

Digital Readiness Case Study in Brief: Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center

March 2021



About the organization

Located in Superior, Wisconsin, the Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center (BVHC) preserves and honors the memory of Major Richard I. (Dick) Bong and all veterans of World War II and subsequent conflicts, and provides educational resources for community and beyond. The BVHC opened to the public in September 2002 and maintains a remarkable collection of historic records and artifacts that document Wisconsin veterans and their military service. Briana Fiandt serves as the BVHC curator of collections and participates in Recollection Wisconsin governance committees.

Digital Readiness Challenges and Opportunities

- **Participation in Curating Community Digital Collections (CCDC):** Work completed through CCDC was an important and welcome opportunity to advance their digitization program. Volunteers now follow more detailed workflows for scanning and cataloging their materials.
- **Community support:** Staff often rely on Recollection Wisconsin's digital projects resources including Metadata Essentials and the Digital Projects Toolkit.
- **Content management systems:** They are migrating their digitized content out of PastPerfect and into Collective Access, a free, open-source content management system for cataloging and sharing museum and archival collections. Concerns about ongoing sustainability and support from PastPerfect motivated this change.
- **Oral histories and Listening to War:** The BVHC's wartime oral histories are included in Listening to War: Wisconsin's Wartime Oral Histories, an NEH-funded project which brings together first-person accounts of Wisconsin veterans and civilians. The project provides an opportunity to reach new donors, by demonstrating how the public might interact with BVHC collections.
- **Content warning statements:** It's important to prepare patrons for sensitive or harmful topics and language they might encounter in a collection or exhibit, especially war-related material. They include a disclaimer to prepare users for the content: "*This [item] contains language that is offensive and is presented as it exists in the original documents. The materials reflect the context in which they were created but do not represent the views of the Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center.*"

Lessons Learned

- **Legacy projects.** Sometimes it's better to live with less-than-ideal components of a legacy digitization projects. A much better use of time and resources could be to focus on current and new projects and adopting the guidelines and best practices.
- **Working with volunteers.** Volunteers have varied skills sets and different work styles so it is important to have good training materials and a strong support system to guide their work.
- **It's more than just a policy.** Information included in their digital preservation policy provided a good jumping off point for conversations about digital work with different stakeholders.
- **Slow and steady progress.** Focusing on one or two small goals like developing, implementing, and documenting a file-naming scheme or documenting a scanning process as a training tool for volunteers. Over time, small goals will become part of a larger, more sustainable digital program.

For more information about our Digital Readiness Community of Practice, visit <https://recollectionwisconsin.org/cop>.

