Digital Readiness Levels

The Digital Readiness Levels are a structured roadmap for public history organizations to plan and sustainably grow their digital initiatives in order to improve access to collections.

Focus Area	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Plan and Prioritize	Set goals for digital work that fit the organization's mission and policies. Adopt a digital mission statement or revise existing mission statement to include digital work.	Identify and prioritize potential digital projects. Make a digital project plan that includes roles, activities, required resources, and partners.	Adopt a digital collection development policy or revise existing policy to include digitized and born digital content.
Obtain Permissions	Create and use permission forms and donor agreements that include specific language for the use of digitized and born-digital content or modify existing forms.	Evaluate copyright status of content. Identify items with access restrictions or concerns, including privacy, ethical, or cultural considerations.	Assign standardized rights statements or Creative Commons licenses for collection items. Adopt a takedown policy and, if applicable, a statement on harmful content.
Digitize	Determine standards and procedures to be used to digitize physical materials or process born-digital content.	Using identified standards, undertake digitization or born-digital processing work either in-house or with an appropriate vendor or partner.	Use a quality control checklist to review content and confirm it meets identified standards.
Describe	Adopt a consistent naming convention for digital files. Determine standards to be used to describe digital content.	Using identified standards, create basic descriptive metadata for items.	Develop a data dictionary and use controlled vocabularies to standardize metadata.
Share	Review goals and options for providing access to content. Choose an access platform or system that meets identified needs.	Make items and associated descriptive information available for discovery and repurposing.	Implement techniques to support accessibility of online content, including alt text, transcripts, and other best practices.
Store and Maintain	Create and maintain a collection-level inventory of digital content.	Store at least two, preferably three, copies of each primary file and related metadata, with one copy stored off-site. Check and refresh storage media on a regular schedule.	Plan for future storage needs. Use software tools to check file integrity.
Evaluate	Identify primary users and ways to engage them with digital content.	Collect data and stories about how digital content is used.	Use collected data and stories to inform future collection development, outreach, and programming. Share knowledge with other practitioners to build community around digital work.

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Check As You Go

As you move towards a new level in any of the focus areas, consider the following questions:

Is it documented?

- Are new directions and decisions represented in existing policies, such as a collection development policy or a rights and reproductions policy? Do policies need to be revised or do new policies need to be created?
- Are new procedures or processes written down, such as steps for using a scanner or standards for how to describe content? Is there enough information provided that someone new to the organization would be able to carry out these processes on their own?
- Are partnerships or arrangements with other parties, such as a digitization vendor or a content contributor, documented in some way, like a contract, Memorandum of Understanding, or letter of commitment?

Is it sustainable?

- Is there a plan for how this work will continue to be supported by staff and/or volunteers from year to year?
- What work needs to be done to maintain relationships with partners or collaborators?
- Is funding committed for any recurring costs, such as a cloud storage service?
- Are best practices and widely-adopted standards being used, so that digital work is "future proof"--that is, it's compatible with commonly-used platforms and systems?
- Is there an exit strategy for any tools or partnerships? For instance, can content be removed from a platform if necessary?

Is it appropriate, relevant and/or accessible?

- Are new digital initiatives in line with the organization's mission and values? Do digital initiatives reflect community needs and respect community priorities?
- If information is available publicly, is it violating any privacy, copyright or ethical considerations?
- Can all potential users access the content? What can be done to improve accessibility for people with disabilities?

Is it working?

- Are we doing what we set out to do? What were our goals and have we achieved them, partially or fully?
- What have we learned and what will we do differently next time?
- What lessons learned would be helpful to other organizations?
- Have we communicated our project decisions and progress to stakeholders and partners, including any funders?