



BEST PRACTICES

GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE

in the Digital Representation and Management of Cultural Heritage Materials

December 1, 1999

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A. INTRODUCTION

The National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage ([NINCH](#)) is undertaking a project to review and evaluate current practice in the digital networking of cultural heritage resources in order to publish a *Guide to Good Practice in the Digital Representation and Management of Cultural Heritage Materials*. The Guide will be published in print and electronic form.

A NINCH [Working Group on Best Practices](#) outlined the scope and purpose of the Guide. It will divide into two sections:

- on the capture and creation of digital cultural heritage resources; and
- on the management and maintenance of that digital data.

The Guide will encompass all genres. To encourage broadest use of digital resources, the Guide will focus on **object-types** (e.g. manuscripts, paintings, performance documentations, etc.) going beyond the limited perspectives of institution types or disciplines (e.g. museums or history). The primary audience will be institutions or researchers preparing to create and manage digital cultural heritage resources with little extensive knowledge of current technical and information standards, metadata and best practices. Funders will be an important secondary audience, for whom the Guide could provide a set of key criteria for funding digital projects.

The Working Group will proceed by commissioning a survey of the field to discover and define exemplary practice. The survey will include interviews with practitioners and reviews of published guidelines and projects that demonstrate good practice; it should also reveal areas for which good

practice still needs to be developed and documented. The Working Group will announce a call for nominations of practitioners and projects to be considered by the survey.

As a starting point, the Working Group created an initial definition of good practice consisting of six principles each of which has a set of evaluative criteria, by which to judge current practice. The Working Group has built into the process a stage in which it may refine and extend these criteria as a result of the survey. The survey is not intended to be a comprehensive review of current practice; its purpose is to gather material, experiences and opinions for the writing of the Guide.

The Working Group has recently received full funding for this project from the **J. Paul Getty Trust**. It is hiring a consultant team to conduct the Survey and write the Guide in close consultation with the Working Group. A Request for Proposals was circulated June 1, 1999 and a research team assembled by the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute of Glasgow University, Scotland, was selected by the Working Group. Pending completion of a contract, work is scheduled to commence January 2, 2000, with delivery of a manuscript by October 15, 2000.

B. CONTENTS OF GUIDE

The following prospectus outlines the intended contents of the Guide:

GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE

Table of Contents

1. PREFACE:

Establishes the scope and context of the Guide and summarily discusses contingent issues not covered in detail.

2. GUIDE TO THE CREATION AND CAPTURE OF DIGITAL RESOURCES AND METADATA.

This section will include but not be limited to the following:

- an overview of principles and general issues common to all formats;
- a detailed discussion of the issues and techniques pertaining to digitizing specific types of original formats and creating appropriate metadata;
- a discussion of the different strategies to be considered with particular digital materials for particular uses and audiences.

3. GUIDE TO THE MANAGEMENT OF DIGITAL DATA & METADATA

A discussion of general issues in the management and maintenance of digital cultural heritage materials. These will include but not be limited to:

- intellectual property and access management;
- strategies for the storage, archiving, and long-term maintenance of large collections of digital data in accordance with newly-developed standards and

technologies;

- the documentation of all practice.

The discussion will include links to web pages and projects that exemplify model practice and its documentation. The guide will also indicate the areas that need to develop good practice that is also well documented.

4. AFTERWORD

The Afterword will concentrate on the range of potential uses of digital material. Focusing on model projects that exemplify best practice, as determined by the Working Group's evaluative criteria, it would examine the power of the medium to connect and re-combine material, and use digital objects in often unforeseen ways.

C. SCHEDULE OF WORK

An outline schedule of work includes:

1. Initial survey

The consultant will commence by interviewing practitioners and reviewing projects drawn from an initial small pool of approximately ten practitioners and projects from diverse cultural communities, applying the criteria for evaluating practice established by the Working Group.

2. Submission of Report 1.

The consultant will present initial findings in written form to the Working Group.

3. Working group review and project evaluation.

The Working Group will discuss its response to the findings and make modifications to the evaluative criteria and survey method, as appropriate, with the consultant.

4. Main survey

The consultant will proceed, interviewing practitioners, reviewing existing statements and guidelines on good practice, and investigating exemplary projects nominated by an open call to the community, issued by the Working Group.

5. Submission of Report 2.

The consultant will write a report on the survey findings, including a bibliography and/or other compilation of useful resources gathered through the survey, and present it to the Working Group for its review.

6. Working group review and project evaluation.

The Working Group will review and evaluate the survey report. On the basis of the survey report, the Working Group will then review and make modifications to the proposed form and content of the Guide, as appropriate.

This will complete Phase 1 of the project. If the Consultant has proposed to work only on Phase 1, his or her work will then be complete. If the Consultant has proposed to work on both Phase 1 and 2, his or her work may continue uninterrupted. If a Consultant has proposed to work only on Phase 2, his or her work will now commence.

7. Writing of the Guide

A consultant will proceed to write the Guide, according to a timetable mutually agreed to by consultant and Working Group.

8. First Draft of Guide manuscript due.

9. Working group review and evaluation of guide manuscript draft 1.

Consultant and Working Group will discuss a first draft of the Guide, after which the consultant will revise the Guide as needed.

10. Final Draft of Manuscript due.

11. Publication

The Working Group will then proceed with making arrangements for the electronic and print publication of the Guide.

D. NINCH Working Group on Best Practices

Kathe Albrecht

from May 24, 1999
 American University
 Visual Resources Association

Katherine Jones

Peabody Museum, Harvard University
 American Association of Museums

Richard Rinehart

from June 14, 1999
 Berkeley Art Museum
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 Museum Computer Network

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Library of Congress

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H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences
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Thornton Staples

University of Virginia Library

Peter Hirtle

Cornell University
 Society of American
 Archivists

Joan Lippincott

Coalition for Networked Information

Jennifer Trant

through May 24, 1999
 Art Museum Image Consortium

Lorna Hughes

New York University

Mike Neuman

Georgetown University

Don Waters

through May 24, 1999
 Digital Library Federation

E. EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The Working Group, at its April 20, 1999 meeting, determined the following as an initial set of working criteria for evaluating practice in creating, capturing and managing digital cultural heritage resources. The criteria are organized under six basic principles.

Exemplary Practice:

1. OPTIMIZES INTEROPERABILITY OF MATERIALS

Digitization projects should enable the optimal interoperability between source materials from different repositories or digitization projects

Criteria:

1. The project uses community-appropriate and widely deployed:
 1. means of representing content (e.g., TEI, CIMI DTD, Laban Notation, etc.);
 2. means of describing content (e.g., MARC, Dublin Core, EAD, TEI Header, Categories for the Description of Works of Art);
 3. technical means of representing information digitally (e.g., SGML, UniCode, JPEG, MPEG, etc.);
 4. means of controlling data values (e.g., AAT, Thesaurus of Geographic Names, LC-Names, etc.); and
 5. existing guidelines to digitizing particular document types and object types; (e.g., TEI/MASTERS proposals for manuscripts; LC/Amertiech Competition Guidelines, etc.)
2. The project has the capability of being used by users other than the primary intended audience.

2. ENABLES BROADEST USE

Projects should enable multiple and diverse uses of material by multiple and diverse audiences.

Criteria:

1. The project uses community-appropriate and widely deployed solutions, systems, standards, software, etc., to enable broadest use;
2. If the project managers have made decisions that limit the use of materials, they have declared and justified those decisions;
3. Project managers considered potential users of the digital resource other than the intended audience;
4. The project takes account of the W3C'S "[Guidelines for Web Site Accessibility](#)" or otherwise acknowledges the needs of those with disabilities.

3. ADDRESSES THE NEED FOR THE PRESERVATION OF ORIGINAL MATERIALS

Projects should incorporate procedures to address the preservation of original materials.

Criteria:

1. Project managers have addressed the need for the preservation of the original materials (if any) in a digital project
2. Project managers justified their choice of methods that destroyed or compromised original materials

4. INDICATES A STRATEGY FOR THE LIFE-CYCLE MANAGEMENT OF DIGITAL RESOURCES

Projects should plan for the life-cycle management of digital resources.

Criterion:

If long-term preservation of digital resources was a consideration, the project managers have a reasonable strategy that will facilitate long-term access.

5. INVESTIGATES & DECLARES INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY & RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

Ownership and rights issues need to be investigated before digitization commences and findings reported to users.

Criterion:

Project Managers have investigated, acted on and declared the rights status of all parts of a project as much as is possible.

6. ARTICULATES INTENT & DECLARES METHODOLOGY

All relevant methods, perspectives and assumptions used by project staff should be clarified and made explicit.

Criteria:

1. The project has declared its rationale, its intended scope, significance and funding base (for example, is it the equivalent of a scholarly monograph or a broad collection of national resources?).
2. The project is explicit about:
 1. its intent;
 2. its primary audience;
 3. its long-term persistence;
 4. its chosen level of faithfulness to an original or an intermediate, whether analog or digital;
 5. its suitability for different levels of teaching and research.

The logo for NINCH, consisting of the word "ninch" in a lowercase, italicized serif font, enclosed within a thin green rectangular border.