

Deep Research, Wide Results: Updating Format Descriptions in NARA's Digital Preservation Framework

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Abstract

NARA's Digital Preservation Unit created the Digital Preservation Framework in 2019 in response to the current and anticipated volume of electronic records in NARA's holdings. The Framework's Risk Matrix provides numeric risk ratings for file formats, the File Format Preservation Action Plans offer guidance on transformation, and the Record Category Preservation Action Plans document the significant properties of categories of formats, such as digital audio, web records, or calendars. Over time, 760 file formats have been analyzed for preservation risk and future planning. Together with resources such as the PRONOM database and the Library of Congress' Sustainability of Digital Formats website, the Framework provides the archival community with detailed information to help preserve and access files in their repositories. The Framework was recently overhauled to address issues with consistency that have occurred over the years. The Risk Matrix was updated in 2024 and all formats re-analyzed under more standardized, scalable metrics. A new template for format descriptions was put in place; every existing description is being assessed and in most cases re-written to fit. All of this work requires detailed research into each file format. This platform presentation will introduce the Digital Preservation Framework, give an overview of the work being done to improve the Framework, and provide examples of the intense research that goes into each entry.

About the authors:

Leslie Johnston is the Director of Digital Preservation for NARA, with responsibility to develop and execute a digital preservation strategy for the agency. Ms. Johnston has over 30 years of experience in the cultural, higher education, and federal communities including the Getty Research Institute, the Stanford, Harvard, and University of Virginia libraries, and the Library of Congress. Her expertise includes system design and implementation, setting and applying content and metadata standards, digitization, and the preservation of born-digital and digitized collections; her primary research interests are risk analysis in digital preservation and the history of technology. She serves on the Executive Board of the Digital Preservation Coalition and on the PREMIS Digital Preservation Metadata Editorial Committee. She holds a BA in Anthropology and an MA in Archaeology from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Amanda May is currently an Archives Specialist in the Electronic Records Division of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). She is a digital archivist with fifteen

years of experience at the Library of Congress, National Library of Medicine, Naval History and Heritage Command, and University of Maryland. Amanda is a Certified Archivist and holds an MLS in Archives, Records, and Information Management from the University of Maryland, College Park as well as a Bachelor of Journalism and BS in Radio-Television-Film from the University of Texas at Austin. With research interests in legacy media and building practical applications at scale, Amanda evaluates and implements tools for evaluating, processing, and preserving born-digital archival records and ensuring that they are usable by researchers.

Mackenzie Beasley has over 10 years of experience with a career in audiovisual archival work to include the Library of Congress, New York Public Library, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, National Public Radio, the Smithsonian Channel, Smithsonian Archives of American Art and NARA-Nixon Presidential Library. Pivoting in a new direction towards born-digital records, she was briefly a Digital Preservation Specialist and is now an Electronic Records Archives Specialist at the National Archives and Records Administration. She has an undergraduate degree in Filmmaking, a master's in Film Studies, and an MLIS degree. When she's not at work or watching old films, she's out with her husband, their 1 year old daughter and sassy corgi traveling in their 1974 VW Westfalia van.