

THE PEOPLE AND PROCESSES OF DIGITAL PRESERVATION

International organizations leveraging internal wisdom to build support for digital records

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Abstract: Most initiatives to build digital preservation programs focus almost exclusively on technical issues: hardware, software, and information architecture. Our panel will instead discuss the organizational, functional, and staff-related questions that needed to be answered in order for three archives at international multilateral organizations to evolve their programs to support digital records. A significant portion of the panel will be dedicated to comparing and contrasting our challenges, approaches, and successes.

Keywords – digital preservation, capacity planning, organizational issues, leveraging expertise, international organizations

Conference Topics – Building Capacity, Capability and Community: Designing and Delivering Sustainable Digital Preservation

I. INTRODUCTION

Staff from the archives of three international organizations: the World Bank Group (WBG); the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), will discuss lessons learned and approaches to the preservation of digital records. The juridical environment of each international organization creates a unique situation for their archives and for the staff who care for them. The archives of international organizations are not subject to the laws or government directives that normally provide a mandate for compliance in records management and long-term preservation. These archives typically have a role to play throughout the records lifecycle: from birth, to death, to the archival afterlife. The knowledge, expertise and experience of staff working in the archives of international organizations are the bedrock of the records management and archival work for these institutions. With born-digital records the functions remain the same, but the way the functions are executed will be different. By engaging the diverse talents of the people in our teams and valuing our

shared expertise within our organizations, we have the best chance of creating procedures and methods that carry our archives forward into a future dedicated to preserving and providing access to born-digital records.

A. *At the World Bank Group (WBG)*

1. *Challenges*

In launching the WBG's digital preservation program, we identified the people and process investments needed to evolve into an archives that can handle both analog and born-digital records. The new solution needed support from both our existing archives team as well as from teams across our broader organization. We also needed to leverage our existing infrastructures and archival expertise.

2. *Approaches*

The implementation of our 'Digital Vault' has relied on giving agency to the staff of our archives. We identified six focus areas around which we created teams to evaluate and tackle all the related issues: Transfer & Ingest; Description, Metadata, & Intellectual Control; Access & Reference; Selection; Strategy & Planning; and Formats, Preservation, & Long-Term Access. The focus teams have been given great latitude in how they organize their work - prioritizing and assigning deliverables to answer their subject area's questions. Since our staff have in-depth knowledge of WBG records throughout the lifecycle (and the technology at play), important efficiencies and opportunities in digital records preservation have been revealed.

3. *Successes*

Rather than attempting to propose and implement changes to our existing processes, workflows, staffing model, and standards from the top down, this approach of engaging the full team has given them greater agency

and personal investment in this new endeavour. It has also enabled us to build bridges to other teams across the WBG.

B. At the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

1. Challenges

Critical to our work has been finding ways to support our organization's core mandate to protect refugees and displaced people. With 68.5 million refugees worldwide, over 16,000 staff stationed all over the world in some of the world's most challenging situations, complex data and formats, and outsourced IT services, UNHCR faces many challenges. How can we justify the investment in such a system over, for example, the investment in things that directly save lives? How, can an outsider understand UNHCR well enough to gain acceptance within the organization and argue for the necessity of such a solution? Where to start?

2. Approaches

Our solutions seek to fit UNHCR's particular organizational, technological and (of course) resource limitations while giving back benefits to our stakeholders: refugees/displaced people, staff and the community of practice. We look at how to solve and support, not drain existing resources.

3. Successes

UNHCR's work toward digital preservation started long before it embarked on the Digital Preservation Project. Records Management in the paper and the electronic environment has proven to be the foundation for the success of DPP.

C. At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

1. Challenges

The complexity of military and political interrelationships at the international level and the wide spectrum of situations in which NATO digital information is generated requires specific procedures and approaches for their management and preservation. The multinational character of NATO missions demands a solid policy and procedural framework for all stakeholders addressing reliability, authenticity, confidentiality, integrity, ownership and availability of digital information.

2. Approaches

The NATO Archives acquired a tool to enable the preservation of digital information of permanent value and to establish a trusted digital repository. Currently all efforts aim to develop procedures and working practices for the preservation of NATO's digital information of permanent value. We include all stakeholders throughout NATO in the process. The stakeholders included members of the NATO information, archival and data community as well as experts in NATO member countries. This covers the pre-ingest process of digital information, the development of a metadata schema and in the organization of its collections. The

goal is to share the expertise with the NATO information and data management community and to incorporate the procedures into information and knowledge management policies and systems throughout the Organisation.

3. Successes

The Archives Committee, composed of archival and information management experts from member countries of NATO, provided guidance and direction for digital preservation at NATO. A solid policy framework for the preservation of NATO's digital heritage was established. This framework has been fundamental in raising awareness throughout the Organisation about both the complexity of preserving digital information and the importance of addressing digital preservation early in the lifecycle.

D. Discussion

Much of the panel time will be reserved for discussion of the contrasts among our approaches and answering questions from the audience. These are some sample questions we plan to address:

- What is your best advice to an archives starting this journey?
- What were the biggest organizational, functional, or staff-related challenges you had to overcome?
- What allies from across the information management & technology communities within your organization were most supportive?
- In what ways did your changes to handle hybrid records change performance of existing tasks?
- How did you build understanding and support for your digital preservation program, often in the shadow of limited resources and demands of our organizations' primary missions?