
Digital Collections Strategy Overview 2022-2026

The Library's *Digital Collecting Plan* was completed in December 2016 and approved in January 2017. A public version of the document is posted [here](#). This agency-level plan has guided work for digital collecting across the organization and focused primarily on the acquisitions portion of the digital content lifecycle. Over this period, major progress has been made integrating and expanding digital collecting activities.

In the fall of 2020, the Associate Librarian for Library Services (ALLS) approved a recommendation that the development of a successor to the *Digital Collecting Plan* be undertaken, assigning the Collection Development Office and the Digital Collections Management and Services Division as co-leads.

Whereas the *Digital Collecting Plan* was limited to acquisitions, this successor plan was intentionally developed to cover all aspects of born digital collecting and curation, end-to-end. Areas of work in scope for the *Digital Collections Strategy* include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Workflows, policies, and practices for recommendation, identification, selection, acquisition, description, processing, preservation, and access of born digital content for the Library's collection
- Further development of the Library's technical infrastructure to support the full digital content lifecycle
- Development of various access policies and procedures appropriate to different categories of digital content
- Training and development of staff
- Facilitating access to all relevant digital material regardless of its "holding" location
- Realignment of resources to match an environment in which an increasing portion of the Library's collections are digital

Digitization of the Library's physical collections was not in scope for this planning effort.

Vision

The Library's universal collection will continue to be built by selectively acquiring materials in a wide range of formats – both tangible and digital. Policies, workflows and an agile technical infrastructure will allow for the routine and efficient acquisition of desired digital materials. The content will be made available to our users in the broadest possible manner, while respecting intellectual property rights, and will be preserved permanently. The total collection will support the Library in its mission to engage, inspire, and inform Congress and the American people with a universal and enduring source of knowledge and creativity.

Given the agency-wide and cross-service unit nature of this work, a large Working Group was formed with the representation of organizational stakeholders from Library Services, the Law Library, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, the United States Copyright Office, the Congressional Research Service and the Strategic Planning and Performance Management Office. The strategy was approved by the Librarian of Congress in September 2021 and implementation begins at the start of Fiscal Year 2022, in October 2021.

Assumptions and Principles

The Library's digital collecting strategy is based on a number of assumptions, including the following:

- The Library will continue to build its universal collection.
- The amount of available digital content will continue to grow at a rapid rate.
- Some types of material will continue to be published in physical formats for the foreseeable future, while others have already transitioned to digital only or will soon transition to digital only.
- There will be much duplication in the marketplace, with the same content being available both in tangible and digital formats.
- The Library will be selective regarding the digital content it acquires.
- There is a growing expectation of users to have wide access to digital content.
- IT modernization will be addressed within the Library's existing IT governance framework and processes.

Likewise, there are a number of principles that support the strategy, including the following:

- The Library is developing one interdependent collection that contains both its traditional physical holdings and materials in digital formats, and the [Library of Congress Collections Policy Statements](#) apply to all of that material irrespective of format.
- The Library will ensure that the rights of those holding intellectual property will be respected.
- Appropriate methods will be put in place to ensure that rights-restricted digital content remains secure.
- In acquiring new content, every effort will be made to adhere to the Library's [Recommended Formats Statement](#), since acquiring in those formats maximizes the content's sustainability and accessibility into the future.
- When desired content is available in both digital and tangible formats, the Library will apply various considerations (overall costs, preservation requirements, access restrictions, user needs, etc.) to determine which format – or formats – is preferable at the time of acquisition.

- In acquiring new digital content, the widest patron access is the preference; however, limited access, embargo periods, and dark archive storage are appropriate in many cases.
- For electronic resource acquisitions that require payment, it is preferable to purchase and own the content permanently rather than to license access via a subscription.

The Strategy

Over the last five-year period, the *Digital Collecting Plan* played a key role in establishing and beginning to routinize digital collecting activities across the organization. At a high level, the *Digital Collections Strategy* for the next five-year period focuses on further mainstreaming and routinizing digital collecting and digital collections management across the wide range of areas, formats, and subjects the Library of Congress collects.

This plan aligns with the [Library's Strategic Plan](#) and shares its goals:

- Expand Access
- Enhance Services
- Optimize Resources
- Measure Impact

The following thirteen objectives of the plan are thus organized in these four areas.

Digital Collections Strategy Objectives

1. Expand Access

1.1) Expand and routinize acquisition and access of openly licensed and openly available digital works: Few library organizations are prioritizing acquiring and hosting copies of openly licensed digital works. As a result, large amounts of openly licensed works are at risk of being lost. In line with the Collections Policy Statements, the Library will play a key role in enabling enduring access to this content. In the case of openly licensed content, given the terms of the licenses, acquiring and making available this content is in direct accord with the wishes of content creators. In contrast, acquiring and enabling access to openly available content without open licenses requires considerable effort and time to secure rights to acquire individual works.

1.2) Pursue a coordinated program of policy and IT infrastructure development to enable the broadest possible access to rights restricted content: Major progress has been made in enabling access to rights restricted content in the Library's collection. This is an essential component of building a robust collection of contemporary works in accord with the rights of content creators. However, there are substantial areas of policy and digital infrastructure that are still needed to enable the broadest usability of this content. Areas to explore include: interlibrary loan of digital content and other circulation of content; remote access to content for short periods of time; enabling non-consumptive use; providing portions of works as part of reference services; and enabling remote full text search but not fully rendering works.

1.3) Develop and implement an integrated strategy for discovery of digital and analog collections materials: Discovery of digital collections content currently requires use of multiple independent systems including the Library of Congress website, the Library of Congress Catalog, the E-Resources Online Catalog, and a range of other systems and APIs. Along with this, there are inconsistencies in practices for cataloging and metadata for digital collections. As the Library works to implement a new Library Collections Access Platform, it will be necessary to pursue parallel efforts to standardize practices and develop a coherent overall strategy for the creation, management, and integration of metadata for digital collections content.

2. Enhance Services

2.1) Expand the depth and breadth of digital content acquisition via the Copyright Office. Work with the Copyright Office to explore and strategically plan the possible implementation of regulatory updates to Library and registration deposit requirements and/or options. This would include planning electronic deposit workflows related to the acquisition of electronic deposits for mandatory deposit and registration deposit within the current Electronic Copyright Office (eCO) system and the forthcoming Electronic Copyright System (ECS). Formats to explore include books, serials, motion pictures, sound recordings, music compositions, maps, photographs, prints, drawings, design and architectural materials, technical designs, technical reports, and web content.

2.2) Transition to "e-preferred" as appropriate across major collecting streams: Continue to standardize digital collecting across major acquisition streams. Evaluate all acquisition streams and determine for which areas the Library should begin to default to acquiring a digital instance of content instead of acquiring an analog version. This includes both general and special

collection materials. IT modernization activities must also develop to support all these streams and formats of digital content at varying levels of access restrictions.

2.3) Modernize and expand efforts to collect diverse perspectives on everyday life: Digital media production has dramatically expanded the range of people producing and sharing content. Building on successes like the partnership with StoryCorps and ethnographic collecting projects of the American Folklife Center, the Library will expand efforts to modernize tools and systems to support oral history collecting initiatives. Along with this, review, and to the extent necessary, update Collections Policy Statements in support of advancing selective acquisitions of unpublished or self-published digital materials. In these areas, the Library will prioritize acquiring material of underrepresented perspectives and voices in the Library's collections.

2.4) Determine and implement a coordinated approach to support use of collections for digital scholarship. The Library has not yet made fundamental decisions about how it will support digital scholarship. This directly impacts the collecting plans for certain types of content and necessitates software to support such scholarship. For example, acquisitions of large-scale datasets are only worth pursuing if there is a supporting infrastructure and staff expertise to enable their use. Previous recommendations in this area should be evaluated, and binding decisions about this topic should be made.

3. Optimize Resources

3.1) Ensure optimal organizational structure to support the transition to an increasingly digital collection. Much of the staffing and organizational structure of Library of Congress organizational units focused on acquiring, preserving, and delivering collections has naturally been optimized for a primarily analog collection. It is now critical to ensure the organization is able to support a dual focus on physical and digital collections. By enabling staffing and organization to accommodate both types of collection material, we will be able to successfully prioritize acquisition of either format quickly and flexibly.

3.2) Invest in end-to-end modernization of IT infrastructure to support the centrality of digital collecting. Many current digital collections systems were developed to support only particular portions of workflows or were developed to only support specific forms of content. Further, current copyright systems and future state copyright systems need to directly interface and interact with these digital collection systems. Copyright deposits are central to building the Library's collection, and it is critical for it to be as easy as possible for content and metadata delivered to the Copyright Office to be considered for additions to the Library's collection. Currently, it is difficult to broadly scale and expand digital collecting efforts end-to-end. Significantly, many important forms of born digital unpublished materials (ex. email, research data, geospatial datasets, complex digital objects, national security classified documents, etc.) in archival collections are also not currently supported in systems for preservation and access in existing tools and systems and will need to be supported in future systems. Also, future systems that support broadcast capture of unpublished audiovisual transmissions from any source represent a workflow that exists under Copyright Office authorities, but will have a different architecture than copyright-based systems. Given limited resources, it is essential that the Library advance a coordinated approach to end-to-end workflows to support all areas of digital content acquisition, processing, preservation, and delivery.

3.3) Invest in empowering the Library’s workforce with the skills and knowledge needed to manage an increasingly digital acquisition program. Focus on development of documentation and training to support professional development of staff necessary for recommending, selecting, acquiring, preserving, and serving an increasingly digital collection.

3.4) Review digital collections governance and stakeholder groups. Over the last two decades, a number of committees and groups have been established to oversee aspects of digital collections. As digital collections become more central to the operations of the Library, it is critical to analyze the role various groups and committees play in regard to digital collections to determine if changes are warranted.

4. Measure Impact

4.1) Engage in user behavior research to broaden and deepen use of the collections.

Working from the four user communities identified in the Library’s Strategic Plan (Congress, creators, learners and connectors), establish and sustain a user research program regarding all aspects of the digital and analog collections programs.

4.2) Implement a program of digital collection workflow and usage tracking and analysis through the recordation of explicit, consistent and persistent metadata in cross-organizational systems of record in a manner that can be extracted programmatically.

Across increasingly unified systems and approaches for enabling access to content, use baseline and trend data to track the processing, growth and usage of collections to inform the development, management and description of the Library’s collection, including updating the Library’s Collections Policy Statements and incorporating output- and outcome-oriented measures in directional plans.

