students, and 12 experts will work in small cohorts to perform holistic, systematic, and practical analyses of each organization's current digital stewardship practices; focusing on the creation of actionable and achievable goals and activities.**Statement of Broad Need:** ASU Library requests \$247,012 for a two-year Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Project Grant to create a digital stewardship-focused, assessment-based professional development training program for cultural heritage practitioners and emerging professionals currently enrolled in library/archives graduate programs. Digital preservation assessment helps to "facilitate diagnosis of where an organization stands in terms of capabilities and stages of growth and maturity."¹ The majority of professional literature concerning digital preservation assessment focuses on frameworks intended for audit and certification purposes, such as the *TRAC Criteria and Checklist*, the *Data Seal of Approval*, and the *NESTOR Seal*. Achieving certification demonstrates compliance with standards and communicates to stakeholders that the institution is fulfilling stated responsibilities. However, certification is also an arduous and expensive process, and is simply not necessary or appropriate for every institution that stewards digital materials.

Lighter weight models, such as the [NDSA Levels of Preservation](#), have become immensely popular in recent years because they can be completed quickly, and are much less intimidating to smaller organizations. However, some organizations find that they do not even meet Level 1 (Know your content) criteria, and can become disheartened to find out that they are so far behind. The Digital Preservation Coalition's [Rapid Assessment Model \(DPC-RAM\)](#) promises to serve as a rapid benchmarking tool appropriate for organizations of any size, and in any sector. The Digital POWRR Project's "POWRR Plan" wedes an approachable short self-assessment with the creation of a personalized action plan, helping practitioners understand how to put assessment results into practice.² This proposed project would take the best elements from these frameworks plus others, creating an inclusive, approachable solution that will promote the participation of students and practitioners from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds.

Project Design: The project would commence on August 1, 2021, and end July 31, 2023. Training will be provided in three cycles to keep the ratio of practitioners to mentors low, so that more time can be spent working with one another. Training periods will be five months total, and will run during the course of the traditional academic semester so that student participants can receive academic credit for their participation, as well as a stipend. Each period will feature 16 practitioners, four mentors, and four grad students, who will be divided into four cohorts of six. Training periods will be five months total, and will run during the course of the traditional academic semester so that student participants can receive academic credit for their participation, as well as a stipend. Additional time will be devoted to evaluative work and the production of final deliverables.

Key project groups will include: 1) the Project Team, comprised of the principal investigator Stacey Erdman,³ and a graduate assistant selected from the [Knowledge River](#) program⁴ who will handle grant administration duties and logistics; 2) an Advisory Board, comprised of several "thought leaders" in the field with substantive

¹ "Organizational Assessment Frameworks for Digital Preservation: A Literature Review and Mapping," ASIS&T, 28 April 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23807>

² Digital POWRR Institute participants emphasized in evaluations that they found the melding of assessment and action plan to be very useful: "I love the POWRR Plan idea. I often come away from workshops full of enthusiasm and ideas but unsure of how to apply them to my day-to-day work. The POWRR Plan helped solidify steps I can make towards better digital preservation strategies and left me with something to reflect on once I returned home." ("Digital POWRR Institute Reflections," by Krista McCracken, January 15, 2018, <https://digitalpowrr.niu.edu/guest-post-digital-powrr-institute-reflections-by-krista-mccracken/>)

³ Erdman currently serves at ASU Library's Digital Preservation & Curation Officer and as the Acting Manager of the Digital Repository.

⁴ The Knowledge River program promotes an understanding of library and information issues from the perspectives of Latino and Native Americans, and advocates for culturally sensitive library services to these communities. It is located at, and administered by the School of Information at the University of Arizona. ASU Library has a preexisting relationship with Knowledge River and has regularly hosted scholars at the Labriola National American Indian Data Center, among other units. K.R. does not currently have a "stream" dedicated to digital stewardship; however program administrators have expressed interest in expanding into this as an future and ongoing "stream." This project would allow this stream to be piloted in a meaningful way.

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creating/working with assessment frameworks; 3) Practitioners, representing under-resourced organizations who are seeking guidance on how to best steward their digital collections; 4) Mentors, cultural heritage professionals with substantial digital preservation work experience; and 5) Graduate Students, who are seeking a meaningful, hands-on introduction to digital stewardship work.

Project goals and outcomes will include the following:

- An analysis of existing assessment frameworks, and their applicability for this audience, as well as the creation of an assessment framework focused on the unique needs of under-resourced organizations.
- A publicly open virtual showcase at the conclusion of each semester where cohorts share their assessment results and experiences.
- The creation of lasting collaborative relationships from the intensive cohort-based learning model.
- Providing participants with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to confidently conduct peer assessment work, and to train others on the process after the project's conclusion.
- A white paper summarizing the assessment framework(s) created/employed, as well as highlighting common gaps in practices, and impediments to progress experienced by practitioners.

Diversity Plan: The proposed training is directly aimed at advancing the role of underrepresented minorities in cultural heritage institutions nationwide, and as such, participation by these populations is integral to the success of the project. The project PI would leverage preexisting relationships with organizations that explicitly serve minority populations in order to recruit a diverse pool of participants. These organizations include: the Knowledge River program, the Sustainable Heritage Network; Archives for Black Lives; Historically Black Colleges and Universities Library Alliance; ALA's Rainbow Roundtable; Association of Hawai'i Archivists; and Northwest Archivists, Inc.;. Application materials will ask participants to self-identify what group(s) they represent. Diversity issues will also be considered across every aspect of the design and execution of the training.

Broad Impact: This project will enhance National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives by creating a vigorously immersive, yet accessible and equitable education opportunity for *both* emerging and existing professionals, who wish to gain hands-on experience evaluating digital collections in a systematic way. According to the "Report on the 2017 National Digital Platform at Three Forum," many mid-career information professionals are in great need of digital preservation professional development opportunities, as these duties are often ones they have inherited. The proposed project would represent a distinctive addition to the training landscape, as the majority of existing learning opportunities focus on learning fundamentals, acquiring specific technical skills, or approach preservation work in a very theoretical manner. This project meets nearly all of the "overarching themes and future work" outlined in the forum report, most notably Collaboration, Community, Continuing Education, Preservation, and Sustainability.⁵

This project builds upon programs that have focused on providing digital preservation and stewardship training; among these, the most notable is the National Digital Stewardship Residency program. The project will benefit directly from the PI's prior involvement with several IMLS and NEH-funded initiatives that explicitly provided assessment-based training including: the NEDCC's "Digital Preservation Assessment Training" (DAT) project, where she received training to deploy the DAT framework as a consultant; the WiLS "Curating Community Collections" project, where she served as a mentor to the Beloit Historical Society; and the Digital POWRR Project, where she served as Technical Coordinator, Communication and Communities Coordinator, and as an instructor, conducting over 50 individual assessments as part of the institute's POWRR Plan assignment.

Budget: The total budget proposal for this two-year project is \$248,753, cost share is not required for project grants under \$249,999. Project costs include Personnel Effort (\$37,048); Fringe (\$6,437); Travel (\$40,000); Participant support stipends (\$56,000); Consultants/honoraria (\$48,000); Project Supplies (\$2,000); Indirect Costs (\$59,268).

⁵ "National Digital Infrastructures and Initiatives: A Report on the 2017 National Digital Platform at Three Forum," pages 13-16, <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/imls-digital-platform-report.pdf>