

Digital Content and Libraries *Project Proposal*

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Problem:

In the next decade, the world's knowledge base will be either created in or transformed to digital form, with great consequences for how information is created, stored, preserved, and accessed.

The creation of this advanced digital knowledge infrastructure is raising very difficult technical, institutional, and policy issues for cultural institutions such as libraries, historical societies, museums, public broadcasters, performing arts organizations, and, of course, educational institutions at all levels. These institutions collectively will continue to have the fundamental responsibility for maintaining society's cultural resources and for providing access to the communities they serve. Yet, as a group, they have to date had little voice in the development of this advanced infrastructure.

The cultural heritage community—including libraries, museums, historical societies, and the like—needs to articulate in the policy debate a public interest vision of the digital infrastructure. Without such a vision, the infrastructure could evolve in ways that, while serving specific focused interests, would impede or even prevent the development of potentially transforming new cultural forums and would chill public access to them.

The OITP Advisory Committee has been discussing this dilemma for the last two years in the context of the evolving cyberinfrastructure. In light of the rapidly changing technological scene, particularly in the field of digitization, they have determined that it is more important than ever to take action.

Objective:

Libraries are key players in the mass digitization movement. Our objective is to begin a discussion within ALA and its sister societies aimed at developing a clear, detailed policy statement on libraries and mass digitization. The statement should explore the roles and responsibilities of libraries in the world of mass digitization and identify key policy issues raised by this transformation of scholarly and cultural communication.

Suggested Approach and Timeline:

To start the discussion, in April of 2006, OITP will convene a broadly representative member group of approximately forty people from ALA and the wider library and cultural heritage community to develop a draft statement or statements roughly modeled on the Principles for a Networked World document created in 2002 at a workshop held in Skokie. If the discussions are productive, we are intending to create a draft document for review and discussion at annual 2006.

To discuss the need for such a process and begin preliminary planning, Sherrie Schmidt (Chair of OITP Advisory Committee) convened a small group at the CNI meeting in December, including Liz Bishoff, Nancy Davenport, Julia Blixrud, Michelle Newbury, and Karen Coyle (by phone). This initial group is the core of a planning committee for the meeting. This initial group, somewhat modified and expanded, will meet at midwinter to further planning for the April function.

Resources:

We will be drawing on the volunteer efforts of ALA members.