Community Development Model for Digital Community Archives
Virginia Tech

1. Statement of National Need

Virginia Tech (VT), in partnership with University of North Texas (UNT), University of Georgia (UGA), University of Virginia (UVA), and University of Pennsylvania (Penn) respectfully requests a Community Catalyst Planning Grant for $90,638 to develop a model for community engagement that fosters robust partnerships among academic libraries and regional organizations that will result in greater digital access to geographically-siloed collections and networks.

Small regional institutions and organizations possess rich cultural heritage collections but lack robust digital infrastructure. This barrier inhibits broader access and use by researchers and the wider public. Larger institutions are able to digitize and provide access to such collections, though too often it occurs through physical acquisition, resulting in smaller institutions losing their unique materials. While physical collection acquisition will always play a part in collection development, it should not be the only means to provide digital access and preservation services. There is a gap between well-resourced libraries with robust digital infrastructure and community organizations of more limited means, many of which produce analog and digital media (archival materials, tweets, images, videos, blogs) across multiple platforms but often without a preservation strategy. Our project will address this gap through collaborative digital repatriation and collection development. Our goal for the Planning Grant is to develop a participatory library development model that we will pilot through engagement with rural Appalachian and Allegheny communities in southwestern Virginia, with a topical focus on the production and transportation of energy, and the related themes of land use, human migration, and labor. Our project will expand digital access to previously siloed and rural collections while ensuring that the collections continue to reside with their owners. The model will be generalizable for community partnerships between libraries and regional stakeholders

Regional institutions already experiment with digital library collaborations, but the practices and strategies (whether successful or not) need systematic study and documentation in order to produce a common collection development model. Prominent examples of larger institutions that support other organizations in a similar manner are the Portal to Texas History (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ at UNT) and the Digital Library of Georgia (https://dlg.usg.edu/ at UGA) These active collaborations work to amass collections through aggregators such as the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). However, these collaborations address only a fraction of the overall need and only serve the regions in which they are situated. Furthermore, many organizations lack the resources to get their materials into a DPLA Service Hub. These efforts show that successful digital collection partnerships do not require combining or co-opting proprietary resources, and thereby they exemplify ALA's Core Values of Librarianship, including Democracy, Diversity, Service, and Social Responsibility. Our model will guide libraries as they seek to be catalysts that contribute to the well being of communities. DPLA's promise and success demonstrates viability for this kind of service, yet there is no published model for supporting smaller institutions and community archives, and programs like the Portal to Texas History and Digital Library of Georgia are still atypical.

While this project utilizes VT infrastructure, it is driven through a reliance on community voices and leadership. This model builds on the idea of digital repatriation through a community archive focused on the economic and ethical implications of energy production. We hope to contribute to community well being through collaborative planning, social engagement, public humanities, and library collection development, ultimately strengthening libraries to serve as trusted spaces for community engagement and dialogue.

2. Project Design, Key Personnel, and Partners

Our project will develop a replicable model for development of participatory digital archives for community and issue engagement. We will pursue this goal through collaboration and documentation with cultural heritage organizations and with regional groups focused on coal and gas industries and their effects on the natural environment, human health, and labor. The project team will identify regional stakeholders and host on-site focus groups with community leaders, librarians, archivists, historians, and digital library and information technology professionals in southwestern Virginia. The focus groups will identify content, stakeholder needs, and functional requirements for a proposed online community archive with a focus on the nexus between the energy industry and regional cultural heritage. The team will also host and facilitate a partner showcase and training workshop to highlight regional collection efforts. VT Community Archivist Anthony

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Wright de Hernandez, along with VT History and Appalachian Studies faculty (Jessica Taylor, Anita Puckett, and LaDale Winling) collectively bring connections to Appalachian communities as well as expertise in oral history, ethnographic and participatory research methods, and industrial impacts on local communities.

The project team will synthesize findings in a digital library development plan for implementation through a future IMLS NLG *Project Grant*. VT Library personnel (Jim Tuttle, Wen Nie Ng, Alex Kinnaman, Luke Menzies, Steve Tatum) will develop policies, procedures, and prototypes for selection, arrangement, description, digitization, and preservation of collections. The project will utilize digital library infrastructure at VT, including a DPLA Service Hub membership through *Digital Virginias*.

Nathan Hall (VT) will direct the project and manage the budget. Mark Phillips (UNT) and Sheila McAlister (UGA) will serve as senior advisors, drawing on their experience leading the Portal to Texas History (395 partnering organizations) and the Digital Library of Georgia (50 content partners). Other senior advisors include Carol Davis, Head of Sustainability for the Town of Blacksburg, VA; Emily Satterwhite (VT), who conducts research in Appalachian identities and environmental health; Siko Bouterse, Co-Director of *Whose Knowledge?* organizes pluralistic online community networks and archives; Laurie Allen (Director of Digital Scholarship, Penn) brings expertise in community engagement and local and environmental data projects; Aaron Purcell (VT Libraries Director of Special Collections), and Morgan Gieringer (Head of UNT Special Collections), bring knowledge of collection development and statewide heritage efforts; and Bradley Daigle directs Digital Curation at UVA Libraries, as well as the *Digital Virginias* DPLA Service Hub.

The primary deliverables for the Planning Grant are a project plan for a southwestern VA community archive, and a replicable model for developing a regional non-acquisitional digital archive. This model will identify the sociotechnical resources libraries need to leverage in order to support smaller institutions in community archiving efforts, and to aggregate content with them. We will disseminate our findings through relevant listservs, conferences, and journals.

4. Diversity Plan

While Appalachia's connection to coal and rail transportation is widely documented, our project contextualizes contemporary voices in the rural Blue Ridge and Allegheny regions of Appalachia with the region's history of extracting and transporting energy, along with the physical and existential threats and effects of these industries on the region's character. Much of this region is isolated and experiencing economic distress. Our project team includes diversity in expertise, with collaborators coming from backgrounds in digital libraries, technology development, community archiving, regional studies, community activism, and education. The project team includes partners and participants from Texas, Virginia, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. The model developed through this project will serve community archiving projects across the field. Our project will also serve participants of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds through their direct participation in the steering committee and planning efforts, as well as providing a means of ensuring the documentation and preservation of perspectives from communities impacted by fracking in Appalachia and the Great Plains.

5. National Impact

This project will advance knowledge and best practices for community archiving and digital library collection development. Our proposed model will enhance cultural engagement through participatory collection development between academic libraries and communities. The model will strengthen and diversify collections, as well as promote inclusion through digital repatriation and active preservation of historical and contemporary documents and voices. The project benefits communities through greater access to digital library infrastructure to address community environmental and economic challenges.

6. Budget Summary

We request from IMLS a total budget of $90,638 over a 12-month period (August 1, 2019 - July 31, 2020). This includes $75,967 for direct costs and $14,671 for indirect costs, calculated at VT's negotiated rate of 23.3% MTDC. Expenses include $28,437 for salaries of VT personnel as well as $18,000 for contractual and consulting labor of local leaders who join the leadership team, $9,530 for fringe benefits, $10,000 for participant support costs, $3000 for facilities, and $7,000 for travel. Travel and participant support costs include transportation, lodging, and catering.