

# "Above all, try something" Invoking FDR's innovative spirit to make access happen

## Problem

Publish online whole collections or series of manuscripts, plus still photographs, in searchable archival context with intuitive usability. Accomplish with cost-effective measures and small staff.

## Our Solution: bold, persistent experimentation

*"The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: if it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."*  
– Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1932

## Starting Point

**NARA Strategic Goal:** Make Access Happen

**FDR Library Mission:** Foster research and education on the life and times of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and their continuing impact on contemporary life

**Existing Resources:** Website hosted by partner Marist College, digitization grant funding from non-profit Roosevelt Institute, extensive microfilm holdings reflecting whole collections and series of manuscripts, small archival staff plus seasonal interns and volunteers, limited networked storage space, access to agency software licenses, basic desktop scanning hardware

**Legacy Description:** Mostly paper-based finding aids for about 400 manuscript collections, some collection-level description in NARA's Online Public Access catalog (OPA), about 2,000 still photographs described in OPA out of 130,000 in larger collection

## Digitization for Access

- Both systematic and on-demand, embracing MPLP/guerrilla approaches
- Large scale microfilm scanning by contractor, in-house image processing
- Rapid capture digital photography in-house
- *Citizen archivist* contributions and harvest of items scanned on-demand for researchers

## Use Existing Description

- Capture and update clean descriptive data from legacy finding aids
- Encode legacy finding aids with EAD, provide folder-level access points for manuscripts: digital surrogates coded with <altformavail> tag and hyperlinks to PDFs stored on web server
- Harvest and augment legacy data from OPA

## Outcome

- FRANKLIN – Access to the FDR Library's Digital Collections
  - System launched in December 2013 with 350,000 pages of documents and 2,000 photographs
  - Very low cost to government, FRANKLIN database simple and highly usable interface offering a virtual research room environment
- Ongoing programmatic digitization
  - Further microfilm scanning, rapid capture photography, flatbed scanning
  - Regularly import FRANKLIN's metadata to OPA for cross posting and further discovery
  - Further encoding of finding aids in progress; expect all Library collections described online to the folder level by FY 16

## User-focused Interface Design

- Modify Archon API and stylesheets – Users see finding aids in Collection Manager as "Documents" and Digital Library DAMS as "Photographs." Sections can be searched together or separately
- Finding aids act as primary access point for all manuscript surrogates (virtual research room). All search results presented in context of structured finding aid
- Focus group testing based on three user types - educators, historians, students/general interest

## Digital Asset Management

- MS Office tools for collecting and organizing descriptive data
- Open source Archon database to convert, store, and serve description
- Adobe Lightroom for batch processing of digital images
- Adobe Acrobat for PDF processing
- Oxygen XML Editor for encoding finding aids for digital collections
- External hard drives for asset storage, migrate to server environment when possible

*"I am referring to the duplication of records by modern processes [...] This involves, of course, a vast amount of work because of the volume of federal, state and local archives of all kinds – but I think that a broad plan would meet with hearty public support if it could be properly publicized."*  
– Letter, FDR to SAA President R.D. Connor, February 13, 1942.



*"In an effort to make an ever-increasing number of records available to the public we have promised to streamline processes, innovate, and collaborate with others to significantly increase the number of NARA records that are available to the public."*

– Archivist of the US David Ferriero, from "FDR's BHAG [Big Hairy Audacious Goal]," AOTUS blog 8/29/13

