

There are compelling reasons and, in some cases, political pressure, to engage in greater collaboration within and between organisations in order effectively to confront and overcome the challenges of digital preservation. The range of skills required to do this demands flexibility within organisational structures to facilitate working in multi-disciplinary teams. There is a significant overlap in the digital preservation issues being faced by all organisations and across all sectors so it makes sense to capitalise on the potential benefits of pooling expertise and experience.

Internal collaboration

The usual assumption is that collaboration is external. However, most libraries and archives are managing a combination of paper-based and digital resources for the foreseeable future and will need to structure their organisation to manage the disparate needs of the two. The blurring of boundaries which digital technology produces means that sections and departments which are structurally distinct, will now need to co-operate in order to integrate the preservation and management of digital materials with other materials.

Such co-operation may well prove impossible unless there are mechanisms put in place to facilitate it. At the strategic level, a cross disciplinary committee charged with developing and overseeing objectives is one means of ensuring that the involvement of all relevant sections can be brought together ([DLM Forum 1997](#)). At the operational level, consideration will need to be given to defining what specific tasks are required and where those responsibilities logically lie. Setting up of working groups to investigate specific issues is one means of blending the range of skills required ([Lee 1999](#)).

Advantages

- Makes good use of available skills and expertise.
- Promotes team working.
- Recognises the diversity of skills required for the digital environment in general and digital preservation in particular.
- Is much more likely to yield a good outcome in the longer term.

Disadvantages

- May be frustrating and time consuming in the short term.
- Communication may be difficult initially.
- Senior management may be unwilling to risk perceived lack of control.
- Staff may feel uncomfortable with new ways of working.
- Organisational structures may not be sufficiently flexible to facilitate effective collaboration between different sections.

See also [Outreach](#) .

External collaboration

External collaboration can include formal agreements between two or more organisations and informal arrangements between colleagues working in different institutions and possibly also across different sectors. See also [Outreach](#) .

Formal agreements can range from collaborative agreements for simply sharing information to accomplishing a specific task (for example working groups), or agreeing on specific allocation of archiving responsibilities. Clearly, the more complex the nature of the agreement, and the more differences there are between participating organisations in terms of their business needs, the more difficult it is likely to be to achieve, though the longer term benefits may also be greater.

Advantages

- Organisational commitment and authority.
- Clear allocation of responsibility.
- Clearly identified gains.
- Enhanced understanding of complex issues.
- Economies of scale - the sum being greater than the parts.
- Greater practical benefit from pooled resources and expertise.
- Greater political and economic clout.
- Improved prospects for future mutually beneficial collaboration.

Disadvantages

- Difficulty of establishing unambiguous agreements able to be accepted by all parties.
- Time taken to establish them.
- Difficulties of communicating across different professional and organisational frameworks.
- Potential bureaucratic barriers.

Informal arrangements have always played an important role in maintaining current awareness among colleagues in similar disciplines. Digital technology provides an increased imperative to share experience and information in an emerging discipline as well as a simpler and more rapid means to contact colleagues known to be working in areas of interest.

Advantages

- Specific to individuals and their personal development and interest.
- Speed and ease of communication.
- Efficient transfer of information.

Disadvantages

- Potential to side-step wider organisational perspective.
- May miss the potential for wider dissemination of knowledge unless there are organisational mechanisms in place to facilitate sharing of knowledge.

[See Exemplars and Further Reading](#)