

Connecting Presidential Collections

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Abstract: Connecting Presidential Collections is an IMLS-funded grant project that is creating a beta product to make presidential materials more accessible. Based on a survey conducted at the 2010 Presidential Sites and Libraries Conference, presidential collections include a wide variety of resources but the vast majority of important presidential collections remain untapped, isolated, and hidden in obscurity. A related problem for users is the large number of organizations—libraries, museums, sites—that contain presidential materials, which leaves them unsure of where to look for an item. Presidential studies, and more broadly, the study of history would benefit from a central resource that supports greater access to the records of the U.S. presidents.

The Scripps Library at UVa's Miller Center has worked with a Steering Committee of archivists, documentary editors, and digital humanities scholars, to create a beta product that allows users to search a federated collection of materials from presidential sites, libraries, and museums. One goal of this project is working with partners to create a centralized resource that would provide users one place to begin their searches. The beta product aggregates metadata using Solr as the index and Blacklight as the user interface, and then sends the user to the partners' web sites to view the digital record or object. Issues have included mapping different sources of metadata submitted in different formats as well as policies and language to encourage collaboration and sustain partnerships. The goal is to make valuable historical resources more easily accessible to scholars, teachers, students, and everyone interested in presidential history.

About the author:

Sheila Blackford is the librarian of the Scripps Library at the Miller Center. The Miller Center is a non-partisan research institute at the University of Virginia that studies the U.S. presidency and political history. She is also the managing editor of the *American President* website. Sheila received her B.A. in history from the University of Virginia and her M.S. from School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee.