REPORT TO SIX PLUS ONE DIRECTORS

By the Digitization Working Group
April 2003

TERMS OF REFERENCE

In May 2001, the Digitization Working Group was created by the Six Plus One Directors and mandated to explore province-wide strategies concerning digitization.

Specifically, the Digitization Working Group was directed to:

- Review the document *Saskatchewan Electronic Text Initiative (SETI): A Discussion Paper* to determine if the model proposed in the paper would be desirable for Saskatchewan and to bring comments and recommendations back to the Six Plus One Directors.

- Prepare the *Saskatchewan Electronic Text Initiative* discussion paper for broader distribution, including setting it in the appropriate context and determining who should send it out and how.

- Identify and research issues regarding digitization including concerns such as the priority for digitization, possible digitization projects, funding sources for digitization and consultation strategies.

The Digitization Working Group met on May 8, 2002, June 7, 2002 and November 25, 2002, and February 4, 2003. The assessment and recommendations of the working group follows.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Response to SETI

The working group agrees with several of the points made in *SETI*, namely:

- Digitization is a high priority.
- Saskatchewan libraries and archives should take a lead role to build a co-operative, province-wide strategy around digitization.
- International digitization standards should be followed.
- Consolidation of digitization expertise, particularly in the areas of copyright and technology, would be useful to libraries, archives, and other agencies.

The working group does not agree with SETI's proposal to build a physical digitization centre in Saskatchewan.

2. Recommended model for province-wide co-operation

The working group recommends building an alliance of Saskatchewan organizations to share digitization expertise, make collective decisions on digitization standards, investigate joint licensing of digitization products/services; and co-ordinate inventories of projects, listings of grants, and networking. We suggest a clearinghouse model, co-ordinated by two resource people with copyright and technical "know-how."

3. Recommended next steps

- The working group has drafted a new discussion paper (see attached) that proposes province-wide co-operation on digitization, based on the clearinghouse/consortium model.
- If Six Plus One directors approve of this strategy, we recommend that a consultation process be used to determine if the strategy would meet the needs of Saskatchewan institutions.
- Representatives from interested organizations could then be brought together to refine the strategy and create a business plan, which can be used to ask for funding and support.
- We recommend that Six Plus One directors choose from one of the following two options to manage the consultation process and advancement of this initiative:
    - Refer the discussion paper to the Multitype Library Board and ask it to co-ordinate consultations and ongoing advancement of the initiative. The Multitype Library Board's role is to co-ordinate province-wide co-operation among all types of information providers in Saskatchewan. This role is unique and highly suited to the proposed initiative; or
    - Six Plus One Directors take ownership of the consultation and advancement process.

ASSESSMENT OF KEY ISSUES

The working group assessed key issues concerning digitization, including: How important is digitization? Should libraries and archives give digitization a high priority? What are the key challenges facing organizations that wish to digitize collections? How can we overcome these challenges? The following themes emerged from the working group's assessment of key digitization issues. These themes were then used to develop our proposed model for province-wide co-operation. (It should be noted that the working group discussed possible digitization projects and funding sources, as per the terms of reference; however, working group members concluded that it would be premature to develop these ideas prior to the advancement of our proposed strategy.)

Saskatchewan archives and libraries should take the lead to develop a province-wide digitization strategy.
- Archives and libraries have many years of experience building information resources and tools for their users.

- Archives and libraries possess expertise on standards for information organization, access, and retrieval -- expertise that is crucial for digitization success.
- Archives and libraries have a mandate to plan for future access to information content.
- Archives and libraries are repositories of rich content. Effective digitization of this content offers tremendous opportunities to enhance access and preservation. It also offers innovative opportunities to develop this content into interactive digital objects.
- Digital collections are a promotional vehicle for libraries and archives.
- Archives and libraries recognize the importance of the culture and heritage of Saskatchewan, and have made tremendous investment in their collections to preserve historical resources. Digitizing these collections will open up historical documents, promote the province to the outside world, and attract much usage from Saskatchewan expatriates around the globe.
- Digital learning objects and digital collections will support lifelong learning and education.

Partnership is key to success.
- Digital content creation is an area of convergence for Saskatchewan archives, libraries, post-secondary education institutions, K-12 institutions, museums, cultural institutions, genealogical societies, and many other information providers.
- A province wide strategy is needed to bring these partners together to discuss the ways in which their digital content interests overlap and how they could co-operate to enhance capacity and outcomes.

Access, education, preservation, promotion, and institutional learning are opportunities offered by digitization.
- Transferring information content from print (or other formats) to digital objects offers exciting new opportunities to enhance the services of information agencies. Intellectual access to information resources can be increased. Digital content can help agencies showcase their collections to a broader audience.
- Standards-based digitization offers new opportunities to collaborate in the creation of interactive and dynamic information and educational tools. Interoperability standards enable digital objects created across many sectors to be integrated into multiple information products, learning tools, teaching tools, and/or collections. Such tools will be an expectation of users in the 21st century and will serve to promote and enhance the services of the institutions providing them.
- Embracing digitization offers institutions an opportunity to develop staff skills.
- Digitization can be a useful adjunct to paper preservation programs, and promoting the use of proper standards can contribute to preservation of digital materials whether these be "born digital" or converted.

A province-wide digitization strategy should focus on building expertise and capacity rather than building a physical electronic text centre.
- Expertise on technical standards and digital rights management and copyright is the primary challenge facing institutions that wish to enter the digitization arena.

- Therefore, a province-wide strategy should focus on providing expertise to institutions about copyright requirements, digital rights management and technical standards and other areas of digitization projects that may be applicable.
- A province-wide strategy can also foster excellence in digitization by enabling collective decision-making on technical standards, coordinating joint licensing of digitization products, coordinating inventories of projects, listings of grants, and networking.

"Future proofing" is a priority.

- "Future proofing" means coming to collective agreement on digitization standards so that digital objects created in isolation can, at any time in the future, be integrated into broader digital collections, libraries, learning resources, teaching tools, and other future environments and formats which we may not even yet envision.
- Many institutions are currently building digital content, but this content is stored in isolated pockets. It is difficult to find because pieces are scattered in separate repositories across the web. Also, many digital objects are stored in repositories that may be proprietary and inaccessible.
- The goal of a province-wide strategy should be to build an awareness of the value of sharing digital objects and to agree upon metadata, storage formats and programming standards that enable digital object interoperability.

A province-wide "consortium" or "alliance" could be formed to start a clearinghouse of information and coordinate capacity development initiatives.

- Many Saskatchewan agencies are undertaking digitization. It makes sense for these agencies to talk to one another, share expertise, and collaborate where appropriate.
- Interested institutions could form a strategic alliance to:
  - Share information about their individual digitization initiatives;
  - Discuss issues related to digitization projects -- digital rights management issues, metadata standards, hardware, software, product design;
  - Develop a body of expertise, best practices, and standards;
  - Share two resource people who can become advisors on digitization;
  - Establish a funding pool for digitization projects;
  - Investigate joint licensing of digitization products; and
  - Represent the digitization interests of participants to vendors, potential funding sources, and government.
- Information sharing could include: lists of funding resources available, lists of digital collections in the province, lists of projects underway or under consideration, lists of content that are a high priority for digitization, tools for project planning, expertise on copyright and digital rights management, recommendations on metadata and other standards, and technical guidance.

PROPOSED MODEL FOR PROVINCE-WIDE CO-OPERATION

The working group discussed various options for developing a province-wide digitization initiative. It developed the following model, which should be refined through a consultation process.

Vision *(proposed)*

To develop a locus of knowledge and support that enables the public to find, locate, and utilize Saskatchewan knowledge and information created through co-operative Saskatchewan digitization initiatives.

Values and Principles *(proposed)*

Co-operation would be founded upon shared principles:

Partnership -- The value of strength in collaboration.

Access to and discovery of information -- Commitment to access to information.

Institutional learning -- Commitment to growing as institutions by learning new skills, and sharing our learning experiences with our partners.

Education -- Digital content is an important component of education: K-12, post-secondary education, and life long learning.

Cultural development -- Commitment to preserving cultural heritage and developing our cultural future via digital content creation.

Promotion -- Digital content is an effective way to promote our organizations and the province.

Standards -- Commitment to excellence in digitization by fostering adherence to international digitization standards.

Preservation -- Capturing Saskatchewan information.

Objectives

1. **Build expertise**
   We propose finding a way to fund two individuals: an expert on copyright, digital rights management, and legal components of digitization; and, an expert on international metadata and digitization standards, as well as digitization hardware and software. These individuals could be shared among the alliance's partners, providing direction, support, and on-site assistance. We also propose engaging alliance partners in regular meetings to facilitate sharing of expertise and experiences.

2. **Provide co-ordination and leadership**
   We believe it would be useful to have a locus of provincial co-ordination and leadership to:
   - Co-ordinate joint licensing of digitization products, if desired.
   - Inventory digital content developed.
   - Create a registry of Saskatchewan digitization projects with detail about the standards and policies they have used (i.e. best practices).
   - Compile priority lists and wish lists for future digital content creation and for navigational tools.
   - Co-ordinate collective decision making on matters such as standards.
   - Co-ordinate regular meetings of the alliance partners.
   - Identify, co-ordinate, and/or build partnerships around joint projects where desirable.

3. **Develop financial capacity**
   Most institutions apply to external grant funds to finance digital content creation. This process could be aided through the establishment of a provincial funding pool to be used for leveraging grant funds for digital content creation. The alliance could establish a funding pool, soliciting contributions, and co-ordinate its ongoing management. The alliance could set up an impartial adjudication group to review applications.

4. **Future proof digital collections**
   We propose sharing information on future proofing and international standards, so that institutions in Saskatchewan have a better understanding of their options when developing digital content.

5. **Preserve Saskatchewan information**
   Digital standards have not yet evolved to the point where they offer a permanent alternative to traditional methods of reformatting original documents. Digitization does, however, offer the ability to provide researchers with a virtual image that can be used instead of the fragile original, thus saving the original from further damage through frequent physical handling (although it may be noted that demand for physical handling of the original can often increase as a result of virtual publication).

   Preservation is also a concern (for information managers) where solutions must be found for issues of technical obsolescence and migration for 'born-digital' documents, i.e. information originally created and stored in digital formats, and print documents that have been transferred to electronic form. A digitization advisory alliance could help institutions address these concerns by providing guidance on digital standards that offer the best long term accessibility options.

   From these perspectives, digitization can be seen as a useful adjunct to paper preservation programs. A priority of a Saskatchewan digitization alliance should be to build understanding of the opportunities and limitations that digitization offers with regard to preservation, so that partner institutions can make wise preservation decisions.

Structure

We suggest the following principles and priorities to guide structural development, recognizing that true structural development can only begin through consultation with interested partners.

Locus of knowledge concept -- The focus should be to build and co-ordinate a collaborative support network (instead of building administrative structures).

Expert staff -- Expert staff, committed to the digitization alliance is necessary given the complexity of digitization. Funding would need to be sought for two staff persons, who could possibly be based in a partner organization.

Governance – An advisory committee, with representation from all partners, could be established for the alliance. The "home" for this advisory committee and staff would need to be determined in consultation with the communities of interest. The Multitype Library Board is a possible option, because it has a role to co-ordinate co-operative province-wide initiatives for all types of information providers in Saskatchewan.

Funding pool -- Financial contributions should be sought to develop a funding pool. Light administrative structures, managed through partner representatives, the parent/host organization, and staff members, would be needed to manage the funding pool.

Provincial government support – Sustainable funding should be sought from the Government of Saskatchewan, including funding to hire staff support and for the funding pool. Government support is appropriate given the broad positive impact this initiative can have on the learning, library, heritage, archives, and cultural sectors (particularly in regard to technology-enhanced learning and online service development).

Additional financial support – Funding should be sought from other groups, such as the Canadian Council of Archives and other bodies identified by the communities of interest. Corporate donations should be sought to support a funding pool.

ADVANCING THIS INITIATIVE

Consultation Process

A consultation process should be used to determine if this strategy would meet the needs of Saskatchewan institutions, obtain their input to refine the strategy, and generate grassroots support. Many types of Saskatchewan institutions may be interested in this initiative, including all types of archives, all types of libraries, museums, genealogical societies, historical societies, cultural organizations, and educational institutions.

To approach this range of institutions in an effective way, we recommend contacting umbrella groups that represent key sectors:

- Multitype Library Board
- Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists
- Museums Association of Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Genealogical Society
- Saskatchewan History & Folklore Society
- Saskatchewan Learning
- SaskCulture
- Saskatchewan Culture, Youth & Recreation

We have developed a new discussion paper (see attached) that outlines the proposed strategy and can be mailed out to the umbrella groups. An accompanying cover letter should give background and an overview of the proposed initiative. It should also request feedback on the following questions: Would this initiative be useful to you and meet your needs? Would you support this initiative and be interested in discussing it further? The cover letter should provide contact information so that interested institutions can respond. Contact information may also be inserted into the "Request for Feedback" section of the discussion paper.

It may be desirable to organize consultation meetings in various locations around the province as a follow up to these letters of introduction. Consultation meetings should be used to obtain feedback, refine the strategy, and determine how to further advance the initiative.

Business Plan

We believe that a business plan will be needed to establish this initiative. The business plan should consolidate the proposed model, offer a strategic plan, and outline accountability measures. It should also clearly argue the positive outcomes that will be achieved. A jurisdictional analysis with an inventory of what other provinces are doing in this area may also be useful.

The business plan can be used to solicit support for the initiative. Government may be interested in supporting the initiative. Other organizations may be willing to donate funds or in-kind contributions.

Co-ordination Responsibility

Who is responsible for advancing this initiative? We offer two options and leave it to the Six Plus One Directors to decide:

1. Refer the discussion paper to the Multitype Library Board and ask it to co-ordinate consultations and ongoing advancement of the initiative. The Multitype Library Board's role is to co-ordinate province-wide co-operation amongst all types of information providers in Saskatchewan. This role is unique and highly suited to the proposed initiative.

2. Six Plus One Directors take ownership of the consultation and advancement process.

CONCLUSION

We were pleased to work together on this strategy and look forward to continued development on this initiative in the future.

Respectfully submitted by,

Six Plus One Digitization Working Group

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