Semi-Annual Narrative Report (April 2021)
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Building a Digital Readiness Community of Practice. This one-year project began in October 2020. It builds on work completed through a 2019 NHPRC planning grant and will support "digital readiness" in small and under-resourced local historical societies and historic preservation organizations across Wisconsin. WiLS, Recollection Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Historical Society staff00 provide support for this community-driven venture along with a launch committee composed of librarians, archivists and other local history practitioners who actively participated in our planning grant work.

Outcomes and benefits to participants include systems and procedures to guide digitization efforts and help local history organizations remain consistent during periods of staff or volunteer turnover, increased opportunities for engagement with practitioners in the digital and virtual realm, conversations with and connections to other organizations engaged in digital project work and an ability to confidently pursue digitization projects that support reference, exhibitions, programming and digital storytelling.

Our goals and activities are community-driven and developed from surveys, community conversations and strategic planning sessions with local history practitioners around the state as part of our planning grant. In September 2020, we hired Kristen Whitson to serve as our program assistant. Whitson received her MLIS from UW-Madison in 2020 and participated in Curating Community Digital Collections, another Recollection Wisconsin digital stewardship-focused project. Her background and experience working on digitization, archives collection development and preservation projects, along with her passion for creating community with local history organizations and Wisconsin tribal and LGBTQ+ communities has been indispensable. Wisconsin Historical Society Milwaukee outreach coordinator, Kristen Leffelman, and Recollection Wisconsin project manager, Vicki Tobias, serve as project advisors with additional support from Wisconsin Historical Society outreach director, Janet Seymour, and Recollection Wisconsin program manager, Emily Pfotenhauer.

In October 2020, we convened a group of eleven dedicated and enthusiastic local history practitioners to serve on our Digital Readiness Community of Practice launch committee. This group meets monthly and provides guidance, insight, and support for our digital readiness work by helping us build the community and better understand how we might best support local history practitioners. We also work closely with the Wisconsin Historical Society's Local History Affiliates program staff to engage new audiences.

We are currently planning four Digital Readiness Fairs to be held in summer 2021. Through these events, we hope to increase awareness of and build support for the Community of Practice, promote digital concepts and the value of creating digital collections, provide opportunities to learn about and from other Wisconsin local history organizations, build community connections through social and learning opportunities, and share our Digital Readiness Levels and other resources. These half-day virtual events will be "hosted" by four different Wisconsin libraries and local history organizations.

We originally planned to convene in-person events but pivoted to virtual gatherings in response to COVID-19. The Digital Readiness Fairs will offer a mix of activities and learning opportunities, and we are thrilled to be showcasing digitization projects from around the state. Each event will include several local history practitioners sharing their organizations' approaches to digital projects, specifically their challenges, successes, and lessons learned along the way. We are excited to offer an opportunity for attendees to form connections with other practitioners in their region. Participants will also learn more about our ongoing digital readiness work, Recollection Wisconsin, DPLA and the Wisconsin Historical Society's Local History Affiliates program. The Digital Readiness Fairs are free and open to the public, though registration is required. Our Digital Readiness Fairs host sites and dates are:

- Appleton Public Library: Tuesday, June 29, 2021
- Crandon Area Historical Society: Friday, July 16, 2021
- Barron County Historical Society: Tuesday, August 3, 2021
- Kenosha County Historical Society: Wednesday, August 18, 2021

To support event planning, we convened a working group to help plan and support each event. We created an event planning template and an internal outreach schedule to facilitate event promotion. We also created reusable graphics and a customizable media kit and will provide logistical support for each virtual fair and their host organization.

We are also planning a larger, statewide digital readiness-related event in conjunction with the Wisconsin Historical Society's Local History and Historic Preservation Conference in October 2021. This event will also be virtual and provide an opportunity to continue building community around digital work by sharing out and celebrating the results of this implementation grant and showcasing some of our case study subjects.

In early 2021, we finalized and are now beginning to promote our Digital Readiness Levels, a key component of this project. It is a structure and a planning tool for digital stewardship activities and includes best practices scalable to different capacities through tiered benchmarks that support consistency of practices across organizations and continuity within organizations.

We enlisted our launch committee along with other experts -- librarians, archivists and information professionals engaged in digital work -- to review and provide feedback on a first draft and revisions of the Digital Readiness Levels. This document includes seven functional areas and three levels of capability benchmarks within each functional area. It also includes "Check As You Go" questions to guide work within each functional level. We will continue using the Levels as a framework for other learning opportunities and resources we create as part of this project including our Digital Projects Toolkit and case studies.

We continue to build community and support for our work through regular communications and engagement using our project listserv, *Wisconsin Digital Stewardship* (digistew@recollectionwisconsin.org), monthly blog posts sharing project updates and resources, and monthly digital readiness case studies showcasing local history organizations and their digital projects, and challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned. To date, we have completed four case studies with the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation (Madison, Wisconsin), Lake Mills Aztalan Historical Society (Lake Mills, Wisconsin), Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center (Superior, Wisconsin) and the Chippewa Valley Museum (Eau Claire, Wisconsin). We are collecting data and tracking study views and location of viewers in real time to inform our outreach efforts. The following are two strategic goals for our project:

Goal One: Leadership and Structure - *The Digital Readiness Community of Practice will have a sustainable leadership structure and communication strategy that will guide the launch and growth of the Community of Practice.*

In our first six months, we built a sustainable leadership structure and communication strategy. Our launch committee meets monthly to provide guidance on activities, resources and events created for the benefit of the Digital Readiness Community of Practice. Some examples of those meeting activities include:

- Review and provide feedback on the Digital Readiness Levels,
- Various community building exercises including creating "personas" to better understand our community members and their needs,
- Brainstorm ideas about our Digital Projects Toolkit, and
- Participate in workgroups to plan and support the Digital Readiness Fairs.

We have leveraged existing communications networks and expanded or implemented newly formed relationships to provide open, inclusive, consistent, and supportive communication. We are fortunate to have the Wisconsin Historical Society as a project partner as they continue to promote our work and activities to their larger network of Wisconsin local history practitioners through the Local History newsletter, Local History listserv, and Society-wide newsletter that

reach their staff, members and, specifically, their Local History Affiliates Program participants and members.

Goal Two: Skills, Knowledge and Capacity Building - *Wisconsin's public history organizations will have a road map for undertaking digital collections creation and management. They will have access to best practices, guidelines, and tools that accommodate a range of needs and resources, and they will understand how to use those resources to support local goals and capacities.*

We've provided local history organizations a roadmap for undertaking digital collections creation and management. The Digital Readiness Levels provide a structure for Wisconsin's local history organizations to undertake digital collections creation and management. Additional resources in progress or to be completed as part of this project include:

- Recollection Wisconsin's [Digital Projects Toolkit](#) - We are currently revising this website to include more best practices, tools, resources, and templates structured to follow the Digital Readiness Levels.
- [Digital Readiness Glossary](#) - A web-based glossary of terms and definitions commonly used in digital projects work.
- Digital Readiness [blog posts](#) - Our monthly blog posts provide project updates, our new resources and further context for digital readiness.
- Practitioner [case studies](#) - Our monthly case studies highlight a local history organization and their digital projects work and focus on digital readiness themes. Case studies highlight organizations from around Wisconsin, representing geographic, community and collections diversity.

Our outreach and engagement priority is to share information that connects community members to each other for advice, expertise or potential partnerships. We regularly direct practitioners to our [project website](#) for context and details about our project work, and are actively using Recollection Wisconsin's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) platforms to promote our work.

We are proud to share that this project has inspired related grant project proposals. The ongoing [Community Archiving Workshop](#) (CAW), also a Recollection Wisconsin partner, will be applying for an upcoming NHPRC Implementation Grant to create A/V-specific Digital Readiness guidelines based on our Digital Readiness Levels. Two members of the project launch committee, Robin Untz and Janean Mollet-Van Beckum, will join Kristen Whitson and Vicki Tobias for a panel discussion about the project and digital readiness concepts at the [Midwest Archives Conference](#) on May 14, 2021. We have an article coming out in SAA's *Archival Outlook*

in September 2021. We are exploring other presentation possibilities including the 2021 DLF Forum.

Final Thoughts

The goals set in the original proposal were realistic and appropriate, as they were based on work completed during our planning grant and derived from community input. Like other organizations and projects, COVID-19 forced us to rethink a few key project components. We pushed back our original start date from June 2020 to October 2020 to allow grant staff and project participants time to adjust to the impact of COVID-19 on their institutions and work. We also decided to shift from in-person to virtual events, including our monthly launch committee meetings, Digital Fairs, and other events. This prompted discussions and additional inquiry (and creative thinking!) about community-building strategies in a virtual-only environment. We benefited greatly from our launch committee members and project advisors who were happy to share their own recent experiences either facilitating or participating in virtual conferences or learning activities.

Although the Wisconsin Historical Society and Recollection Wisconsin are experienced in facilitating virtual meetings and gatherings, developing, and launching half-day virtual events posed some new challenges. Each fair has been meticulously planned by a working group with support from our project staff and including a robust publicity plan for each. Our goal is to make these events fun, informative, and an opportunity to connect with other folks engaged in similar work. We understand that a virtual environment may not be ideal, but we are working hard to develop activities and presentations that engage and educate. We are also aware that some of our anticipated attendees may not have access to adequate Wi-Fi or a location to participate virtually. Some of our hosts plan to convene safe and socially distant "watch parties" at a central location. Conversely, virtual provides an opportunity for those who may not normally attend such events due to cost and travel. We plan to follow up each fair with a participant survey, gathering their feedback on the event structure and content. We appreciate that our project participants and current and potential community of practice members are all experiencing the pandemic in different ways. We are respectful of people's time and limited capacity to participate in meetings, activities, etc. We are careful not to "over-ask" or expect too much and to be sure we are not wasting anyone's time. We know Zoom fatigue is real, so we try to keep our meetings tight, on time, light-hearted, and purposeful.

We are looking forward to rolling out our Digital Readiness Fairs, launching our new Digital Projects Toolkit on the Recollection Wisconsin website, continuing to publish case studies, and sharing our project work with the larger community of practitioners engaged in digital work. Thank you!