



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-259719-OLS-26
Project Category: Planning

South Dakota State University, Hilton M. Briggs Library

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$136,056
Amount of cost share: \$0

South Dakota State University Archives and Special Collections will plan to design a replicable statewide archival discovery framework. This project will provide a scalable model for other rural, decentralized states and regions. The goal is to ensure that the unique records preserved in rural archives are discoverable, accessible, and finally integrated into the shared American experience. South Dakota State University Archives and Special Collections will lead the initiative in consultation with the South Dakota State Archives and other statewide stakeholders. Intended results include a publicly available planning report that will present a prototype framework for a statewide archival discovery clearinghouse, recommended collection-level descriptive standards, a proposed governance model, and an implementation roadmap. The project will be designed for reuse by other rural and decentralized states seeking scalable approaches to improving archival discovery.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

South Dakota State University, Hilton M. Briggs Library

Institute of Museum and Library Services – National Leadership Grants for Libraries, Planning Project

“Discovering South Dakota’s Archival Landscape: A Planning Initiative for Statewide Archival Discovery”

Narrative

Introduction

South Dakota State University (SDSU) Archives and Special Collections requests \$136,056.00 in IMLS funding for a one-year planning project to design a replicable, statewide archival discovery framework for South Dakota. The project will collaboratively define the structural, descriptive, and governance components needed to support this framework. Archival materials documenting the state’s community memory and cultural heritage are widely dispersed across institutions with varying staffing, resources, and technical capacity, making statewide discovery inconsistent and difficult. To address this challenge, SDSU Archives and Special Collections will lead the initiative in consultation with the South Dakota State Archives and other statewide stakeholders. Intended results include a publicly available planning report that presents a prototype framework for a statewide archival discovery clearinghouse, recommended collection-level descriptive standards, a proposed governance model, and an implementation roadmap. The project will be designed for reuse by other rural and decentralized states seeking scalable approaches to improving archival discovery. By improving the visibility of dispersed archival collections, the project supports broader access to materials that document the shared American experience and cultural heritage.

Project Justification

South Dakota’s archival landscape is a rich resource that preserves the state’s community memory, but it is dispersed across local libraries, historical societies, tribal archives, museums, university repositories, local governments, churches, community organizations, halls of fame, historic preservation organizations, and other cultural heritage institutions. While these institutions serve as dedicated stewards, a significant discovery gap exists. Although some repositories maintain online finding aids, many, especially small, rural, and volunteer-run institutions, lack the staffing and technical resources to provide consistent collection-level descriptions online.

Currently, no statewide mechanism has been developed to identify what archival collections exist across South Dakota, where they are located, and how they can be accessed. Discovery often depends on personal networks or labor-intensive searches across individual institutions, limiting public access and constraining learning and research. This discovery gap is most evident among rural and under-resourced repositories, which are the least likely to be described online. As a result, these valuable archival materials remain largely hidden from potential users. Without a shared statewide discovery layer focused on collection-level description, neither users nor institutions can fully understand the broader archival landscape in South Dakota. Researchers, educators, students, community historians, and the general public will benefit from expanded access to information that supports lifelong learning, civic engagement, and scholarship.

These challenges were identified through ongoing professional collaborations and researcher inquiries received by the South Dakota State University Archives and Special Collections. It has become apparent that there is a need for statewide coordinated planning to develop the infrastructure that would support access to and stewardship of archival collections. Participating institutions will gain increased visibility and opportunities for collaboration.

As part of a land-grant institution with longstanding statewide relationships, SDSU Archives is well positioned to lead this effort. With assistance from the South Dakota State Archives, the project will build on existing relationships and develop new partnerships with local heritage organizations throughout the state, to ensure that the perspectives and needs of institutions of varying sizes and capacities are represented. Including input from repositories across South Dakota will ensure that planning is practical, scalable, sustainable, and grounded in local realities. These collaborative planning activities will analyze statewide needs, strengthen partnerships, and develop a framework capable of supporting future implementation.

Across the country, coordinated digital infrastructures have successfully improved access to cultural heritage materials. Statewide and regional initiatives such as the Minnesota Digital Library, the Digital Library of Georgia, the Maine Memory Network, and Mountain West Digital Library demonstrate the value of coordinated multi-repository platforms that aggregate digital materials in a single point discovery system. These models have significantly advanced public access to digitized primary resources. Other models, like Texas Archival Resources Online and the National Archival Finding Aid Network, have created portals for connecting archival finding aids online. However, most existing portals focus primarily on digital collections or repositories that already have the capacity to create finding aids rather than on scalable models designed specifically for rural states

with highly distributed repositories that have minimal resources. As a result, large parts of the documentary record and community memory remain invisible and underutilized for public learning.

This project proposes a planning initiative to design a county-by-county statewide archival discovery clearinghouse that prioritizes collection level visibility for small, rural, and tribal repositories. Building upon lessons from existing national and state models, the project will develop minimum descriptive standards and planning frameworks that support the participation of repositories of all sizes. Grounded in established relationships, demonstrated need, and statewide collaboration, this initiative will bring together stakeholders to discuss shared priorities, and develop realistic and actionable recommendations. The project will move the state from informal awareness of the problem to a coordinated and sustainable strategy for archival discovery and enhanced stewardship of collections.

As a planning project, activities will focus on feasibility analysis, partnership development, and the creation of a prototype framework designed to support future implementation. The project will develop a scalable model for collection-level archival discovery that can be adapted by other rural states or regions with decentralized cultural heritage networks. Although the project is focused on South Dakota, the planning outcomes will generate transferable practices that strengthen archival discovery and access in rural communities. By providing a practical implementation roadmap, this initiative shifts focus from resource intensive digitization toward sustainable approaches to improving the visibility of archival collections. Ultimately, the initiative will help ensure that records preserved in rural archives are more discoverable, support broad public access to information, and are finally integrated into our shared American experience.

Project Work Plan

Project Overview

The South Dakota State University (SDSU) Archives and Special Collections will lead a one-year, four-phase planning project to design a replicable statewide archival description clearinghouse that supports small, rural, and tribal repositories to participate in and maintain. Rather than pursuing immediate system development, the project prioritizes the collaborative design of a sustainable framework that institutions of varying sizes can realistically maintain. Project activities will integrate stakeholder engagement, statewide repository assessment, and technical analysis, resulting in actionable recommendations, a scalable information framework, and pilot-ready metadata standards.

Project Management, Staffing, and Partners

Principal Investigator (PI): Michele Christian, University Archives and Special Collections Librarian at South Dakota State University. The PI will provide strategic leadership and oversee the coordination, partner engagement, reporting, and deliverables. She will supervise the project coordinator and ensure alignment with statewide priorities. Her experience managing grant-funded projects and complex archival initiatives, along with her connections with cultural heritage institutions throughout South Dakota, positions her to guide a multi-institutional planning effort.

Project Coordinator (PC): (To be hired). A full-time PC will manage day-to-day operations including coordinating meetings, facilitating stakeholder engagement, analyzing data, and drafting deliverables. The PC will also administer surveys and conduct in-person site visits to repositories across South Dakota to assess local needs and technical constraints.

Advisory Team (AT): A twelve-member body including the PI, State Archivist, and representatives from county historical societies, libraries, tribal archives, museums, academic repositories, and other archives across the state. The AT will contribute subject expertise and regional perspectives to ensure the planning process reflects the operational realities of institutions with varying capacities. The AT will participate in planning meetings and provide guidance throughout each project phase.

Student Assistant (SA): A part-time student assistant will assist with data entry, document preparation, compilation of repository information, and other support tasks. The position will provide hands-on experience in project planning and documentation. The SA will be supervised by the PC.

Phase 1 – Project Setup and Statewide Landscape Assessment (Months 1 - 4)

During the first phase, the PC and PI will establish a project management system and assess the current archival discovery environment in South Dakota. This phase establishes baseline conditions needed to evaluate the feasibility of a shared statewide information framework.

Activities:

1. **Hire and onboard the project coordinator:** The PI will recruit a full-time PC with experience in archives and metadata. The PC will establish shared documentation

and communication systems to support transparent collaboration and consistent tracking of planning outcomes.

2. **Establish a joint planning structure:** The PC, PI, and State Archivist will form the AT. Regular meetings will support shared decision making.
3. **Conduct a statewide landscape analysis:** The PC will compile a preliminary census of repositories. Data will be collected through an online form or through U.S. Mail for those that are unable to respond electronically. For each repository, data will be collected regarding online presence, level of collection descriptions, technology, staffing, and readiness.

Milestones

- Project coordinator hired
- Advisory team established and meeting regularly
- Preliminary statewide repository list created
- Summary of the archival landscape drafted

Project phases will intentionally overlap, allowing findings from the landscape assessment and stakeholder engagement to inform real time planning decisions.

Phase 2: Statewide Stakeholder Engagement (Months 3 - 8)

This phase will focus on interviews and listening sessions to ensure that any future system reflects conditions under which small institutions can realistically contribute. Findings from stakeholder engagement will directly shape the development of descriptive standards, platform evaluation criteria, and governance recommendations in later phases.

Activities

1. **Interviews and surveys:** The PC will design and administer SDSU Institutional Review Board-approved surveys and conduct interviews with a representative sample of repositories statewide.
2. **Virtual listening sessions:** Four virtual listening sessions will be held to gather additional input from stakeholders representing various repository types.
3. **Focused outreach:** The PC will conduct targeted site visits. Participation in all project activities will be voluntary. Engagement with tribal repositories will be

consultative and will respect tribal sovereignty over description, access, and culturally sensitive information.

Milestones

- Interviews and surveys completed
- Listening sessions held
- Written summary of stakeholder needs and priorities is completed

Phase 3: Data Standards, Platform, and Governance Planning (Months 7 - 10)

After reviewing the findings, the PC will design a proposed technical and organizational framework for the clearinghouse. The advisory team will provide feedback throughout this phase. This phase translates stakeholder findings into practical models that can be realistically adopted by repositories with limited staffing and resources. Standards will be refined through advisory review and stakeholder validation.

Activities

1. **Establish minimum descriptive standards:** Define a realistic minimum set of collection-level metadata fields that small institutions can maintain without specialized software.
2. **Evaluate platform options:** Review potential technical approaches for ease of use, interoperability with national aggregators, accessibility, and long-term sustainability.
3. **Develop governance recommendations:** Propose options for possible host institutions, for decision making processes, for data maintenance, and for support for small institutions.
4. **Design a proposed information framework:** Develop a framework for the future statewide clearinghouse.

Milestones

- Draft minimum descriptive standards prepared
- Platform comparison matrix completed
- Governance structure drafted
- Proposed information framework developed

Phase 4: Reporting and Future Planning (Months 9-12)

The last phase develops an actionable plan for future implementation.

Activities:

1. **Develop statewide planning report:** Produce a comprehensive report that includes archival landscape overview, stakeholder perspectives, and recommendations for descriptive standards, a technical platform, governance structure, and phased implementation roadmap.
2. **Develop costs and timeline:** Generate a projected operating budget for a sustainable system, including staffing for initial implementation, and a suggested timeline for a pilot and statewide rollout.
3. **Share findings with stakeholders:** Circulate draft reports to solicit feedback and host a final virtual meeting to present recommendations.
4. **Prepare for an Implementation Project:** Identify potential funding sources and outline next steps.
5. **Evaluation and Lessons Learned:** Evaluation will focus on stakeholder participation rates, assessment of feasibility, and documented consensus regarding standards. Surveys, meeting feedback, and milestone tracking will be used to assess progress and inform refinements throughout the project.

Milestones

- Final report drafted
- Stakeholder feedback gathered
- Final report finalized and published
- Implementation framework completed

Together, these phases ensure that stakeholder input, technical evaluation, and governance planning proceed in a coordinated and achievable manner, resulting in a realistic, community-informed implementation roadmap.

Project Results

At the conclusion of the planning grant, the project team will produce a set of publicly accessible deliverables designed to guide the development of a sustainable statewide

archival discovery system. All deliverables will be made available in South Dakota State University's institutional repository, Open PRAIRIE:

1. **Statewide Planning Report:** A comprehensive analysis of South Dakota's archival landscape that documents current discovery practices, identifies critical gaps, and evaluates opportunities for coordinated access to archival collections. The report will analyze findings from surveys, stakeholder interviews, and environmental scans to provide a data-driven foundation for future implementation.
2. **Minimum Descriptive Standards Framework:** A collection-level descriptive framework designed to be realistic, low-barrier, and interoperable. Developed collaboratively with small, volunteer-run, and tribal institutions, the framework will support consistent metadata practices and promote participation in discovery efforts regardless of an institution's technical budget.
3. **Technical Platform and Governance Analysis:** An evaluation of technical options, sustainability models, and collaborative governance structures appropriate for a statewide archival discovery initiative. This analysis will outline the relative benefits, resource implications, and long-term feasibility of potential technical and governance approaches.
4. **Phased Implementation Plan:** A sequenced roadmap detailing recommended next steps, pilot activities, projected operating costs, partnership commitments, and potential funding strategies. The plan will position partners to move directly into implementation and will provide a clear structure for statewide development.

Addressing the Identified Need

Together, these deliverables address the fragmentation of archival description and discovery across South Dakota. By establishing shared standards, the project will improve collection-level discoverability and create a sustainable foundation for a coordinated statewide discovery infrastructure.

Participating repositories will gain a shared vision and practical guidance for contributing collection-level descriptions, along with clear expectations for participation. Once the plan is implemented, researchers, educators, students, and community members will have a central starting point to discover archival holdings that are currently invisible to the public.

By emphasizing collection-level discovery rather than resource-intensive digitization, the project creates a low-barrier participation model that supports the needs of institutions with limited staffing, technical capacity, or financial resources.

Evaluation findings collected throughout the planning process will be incorporated into the final recommendations, ensuring alignment with stakeholder needs and demonstrated feasibility.

Adaptability and Generalizability

All planning outputs will adhere to nationally recognized best practices, including DACS (Describing Archives: a Content Standard) and TK (Traditional Knowledge) Labels, to ensure relevance, interoperability, and ethical stewardship. The resulting assessment methodology will provide a replicable, community-informed model for other rural, geographically dispersed, or resource-limited states and regions seeking sustainable, scalable approaches to collaborative archival discovery. The project's emphasis on low-barrier participation and collaborative governance supports broad national relevance and adaptability. Deliverables will be designed to be ready-to-use models that other regions and states can easily adopt.

Dissemination

Project results will be actively shared to encourage adoption through:

- Public posting of all reports, frameworks, and supporting documentation in Open PRAIRIE and on a dedicated project website.
- A statewide virtual briefing session for South Dakota's cultural heritage repositories.
- Presentations at regional and national professional meetings, including proposed sessions for the Society of American Archivists and Midwest Archives Conference.
- Distribution through archival networks to facilitate national scaling.

Sustainability and Future Work

The planning project is intentionally designed to produce a decision-ready model for a multi-year implementation initiative. The phased implementation plan will position project partners to secure future private and federal funding, formalize governance and partnerships, and begin pilot development. Collectively, these outcomes will ensure that culturally significant materials across the state, especially those held by small, rural, or tribal institutions, are integrated into the national archival discovery system.

[illegible]