

Memory Happens Now: A Collaborative Strategy for Digital Preservation of Organizational Records

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Abstract:

Everyone agrees that digital preservation is best done at the point of creation. But what does this mean for the records creators in a small organization without academic IT support or government records mandates? The AIA Digital Repository is a collaborative practice model that involves records creators throughout the American Institute of Architects staff in building and maintaining digital archives.

In the traditional archives model, the archivist adds meaning and context through appraisal, arrangement, and description, after the records arrive in the archive. The AIA Digital Repository flips this model on its head. The archivist worked with staff to develop an archival collection framework first, based on the American Institute of Architect's programs and functions, to accommodate the types of born-digital records we know we will produce each year. With the collection framework in place, it's easy for staff to drop their records into the right pigeonhole without a lot of tedious tagging. As programs change name and sunset, changes to the descriptive metadata at the program level maintain the archival context. Both the records themselves and their context are saved as they happen, creating an ongoing institutional memory that's directly accessible to all staff.

This talk will discuss how the archives collaboratively involved creators from initial planning to full implementation, what was effective for change management, and how this practice model alters the roles of archivists and creators.

About the author:

Nancy Hadley is Senior Manager, Archives & Records, for the American Institute of Architects. She has been a certified archivist since 1991, and was in the first group to receive the SAA's new Digital Archives Specialist certificate. Prior to becoming archivist for the American Institute of Architects in 2003, she held positions at the College of William & Mary and at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. She holds a B.A. in architecture (Princeton University), M.Arch. (Rice University), and M.L.I.S. (North Texas State University).