INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-260359-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

Miami-Dade Public Library System

Amount awarded by IMLS:	$50,000
Amount of cost share:	$0

Miami-Dade Public Library System will facilitate a Community Memory Lab to collect and digitize print, audio and video records of local Miami-Dade history through the eyes of the local community. The project will enable free access to digitization equipment and expertise, enabling Miami-Dade residents to preserve print, audiovisual, and object-based personal and familial memories. This work will be supported by the library's established digital infrastructure, experienced Digital Collections staff, the Digital Collections content management system, and the Library's Digital Preservation Program. The project will demonstrate how free public access to a Memory Lab reduces financial, technological, and knowledge-based barriers for documenting local history, how community-led digitization reduces gaps within institutional digital archives, and which workflows and support structures most effectively enable users with varying levels of technical ability to successfully digitize personal materials.

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.

250 Years of American Memories: A Digital Community Preservation Initiative

Introduction

The Miami-Dade Public Library System (MDPLS or Library) is requesting $50,000 in IMLS funding to establish a community Memory Lab. It will enable free access to digitization equipment and expertise, enabling Miami-Dade residents to preserve print, audiovisual, and object-based personal and familial memories that are becoming obsolete and are costly to digitize through private vendors. This project addresses gaps in access to preservation technology while expanding and diversifying the Library's Digital Collections Community Memory initiative through community contributions. Using established digitization standards and workflows, along with a combination of open source and proprietary user-friendly software, MDPLS will implement a scalable, community-centered model. This work will be supported by the Library's established digital infrastructure, experienced Digital Collections staff, the Digital Collections content management system, and the Library's Digital Preservation Program. MDPLS will develop step-by-step guidelines, training videos, informational signage, and promotional materials to support this endeavor. The project will demonstrate how free public access to a Memory Lab reduces financial, technological, and knowledge-based barriers for documenting local history, how community-led digitization reduces gaps within institutional digital archives, and which workflows and support structures most effectively enable users with varying levels of technical ability to digitize personal materials successfully. Once established, the Memory Lab will ensure expanded public participation in recording community history and the long-term preservation of materials documenting the lived experiences of Miami-Dade's communities. Their personal, familial narratives together shape and define the broader American experience, contributing to national America 250 commemoration efforts.

Project Justification

The Miami-Dade Public Library System (MDPLS) Digital Collections was established in 2017 to expand online access to materials from the Library's extensive Special Collections and Permanent Art Collection. Prior to this initiative, these materials were primarily accessible only at the Main Library branch and had limited discoverability through the Library's catalog. Since its inception, the program has grown into a recognized digital stewardship initiative, receiving multiple grants and awards. These include three Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grants from the Florida Department of State Division of Library and Information Services, four Breakthrough Digitization Awards from the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN), and three National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Awards.

From inception, the collection, in collaboration with local organizations and Miami-Dade County Departments, held their digitized archival materials, providing public access to through the MDPLS Digital Collections platform. These partnerships have enabled the inclusion of content from organizations such as the Miami-Dade Military Museum, the Coral Gables Woman's Club, and the Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places program from the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, among others. Through these collaborations, MDPLS expands the scope of its digital holdings while providing its partners with professional digitization support, preservation, and a public platform to share their collections at no cost.

The project has also prioritized broad public access through national discovery platforms. In 2018, MDPLS became a founding member of the Sunshine State Digital Network (SSDN), Florida's service hub for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). Since then, new MDPLS digital collections have been added to DPLA, significantly expanding the visibility and accessibility of the MDPLS Digital Collection to a national audience.

While institutional collections provide essential documentation of Miami-Dade's history, many residents hold equally significant personal records that remain inaccessible due to technological and financial barriers. Miami-Dade residents possess personal memories stored in obsolete or deteriorating formats but lack the knowledge and sometimes financial means to digitize them through private vendors. At the same time, gaps within institutional archives reveal an underrepresentation of many local communities within Miami-Dade.

To address the need for digitizing personal archives, the Digital Collections unit launched the Community Memory Project in 2023 with an open call inviting Miami-Dade County residents to bring materials from their personal collections to be digitized and shared online through the Digital Collections website. The initial response provided valuable insight into community needs, revealing the demand for accessible digitization services, the limited resources available to individuals for converting materials in obsolete formats, particularly audiovisual media, and the importance of offering options for participants to digitize items for private use without requiring public sharing. The proposed Memory Lab will build on and expand the Community Memory Project by providing the equipment, guidance, and infrastructure needed to support the digitization of personal archives and better serve the community.

This project builds upon established digitization standards and professional workflows already implemented by MDPLS in its Digital Collections program and adapts them into a community-centered, self-service model. The MDPLS's Digital Collections follows the Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiatives (FADGI) best practices for digitization of

still and moving images, including parameters to create archival/master files for long-term preservation, and production/derivatives copies for dissemination.

We use established metadata standards to describe and organize digital collections, making them easy to manage, search, and share. For individual items in CONTENTdm, we use Dublin Core, while archival collections in AtoM are described using Encoded Archival Description (EAD). Both schemas are stored as XML files, a structured, text-based format that is open, widely supported, and platform-independent. This ensures that metadata can be reliably exchanged between systems, displayed consistently, and preserved long-term, as XML files are human-readable and can be migrated or reused by future platforms without losing descriptive information about the collections.

The Library's digital repositories are OAI-PMH compliant, enabling seamless metadata harvesting. As an active member of the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), all digital collections are harvested quarterly through the Sunshine State Digital Network (SSDN). This partnership includes adherence to the DPLA's rights management standards. MDPLS applies RightStatements.org's 12 standardized rights statements to all digital materials, providing clear, consistent guidance on permissions and restrictions. These practices ensure that users can understand and appropriately use the Library's digital cultural heritage resources.

For descriptive metadata, we follow the Cataloguing of Cultural Objects (CCO) content standards, ensuring that information about each item is recorded consistently, accurately, and in a way that supports both discovery and long-term management. All metadata terms are drawn from established controlled vocabularies, including the Getty Thesauri: Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) for object types and materials, Union List of Artist Names (ULAN) for creators, Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names (TGN) for places, and Cultural Objects Name Authority (CONA) for named works of art. We also incorporate Library of Congress Authorities and Subject Headings for broader contextual and subject metadata.

The project aligns national digital preservation standards by ensuring all digitized surrogates are ingested and maintained within the Digital Collections' long-term preservation infrastructure. The Library's Information Technology department oversees routine operations, including automated backups, replication across storage nodes, fixity validation, and enforcement of retention policies. For redundancy, MDPLS participates in the Community Webs program from the Internet Archive, which provides access to a dark archive, off-site, cloud-based storage that serves as a secure secondary copy, safeguarding the digital collections against data loss or corruption. The Digital Collections program complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for webpages, ensuring access to its resources while adopting best practices in digital accessibility. In alignment

with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), it implements accessible web design that supports screen readers and keyboard navigation, provides materials in alternative formats such as text-readable PDFs and transcripts, and includes detailed metadata to improve usability. Additionally, audio and video content feature captions and transcripts. Through these efforts and a commitment to universal design principles, digital collections are accessible to anyone choosing to visit the website.

This project is inspired by The Memory Lab Network at the District of Columbia Public Library, which established a free, do-it-yourself digitization space within a public library. MDPLS will adapt this model for the Miami-Dade community, integrating it into the Library's Digital Collection through the Community Memory Project. Unlike traditional top-down collecting approaches, this model centers community members as active contributors and co-creators of the historical record, strengthening participatory archiving practices while maintaining professional quality control.

The primary beneficiaries of the project will be members of Miami-Dade County seeking to safeguard their personal and family histories. Participants will gain free access to equipment, training, and preservation infrastructure that would otherwise be difficult to access. All training materials and documentation will be available online and in print, and personal assistance will be available to ensure participants can fully engage in the digitization process. Secondary beneficiaries include researchers, educators, students, and the broader public, who will gain access to a richer, broader digital archive reflecting the lived experiences that collectively shape the American story. By preserving and sharing these narratives, the project not only protects vulnerable personal histories but also strengthens intergenerational memory and community identity as part of the nation's America 250 celebration.

Project Work Plan

Project Staff

All roles established for the implementation of the Memory Lab will continue beyond the grant period as part of the permanent responsibilities of the primary staff. Margarita Mirabal, Library Operations Manager for Special Collections, Art Services, and Digital Collections at the MDPLS will serve as Project Manager. Margarita has more than ten years of experience working with digital collections, including five years as a metadata librarian in an academic library and eight years as the founder and manager of the MDPLS Digital Collections unit. As Project Manager, she will coordinate preparation activities and oversee the ongoing implementation and management of the Memory Lab.

Library Media Project Specialists Cesar Bracamonte and Alexandra Rincon will provide onsite assistance to participants using digitization equipment and software. They guide users in operating the equipment and understanding software with the goal of guided self-service, particularly because the Library anticipates repeat users of the Memory Lab. Editing services will be offered for prospective contributions. Cesar will edit audiovisual materials, and Alexandra will edit still images. Cesar has an educational background in computer science and four years of experience in the Digital Collections unit, where he has contributed to the implementation of audiovisual digitization and 3D technologies. Alexandra is a professional photographer with more than ten years of experience in digital photography and has worked with Digital Collections for five years, serving as the team's specialist in image editing.

The Library Archivist, Grisel Choter, Librarian II, and the Metadata Librarian, Maria Jimenez Librarian II, will conduct interviews, both in person and virtual, with participants interested in sharing digitized content from their personal collections with the Community Memory Project. Both have worked with Digital Collections since its establishment in 2018. Prior to this role, Grisel served for many years as a genealogy librarian at MDPLS, giving her extensive experience working with family collections and understanding their historical value. Maria has served as the sole metadata librarian for Digital Collections and played a central role in the implementation of the CONTENTdm content management system in 2018. She has in-depth knowledge of the system's metadata configuration and maintains consistency across collections. Together they will provide authorization and release forms for online publication, explain the Library's policies for the Community Memory Project, and gather the descriptive information needed for metadata creation. The Metadata Librarian will then use this information to describe each item according to the Digital Collections standards and procedures.

The Library's Information Technology team, led by Julio Campa, will oversee the installation of hardware and software for the Memory Lab. They will also provide server storage for digitized materials contributed to the Community Memory Project as part of Digital Collections infrastructure. This team will continue to manage daily system backups, fixity checks, and reporting for the entire Digital Collections environment, including Community Memory materials

Project Activities - The project will be implemented through the following sequential and interrelated activities. Year 1 will be spent on preparation and Year 2 will be for project implementation.

PREPARATION:

1a. Preparation of Entry Area

The project will begin with the reconfiguration of the Digital Collections receiving area into a multifunctional space. The area will be arranged to support Memory Lab users before they enter the lab. Participants will be able to organize and review their materials and meet with staff to ask questions before beginning the digitization process. This space will be particularly helpful for first-time users who may need orientation and guidance before using the equipment.

The repurpose will primarily involve the addition and arrangement of furniture rather than structural changes. Existing furnishings, including a conference table and chairs already available within the unit, will be used to create a comfortable workspace where participants can sort and prepare their materials. The space will also include a touch-screen smartboard displaying step-by-step instructions, guidelines, and reference materials for Memory Lab users. This will allow participants to review procedures independently and return to the instructions as needed during their visit.

1b. Installation, Configuration, and Environmental Setup of the Memory Lab

The Library's Information Technology Department will oversee the installation and configuration of the Memory Lab's technical infrastructure. This includes electrical load planning, surge protection, cable management, and network isolation. Two dedicated digitization workstations will be configured as air-gapped systems (i.e., not connected to the Library's internal network) to mitigate cybersecurity risks associated with external media ingestion.

Signal chains will be configured to support analog-to-digital conversion through appropriate capture hardware and software, with attention to signal integrity, time base correction (for video), and audio level calibration. Frequently used devices will be maintained in a ready-state configuration, while less frequently used equipment will be stored in secured cabinets in the lab. The space will also include environmental controls appropriate for temporary media handling, as well as secure cabinetry for spare parts, consumables, and backup equipment. Equipment usage metrics will be tracked to support ongoing evaluation and sustainability planning.

1c. Identification and Acquisition of Legacy Media Equipment

Given the obsolescence of many playback devices required for legacy media digitization, the project will implement a dual acquisition strategy. First, an internal and inter-agency recovery initiative will identify functional equipment from within the Library system and other Miami-Dade County departments. This reuse strategy supports both cost efficiency and sustainability.

Following a six-month identification period, remaining equipment gaps will be addressed through targeted procurement using grant funds. Selection criteria will prioritize operational stability, compatibility with existing workflows, and serviceability. This activity will include documentation of all acquired assets for inventory control and lifecycle management.
Once completed, the lab will support a wide range of legacy audiovisual and digital formats through modular equipment configuration. Core components include:

- High-resolution flatbed scanning systems for reflective materials (photographs, documents)
- Transparency adapters and film scanning systems for slides and negatives, supporting both single-frame and batch digitization
- Analog audio playback devices, including compact cassette and microcassette decks
- Analog video playback equipment supporting VHS, Betamax, and additional legacy formats
- Open-reel audio playback systems
- Legacy digital storage interfaces, including floppy disk drives (multiple formats) and removable media readers

2. Technical Testing and Workflow Validation
Library Media Project Specialists will conduct systematic testing of all equipment and associated software to validate digitization workflows across supported media types. Testing protocols will include:

- Format-specific playback verification
- Calibration of capture settings (resolution, bit depth, sampling rates)
- Evaluation of signal stability and noise levels
- Identification of hardware or software incompatibilities

All findings will be documented and used to develop standardized operating procedures, including troubleshooting guidelines and format-specific handling recommendations.

3. Development of Technical Documentation and Best Practice Guideline, Training, Instructional, and Outreach Materials
Detailed documentation will be prepared to guide staff operations and assist public users. Staff-facing documentation will include standard operating procedures (SOPs), equipment handling protocols, and digitization specifications aligned with current professional

standards. Particular emphasis will be placed on audiovisual preservation practices, an area historically reliant on outsourced services.
The project will incorporate external expertise through consultation with Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archives at Miami Dade College, particularly in relation to time-based media workflows. Public-facing documentation will consist of structured, step-by-step digitization guides adapted from the Memory Lab Network model. These materials will be informed by peer knowledge exchange with Broward County Public Library, which has prior implementation experience.
In collaboration with the Library's Graphics and Marketing teams, the project will produce a suite of instructional and outreach materials designed to support user engagement and technical literacy to include:

- Video tutorials demonstrating software workflows and equipment operation
- Visual guides documenting step-by-step processes
- Interpretive materials explaining basic digital preservation concepts

Digital preservation guidance will address file formats, resolution standards, storage redundancy, and distinctions between preservation masters and access derivatives. Materials will be disseminated through both physical formats and a dedicated web presence. Signage systems will be developed to support wayfinding, communicate lab policies, and provide quick-access instructional content via QR codes. Promotional materials will be distributed Library system-wide and through Library digital communication channels.

4. Access Management and Scheduling Infrastructure
A dedicated Memory Lab web interface will be developed to centralize access to instructional materials and scheduling tools. The Library's existing appointment schedule management system will be used to collect and manage appointments. Sessions will be in structured time blocks (10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday), ensuring adequate time for meaningful digitization activities. A one-hour buffer between sessions will be used for equipment inspection, cleaning, and reset procedures, including mitigation of contamination risks such as mold transfer. Trained staff will be assigned to provide technical assistance and ensure adherence to lab protocols.

IMPLEMENTATION:
1. Self-Digitization & Participatory Archiving
Upon arrival, participants will undergo a brief orientation. This process includes:
(1) instruction on handling protocols and user responsibilities
(2) a preliminary condition assessment of materials

Staff will inspect materials for mold, physical damage, or other potential risks brought by participants. They will also assess each user's technical skills to determine whether they can work independently or will need additional assistance. This intake process ensures both the safety of the lab equipment and appropriate support for users before they begin using the equipment.

Participants will be introduced to the Community Memory Project and invited to contribute selected digitized materials from their personal collections. Each submission will undergo review by the Project Manager to ensure alignment with the project's scope and adherence to content guidelines. To recognize and encourage participation, contributors will receive professionally enhanced digital files, including basic editing and mid-level restoration, such as color correction and audio cleanup, carried out by the Library Media Project Specialists.

2. Metadata Creation & Access

For materials accepted into the Community Memory Project, the Digital Archivist or Metadata Librarian will conduct structured interviews with contributors to capture contextual metadata, including provenance, dates, creators, and associated narratives. Interviews may take place in person or remotely, with the approach determined by factors such as the number of items, their formats, the participant's availability, and staff capacity. Whenever possible, interviews will be conducted on the same day; otherwise, a flexible follow-up session will be scheduled via in-person meeting, phone, or Zoom. Using the information gathered, the Metadata Librarian will create descriptive, administrative, and technical metadata for each record within the Digital Collections content management system, applying established schemas and controlled vocabularies to ensure both interoperability and discoverability of the materials.

3. Long-Term Digital Preservation

All digital assets produced for the Community Memory Project, including master files of digital surrogates, will be incorporated into the Library's digital preservation framework, ensuring secure storage, redundancy, and ongoing access management. Master files will also be preserved in the dark archive through the Community Webs Internet Archive project, providing secondary storage for Digital Collections. All materials will be shared through the Digital Public Library of America via the Florida hub, Sunshine State Digital Network, extending access to a national audience while maintaining preservation standards.

Project Results

The Memory Lab will produce tangible results and deliverables that directly address the need for access to digitization technology and preservation resources of the Miami-Dade County population. Key deliverables include a fully equipped self-service digitization lab; step-by-step instructional guides and video tutorials written in clear, easy-to-understand language to accommodate varying technology skill levels; post-session evaluation surveys; a growing collection of digitized community-contributed materials; and documentation of workflows, best practices, and metadata standards. These deliverables address critical preservation challenges, protecting personal materials at risk of deterioration and supporting broader archival documentation of community histories. While materials and instructions are designed for self-service use, staff will always be available on-site to assist participants as needed, ensuring that everyone can successfully engage in the digitization process.

To ensure adaptability and generalizability, all workflows, instructional materials, and procedural guides will be widely applicable to professional standards, allowing other institutions and communities to replicate the model with minimal technical and procedural barriers. The project's participatory approach, which positions community members as co-creators, further demonstrates a flexible framework that can be scaled or adapted for library contexts nationwide.

Dissemination will occur through the Library website, where we will create a landing page for the Memory Lab, and the link and QR code will be added to all the media channels, like the newsletter, social media channels, as well as flyers and posters across all 50 MDPLS branches. It will also be featured in the Digital Collections Blog. We will attend outreach events in targeted community centers, historical societies, and focused groups, doing in-person presentations and workshops. We will offer webinar sessions also to organizations and institutions interested in replicating the Memory Lab model. Presentations at local conferences like Southeast Florida Library Information Network are going to be used to promote the project, share our firsthand experiences, and open the discussion with other professionals in the field.

Sustainability beyond the grant period will be ensured through integration with MDPLS's Digital Collections infrastructure. Ongoing funding from the Library's operating budget will maintain staff support, equipment, and training resources, ensuring continued community access, preservation of digitized materials, and replication of the Memory Lab model in institutions.

Community Memory Lab																								
Miami-Dade Public Library System	Year 1												Year 2											
TASK	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10	Month 11	Month 12	Month 13	Month 14	Month 15	Month 16	Month 17	Month 18	Month 19	Month 20	Month 21	Month 22	Month 23	Month 24
Preparation																								
Activity 1a																								
Activity 1b																								
Activity 1c																								
Activity 2																								
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