

Building Best Practice for Access to Born-Digital Records

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Abstract: There's a long history of archivists working to establish standards and best practices for acquiring, appraising, arranging, describing, and preserving digital archives, but for many reasons, access has been more difficult to define. Building from working sessions at SAA 2015 and 2016 around hacking access practices and defining tiers of access, we now have a body of foundational research and clearer paths forward with defining best practices for born-digital access. This session will focus on one of those efforts: proposing a guideline for levels of access to born-digital archival material.

Following a 2017 Digital Library Federation (DLF) Forum working lunch on born-digital access, a group formed with the initial goal of creating a document proposing "Levels of Access to Born-Digital Archival Material." Inspired by and structured similarly to the NDSA "Levels of Digital Preservation," the final document will include various access-related areas of work (Description, Distribution, Tools, Researcher support, Policy and Documentation, Security, and Accessibility), and will propose a tiered set of recommendations for decision making and actionable progress in each area.

In this platform presentation, we will give an overview of this research in progress. Topics will include how the group seeks to create a baseline for evaluating and encouraging improvement to access for digital records, what resources we started with, what additional research we're performing to inform the proposed levels, and how we seek to partner with librarians, scholars, and outreach specialists to ensure that digital archives are not just preserved, but utilized by a wide range of patrons. We'll close with our next steps and anticipated outcomes.

About the Authors:

Alston Cobourn is the University Archivist at East Carolina University. Most recently she worked as the Processing and Digital Assets Archivist at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi where she led the library's digital preservation efforts. Previously she was the Digital Scholarship Librarian at Washington and Lee University. She holds a BA and MLS with an Archives and Records Management concentration from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Ashley L. Taylor is an archivist in the Archives & Special Collections at the University of Pittsburgh Library System. In her role as co-chair of the Digital Library Federation's Born-Digital Access Working Group, she is interested in exploring the role of digital records in the archival community. She is also a member of SAA's Digital Archives Specialist Subcommittee.

