

## **The Memory Lab Network: National distribution of the public library Memory Lab model**

### **Executive Summary**

DC Public Library, in partnership with the Public Library Association, requests \$245,000 for a two-year project to embed digital preservation tools and education in public libraries across the United States. Seven libraries will receive training, mentoring and financial support to create digitization stations and curriculum aimed at building public knowledge and skills around the complex and paralyzing problems of personal digital archiving.

### **National Need**

Today we document our lives digitally. Communities risk massive loss of vernacular history and culture, unless the public is equipped with knowledge and tools to sustain their digital memories. Libraries and archives should help the public document and preserve their own histories, while showing that preservation is relevant to their lives and can be fun, understandable, and approachable.

The DC Public Library (DCPL) created the Memory Lab as a National Digital Stewardship Residency (NDSR) project to meet public demand for access to digitization equipment. The Memory Lab became much more, through a holistic approach to public digital preservation education. It provides access to digitization equipment and software, resources for best practice, and a suite of classes around personal digital archiving. Since the lab opened in February 2016, it has been overwhelmingly successful, with lab appointments now reserved a month and a half in advance. More than 350 sessions have been booked, which equates to more than 1000 hours of digitizing DC-area residents' photos, slides, videos, audiocassettes and other personally valuable ephemera. The Memory Lab contributes to DCPL's place in its community as a hub for technology access and education, by empowering citizens to migrate and manage their own digital archives. Librarians across the country, from the Los Angeles Public Library to Chicago Public Library and Harford County Library in Maryland, have asked DCPL how they can build their own Memory Labs, but many feel they lack the expertise or financial support to get started.

The Memory Lab project was built to be a national model. Through open documentation, including guides for individuals and institutions to create their own labs, it is a proven resource and inspiration to libraries nationwide. Leveraging the momentum and interest created by the NDSR project, we propose strategic and coordinated distribution of Memory Labs to public libraries across the country. We will distribute access to digital preservation tools and education and foster continued evaluation and reiteration of the Memory Lab model, adjusting to the challenges and needs of diverse public library communities.

The Memory Lab advances the role of libraries as community anchors. It provides space, skills, and tools for the public to engage with the history of their own lives, families, and communities, facilitates lifelong learning, and promotes digital citizenship.

### **Project Description and Work Plan**

DCPL will work with the Public Library Association (PLA) to create and promote a call for proposals from public libraries. Libraries will be selected based on their interest in the project, commitment, and diversity of geographic location, library system size, and population served. A varied group of participants will allow us to study how the Memory Lab model works across different library systems and how it needs to be adapted to community needs. To apply, libraries will have to create a statement

of interest, designate two staff members to dedicate time to the project, and provide a brief sustainability plan. These staff will gain practical knowledge in digitization and the digital object lifecycle, as well as guidance on building digital preservation workstations, public classes, and outreach strategies.

Staff from the selected libraries will travel to D.C. to learn from experienced Memory Lab staff and experts in digital preservation and personal digital archiving from other organizations. After the initial training, the cohort will meet virtually with guest speakers and webinars monthly. They will be encouraged to use the cohort and project team as a support network and to share questions, successes, challenges, and best practices.

DC Public Library has been refining the Memory Lab model since fall 2014 and is committed to continuing to cultivate and host digital preservation resources for other libraries. It has a dedicated Labs staff and working group with experience building and running the Memory Lab and teaching internal and external audiences about personal digital preservation.

The project manager will coordinate the project. This includes overseeing project outreach and publicity; selecting libraries; arranging virtual and in-person cohort trainings and meetings; evaluation and iteration of Memory Lab resources; timeline management; and presentation and publication of findings.

PLA will work with DCPL to create and promote the call for proposals. DCPL and PLA will build an advisory board for participant evaluation and selection, and general project guidance and promotion.

### **Timeline**

6 months: Project manager hired and learns about Memory Lab's history and current operations, call for proposal is created and publicized, evaluation plan created, and libraries are selected for participation

12 months: Participating libraries come to D.C. for cohort training, create individualized work plans, and research and select digitization station equipment

18 months: Libraries assemble labs, begin outreach and education programs, and project manager visits

24 months: Libraries document their labs and programs, project manager evaluates labs and lab model, creates final best practice and how-to documentation, and presents and publishes on project

### **Goals and Outcomes**

- Build seven Memory Lab programs in public libraries across the country.
- Preserve personal histories already at-risk and aid the public in future digital stewardship.
- Study and evaluate the varying needs and challenges of Memory Labs in different communities.
- Build on DCPL Memory Lab documentation to create best practices and trainings manuals for public transfer labs.
- Create support network and centralized resources for institutions that have or want Memory Labs.

### **Budget**

The estimated two-year budget is \$249,000. Grant funding will be allocated among the salary of the project manager (\$120,000 for 2 years of salary and \$14,000 for travel and conferences), travel funding for staff from the selected libraries (\$35,000), travel and modest stipends for training speakers from outside DCPL (\$10,000), and seed funding for the libraries for purchase of equipment, software, digital transfer station needs, as well as outreach and education needs (\$70,000).