Digital Preservation Policy Framework for Museums and Galleries

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Introduction

The processes for digital preservation in museums and galleries borrow heavily from the standards and best practices used by digital archivists. However, there are differences. The biggest is that museums and galleries tend to have information systems that are already set up to catalogue physical collections, typically by using collections management software. Digital archives, by contrast, tend to employ software based on the widely accepted open archival information system (OAIS) framework reference model to ensure that a digital asset remains authoritative, authentic, reliable and useable and to ensure that the integrity of the object is preserved. Clearly, archival and collections management systems are not meant to accomplish the same tasks, but there is overlap. Thus, establishing both systems in an institution that has no formal mandate to manage a digital archive often involves an impractical (and in the case of smaller institutions, impossible) level of effort and resources.

Since 2012, the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) has promoted the use of the *Digital Preservation Policy Framework: Development Guideline Version 2.1*, developed by Nancy Y. McGovern. CHIN continues to support and promote this framework. We recommend it where the management of a formal archive is consistent with the institution's mandate and where resources to manage such an archive exist.

For museums and galleries that are not mandated to manage a formal digital archive and that do not have the resources to manage one in addition to their collections management system, CHIN has produced the following policy framework. We acknowledge the 2012 guideline, after which some of these sections are modelled.

What is a digital preservation policy and why is it important?

All policies answer the questions "What should we do?" and "Why should we do it?"

A digital preservation policy is a high-level document that identifies which digital resources should be preserved for long-term access and under what circumstances and conditions. It also clearly indicates why such preservation is important in the context of the institution's mandate and activities.

A digital preservation policy is important because it can be used

- to tie preservation activities to the mandate and goals of the institution, even where the institution's core mandate is not to manage an archive;
- to set parameters for the development of a digital preservation plan and procedures;
- to provide a decision-making context for any circumstance not already accounted for by existing preservation plans or procedures;
- to create consent at all levels for organizational change; and
- to create consent for securing long-term funding.

Who should be involved in the creation of a digital preservation policy?

Representatives from the following groups should all be involved, to varying degrees, in policy development:

- the project lead responsible for undertaking the institution's digital asset inventory (Step 1 of the digital preservation toolkit workflow, which can be found on the page [How to use the Digital Preservation Toolkit](#));
- the anticipated project lead for the digital preservation plan (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow);
- senior-level staff who will be held responsible for managing digital preservation activities;
- representatives of all internal stakeholders, including those who create digital assets, those who must manage them and those who access these resources;
- the legal department, particularly where copyright and privacy may be an issue;
- a project champion, such as a person in senior management who is responsible for carrying out the mandate of the institution;
- an approver, such as a person in senior management who is responsible for long-term (core) funding allocation; and
- independent peers in related institutions or the digital preservation community who review a draft version of the document to help ensure that the policy is in keeping with best practices.

In small museums, all these categories may be represented by as few as one or two people, since employees in small institutions tend to fill many roles. In large institutions, representation could involve significantly more people.

When should a policy be created or revised?

The policy is created in Step 2 of the toolkit workflow, after having taken stock of the current digital assets in the museum. That is to say, as a second step during the initial processes of

- taking an inventory of the institution's digital assets,
- developing a digital preservation policy and
- developing a digital preservation plan and procedures.

Some sections of the policy must be created prior to Step 3 (plan selection and development), whereas other components of the policy (those that justify the course of action taken) must be completed after that plan has been developed. For each component of the policy described in the next section, clear indication is given as to when that section should be started and when it should be completed.

Contents of a digital preservation policy for museums and galleries

The following is a summary of the components that should be found in any digital preservation policy document for museums or galleries.

Section 1: cover page

This section is started during the initial draft of a policy (Step 2 of the toolkit workflow) and is finalized upon completion of the policy and plan.

Cover page components include the following:

- Document title: indicates that the document is a digital preservation policy and names the institution.
- Document version: clearly indicates that the current version supersedes any preceding versions. All preceding versions should be listed with the version number struck out.
- Date that the current document enters into effect.
- Signature of an executive in the institution who has the authority to place the document into effect and the date of signature.

Section 2: problem statement

This section is started and generally completed during the initial draft of the digital preservation policy. The term "problem statement" is borrowed from the business management world and does not necessarily mean that the current state of affairs is faulty. Instead, the term simply refers to the issue (or issues) to be addressed by the policy and ensuing plan.

This section is accompanied by supporting references to indicate where the problems were identified. They could come from the following sources:

- gaps between the institution's mandate and its current outcomes as they relate to digital materials,
- issues identified during the digital inventory process (Step 1 of the toolkit workflow) and
- issues identified by any other means.

The problem statement should not imply a specific solution.

Section 3: scope of goals and objectives

This section is created and completed during the initial draft of a digital preservation policy. However, revisions may be required once a plan is selected.

The section states the overarching goal of the policy (typically something along the lines of "ensuring digital assets are made accessible in the long-term") and is then further fleshed out with more measurable objectives that qualify this goal. An example could be "making copies of digital assets freely accessible to the general public."

This section will also serve as a starting point for the requirements that will be defined during the plan development stage (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow). As such, considerable thought should be given to this section, and as many stakeholders as possible should be consulted. Objectives should always focus on the issue (what needs to be done and why) and not on a specific solution (how something will be done).

This section should be used to identify what is clearly out of scope. An example could be "this policy and the ensuing plan do not encompass greater issues related to the museum's IT strategy." Stating what is out of scope will help better define the focus of the policy and plan, and it will reduce the likelihood of the project succumbing to scope creep (where the scope of a project continues to grow). Out-of-scope issues may still be relevant to the chosen digital preservation solution (for instance, the resulting digital preservation plan might need to mesh with the museum's new IT strategy), but these out-of-scope issues do not need to be resolved in the digital preservation policy.

Section 4: compliancy statement

This section should be completed during the initial draft of the policy (Step 2 of the toolkit workflow).

This section outlines which standards, principles and best practices the policy and plan will follow. Unlike the *[Digital Preservation Policy Framework: Development Guideline Version 2.1](#)*, compliance may not be to the OAIS framework reference model. Instead, compliance can be to any commonly accepted digital preservation standard, guideline or practice. Examples include materials found in CHIN's [Digital Preservation Toolkit](#), a digital preservation metadata standard and materials taught in a digital preservation course. By stating the materials with which you intend to comply, you indicate the degree to which you are committed to following standards and best practices. Be sure, however, that your chosen solution does indeed comply with the documents mentioned in this section.

Section 5: reference to a chosen digital preservation plan

This section is completed after the action plan (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow) has been selected and developed. In it, evidence is given that appropriate due diligence has been carried out in the following categories:

- Financial sustainability: this subsection should include a summary of how much the chosen plan will cost (beyond current expenses) to initially implement, how much it is expected to cost annually and the source of the funds for these costs. This information is taken from a more detailed financial analysis in the plan (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow) and is intended to show that the solution is financially sustainable.

- Technological suitability: this subsection summarizes the chosen hardware and software identified in the plan (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow). It indicates why this technology was a suitable choice in light of the goals and objectives, the compliancy statement, the financial limitations and human resources (in terms of time and skills available). The goal is to show that while the chosen technology may not involve a formal digital archive, it is a reasonable choice, given what needs to be done and the resources available.
- Audit and security mechanisms: this subsection indicates what processes in the chosen plan (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow) are in place to ensure that objects are authentic, reliable and useable and that the integrity of the object is preserved.
- Environmental sustainability: this subsection is recommended and may be required, depending on your institution's practices. It refers to the chosen plan's consideration of environmental impacts, such as increased power consumption and the selection of equipment from carbon-wise manufacturers.
- Challenges and risks: this subsection acknowledges that the chosen plan (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow) likely involves compromise and, consequently, challenges and risks. These risks, which are outlined in greater detail in the plan, are summarized in this subsection along with a justification for accepting them and mechanisms for mitigating them.

Section 6: triggers for revision

This section is completed after the plan (Step 3 of the toolkit workflow) has been completed.

It indicates when this digital preservation policy should be reviewed and revised. Typical triggers stated here include the following:

- Revisions during plan creation: often it becomes apparent that the objectives in a policy may not be achievable within the confines of the current finances, technology or human resources.
- Revisions after a trial period of plan implementation: after a trial period, it may become apparent that the plan does not function as expected. Typically, in such a scenario, only the plan is revised. However, if the plan cannot be revised to meet the desired objectives, it may be necessary to modify the policy as well.
- Internal disruptions: if the museum's mandate, human resources, finances, related plans or strategies are changed, it may affect the goals and objectives of a digital preservation policy or plan.
- External disruptions: if the state of technology or the state of digital preservation knowledge changes, this may affect both the digital preservation plan and policy.
- Regular review: in addition to the above triggers, the policy should be reviewed on a regular basis (biannually, for instance) to ensure that it remains current and relevant to the goals and activities of the institution.

Section 7: definitions

The digital preservation policy should be readable by any staff member, including the institution's executive. Any technical term that is specific to digital preservation, and which may not be commonly known, should be included in this section.

Section 8: references

Any reference to external or internal documents should be included in this section.

Addendum: digital asset retention and disposition schedule

If all digital assets are to be preserved indefinitely (keeping in mind that there is work in doing this), then this should be stated in the digital preservation policy's goals and objectives section. In this case, no addendum is required.

Barring that, an addendum that states how long each type of digital asset should be retained can be included in this section. A simple way of stating this information is to include a digital asset retention and disposition schedule, which consists of a table listing the institution's digital asset categories (determined in Step 1 of the toolkit workflow) and the number of years these items should be retained.

Another method would be to categorize objects into meaningful groups such as "Objects of Transitory Nature," "Objects of Enduring Value" and "Objects of Business Value." Then, provide retention rules for each of these categories.

Regardless of the method used, this addendum should be relatively short in length. It is typically one or two pages.

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Glossary

authentic object
> Object that has the quality of being genuine or being what it purports to be. An electronic copy of a newspaper article is authentic if it indeed is a copy (image or text) of the article referred to in its metadata.

object with integrity
> Object that was preserved without alteration or, at least, without alteration of any information that the object represents. A digital copy of a newspaper article, for instance, has integrity if it can be established that the information represented in the copy has not been altered in any way.

reliable object
> Object that is associated with a complete, accurate and controlled record. An electronic copy of a newspaper article, for instance, is reliable object if it is a complete copy of the article and if all information (metadata) about the article has been detailed in full.

useable object
> Object that can be easily accessed. This refers to properties such as their availability, discoverability, searchability and completeness.

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