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

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.

Implementation

The implementation team:
Conducted 4 regional "Introduction to Encoded Archival Description" workshops at Florida State University, Tallahassee, University of Miami, and Florida International University.

For Archives Florida, the project team:
Collected EAD-encoded finding aids created by workshop participants.
Added new finding aids to FCLA database.
Developed 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.

Planning

In this project period, the steering group decided to diversify the workshop topics based on feedback from participants and survey respondents. In addition to the three regional EAD workshop partners, the project team agreed to raise the level of technical expertise among Florida archivists.

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.

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 respondents indicated their organizations likely contribute EAD finding aids to a statewide database such as FCLA's Archives Florida, but only 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 50% 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, 48% 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 clearly the scope and extent of technology-related training needs among Florida's archivists. 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.

Our Solution: Opening Archives, 2005-2006

The team of experts included:

- Florida State University (FSU)
- Florida International University (FIU)
- University of Miami (UM)
- University of Florida (UF)
- Florida Atlantic University (FAU)
- University of South Florida (USF)
- University of Central Florida (UCF)
- University of Florida (Tallahassee)
- Florida State Library and Archives
- Florida Digital Library
- FCLA Team
- Professional archivists from Florida institutions
- Florida archivists and librarians from several state universities

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:
http://archives.fcla.edu/ArchivesFlorida

Title Page

Archives Florida

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 deliver training to Florida archivists. The aims 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,
- 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
- Florida Digital Library
- University of Central Florida (UCF)
- University of Florida (UF)
- Florida Atlantic University (FAU)
- University of Miami (UM)
- Florida State Library and Archives

The Opening Archives program team, consisting of four regional trainers from FCLA, UF, UCF and FIU, began by conducting an extensive needs assessment survey for the state. Based on 76 responses, the team developed:

- an EAD training curriculum,
- a workbook,
- a suite of free EAD tools and templates,

Lessons Learned & Implications for the Future

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
- Elizabeth Gostling (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 Rinkus (UM) – Steering Group, Trainer
- Chris Prom and Scott Schwartz

Opening Archives Team

From 2005-06, 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.

The Opening Archives 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.

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.

Barriers to EAD Implementation in Florida

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

In the 2004-05 Census funded by IMLS, the 103 Florida respondents identified training 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. However, an informal survey revealed that few repositories had implemented EAD and most had no plans to do so in the immediate future.

In 2005-06, 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. Although no formal survey was conducted, an informal survey revealed that the vast majority of repositories in Florida were sure they would, 44% were not sure; only 10% indicated they probably would not adopt EAD.

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 Rinkus from the University of Miami, the private institution, the Opening Archives program became a partnership of both public and private repositories.

Implementation

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

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

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 Anchon and 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/illini/OpeningArchives/