



Canadian Digital Information Strategy

Exploratory Meeting

Ottawa, Ontario, October 17-18

Meeting Summary

Meeting details

- LAC hosted an 1.5-day invitational meeting on October 17th and 18th to explore the possibility of collaboratively developing a national digital information strategy. Such a strategy would aim to ensure that Canada has a vibrant and enduring body of Canadian digital content to carry into the future and to build upon over time.
- The meeting goals were threefold:
 - to assess the need and appetite among representative stakeholder groups to work toward such a strategy;
 - to explore the appropriate scope and parameters for a strategy; and
 - to discuss the process that would most effectively foster development of a strong, workable and collaborative strategy for Canada.
- The meeting was attended by 52 participants representing a range of sectors and interests including:
 - content producers (e.g. NFB, Canadian Book Publishers Council, Canadian Health Information Management Association, canadiana.org)
 - libraries and archives (e.g. CCA, ACA, AAQ, CLA, CARL, PTLDC, CIDL)
 - federal departments and agencies (e.g. PCH, CHIN, CCI, IC, Stats Can, CISTI, CIOB, Environment Canada)
 - funding bodies (e.g. CFI, NSERC, SSHRC)
 - university-based digital initiatives (e.g. Érudit, Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library)
 - educators (Ottawa-Carleton Education Technology Integrator Program)
 - the municipal sector (City of Montreal Archives)
- Three background papers were distributed prior to the meeting. These papers are available upon request, and will soon be available through the LAC Web site.
 - *Towards a National Digital Information Strategy: Mapping the Current Situation in Canada / Vers une stratégie nationale sur l'information numérique : Portrait de la situation actuelle au Canada*

- *Towards a National Digital Information Strategy: A Review of Relevant International Initiatives / Vers une stratégie nationale sur l'information numérique : Revue des initiatives internationales pertinentes*
- *Digital Information at Library and Archives Canada : An Overview of Progress and Issues / Information numérique à bibliothèque et archives Canada: Une Vue d'ensemble des progrès et des enjeux.*
- The agenda for the first day included presentations of the highlights of the first two of these papers, as well as a presentation from Bill LeFurgy from the Library of Congress about the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program in the US (“NDIIPP”).
- Participants then used a discussion paper to discuss, in breakout groups, issues related to production, preservation, access, and supporting infrastructure (including leadership, laws and policies, funding, research, and technical infrastructure).
- On the second day, groups spent time outlining characteristics of the desired end-state and steps to get there. Subsequently, there was discussion of an national summit on digital information and concrete steps to get us there.

Meeting Outcomes

- There was strong endorsement that a national strategy to frame a range of concrete actions was desirable. As one participant put it, we need to think of digital information as the country’s “intellectual and information capital” and invest in its growth, longevity and accessibility accordingly.
- An overwhelming majority of participants felt that a strategy must address both making more digital content available for Canadians and preserving digital content over time. A handful of participants felt that digital preservation alone would be a more focused and feasible scope.
- It was therefore agreed that the strategy should *look to cover*:
 - all types of digital content (whether cultural, scientific, data, etc.),
 - all jurisdictions with a stake in it, and
 - all functional stages of the life cycle (e.g. creation/production, management/preservation, access/use) as well as supporting infrastructure for those functions.
- But it was also acknowledged that the scope and strategic needs for each of these were not sufficiently well understood at this point to be sure that a strategy can and should cover all of these with equal emphasis.
- It was recommended that, to the extent possible, the strategy look to “adapt and adopt” sound strategies, models, and practices that have already been

developed, whether within sectors in Canada (e.g. the digital health record strategy) or in other countries.

- There was a strong sense that the Canadian model must be a decentralized one—that no one institution can ‘do it all’ in managing and preserving Canadian digital content.
- The need for as much digital information as possible to be openly accessible and repurposable was emphasized. That puts the user in the driver’s seat and would allow unanticipated future uses.
- Participants emphasized that the voices of information consumers, youth, creators, and the private sector would be valuable to add at the appropriate time to those already at the table.
- There was general consensus that an incremental approach was desired, that there was no point in trying for the “perfect” strategy for all areas, but rather, a need to look at “chewable chunks.” It was also noted that the digital environment is highly fluid, requiring a flexible strategy that could evolve over time as required.
- There was a strong call for LAC to show leadership by acting as a “hub” and coordinator on this initiative, and to provide a secretariat function to it. There was also a sense that LAC’s role would, quite appropriately, vary within different areas of the strategy.
- Participants endorsed the notion of a summit on digital information next March, and offered suggestions about specific work to be undertaken for it and the need for a smaller planning body drawing on a few of the meeting participants. LAC undertook to contact interested parties and to involve and support them in preparatory work for the summit.