

Supporting Statewide Best Practices Through Outreach and Education: Three Years of *Opening Archives in Florida* (2005-2008)

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Abstract

From 2005-2008, the Florida Center for Library Automation (FCLA) was awarded funds through the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) Library Services and Technology Act to encourage, through training and consulting, the creation and sharing of encoded finding aids for collections in cultural heritage repositories such as libraries, archives, museums, historical societies and government agencies throughout the state of Florida. The goals of this project have been to raise the general level of technical expertise among archivists in the state, to promote the use of Encoded Archival Description (EAD) and Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) in Florida, and to increase archival information sharing in the state by encouraging Florida's cultural heritage institutions to contribute EAD finding aids to the statewide database hosted by FCLA, *Archives Florida*. The *Opening Archives in Florida* program has successfully fostered collaboration between state agencies and several public and private repositories, and has made significant contributions to the establishment of statewide best practices for archival description. This poster will present an overview of *Opening Archives*, presenting evaluation methods, data and outcomes related to three years of outreach and education dedicated to promoting best practices and standards for creating and sharing encoded archival descriptions in Florida.

The Challenge

Hidden Collections in Florida

- Over 200 cultural heritage repositories collect archival materials in Florida, but most do not create electronic finding aids or publish them on the Web.
- Few researchers are aware of the wealth of documentary materials buried in Florida's hidden collections.

During a 2001-02 project regarding access to special collections in Florida, archivists and librarians from several state universities discussed this problem and agreed that the ideal solution would be to encourage the creation and sharing of EAD finding aids. However, an informal survey revealed that few repositories had implemented EAD and most had no plans to do so in the immediate future.

Barriers to EAD Implementation in Florida

- Lack of EAD knowledge
- Lack of training
- Travel costs of training

In the 2004 A*Census survey funded by IMLS, the 103 Florida respondents identified travel and cost as the top barriers to participating in the training they desired. On a scale from "no barrier" to "very much a barrier," 60.7% ranked distance above the midpoint and 57.5% ranked cost above the midpoint. More than 25% reported that their employers pay no part of travel or registration fees for continuing education.

In 2005, representatives of the state university libraries completed a survey related to EAD training needs. The survey results revealed that only three institutions in Florida had adopted EAD and that all of the survey respondents required training. When asked to describe the barriers to EAD creation, over 80% indicated a lack of basic EAD knowledge.

Our Solution: Opening Archives, 2005-2006

Planning

In 2005-06, FCLA and its partner institutions were awarded a \$34,000 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant to develop an educational curriculum and offer training to Florida archivists. The goals of the program, entitled *Opening Archives: Improving Access to Primary Sources in Florida*, were to:

- raise the general level of technical expertise among archivists,
- promote the use of the EAD standard in Florida,
- and increase archival information sharing using a statewide database.

In addition to FCLA, partners included:

- Florida International University (FIU)
- Florida State University (FSU)
- State Library & Archives
- Tampa Bay Library Consortium
- University of Central Florida (UCF)
- University of Florida (UF)

The *Opening Archives* program team, consisting of four regional trainers from FCLA, UF, UCF and FIU, began by conducting an education needs assessment survey for the state. Based on 75 responses, the team developed:

- an EAD training curriculum,
- workbooks,
- a suite of free EAD tools and templates,
- and an EAD guidelines document: *Best Practice Guidelines for the Implementation of EAD Version 2002 in Florida Institutions*.

Our Solution : Opening Archives, 2005-2006

Implementation

The implementation team:

- Conducted 4 regional "Introduction to Encoded Archival Description" workshops (Ft. Lauderdale, Tallahassee, Tampa, and Orlando),
- trained over 80 participants from 41 Florida repositories,
- gathered evaluations,
- conducted follow-up visits to five sites,
- and provided free consultation services to repositories in their regions.



The project also improved access to Florida's archival collections by creating a statewide database of archival finding aids. *Archives Florida*, hosted and maintained by FCLA, is available at: <http://palm2.fcla.edu/af/>

For *Archives Florida*, the project team:

- Collected EAD-encoded finding aids created by workshop participants.
- Added new finding aids to FCLA database.
- Created collection home pages for new contributors.
- Collected *Archives Florida* server data.
- Promoted workshops via listservs and a project website.
- Published articles in journals and newsletters.
- Made presentations at conferences and meetings.

Our Solution: Opening Archives, 2007-2008

Planning

In this project period, the steering group decided to diversify the workshop topics based on feedback from previous training participants and survey respondents. In addition to the three regional EAD workshops, the partners agreed that the best way to raise the level of technical expertise among Florida archivists would be to host additional workshops offered by SAA. A total of 54 trainees participated in three EAD workshops created and conducted by the *Opening Archives* expert trainers, and 56 trainees participated in four SAA workshops covering:

- style sheets for EAD,
- the Archon archival information system,
- and Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS).

In addition to FCLA, members of the steering group and training team included personnel from:

- Florida Atlantic University (FAU)
- Florida International University (FIU)
- Florida State University (FSU)
- University of Central Florida (UCF)
- University of Florida (UF)
- University of Miami (UM)
- University of South Florida (USF)
- University of West Florida (UWF)

With the participation of Kyle Rimkus from the University of Miami, a private institution, the *Opening Archives* program became a partnership of both public and private repositories.

Implementation

The *Opening Archives* project trainers conducted three "Introduction to Encoded Archival Description" workshops in Florida at:

- University of Miami (Coral Gables)
- Florida International University (Miami)
- Florida State University (Tallahassee)

Many archivists and professionals were interested in education and training on technologies associated with EAD, such as style sheets. Therefore, the following SAA workshops were also brought to Florida:

- Style Sheets for EAD - University of Miami (Coral Gables). Trainers: Michael Fox and Kris Kiesling.
- Style Sheets for EAD - University of Central Florida (Orlando). Trainers: Michael Fox and Kris Kiesling.
- Implementing DACS in Integrated Content Management Systems: Using Archon - St. Petersburg College (Clearwater). Trainers: Chris Prom and Scott Schwartz.

Additionally, three *Opening Archives* trainers attended the SAA workshop, "Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)" at the University of Rhode Island (Trainer: Kelcy Shepherd), with the intention of replicating the workshop curriculum at the state level in future years.

Information about the *Opening Archives* program, including all proposals, reports, training materials, and tools, is available at: <http://www.fcla.edu/diini/OpeningArchives/>

Lessons Learned & Implications for the Future

Outcomes

2006: *Archives Florida* had 3 contributing institutions and a total of 12 EAD finding aids.

2009: *Archives Florida* has 11 contributing institutions and 1101 EAD finding aids.

Since 2006, 190 individuals representing 41 repositories have participated in *Opening Archives in Florida* workshops.

Summary

The primary goal of *Opening Archives* was to establish an in-state continuing education program delivering EAD training similar to that offered through the SAA workshops. This goal was achieved.

In the initial training needs assessment survey of organizations throughout the Florida, 88% of 75 respondents indicated their organizations would likely contribute EAD finding aids to a statewide database such as FCLA's *Archives Florida*, but that nearly 75% of them had little or no knowledge of how to create EAD finding aids.

Analysis of evaluative feedback from participants following the workshops revealed that 92% agreed that they had greatly improved their knowledge of EAD. When asked if they planned to create EAD-encoded finding aids using knowledge gained in the workshops, 46% were sure they would, 44% were not sure; only 10% indicated they probably would not adopt EAD.

Opening Archives has successfully fostered collaboration between state agencies and several public and private repositories, and has made significant contributions to the establishment of statewide best practices for archival description.

FCLA and the partner institutions now understand more clearly the scope and extent of technology-related training needs among Florida's archives. The initial training needs assessment survey completed in 2006 revealed that more than 80% of respondents also want training in other technologies relevant to making descriptive information and archival materials available online, including DACS, digitization, XML and stylesheets. These findings will be reflected in future proposals to expand the training agenda for additional workshops.

The second major lesson of this project was the scope of the challenge when supporting both customization and flexibility of any standards or systems for a large network of customers. Already, FCLA is clarifying with additional policies and training what degree of customization and flexibility can be supported realistically for a large statewide effort.

Opening Archives Team

From 2005 to the present, the following Florida archivists and librarians have served on the *Opening Archives* team.

- Judith Beale (UCF) – Steering Group
- Priscilla Caplan (FCLA) – Steering Group
- Melissa Finley Gonzalez (UWF) – Steering Group, Trainer
- Elizabeth Golding (State Library and Archives) – Steering Group
- Salwa Ismail Patel (FAU) – Trainer
- Elizabeth Konzak (UCF) – Steering Group, Trainer
- John Nemmers (UF) – Steering Group, Trainer
- Lucy Patrick (FSU) – Steering Group
- Kyle Rimkus (UM) – Steering Group
- Tomaro Taylor (USF) – Steering Group
- Chuck Thomas (FCLA) – Steering Group, Trainer
- Eddie Woodward (FSU) – Steering Group, Trainer

