

MODULE 18

USING EAD3

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EAD Case Study: Congregational Library & Archives

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The Congregational Library & Archives (CLA) started investigating EAD implementation in fall 2012, beginning with an environmental scan of the implementation practices and lessons learned by other archives in the Boston area. In an internal white paper written for CLA's upper management and Board, archives staff made a compelling case for adopting EAD, outlined the potential opportunities for saving staff time and money, and presented possible options for implementation. The white paper articulates a number of benefits for both researchers (e.g., better access, more robust searching, ease of use through increased consistency, etc.) and for the archives (e.g., better control, ability to reach a larger audience, potential to eliminate "hidden" collections, improved workflow efficiencies, interoperability, ease of future migration, and many others).⁸³

Before adopting an EAD-based workflow, CLA archivists created finding aids in Microsoft Word and then handed them off to a specialist for encoding in HTML so that they could be published on the web. Legacy typewritten finding aids were scanned, run through OCR software, converted to PDF, and linked from the archives website. Although these approaches worked, they were time-intensive and outmoded, and they didn't take advantage of advances in archival standards or web technology. The potential for archivists to create an EAD finding aid at the time of processing, and to be able to convert that EAD to many different formats as needed, on the fly, was part of the attraction of implementing EAD.

In considering options for EAD encoding, CLA narrowed in on two choices: the bare-bones approach of purchasing Oxygen XML Editor and coding finding aids by hand or taking the more ambitious step of adopting an archives management system. Staff members felt that oXygen would let them get started fairly quickly but that an archives management system would create efficiencies in that all collections data would be in a single system, encoding would not need to be done by hand, and existing EAD templates and stylesheets would be built into the system. They also recognized that an archives management

83 Cristina Prochilo, "Making the Case for Encoded Archival Description (EAD) at the Congregational Library" (unpublished report, January 29, 2013).

system would enable them not only to produce EAD-encoded finding aids but also to improve accessioning and reporting activities that were being done in a local Microsoft Access database. With essential support from the library director, CLA's staff members chose to "be bold and adopt ArchivesSpace to solve a number of our needs holistically and at once."⁸⁴ CLA became an ArchivesSpace charter member in 2013.

Progress on EAD implementation at CLA has been a steady effort, but a few challenges have slowed the process. The CLA has no in-house IT department and, therefore, no SQL server or systems librarian to perform system upgrades or troubleshoot any issues. For this reason, CLA's staff chose to use a hosted instance of ArchivesSpace, offered through LYRISIS. This required some extra time to secure funding, which came in the way of a grant from the H. W. Wilson Foundation. Lack of IT staff also meant that all work related to EAD implementation has been done by the archivists themselves, which adds the need for training time but has provided the opportunity for archives staff members to learn and develop their own skills along the way.

Despite these challenges, CLA has successfully moved forward in an iterative process, recognizing the need to get started with EAD implementation following a staged approach. The first stage was to migrate existing collection-level descriptions from CLA's Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) into ArchivesSpace, a process that involved data cleanup before and after the data was ingested, to make sure that the data was consistent and compliant with DACS. Along the way, CLA archivists also began describing new collections in ArchivesSpace to ensure that all new descriptions can be exported as EAD. In 2017, CLA will begin the next phase of data conversion, which will involve using oXygen to encode legacy finding aids in EAD so that they can be imported into ArchivesSpace, where the descriptions can be cleaned up and the revised finding aids exported as EAD. (Note that as of 2016, ArchivesSpace exports EAD 2002, though work on exporting EAD3 is underway.)

The final stage—publishing EAD finding aids online—is perhaps the biggest challenge for CLA, and one that CLA's staff members are in the process of working on as of late 2016. As stated previously, CLA

⁸⁴ Prochilo, personal communication.

does not have in-house IT support or a systems librarian, and staff members have limited XSLT experience. Although the XSLT skills could be learned, that slows down the process. There are many EAD implementers in the area and region, but there is currently no EAD consortium where CLA could contribute EADs for publication. This means that even though there is a lot of local talent and resources, CLA's staff members will need to reinvent the wheel in terms of identifying and implementing their own method of publishing EAD. To start this process, they have begun to meet with their web design contractor to discuss options.

CLA's staff will approach this decision using the same considerations that have shaped their implementation thus far:

- Embracing technology and archival standards as much as possible
- Making decisions that will most positively benefit the collections and patrons while at the same time least adversely impact the archival staff (2.7 FTE + 1 PT paraprofessional + Simmons graduate interns)
- Making decisions that will allow them to stretch the AS / EAD budget as far as possible
- Making collections as broadly searchable as possible on the Internet
- Making decisions that are most efficient for staff and collections management
- Working in an iterative manner whenever possible. As a small institution, CLA cannot afford to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Staff members must continue to move ahead or else risk falling behind.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Ibid.