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## Building and Navigating a Path to Collaborative Digital Platforms for Oregon's Libraries: There are Many Ways to Get There

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# Building and Navigating a Path to Collaborative Digital Platforms for Oregon's Libraries:

## There are Many Ways to Get There

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ROSS is the Data & Federal Programs Consultant at the State Library of Oregon. Before planting roots in beautiful Salem, he worked as Digital Engagement Librarian for Washington County Cooperative Library Services (WCCLS), and served as Digital Projects Librarian for the Washington Rural Heritage program at the Washington State Library. Ross has also worked on several audio digitization projects and has contributed to a number of oral history and radio documentary efforts. He has a MLIS from University of Washington and a MA in Folk Studies from Western Kentucky University.

*Over the last several years, the State Library of Oregon has explored options and supported a variety of projects to promote collaboration among libraries to build and sustain Oregon digital collections. Activities such as hosted meetings, grant funding, and pilot projects have identified both opportunities and roadblocks to collaboration, especially for Oregon's small public libraries. A clear and distinct path has proven to be somewhat elusive, and the journey itself has demonstrated that a one-size-fits-all solution is unlikely to emerge soon. Multiple pathways to a more robust digital collections platform may not only be inevitable but preferable, given the diversity among the travelers and the complexity of the map. This article will describe the State Library's efforts to support digital collections in the state and what may be on the horizon for improving access and collaboration.*

### Background

The State Library of Oregon has a long history of funding digital collections projects through its Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Competitive Grants program.



While some of these successfully funded projects have established ongoing, collaborative partnerships among institutions (such as the Southern Oregon Digital Archives and Washington County Heritage Online), other projects have found sustainability and achieving broader access through better discovery platforms to be a challenge.

State Library staff and members of the LSTA Advisory Council sought to improve decision-making around grant awards by creating more specific guidelines and promoting best practices. The Council also commissioned a report that would assess current and potential models for projects that could assist with prioritizing LSTA funding around digital collections.

In 2013 Danielle Plumer conducted an environmental scan and report with recommendations. The goal was to identify project models, assess these projects' adherence to digitization and metadata standards, review existing models for collaboration at both the state and multi-state level, and advise on how the State Library could provide support for digital collection activities that would align with the goals of Oregon's LSTA Five-Year Plan (2013–2017).

Plumer's scan and subsequent report documented a large number of projects and activities across the region but also identified a lack of support and infrastructure for smaller Oregon institutions interested in developing digital collections. A variety of stakeholders identified the need for further discussion around potential collaboration and organized a meeting in March 2015. This Northwest Digital Collections Summit meeting also generated a set of recommendations. Below is a summary of the recommendations from Plumer's initial report and the subsequent summit meeting. The documents with the detailed version of these recommendations can be found at <https://libguides.osl.state.or.us/digitalcollections>.

- Adopt digitization and metadata standards for all future LSTA-funded digital collection projects.
- Provide training on topics related to digitization and digital projects.
- Explore options for statewide repository of Oregon digital content for institutions unable to maintain separate repositories.
- Support existing local and regional collaborative digitization projects, as well as existing statewide newspaper digitization programs.
- Encourage institutions in Washington and Oregon to form one or more initial collaborative project(s) focused on eventual participation in the Digital Public Library of America.

These recommendations laid out avenues for the State Library to explore, but did not recommend a specific model or approach to building a statewide repository/platform for smaller libraries that do not have the resources to build this infrastructure. State Library staff have continued discussions with organizations expected to provide leadership, including the Oregon Heritage Commission, Orbis Cascade Alliance, and University of Oregon. Unfortunately, leadership and staff turnover, as well as shifting priorities since 2015, has slowed any forward momentum on a specific effort to build a statewide platform available to all institutions. It has been difficult to find a model or develop a program that could meet the diverse needs of small libraries without a significant investment in staffing to provide the level of support required for a successful initiative.



While a single statewide model or program has been elusive, communication among the state organizations has continued and information sharing has been valuable as each organization considers its role in statewide efforts. This has led to a few State Library supported projects that have laid groundwork for more collaborative efforts.

### Standards and Training

Requirements for meeting basic digitization and metadata standards for all digital collection projects funded by the State Library's LSTA Competitive Grant program were added to the FY2016 grant application and have been used to assess projects in each subsequent year.

The Orbis Cascade Alliance secured two years (2016–2017) of LSTA Competitive Grant funding to build capacity for digital collections metadata cleanup, training, and support. They created training materials for metadata cleanup helping the Alliance to be in a better position to become a regional hub for DPLA. While focused on Alliance members, the standards and training tools developed have been useful to guide non-members in making their collections compatible with DPLA standards.

### Possible Platforms for Small Institutions

State Library of Oregon staff began talks with Washington State Library staff about possible collaboration around the Washington Rural Heritage project. The Washington Rural Heritage model has worked well for small institutions in Washington, and staff in Oregon wanted to explore ways to leverage an already existing project and infrastructure. Those talks resulted in a pilot project designed to test issues associated with bringing Oregon institutions into the Washington-based project.

For many years, Baker County Library District (BCLD) director Perry Stokes had expressed concerns about the long-term health of their existing digital collections, as well as the general lack of discoverability of the digital collections' content. With Baker County collections held within an aging, unsupported PastPerfect digital repository, Stokes and other staff and volunteers in Baker County sought to make a move to a more sustainable digital collections ecosystem.



Baker City Carnegie Library, ca. 1910. Courtesy of the Baker County Library District, Baker City, Oregon.



Starting at the end of 2017, BCLD, the Washington State Library, and the State Library of Oregon engaged in a pilot project to test the feasibility of a regional collaboration around digital collections. With enthusiastic support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the State Library of Oregon—through a basic intergovernmental agreement—directed a modest amount (\$7,000) of Oregon’s FY2017 LSTA allotment to the Washington State Library to migrate a subset of the Baker County content into the Washington Rural Heritage repository.

A total of 1,044 records (approximately 15 percent of Baker County’s complete digital collections) were migrated from BCLD’s digital archive to the Washington Rural Heritage database by Washington State Library’s Digital Repository Librarian, Evan Robb. Following the initial migration project, Robb provided a report and a set of recommendations for bringing BCLD’s digital collections in line with current metadata standards and training was provided to that end. These recommendations closely follow the Orbis Cascade Alliance’s Dublin Core Best Practices, Version 2.3, which have been tailored to enable metadata inclusion in the DPLA. Finally, Washington State Library staff provided virtual training in the use of its client cataloging software. Two BCLD staffers and one volunteer were trained in editing/cataloging records.

In general, Robb found that PastPerfect metadata can migrate to a ContentDM system, with a combination of manual and automated approaches. The experience gained from working with the software provided the project team with a better sense of the time required to enhance its metadata, and to develop localized workflows for a new era in digital collection development within its organization. The early stages of a migration project of this sort require development of a workflow, creation of new and target metadata fields, decision-making regarding carry-over metadata and transformation of legacy metadata, and integration of legacy metadata within a more extensive repository.

The experience of this pilot project has also provided the State Library of Oregon with more data and additional aspects to consider with furthering a cross-state partnership with the Washington State Library. Both state libraries and BCLD have agreed to continue a second year of migration efforts, in the hopes that a larger portion of the BCLD collections can be efficiently migrated using the existing practices and documentation.



Baker City Coronet Band, 1897. Courtesy of the Baker County Library District, Baker City, Oregon.





Sketches in Baker County, cover of booklet, 1882.” Courtesy of the Baker County Library District, Baker City, Oregon.”

### What Does the Future Hold?

While the lack of progress towards a strategic model for a statewide digital collection platform has been frustrating, it does not constitute failure. Institutions who may be in a position to provide leadership in the future have given careful attention to leveraging existing systems and potential partnerships, in order to maximize value and to avoid duplication of effort.

For now, State Library staff are doing their best to pursue opportunities and find solutions for institutions that express need. The State Library is actively pursuing opportunities to partner with Washington Rural Heritage and to fund grants to support projects that specifically assist small libraries to digitize newspaper and local history collections. The State Library’s own Digital Collections platform, implemented to help manage its Oregon Government Documents collection, may also have potential to help smaller agencies and libraries preserve and store content.

It may also make sense for the State Library to encourage and support small institutions to collaborate with the geographically-based projects like the Southern Oregon Digital Archives or format-based projects like Historic Oregon Newspapers, leveraging existing projects to help meet specific local needs.

In the end, several paths can be forged to help Oregon’s small libraries create, store, and provide access to digital collections. The State Library remains committed to working with Oregon libraries to find the best solutions for their needs. Please contact us to discuss the possibilities! 



### Further Reading

LSTA Grants (State Library of Oregon)

<https://www.oregon.gov/Library/libraries/Pages/competitives.aspx>

Southern Oregon Digital Archives (Southern Oregon University)

<https://soda.sou.edu/>

Washington County Heritage Online

<http://washingtoncountyheritage.org>

Digital Collections Resources (State Library of Oregon)

<https://libguides.osl.state.or.us/digitalcollections>

Digital Collections Documentation (Orbis Cascade Alliance)

<https://www.orbiscascade.org/digital-collections-documentation>

Washington Rural Heritage

<https://www.washingtonruralheritage.org/digital/>

Baker County Library District Digital Collections

<https://www.washingtonruralheritage.org/digital/collection/baker/>

State Library of Oregon Digital Collections

<https://digital.osl.state.or.us/>

Historic Oregon Newspapers

<https://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/>

### Photos

Baker City Carnegie Library, ca. 1910.

<https://washingtonruralheritage.org/digital/collection/baker/id/726/rec/2>

Baker City Normal & Business College postcard, 1909.

<https://washingtonruralheritage.org/digital/collection/baker/id/782/rec/4>

Baker City Coronet Band, 1897.

<https://washingtonruralheritage.org/digital/collection/baker/id/731/rec/77>

“Sketches in Baker County,” cover of booklet, 1882.

<https://washingtonruralheritage.org/digital/collection/baker/id/88/rec/2>

