PRESS RELEASE

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A NINCH PROJECT

GETTY TRUST FUNDS INNOVATIVE SURVEY &

"GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE"

- Guide To Cover Entire Community -

NINCH Working Group Selects Glasgow University's

Humanities Advanced Technology & Information Institute (HATII)

Guide to be Published Fall 2001

The J. Paul Getty Trust has announced the award of $140,000 to the National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage (NINCH) to direct an innovative project to review and evaluate current practice in the digital networking of cultural heritage resources. NINCH will subsequently publish a Guide to Good Practice in the Digital Representation and Management of Cultural Heritage Materials in print and electronic form.

The Humanities Advanced Technology & Information Institute (HATII) of Glasgow University, Scotland, has been selected to conduct a survey of current practice in the cultural heritage sector and write the Guide, in close co-operation with the NINCH Working Group on Best Practices. A critical component of the Guide will be a report on a survey of current practice. The survey is due for completion in March 2001; the final draft of the Guide is due for completion in June 2001; publication is expected to be in Fall 2001.

BACKGROUND

The 1999 IFLA/UNESCO report on its "Survey on Digitization & Preservation," noted "the complete lack of consistency" among survey respondents in how they prepared for and undertook digitization of heritage materials. As many cultural institutions and also many individual faculty go about digitizing material for teaching, research, and even preservation, what ground rules do they have, what questions do they ask themselves, which information and technical standards are they aware of? How can those working in museums, libraries, archives, arts institutions, universities, colleges, or in their own studies or studios learn from others working in different sectors? How can they break institutional barriers in thinking through the wide range of potential uses and users of their materials?

NINCH WORKING GROUP ON BEST PRACTICE

These and other questions were behind the formation of the Working Group on Best Practices by the National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage in January 1999. The Working Group (members listed below) agreed on an approach emphasizing principles by extracting generalizable issues from existing documented practice.

One of the biggest challenges for the cultural community is not in developing or even adopting technical or information standards. Rather, it lies in translating and crafting them to a set of practices, governed by principles, that are shared and widely deployed across a community.

The goal of the Guide is to create a standard "vocabulary" that can be used to read new iterations of specifications in any particular genre or field. We will not address specific audiences but will aim to produce a generalizable, universal document in which specific concerns or instances could be mapped, using a branching structure.

WHY GOOD PRACTICE?

By adopting community-wide shared good practice, project designers will be able to ensure the broadest use of their projects, now and in the future, even by audiences undreamed of by the designers. They will be able to ensure the quality, consistency and reliability of the information contained in their digital resources. They will be able to ensure the compatibility of their resources with

other resources from other projects and from other domains. They will be able to build on the work of others to produce digital resources most economically and maintain and manage them into the future with maximum cost benefit. Overall, "best practices" can be measured by their ability to maximize a resource's intended usefulness while minimizing the cost of its creation and subsequent management and use.

PRINCIPLES

The Working Group drew up a set of core principles that it believes should govern the creation of digital cultural heritage resources:

1. OPTIMIZE INTEROPERABILITY OF MATERIALS

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

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2. ENABLE BROADEST USE

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

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3. ADDRESS THE NEED FOR THE PRESERVATION OF ORIGINAL MATERIALS

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

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4. INDICATE STRATEGY FOR LIFE-CYCLE MANAGEMENT OF DIGITAL RESOURCES

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

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5. INVESTIGATE AND DECLARE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY & RIGHTS OWNERSHIP

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

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6. ARTICULATE INTENT AND DECLARE METHODOLOGY

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

From these principles a set of evaluative criteria were derived by which to measure current practice

SURVEY

Following an RFP issued by the NINCH Working Group on June 1 1999, NINCH has now contracted with the Humanities Advanced Technology & Information Institute (HATII) of the University of Glasgow to conduct a survey of the field to discover and define exemplary practice and write the Guide, under the direction of, and in close cooperation with, the NINCH Working Group. 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. An initial small survey will test the face-to-face, telephone and mail survey instruments and allow for modification of the Working Group's Principles and the Evaluative Criteria. This will be followed by an extensive (though not comprehensive) survey of a wide range of production sites in the US and of a select few in Europe.

Humanities Advanced Technology & Information Institute (HATII)

Founded in 1997, HATII enables teaching and research by Glasgow University Faculty in the Arts through the deployment of information and communications technology and also engages in an active research agenda of its own. Headed by Dr. Seamus Ross, HATII has conducted a number of important evaluative studies of the use of digital technologies in the cultural

heritage sector. It has expertise not only in the full range of media (text, image, moving image, sound) but also with different institution types (universities, museums, archives and libraries). In 1997, HATII conducted an extensive review of the use of information and communications technology in the heritage sector and produced a suite of guidelines and recommendations for the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). These included guidelines for applicants for funding and strategies for the HLF to apply to assess, monitor and review the impact of technology-based heritage projects.

NINCH Working Group on Best Practices

- Kathe Albrecht (from May 24, 1999), American University/Visual Resources Association
- Lee Ellen Friedland, Library of Congress
- Peter Hirtle, Cornell University
- Lorna Hughes, New York University
- Kathy Jones, Divinity School, Harvard University/American Association of Museums
- Mark Kornbluh, H-Net; Michigan State University
- Joan Lippincott, Coalition for Networked Information
- Michael Neuman, Georgetown University
- Richard Rinehart, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives/Museum Computer Network
- Thornton Staples, University of Virginia Library
- Jennifer Trant (through May 24, 1999), Art Museum Image Consortium
- Don Waters/Rebecca Graham (through May 24, 1999), Digital Library Federation

The Getty Trust

The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts and humanities, and includes an art museum, as well as programs for education, scholarship, and conservation.

The mission of the Getty Grant Program is to strengthen the fields in which the Getty is active by funding exceptional projects undertaken by individuals and organizations throughout the world.

NINCH

The National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage (NINCH) is a diverse coalition of organizations created to assure leadership from the cultural community in the evolution of the digital environment through education on critical issues and developments, the sharing of resources, experience and research, and the creation of a framework to develop and advance collaborative projects, programs and partnerships. NINCH members include organizations and institutions representing museums, libraries, archives, the contemporary arts, learned societies, scholars, teachers and others active in the cultural community. NINCH was formed to help shape a digital environment through intensive collaborative discussion and thoughtful action of its constituent members.