



Formalizing a Digital Preservation Program at NARA

Leslie Johnston, Director of Digital Preservation
U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

Jumpstarting the Program

- In 2014, NARA launched the effort to re-think the ERA system and agency digital preservation needs
- In 2017, a new digital preservation program was created in the Office of the Deputy Archivist of the United States.
- A Digital Preservation Advisory Group, with representation across custodial units, IT, digitization, the general counsel's office, and units responsible for agency guidance and standards, and public access, was formed.

Jumpstarting the Program

- In 2017 we undertook a digital preservation gap analysis, lightly structured around the ISO 16363 standard for Trustworthy Digital Preservation Repositories, but not formally using the metrics.
- Reflecting current activities and both the gap analysis and the work guiding the development of the new ERA 2.0 system, NARA published its first agency-wide Digital Preservation Strategy in 2017 to guide its internal operations across all programs and locations. It was updated in 2022.
 - <https://www.archives.gov/preservation/digital-preservation/strategy>
- The cloud-based ERA 2.0 system went into production in 2018.

What Had to Follow

- Analysis of the electronic records holdings and risks on an enterprise level.
- Building and strengthening relationships between the units through the Digital Preservation Advisory Group.
- A centralized point of contact and process to collate and communicate electronic record processing and preservation needs to IT.
- A program to ensure that documentation of existing and new procedures was centrally available to all staff and kept up-to-date.
- A training program available to all NARA staff regardless of role.
- An ongoing process to assess our program capabilities and maturity.

Documenting the Holdings and Risk through a Digital Preservation Framework

- Initiating a program to create and maintain a Holdings Profile across all electronic records collections and systems to capture the file formats in the NARA holdings.
- Developing a Risk Matrix to assess risk and sustainability for file formats.
- Developing Digital Preservation Plans for sixteen categories of records, including email, structured data, video, audio, etc.
- Documenting the File Format Preservation Plans for over 650 versions of file formats, documenting NARA's current actions and tools.
- This work has been shared publicly since 2019:

github.com/usnationalarchives/digital-preservation

archives.gov/preservation/digital-preservation/linked-data

Assessment of our Program

- In 2019 and 2021, NARA completed and internal self-assessments of its programs and systems using the PTAB (Primary Trustworthy Digital Repository Authorisation Body) instrument based on ISO 16363.
 - <http://www.iso16363.org/iso-certification/preparation/>
 - <https://public.ccsds.org/Pubs/652x0m1.pdf>
- We readily acknowledge that there are gaps in our processes, documentation, and systems. This is the necessary first step to prioritize policy revisions, updates to processes, and investment in the infrastructure.
- We're just now starting the work for 2023.

Always Recognizing Who is Working on Digital Preservation

- This is distributed work across the agency:
 - The Digital Preservation unit guides internal operations
 - Agency Services for external guidance, creation of Schedules, and records appraisal
 - Processing archivists in the Legislative Archives, Presidential Libraries, and Research Services for Federal records
 - Digitization for preservation reformatting and access
 - IT Operations and IT Security for monitoring of systems and storage status, and regular emergency system backup restoration tests
 - The Office of Innovation provides public access through the National Archives Catalog
 - Agency leadership supports the work through policies and resources

For More Information, Feel Free to Contact Us

Leslie Johnston

leslie.johnston@nara.gov

archives.gov/preservation/digital-preservation/