PA Digital
Futures Report
2021

**Report authored by the
PA Digital Futures Task Force**

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Background

Over the last seven years, PA Digital has worked with regional and national partners towards the goal of making the digital collections of the Commonwealth's cultural heritage institutions more easily discoverable online through the national framework provided by the Digital Public Library of America. Since 2016, we have served as the Pennsylvania service hub for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), a central partnership and focus over the course of the project's history.

Over the first 7 years of PA Digital, the initiative was funded through a series of Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, which were administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Effective October 2021, PA Digital will no longer be funded by LSTA grants.

Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation Foundry, 1893, courtesy of Historic Pittsburgh and Detre Library & Archives, Heinz History Center.

Planning for the Future

To ensure its long-term sustainability, PA Digital convened a task force in Fall 2020 to assess its core purpose and propose recommended actions to support the project's continuity. This included gathering input from current and potential partners through two virtual meetings in spring 2021 and individual conversations with key stakeholders. This report provides reflections on the feedback from PA Digital stakeholders and presents the conclusions of the task force, including a proposed new vision and strategic goals for the future.

Task Force Reflections on Stakeholder Feedback

In Spring 2021, the PA Digital Futures Task Force hosted two virtual summits. Following both events, the task force distributed surveys to gather additional feedback from participants. Anonymized survey results are included in the appendices of this report.

Exploring the Future of PA Digital

Feb 24, 2021

The first was a 2-hour meeting entitled "Exploring the Future of PA Digital" on February 24th 2021 about the direction of the initiative, open to all current and potential partners. The total number of attendees was 106. Organized as a virtual "World Cafe," the task force gathered feedback from participants about what is important to them about the future of PA Digital, what value is most important to see PA Digital offer in the future, and who PA Digital is primarily for. We also began to engage these partners regarding their institutional capacity to financially support PA Digital in the future. A recording of this event can be found on the PA Digital website.
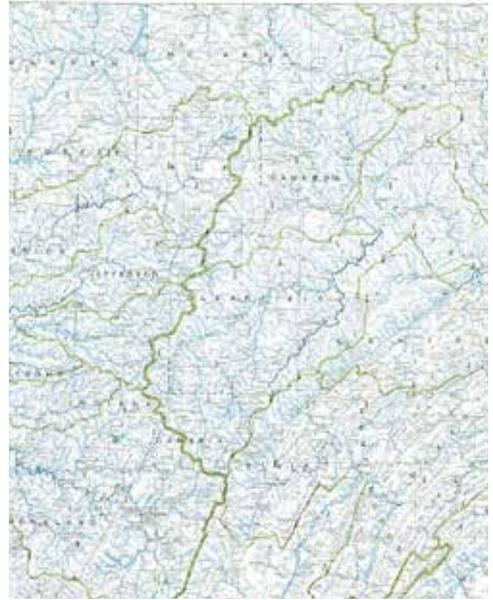
PA Digital Leaders Summit

May 19, 2021

The second was an invite-only meeting entitled "PA Digital Leaders Summit" on May 19th 2021 with executive decision makers (or their representatives) from partner institutions focused on the financial planning for PA Digital. The total number of attendees was approximately 30. In this meeting, the task force presented three potential scenarios as jumping off points for discussion regarding the future of PA Digital. The first scenario was winding down PA Digital completely. The second scenario was a "maintenance mode" focused on PA Digital sustaining a limited role as DPLA service hub, continuing metadata aggregation, and providing some professional opportunities through in-kind contributions. The third scenario is an expanded vision for PA Digital, which will be outlined further later in the report. An introduction by Joe Lucia and slides for this event can be found on the PA Digital website.

Key Insights

Through these and other conversations with current and potential PA Digital contributors, project staff, and stakeholders, the PA Digital Futures Task Force gathered important information about the priorities for institutions who wish to be involved in PA Digital going forward. Feedback revealed several key issues to be addressed through future work as well as insights into shared priorities:

Stream map of Pennsylvania, 1965, courtesy of Pennsylvania State University.

#1: Seeking Continuation of PA Digital

Most stakeholders and leaders agreed that continuation of PA Digital as it exists today was, at a minimum, somewhat important, though several indicated that it was not an immediate priority for their institutions. During the May 2021 meeting when participants were presented with the three potential scenarios (Winding Down, Maintenance Mode, or Expanded Vision), the expanded vision for PA Digital was most popular, followed closely by the maintenance mode.

#2: Questioning Current Value

There was a general lack of clarity about the central infrastructure role played by PA Digital today and its connection to the Digital Public Library of America as a hub in the national framework. The presence of cultural heritage materials in the DPLA still remains important to most stakeholders for national visibility, but PA Digital's role in establishing and populating that presence was opaque or unclear to some, which caused questions about the need for continued investment in PA Digital more generally. In the February 2021 meeting, some participants also felt that there was unclear who PA Digital was for and its relationship to other regional service providers and partners (such as POWER Library and Historic Pittsburgh).

#3: Need for Community Ownership and Leadership

An ongoing commitment to transparency, shared governance, and a greater degree of community engagement will be necessary to drive expanded collaboration efforts for PA Digital. Due to the initiative's current grant-funded structure and focus on technical infrastructure, PA Digital has been reliant on a small group of institutions to sustain the initiative. Going forward, we need to strengthen cross-organizational leadership and communities of practices within PA Digital in order to grow as a network.

#4: Need for Demonstrated Impact and Return on Investment

Greater visibility of collections paired with demonstrated impact of expanded access remains a major motivator and a required value proposition for many institutions. PA Digital offers institutions access to a national framework and potential for greater exposure for cultural heritage items, but it's not enough to build access alone without demonstrated results and impact of use.

#5: Opportunities to Promote Equity

One of the purposes for PA Digital that was articulated in the February 2021 meeting was the broad goal of removing barriers and bringing digital collections to a diverse audience. However, it is unclear to what degree we are currently meeting this goal. In discussing this as part of our future vision, the PA Digital task force recognizes the need to prioritize issues of digital equity, which greatly impact access and community engagement. Digital equity and a focus on unrepresented or underrepresented communities is a promising future direction that warrants further exploration.

#6: Sustainability

Financial resources are currently scarce, and additional planning will be required to build sustainable, community-driven support for an expanded vision. A phased approach will be necessary to support the initiative's continuation and widespread participation.

Task Force Recommendations

Based on the reflections above, the PA Digital Futures task force recommends a phased plan that would build towards an expanded vision for PA Digital, with the understanding that the scope and success of these efforts depend on shared institutional commitments.

A Vision for the Future of PA Digital

Building upon work completed thus far, the PA Digital task force advises strengthening PA Digital's role as a community-based network, with the broader mission of supporting and empowering Pennsylvania residents and those of surrounding communities to share their own stories through cultural heritage collections. The task force also recommends that PA Digital focus its efforts on advancing equity in the creation, access, and reuse of historical and cultural resources online by underrepresented and historically unrepresented groups in the Commonwealth.

This new direction will expand PA Digital's work to establish a shared vision that connects communities and cultural heritage organizations with a range of partners supporting the digital lifecycle from digitization to access and reuse. As an entity, PA Digital will act as coordinator, facilitating collaboration amongst communities of practice, building new partnerships with regional providers and projects, and eventually, aiming to provide the human resources and infrastructure needed to bridge these efforts. This includes maintaining existing metadata aggregation services and professional networks within PA Digital, while also seeking additional opportunities for distribution and reuse.

Erie County, Erie City, Miscellaneous Views, Erie Reservoir, courtesy of Pennsylvania State Archives and POWER Library.

Creation of the PA Digital Partners group

The PA Digital Futures task force advises that the immediate next action should be to issue an open community call for participation in a new PA Digital Partners group made up of library leaders and practitioners passionate about collaborating on cultural heritage work. Based on the new direction outlined in this report, the group will focus on developing renewed engagement in PA Digital while further defining PA Digital's future organizational structure and funding models in service to its vision and mission. This group will continue the planning work started by the PA Digital Futures task force, leading the "Continuity, Planning, and Governance Phase" outlined in the plan below and gathering ongoing feedback from PA Digital stakeholders and community members.

Expectations for the group include:

Charge

PA Digital Partners will lead and guide further development of long-term planning efforts and cross-institutional commitments in support of PA Digital's vision. This includes identifying shared priorities, engaging with existing contributors to build a shared understanding of PA Digital's impact, supporting and developing financial commitments beyond initial 2021-2022 funds, and further defining the governance and business structure of PA Digital.

Timeline

This group should be established by September 2021. The group should expect to meet approximately twice monthly and continue through at least September 2022, at which time the membership may rotate.

Member Criteria

This group should include at least one representative from each institution who currently has made financial contributions to PA Digital. Additional members will be selected from the volunteer pool of the open community call. Ideally, the group should be composed of individuals with a range of professional experience and expertise (community engagement, project management, etc.). Conveners will be selected from within the group.

PA Digital Partners will replace the existing PA Digital Executive and Management groups, which will go on hiatus until a renewed governance structure is in place.

Project Plan Timeline

Priority Focus:
1. Need assessment
2. Governance establishment
3. Priority definition

The PA Digital Futures Task Force expects the stakeholder community to be willing to contribute approximately $45,000-$50,000 in financial contributions in total for the upcoming year (October 2021 – September 2022), after the conclusion of the LTSA grant.

With these contributions, PA Digital will continue its role as the DPLA service hub in Pennsylvania on a significantly scaled back basis as the PA Digital Partners group work toward the next step of planning efforts required to pursue an expanded vision of PA Digital. Preliminary partner funds will allow PA Digital to maintain centralized technical and project management support as a hub.

During this phase, PA Digital will:

- Pay the DPLA membership fee and support involvement in the DPLA Hub network ($10,000).
- Continue only minimal aggregation and technology support for existing contributors, with DPLA as the sole focus for discoverability of PA Digital materials (25% of previous efforts). This work will continue to be led by staff at Temple University Libraries.
- Support limited metadata/rights training and resources, based on volunteer and in-kind efforts of those wishing to contribute.
- Create the PA Digital Partners group, which will guide further development of long-term planning and cross-institutional commitments. Working sub-groups may be created on an as-needed basis to explore operations, services, and business models.

Phase 2:
Further Defining an Expanded Vision for PA Digital
A Network for Digital Equity in Cultural Heritage

2022 - 2024

PA Digital Partners will work within the agreed upon governance and community structures to develop a phased approach to expanding PA Digital's role as a network serving digital equity in cultural heritage. The goals below are subject to change based on ongoing planning efforts in 2021-2022, but provide a preliminary set of objectives moving towards the proposed vision for the future of PA Digital.

Strengthen PA Digital as a Network
Primarily in-kind efforts

2022-2023

- Continue to define shared goals and address priorities identified in the previous phase.
- Continue to develop supporting business models to support an expanded vision.
- Begin further development of community-based partnerships and convene stakeholder groups to create a shared vision for a more equitable approach to cultural heritage work.
- Continue cultural heritage aggregation to the degree possible based on available funding, maintaining role as the service hub for DPLA and utilizing the network while exploring options for new national and regional partnerships to promote visibility of Pennsylvania historical and cultural resources online.
- Strengthen collaboration with partners who provide cultural heritage repository infrastructures with scalable implementations (e.g. POWER Library's PA Photos and Documents, Historic Pittsburgh, PALCI Hyku repository) and identify opportunities for mutual support.

Implementation
Applying business model and building sustainable financial support
2023-2024

- Implement a business model to support project staffing and capacity needs.
- Create/update toolkits and organizational infrastructure to assist PA communities through the digital lifecycle, such as training materials & workshops, learning resources, and bridging connections to services available through PA Digital partnerships.
- Expand partnerships to promote educational outreach for Pennsylvania historical and cultural resources.
- Expand access to digital cultural materials with accompanying community narratives and descriptions through further support of and coordination with existing repository solutions.
- Develop assessment methods for gathering and reporting data related to impact and use of cultural heritage materials.

Extending PA Digital's Reach
Scaling our efforts
2023-2025

- Consider development of a mini-grant program to support community-based cultural heritage work digitizing, describing, building, and/or curating digital access to unique and locally significant cultural heritage materials and narratives, with priority given to those of underrepresented communities.
- Deliver toolkits and additional training through PA Digital partnerships as needed to support the success of mini-grant programs and related community organizing.
- Identify other external partners to continue scaling efforts for greater efficiencies.

Appendix A

PA Digital Stakeholder Survey Feedback

February 2021

Describe your role at your institution with regard to decision-making authority in financial matters.	Institution Type (check all that apply)	AVERAGE : From your perspective, how important is the continuation of PA Digital to your library? (1 = Unimportant; 10 - Very important)	# of respondents
Decision-maker	4-year Academic/College or University Library	5.5	6
	Community College	7	1
	Museum / Cultural Heritage Institution	2	1
	Public Library	5	1
Decision-maker Total		5.22	9
Makes recommendations to decision-makers	4-year Academic/College or University Library	5.83	6
	Library Consortium	7	1
	Museum / Cultural Heritage Institution	8.5	2
	Nonprofit / Library-related organization	6.5	2
	Public Library	3	1
Makes recommendations to decision-makers Total		6.25	12
No decision-making authority	4-year Academic/College or University Library	8	1
	Public Library	8	1
No decision-making authority Total		8	2
Supporting role only	4-year Academic/College or University Library	8.5	2
	Independent Research Library	**7**	**1**
	Public Library	**9**	**2**
Supporting role only Total		**8.4**	**5**
Grand Total		**6.43**	**28**

Institution Type (check all that apply)	AVERAGE of **From your perspective, how important is the continuation of PA Digital to your library?**	AVERAGE of **From your perspective, how important is PA Digital's membership in the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)?**	AVERAGE of **From your perspective, how likely is your institution to engage in PA Digital in the future?**	COUNTA of **Institution / Organization Name**
4-year Academic / College or University Library	6.2	7.14	5.5	15
Community College	7	6		1
Independent Research Library	7	10		1
Library Consortium	7	5		1
Museum / Cultural Heritage Institution	6.33	9.67		3
Nonprofit / Library-related organization	6.5	10	8	2
Public Library	6.8	6.8		5
Grand Total	6.43	7.56	6.33	28

Appendix B

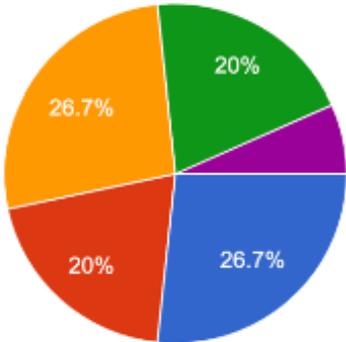## PA Digital Leaders Summit Survey Responses

May 2021

Institution Type (check all that apply)	Describe your role at your institution with regard to decision-making authority in financial matters.	Scenario 1 Winding Down PA Digital	Scenario 2 Maintenance Mode	Scenario 3 Expanded Vision: PA Digital Cultural Heritage Network
		On a scale of 1-5, rate the degree to which you favor/oppose this scenario. (1 = Oppose; 5 = Favor)		
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	1	4	5
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	2	4	5
Medical & Health Sciences College	Decision-maker	1	3	5
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	3	4	5
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	3	3	4
Independent research library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	1	4	5
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	1	3	5
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	2	1	4
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	3	4	4
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	3	4	4
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	1	5	3
Public Library	Decision-maker	3	4	2
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	1	5	3
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	5	4	3
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	5	3	1
Average		**2.33**	**3.67**	**3.87**

Institution Type (check all that apply)	Describe your role at your institution with regard to decision-making authority in financial matters.	Is your library willing/ able to support PA Digital with short term financial contributions to support its continuation in 2021-22?
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Yes
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Yes
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Yes
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Yes
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Maybe
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Maybe
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Maybe
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	Maybe
Public Library	Decision-maker	Maybe
Medical & Health Sciences College	Decision-maker	No
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Decision-maker	No
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	No
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	Unsure / Not a decision-maker
4-year Academic/College or University Library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	Unsure / Not a decision-maker
Independent research library	Makes recommendations to decision-makers	Unsure / Not a decision-maker

Is your library willing/able to support PA Digital with short term financial contributions to support its continuation in 2021-22?

15 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Unsure / Not a decision-maker
- maybe; the financial tiers as they exist at this time make a lot of assumptions about our institutions' financial statuses at this time. They may need to be revisited and reviewed.

What specific value proposition or benefits do you need/want to see from a future PA Digital initiative in order to support your library's investment and engagement in collaborative efforts around cultural heritage in our region? (Check ALL that apply, and/or add your own in the field marked "Other")

- Ability to continue to discover and access cultural heritage items contributed previously by PA Digital to the DPLA
- Ability to support on-going/additional harvests and metadata aggregation to allow for DPLA-based discovery / access efforts
- Exploration of other national / international distribution channels to support discovery / access beyond the DPLA
- Professional development opportunities for staff working in support of cultural heritage
- Promotion of digital equity through cultural heritage - broadened community representation
- Facilitation of partnerships for cultural heritage within our region and community engagement
- Facilitation of new partnerships for cultural heritage exertal to our region (national / international)
- Increased understanding of impact; or increased use / re-use of cultural heritage materials
- Development of a community of practice for shared expertise
- Increased visibility for your institution and your institution's cultural heritage holdings
- Opportunity to participate in governance / direction-setting
- Dedicated, shared staffing
- None of the above
- Write-in: Overall enhancement of access to cultural resources
- Write-in: Do not believe that university libraries are a primary source of the types of materials that would be valuable to this enterprise.