

Persona A: Board member or other volunteer at a local historical society

Sam, volunteer, age 67 / Chris, volunteer Board Member, age 41

Sam and Chris are connected to local history personally. Sam's family has been in town for three generations, so family and personal connections to the local historical society are a main motivator for engagement. Chris owns a small insurance agency on Main Street; as a business owner, participation in the local historical society is a way to invest time in the community. They're both interested in and engaged with local history efforts in their own ways.

Sam visits the historical society every Tuesday afternoon to open the doors for anyone who wants to visit. Most Tuesday afternoons are pretty quiet, so he spends that time sorting donated materials into time and subject categories. Sam is a bit hesitant to embrace digitization efforts. All those family photos in the archives are available for in-person researchers, after all; why put them out on the Internet for anyone to see or take? He does like to see digital photos of kids and grandkids on Facebook, though, so he likes the idea of being able to more widely share community history.

Chris attends the historical society's monthly board meetings, donates regularly, and tries to use her experience as a business owner to help keep operations running or even expanding. She knows how to supervise projects and resources, and thinks the historical society could be more engaged in and with the community. Chris likes the idea of digitizing, especially photos; something like a retrospective of businesses on Main Street over time could be a cool marketing tool. But she's already overwhelmed with business and family responsibilities, so the idea of taking on an effort that seems tech-heavy (especially as one of the younger volunteers) feels daunting.

Both Sam and Chris get most of their community information from social media and from the historical society itself. Sam doesn't pick up new skills very often, though he's willing to learn. Chris has to learn new things in her business all the time, but she's not eager to be the only one learning or teaching in a digitization project. For both Sam and Chris, "digital readiness" or "digitization" sounds like specialized technology knowledge is required, and neither have the bandwidth to provide that knowledge.

A community of practice, though, might be a way for both Sam and Chris to find out more about what "digitization" really means. They'd be willing to attend a half-day event on a Saturday morning, especially if other board members and volunteers from other historical societies are there to talk about their projects. For their own reasons, Sam and Chris might not do a lot of self-guided learning, but an event with others seems like an easy way to talk to others in similar organizations. Sam isn't interested in running a scanner, but he likes knowing more about how to describe what's in the historical society's collections. Chris does some light graphic design at work, so she appreciates the extra training on digital file management. Both Sam and Chris leave the event with more knowledge, excitement, and contacts.

Persona B: Professional staff person at a local historical society, archive or museum

Alex, age 40, Archivist

Alex's position as her organization's archivist is a professional commitment driven by a personal interest in history and archives. She has an undergraduate degree in history and a graduate degree in library and information science, so her training has prepared her for managing the organization's collections and its volunteers. As the "lone arranger," there is always more work to be done to arrange and preserve the materials in the archives.

Alex gets a lot of reference requests from genealogists, locals, and a few academics. She enjoys helping patrons, but decades of use are beginning to take their toll on the physical materials. Alex also has several collections that would be really interesting in the context of present-day events, but the reach of her organization's materials is pretty limited; not a lot of people know what the organization has to offer or visit the reading room. She's very interested in digitizing frequently-used, fragile or unique materials, but doesn't have a lot of time or resources to devote to a digitization initiative.

Professional websites, process documentation, webinars and training materials are Alex's sources for information about collections management. Most of her new skills are learned on the fly and out of necessity -- when an artifact needs care, for instance, Alex will figure out conservation as needed. If she has questions, she'll call a colleague in another archive or a classmate. She's pretty comfortable with technology and uses social media both personally and professionally, but her degree programs didn't include in-depth information about digital file management and long-term storage.

A community of practice is an intriguing idea for Alex -- she probably knows some of the people who would be part of that community, which increases her interest in such a network. She really likes the idea of having a go-to place to get her questions answered, rather than having to dig around through several different resources. She doesn't have a lot of spare time, though, and the community of practice needs to be something that is easy for her to keep up with. Having to remember to check a website forum or other discussion site will probably fall by the wayside. A listserv, as long as it doesn't have an overwhelming amount of emails, would be a helpful way to deliver information to her inbox.

Persona C: Staff or volunteers at TLAMs, special LAMs or organizations not affiliated with larger or established LAMs

Bill, age 53, Tribal Archive Coordinator

Bill is a member of an Indigenous community and also works part-time in his Nation's tribal library and archive. His job is important to him, but it's more than a job: it's a deep connection to the history of his people. He knows, or knows of, nearly every one of his Nation's citizens, so keeping and sharing tribal collections is personal.

The idea of digitizing archival materials or curating digital collections is intriguing but largely unknown. He has some experience with Facebook and YouTube, since that's where the Nation's various governmental offices share information and videos, but he hadn't considered digitizing materials from the collections in his archive. Bill likes the idea of being able to share these artifacts and records with far-flung Nation citizens, but he's concerned about non-Natives having access to too many of the historical items. He also knows that some of the materials are subject to deterioration and degradation, like A/V recordings, and wants to learn about digitizing them for preservation.

When he gets stuck on something, Bill tends to ask his relatives and friends for advice on any number of subjects -- but not many of them know much about the particulars of archives. He could call the Wisconsin Historical Society, but their operations are so large he doesn't quite know who to call. Finding information online for his specific questions is helpful, and he heads to the local public library to get tips and tricks too. Because Bill only works part-time, he doesn't have a lot of time to spend on new projects and initiatives.

The community of practice idea comes naturally to Bill; this is exactly how many Indigenous communities operate. He's nervous, though, about attending events filled with non-Natives who are probably much more experienced than he is. If someone he knows will be there, he's more likely to attend and participate. It's helpful to have a place to bring the questions his other contacts don't know the answers to, and to meet others of whom he might ask those questions in the future.