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HELIN Consortium LORI Grant Lyrasis Synopsis to Date

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DATE: May 22, 2014

TO: HELIN Project Planning Committee Members

FROM: Leigh Grinstead and Tom Clareson, LYRASIS

SUBJECT: Synopsis--What We Know So Far about the HELIN Statewide Digital Project

Project Background and Planning Initiatives
In 2011, HELIN appointed a Digital Initiatives Task Force in order to focus on how HELIN could—“Be the library of the future in both storing and accessing knowledge; blend the best of library traditions with the use of new technology tools.”

Through an environmental scan the group determined the top 5 collections identified as desirable for discovery or digitization, and identified a list of other potential collections. The overarching theme for creating a cohesive narrative based on institution collections was determined to be: “People, Places and Society in Southern New England.” The Task Force was interested in following best practices and recommended looking at both in-house and outsourcing options for digitization.

A final report was issued to the HELIN Board of Directors in January 2012. In early 2013, an invitation was issued to the Rhode Island community to begin planning for a Statewide Digital Repository. The Board invited leaders from the library and information management profession, community and business leaders, government and education professionals, and college and university scholars, and thirty nine people attended. The half-day Digital Summit was held in May, 2013 and focused on envisioning how to develop a centralized, supported infrastructure for local digitization initiatives.

What We Know So Far
There was strong agreement that a digital repository was needed for Rhode Island and the individuals present at the Digital Summit wanted to see a repository that would:

- Allow individuals looking for information about Rhode Island to have one place to search
- Brand the State’s cultural identity. That the web presence could be an important piece of economic recovery
- Bring together many smaller institutions and that collaboration could lighten the load on smaller organizations

Half the participants had some reservations that included:
- Defining a repository as “just” Rhode Island
- Questions about what the scope and purpose of the repository would be
• Concerns about the financial burden of creating and sustaining the resource
• Concern about the scale of the project because it would be statewide and that would require a great deal of administration and organization
• Questions were raised about whether all institutions were capable of participating because their materials may not be organized enough to participate

The term “Repository” meant different things to the various participants at the Digital Summit. The group thought that a repository should include:

• Preservation components
  o That the repository would by its nature emphasize and highlight the importance of Rhode Island’s heritage and its material culture thereby raising the profile of these collections and leading to preservation of the State’s physical collections
  o Provide a way to preserve digital resources
• Organized access to fragmented resources about the State
• Applications so that participating institutions would be able to add their own materials through open source input
• Materials that would be provided for public benefit
• Ease of use
  o The public will be able to search and find materials easily
  o The institutional partners will be able to upload materials easily
  o The repository will be able to share information out with other repositories
    • Institutions will need training in standards and best practices so that materials may be shared and so that the materials can be searched across collections
    • Standards will need to be employed by HELIN when institutions upload materials
    • Best Practices will need to be available for participating institutions

There was a note in the meeting minutes that indicated that the overall scope of the repository was not fully understood.

Participants at the Digital Summit identified what they felt would make the repository concept effective for Rhode Island.

First, it was felt that the group would need to address barriers to entry by:

• Identifying standards, processes, best practices for content creation, metadata, delivery, sharing, and preservation
• Getting “buy-in” from small collections and institutions

There would need to be the creation of a business plan for both institutions that already have digital content, that may have a delivery system and funding to pursue digitization, and those that do not have access to such resources. The business plan would need to:
• Address issues of sustainability both in the areas of:
  o financial sustainability and,
  o updating of content

Institutional partners will demand that it be easy to add and remove content, which implies that with users of different sizes and with different technological capabilities, the interface and or administrative process for adding and subtracting content will need to be flexible and responsive to different needs.

As a collaborative, there will be a need to define an effective governance structure. At the Summit that was identified as needing to be participatory in nature. Marketing and training would be taken on by the collaborative as well.

Finally, the group determined what they wanted in terms of services
• Quality control/authority control would be built in
• Professional staff would serve the public and the institutional partners
• High degree of public trust in the resource itself and the institutions that have created this
• Users get updates on new content added
• Usage statistics are captured and shared
• Because of its collaborative nature it will be more cost-effective than providing this service on its own

In June of 2013 there was a follow on meeting to discuss what next steps were needed to further the draft repository design. Some conclusions were:

• Best practices need to include copyright considerations for materials selection
• Existing models and best practices should be researched. The Digital Commonwealth in Massachusetts, and some Connecticut sites were mentioned
• Setting standards for participating organizations will be important to the repository’s success
• Research into other initiatives to be sure RI is standards compliant (e.g. DPLA)
• Further refine the layers of discovery and database
• Administrative staffing needs to be clarified
• Development of a corps of trainers will be necessary for those to start projects and to train smaller organizations that have-not yet begun the digitization process

In November 2013, HELIN and its partners planned that they would submit an IMLS implementation grant application on February 1, 2015.

Conclusions and Assumptions
• There is a need for community agreement that HELIN will spearhead the development of a digital repository for Rhode Island
• The repository will focus on RI first, then branch out to add other NE regions
• There will be a pilot project that will focus on cultural heritage materials found in libraries, museums, historical societies and archives first
• As user needs become more defined and in subsequent phases the repository will expand to include additional content from other partnering organizations such as government entities, businesses, and educational organizations
• The repository framework will be developed using an agile development process with a back end to implement data and a simple front end with the ability to be customized. The front end will have a common search and a good layered discovery tool designed to let users tag items and recommend additional content based on searches requested
• The repository will be phased in and there will be deadlines developed for each phase. It will provide faceted searching and categories will be defined based on different qualities. It will also be developed to be responsive to social input and have a high degree of social integration including the ability of users to share content via social media, and to actively participate and add their own content and comments
• The repository will be cloud based
• Users will desire output in various formats
• There will be the development of a scalable workflow for organizations

The repository working group decided to keep the planning process moving forward from November 2013 until June 2015 by making tangible progress by creating implementation-grant oriented outputs such as:

• Developing a prototype of the platform/website
• Identifying the best practices in existing repositories in other states
• Engaging several topical groups to begin thinking and organizing
• Conducting targeted surveys
• Drafting the stakeholder use cases (can be extracted from the notes from the forum last June)
• Doing a scalable pilot
• Creating a proposal for an IMLS implementation grant

HELIN applied for and received a LORI grant and the primary partners are HELIN, LYRASIS, New Commons and the Reckoner Group. New Commons serves as the project and communications manager to keep all of the professional and volunteer contributions aligned. The repository design will act as the foundation for the proposal. Robert Leaver will facilitate meetings of the work group to extract the proposal content required.
The primary partners in this LORI grant are; HELIN, LYRASIS, New Commons and the Reckoner Group. They have identified the following Mission and Goals for the Statewide Digital Repository.

**Mission**
The Online Repository of Rhode Island will serve as an open digital collection of cultural, scholarly, and social content held or curated by institutions in Rhode Island and the neighboring region.

**Goals**
By striving to be comprehensive, inclusive and responsive to the needs of its users and partners, the Online Repository of Rhode Island will:

- Link and preserve digital content held by cultural and educational institutions of Rhode Island and the neighboring region, providing digital resource discovery in an interactive online environment
- Be an educational and cultural resource for learners of all ages and levels of educational attainment
- Provide partner organizations with professional services to support their digital content preservation and access development initiatives
- Contribute to the development of regional and national ‘best practice’ standards for the curation and discovery of digital resources
- Enhance educational, cultural and commercial opportunities throughout Rhode Island and the region

**Areas Still Needing Resolution**
Throughout the planning process, audiences have been defined as partnering institutions, and it is their needs that have been driving the conversation about functionality and project need. In order to be successful with an IMLS application or with other public funding sources, the project must document a need from identified audiences for the resource—in this case, the Statewide Repository.

To date “learners of all ages and levels of educational attainment” have been the only “public” audience identified. Typically, digitization projects focus in on the users first and the partners and their needs second. Audiences might be defined as:

- **The Primary Audience** for the Digital Collections is made up of genealogists and local historians
- **The Secondary Audience** is made up of whaling enthusiasts, historians, and scholars
• **The Tertiary Audience** is then made up of general special interest groups, creative artists, musicians, authors, fine arts designers, and artisans

In order to gather data and to provide a compelling statement of need for any grant applications, the planning group will need to determine user groups, so that LYRASIS can provide case studies that include the public as well as partner institutions, and can gather appropriate data through surveys and focus group activities.

As part of the planning process a proposed governance structure should be developed. The structure could include formalizing the Planning Committee into a Governing Board, developing a formal agreement with a host institution for the project, development of “membership” or user levels, and the establishment of other roles as necessary. This topic should be further addressed at the Planning Committee Meeting on July 15-16.

Defining how hosting and non-hosting options would work is another key topic for discussion at the mid-July in-person meeting. Identification of what type of system would be used as the basis of this project (statewide metadata repository, statewide digital asset management system, statewide content management system, multi-institutional repository, or other approach) is of critical importance; discussion on this should begin on May 29 and continue through the July 15-16 in-person meeting.