Ohio State University Libraries
Digital Initiatives Program
Guiding Principles

Background:

The stewardship of the Ohio State University Libraries' Digital Initiatives Program is a shared responsibility between all divisions within the organization. The ability to anticipate new and emerging trends, develop flexible workflows, and evolve the program to support future environments is paramount to the long-term success of the Libraries' mission. The Digital Initiatives Program touches many areas of the Libraries' strategic plan, and ultimately, will only be successful with the cooperation, support, and engagement with the many internal and external stakeholders that make up the OSU Libraries' community.

Digital initiatives are resource-intensive undertakings that underpin much of what the OSUL does today. As a research library, we push boundaries – challenging current publication models and re-envisioning what it means to publish scholarly content, creating and developing new content and services to encourage interdisciplinary study, providing robust discovery tools that obscure the content silos that libraries and users are forced to navigate, and taking the lead in exploring the long-term issues around indefinite data preservation and storage. As the Libraries accelerates its digital programs and offerings, it is important to consider some basic underlying principles of design, implementation, and maintenance of the larger Digital Initiatives Program. These principles, and the practices that evolve from them, apply across the full continuum of systems, services, and projects for converted as well as "born-digital" collections.

As the OSU Libraries Digital Initiatives Program continues to mature and evolve, the Program will adopt a broad set of principles that will help guide not only the present, but future development of the Libraries' digital initiatives. A number of key themes have been identified that will serve as touch-points as stakeholders work to develop the Digital Initiatives Program and ensure that the Program has the ability to grow and adapt to meet new needs and opportunities as they are presented.

Digital Initiatives Program Mission Statement:

The OSU Libraries is a dynamic partner and campus leader in cultivating scholarship and creativity, empowering discovery and exploration, and curating our shared knowledge, both past and future. As one of the eminent cultural heritage organizations in the world, the Libraries plays a unique role in advancing the dissemination of scholarly communication and cultivating an environment of academic inquiry that supports the interconnected nature of our global community.

The Digital Initiatives Program plays an important role in the Libraries' mission, providing the mechanical and intellectual scaffolding that enables the OSU Libraries to create, preserve, and disseminate digital forms of information both now and in the future. The Digital Initiatives Program will ensure that the Libraries remains well positioned to continue supporting the mission of the university and its communities, through the active assessment of the Libraries' digital infrastructure and policies and ensuring that our systems and processes evolve to meet the changing needs of a large, dynamic research organization.

Principles:

A number of key principles have been identified that will guide the development of the Digital Initiatives Program and the working group as it evaluates current and future systems, policies, services, and best practices. These principles underscore the changing nature of digital environments and the need to embrace an environment that understands and anticipates the ephemeral nature of technology while ensuring the durability of managed content.

- ***We build services, not products***
  The OSU Libraries' digital infrastructure will be conceived around the philosophy that the Libraries should be investing in the development of services, not one-off development projects. This represents the natural maturation of the OSUL's Digital Initiatives Program; moving from an environment that was tied to individual digitization projects and products, to a programmatic architectural approach that considers the issues of long-term sustainability, interoperability, preservation, and accessibility of resources at OSUL and beyond.   This approach should allow for the Libraries' sharing and leveraging of data to provide better integration, access, and discovery of content.

- ***We carefully weigh when to Build versus Buy versus Borrow***
  The development of the Libraries digital infrastructure must recognize the needs of the institution and weigh them against the Libraries' desire to promote a culture of open access and open source development, and the Libraries' current capacity to develop and support new services and systems. The development of the Libraries' Digital Initiatives Program will occur along a continuum of options, where tools and systems are selected based on the Libraries' needs, support capacity, and a system or tool's "fit" within the present environment.

- ***We develop modular services, not monolithic systems***
  The Libraries' Digital Initiatives Program will be developed around the philosophy that systems designed around modular services and components ultimately will provide a greater level of flexibility and encourage long-term innovation over traditional monolithic systems. The Libraries' will utilize a "plug and play" philosophy, where systems and tools are simply building blocks of a larger whole. This approach will provide the Libraries with the greatest flexibility by allowing the Libraries to

continuously evaluate the blocks that make up the larger architecture, and replace components and tools as new, better options become available.

- ***We develop for change***
  In order to be successful over the long-term, the Libraries' Digital Initiatives Program will adopt a philosophy of continual change. The simple truth is, nothing is forever. Whether it is the digital object and the need to refresh or migrate formats as standards change, or the iterative and incremental development of systems, services, and tools, the technology and processes that make up the Libraries' Digital Initiatives Program will always remain in a state of flux. By recognizing this fact, the Libraries' will adopt a vision of iterative development. This vision will be marked by the following tenets:
    - <u>All things evolve</u> – Regardless of the format, the system, or the people managing and developing a system, things will always be in a state of flux. We acknowledge that and accept it as a part of the architectural design.
    - <u>Plan for continuous improvements</u> – The Libraries will use an agile approach to systems development, adopting a philosophy of iterative development: release soon and release often, allowing the Libraries to move quickly and anticipate new needs and services.
    - <u>It's OK to fail</u> – In systems development, a certain amount of risk exists. It's easy to react to trends, but difficult to anticipate future needs without experimentation. Failure in this context is acceptable and periodically expected, so long as the Libraries is able to learn through the process, fail fast, and fail forward, and not lose managed content.
    - <u>Anticipating End-Of-Life</u> – Whether it is a data format, a tool, a system component, services, or a best practice – anticipating the migration of data, systems, and workflows is a universal constant when working within a digital environment. The Libraries will minimize the impact of these disruptions by proactively planning and preparing for these inevitable technology shifts.

- ***We don't keep everything forever***
  While libraries understand the need to curate traditional print collections, few apply those principles of curation to the digital environment. The simple fact is, the Libraries will not maintain all digital data forever, and the Libraries' digital programs will need to provide a clear process for managing the life cycle of the content that the Libraries curates as part of the OSUL's Digital Preservation Framework. However, this goes beyond curation of content. Technology moves at a rapid pace, and the projects and services created, used, and supported by the OSUL will need to change as well. The Libraries' Digital Initiatives Program must be able to thrive in this ever changing environment, and include clear assessment metrics and documented exit procedures.

- ***We will build in assessment***
  The Digital Initiatives Program will embed assessment into its processes. Utilizing

available data, stories, and user feedback, the Program will seek to continually assess Program strengths, weaknesses, and needs as it moves forward.

- *We focus on the user*
  The OSUL will strive to create a user friendly environment, developing intuitive services, and systems that support the Libraries' strategic mission in advancing discovery and learning. Utilizing techniques such as focus groups, user feedback, and testing, the OSUL will strive to provide a superior, user-focused environment.

- *We work with partners*
  A digital initiatives program is a very complex undertaking, and its success will depend upon leveraging partnerships within the Libraries, across the University, and with stakeholders external to OSU.
  - Partners, not customers: One of the benefits of adopting an agile development environment is the necessity for close partnerships between IT departments (Digital Initiatives, Applications Development & Support, and Infrastructure Support) and the Libraries as a whole. Going forward, the expectation is that librarians and IT will work collaboratively throughout the life-cycle of a project.
  - Excellence to Eminence: As the University and the OSUL strive to embrace the move from excellence to eminence, one aspect of that transformation is the participation in large, national and international collaborations. Nationally and internationally, issues related to digital initiatives, preservation, semantic data, repositories, etc. are being actively researched. OSUL must strive to find a place at that table, and look for strategic opportunities to build new and exciting partnerships outside the University, and with the larger library community.

- *We embrace research as a core, fundamental value*
  One of the fundamental purposes of a university is to cultivate research at all levels, including systems development. This goes beyond the development of new services to considering the fundamental shifts occurring in libraries and positioning the OSUL to be a significant contributor and valued partner as the library community wrestles with these issues. The need to research, experiment, and push boundaries must be a core part of the program.

- *We strive to stay grounded in the real world*
  The pace of technological change can be dizzying as is the wide range of new services, systems, and best practices available. The Digital Initiatives Program will seek to cultivate an environment of experimentation and innovation, while staying grounded in the knowledge that local needs must be met. While these two values can sometimes clash, the Program will seek to provide a balance between innovation and the need to bring together collections and people through the engagement and integration of scholarship and instruction.

- ***We are driven by standards***
  Forecasting the future is never an exact science. Like a meteorologist, we look at available information and make the best decisions that we can. And while we may not always hit the mark, standards provide the touchstones that will keep the OSU Libraries grounded. Standards apply to all areas of a digital initiatives program. They can be found in project management and the need to utilize systematic approaches to planning and development. Standards also inform our decisions around object formatting and reformatting, metadata schemas and vocabularies, and system interoperability and design. The Digital Initiatives Program will work with the OSUL and its partners to help the Libraries navigate these sometimes muddy waters to ensure that we are following a best set of standards and practices. Utilizing well-established international and national standards over locally created best practices, OSUL will strive to create an environment that will support long-term sustainability and promote interoperability between services, assets, and systems, both locally and with our partners.

The Digital Initiatives Program Principles provide the OSUL with a framework for making and evaluating decisions related to the development and implementation of a long-term digital services architecture. These Principles reflect the changing nature of the OSUL's digital programs, shifting the focus from individual projects to a holistic program designed around an evolving services architecture. The Principles illustrate for the Libraries and its stakeholders the core values and long-term direction of the Digital Initiatives Program.

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