Launch of the NASIG Model Digital Preservation Policy

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Abstract

Digital preservation is a significant issue if scholarship is to remain available to future users. All organizations involved in scholarly production and dissemination have a role to play. Champions are needed to raise awareness and engage stakeholders. To help, the NASIG Digital Preservation Committee has developed a Model Digital Preservation Policy. This tool is designed to help you measure, grow, and publicize your organization's commitment to preserving its scholarship. It includes advice on identifying and taking first steps, more advanced options and activities, and opportunities to share and refine professional experiences.

Keywords: digital preservation, e-resources, publishers

The NASIG Digital Preservation Policy Working Group, formed in the summer of 2020, was established with the idea that every digital publisher should have a digital preservation policy. The working group's members included representatives from both libraries and publishers from both sides of the Atlantic. For their purposes, they considered the term digital publisher as broadly as possible, applying it to any organization that creates or distributes any digital content or format.

An early step for the working group was deciding on a definition of digital preservation. While to many it is thought of as a technology problem, it is more of a resource problem – specifically, a human resource problem. When it comes to digital assets, active management is necessary. Active management means you are making a series of decisions that may shift along with the constantly changing technological landscape, so a policy document can establish your organization's commitment to those resources and document those decisions. The policy can also provide a mechanism to assess the risk of loss across different types of content the publisher may provide to guide decisions related to their digital preservation. Digital publishing requires more active management regarding the preservation of content than the world of print publishing.

A digital preservation policy can serve both internal and external functions. Internally, the policy serves as a record of consensus for the organization's decisions regarding digital preservation, as well as something to point to when asking leadership or administration for more resources or funding for digital preservation activities. Externally, the policy acts as a public statement of your organization's commitment to preserving the digital content you steward.

A digital preservation policy can be thought of as a long answer to two short questions: if someone cites or publishes a piece of digital content on the site, what will a future reader see when they come to use it, and how close will that compare to what is seen at the time of publication and citation? The more complex, varied, and digitally native your publications are, the more complex the answer to that question will be, and the more your organization needs to coordinate its efforts to preserve the material effectively. While the desire may be to preserve everything, in reality, that goal is unlikely to be achieved due to expenses and finite resources.

The model preservation policy aims to help speed up the creation of these policies by getting organizations to think through several questions related to the content: future user needs, which version of the content to preserve, the importance of preservation, the content's

dependence on the software through which it is delivered, continued association of metadata with the content, and what partners, skills, and resources are needed both now and for the long term.

In 2018 the NASIG Digital Preservation Committee (DPC) surveyed different institutions about their digital preservation policies. The results revealed that many organizations in scholarly communications lack policies for preservation. A key recommendation was to develop a model policy or template as a resource, which directly led to the creation of the Model Policy Working Group. The call for membership was sent out in June of 2020, and the working group was formed in August 2020.

Once established, the working group set about creating a modular template that could be useful for a wide variety of publishers working with various types of digital content to either create their own policies or better document any pre-existing policies in a single space. The group reviewed sample policies and related tools and discovered most were done in bullet point format with questions to consider. The group decided that for this model, they wanted to write the text themselves, providing institutions with a solid jumping-off point so they could quickly edit or implement the existing language as needed and not have to start from scratch. The first version of the model policy was launched in fall 2021, and after a period for feedback and revisions, the final version was approved by the NASIG board at the 2022 annual conference.[1]

The policy is designed to be broad-based, as institutions seeking to use it might be at different points in the development process. It contains a mandate for commitment which explains the importance of digital preservation. Additional platform or repository-level policies or procedures may be required. The model policy cannot be one-size-fits-all because context, resources, and contents vary, but the working group strived to make it as easily accessible as possible.

The model policy contains all the text and information to help institutions quickly build their own policies. First, there is a section on the principles and scope of the policy to outline the necessary concepts, functions, and purpose underlying the policy. Next are the actual preservation activities, which include the procedures, tools, and techniques

used to implement the policy. The following section gives details of the stakeholders and any groups or people responsible for these activities, such as computer support, preservation experts, repository managers, and publishing team. Finally, there is a section for collaboration, administration, and review, which acknowledges that maintaining the policy will be an ongoing process and will outline the institution's commitment to reviewing and updating as needed.

The model policy provides an outline of recommended sections: introduction, principles, scope, preservation activities, roles and responsibilities, collaboration, framework administration and review cycles, links to any related documents, and glossary. The model policy's related documents include resources used when creating it, but institutions may bolster it with documents related to their own preservation activities.

Because initial feedback when the policy draft was released indicated the need for a fully formed sample policy, the working group put together a sample policy for a small digital publisher based loosely on the library publishing program at Indiana University Bloomington. Each section includes explanatory notes describing the purpose of the section, as well as sample text. Using the model policy as a guide, the working group created this sample policy in around two hours.[2]

An example of an actual organization that has built a policy based on the model is Michigan Publishing Services at the University of Michigan Library. The service publishes various types of born-digital scholarly and educational content in various formats on different platforms. Each platform has its own preservation policy. The Director of Publishing Technology at Michigan Publishing Services was a Working Group member and used the model policy to build an overarching policy that refers to the specific policies for each platform. Afterward, he provided the working group with feedback on the layout of the model policy, suggesting edits to better reflect the intentions and workflows of the process; these suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the model.

Plans for the working group include outreach in the form of workshops and webinars. They also plan to determine groups of stakeholders to train in digital preservation, such as researchers and Open Access

publishers. NASIG's current strategic plan includes the idea of a portal for people to use to share examples of policies created using the model.

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Contributor Notes

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Notes

1 NASIG Digital Preservation Working Group, "NASIG Model Digital Preservation Policy," accessed July 31, 2022, https://www.nasig.org/NASIG-model-digital-preservation-policy.
2 NASIG Digital Preservation Working Group, "Elleysprina Publishers Digital Preservation Policy," https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uPCBbyEe9A DG0UY9XCWk9G5pbkro6tSuQkKtaS5ntzk/edit?usp=sharing.
3 Jeremy Morse, "NASIG Digital Preservation Policy," September 9, 2021, CLOCKSS Digital Preservation Meeting, accessed July 31, 2022, https://youtu.be/4NwOazY15PU.