

Digital Readiness Levels

The Levels are a structured roadmap for organizations to plan and sustainably grow their digital initiatives in order to improve access to collections, and a foundational resource for the Digital Readiness Community of Practice.



Focus Area	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Plan and Prioritize	Set goals for your digital work that fit your organization's mission and policies. Revise existing policies to include digital work, or adopt a separate digital mission statement.	Identify content you want to share in digital format based on your organization's goals, mission and policies. Identify potential partners, resources, tools and platforms to meet your goals.	Make a plan for your digital project with timelines, roles, activities, goals and required resources. Share with partners participating in your project.
Obtain Permissions	Create and use permission forms and donor agreements, or modify existing ones, that include specific language for the use of born-digital or digitized collections.	Assess collection for copyright status. Identify collections items with other access restrictions or concerns, including items with privacy, ethical or cultural considerations.	Assign rights statements or Creative Commons licenses for collection items to be publicly shared online. Develop and share your organizational takedown policy and, if applicable, a statement on harmful content.
Digitize	Identify standards and procedures to be used to digitize physical materials or process born-digital content.	Undertake digitization or born-digital processing work either in-house or with an appropriate vendor or partner using identified standards.	Use or advocate for a quality control checklist to review digitized or born-digital content to confirm it meets identified standards.
Describe	Create and maintain a collection-level inventory of digital content. Identify metadata standards to be used for digital collections.	Using identified standards, create descriptive metadata for collection items to be shared online. Adopt a consistent file-naming convention.	Create expanded item-level metadata, using controlled vocabularies and a data dictionary.
Share	Gather and evaluate digital content. Organize and move content and associated descriptive information to a centralized location using a consistent folder and file organization scheme.	Review access goals and options for providing access to content. Choose a system or platform that meets your goals.	Make item-level metadata and content available for discovery and repurposing. Follow accessibility standards for online content including alt text, transcripts and other accessibility best practices.
Store and Maintain	Store two copies of each unmodified archival file and related metadata. Check storage media annually and refresh as needed.	Store three copies of each archival file and related metadata. One copy should be stored off-site. Check and refresh storage media on a regular schedule.	Plan for future storage needs as your collection grows. Use software tools to check file integrity.
Evaluate	Identify primary users and ways to engage them in your digital collections.	Collect usage data. Consider using analytics tools, social media, or research inquiries to gather use stories.	Share your story with other practitioners to build community around digital work. Use data to inform future collection development work, outreach and programming.

Check As You Go

As you move towards a new level in any of the focus areas, consider the following questions:



Is it documented?

- Are new directions and decisions represented in existing policies, such as a collection development policy or a rights and reproductions policy? Do policies need to be revised or do new policies need to be created?
- Are new procedures or processes written down, such as steps for using a scanner or standards for how to describe content? Is there enough information provided that someone new to the organization would be able to carry out these processes on their own?
- Are partnerships or arrangements with other parties, such as a digitization vendor or a content contributor, documented in some way, like a contract, Memorandum of Understanding, or letter of commitment?

Is it sustainable?

- Is there a plan for how this work will continue to be supported by staff and/or volunteers from year to year?
- What work needs to be done to maintain relationships with partners or collaborators?
- Is funding committed for any recurring costs, such as a cloud storage service?
- Are best practices and widely-adopted standards being used, so that digital work is “future proof”--that is, it’s compatible with commonly-used platforms and systems?
- Is there an exit strategy for any tools or partnerships? For instance, can content be removed from a platform if necessary?

Is it appropriate, relevant and/or accessible?

- Are new digital initiatives in line with the organization’s mission and values? Do digital initiatives reflect community needs and respect community priorities?
- If information is available publicly, is it violating any privacy, copyright or ethical considerations?
- Can all potential users access the content? What can be done to improve accessibility for people with disabilities?

Is it working?

- Are we doing what we set out to do? What were our goals and have we achieved them, partially or fully?
- What have we learned and what will we do differently next time?
- What lessons learned would be helpful to other organizations?
- Have we communicated our project decisions and progress to stakeholders and partners, including any funders?

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