

## Novice to Know-How Module Text

### Course 5: Ingesting Digital Content

# Module 4: Creating a Digital Asset Register

The development of this course was funded by The National Archives (UK) as part of the "Plugged In, Powered Up" digital capacity building strategy.

## 1. Introduction.

In the module "Metadata for Digital Preservation" we established that we need metadata at a variety of levels to enable digital preservation. In this module we will introduce an option for capturing high-level metadata about collections, the Digital Asset Register.

We will start by examining what a Digital Asset Register is, then cover what information it should contain, and how to capture that information. Finally, we will look at how to use and update it, as well as identifying some useful resources when assembling your Digital Asset Register.

So, time to get started!

## 2. What is a Digital Asset Register?

A Digital Asset Register (DAR) is a tool for gathering information about digital assets to support the analysis and management needed to preserve them. It might take the form of a spreadsheet, a database, or another format that is useful for practitioners.

A DAR provides an overarching view of digital assets included in a digital preservation program. This view helps practitioners to identify gaps, overlap, related risks, and other information useful to making data management and preservation decisions.

## 3. Why Have a Digital Asset Register?

A DAR can help support decision-making for digital preservation of a digital collection or subset of a collection. The creation of a DAR requires time and effort, but it is a useful tool that serves multiple purposes.

An up-to-date DAR:

- gathers information about digital content in one place
- logs preservation risks
- coordinates digital preservation actions

- supports negotiations with management
- promotes good practice in management of digital content
- provides basic finding aid in absence of other discovery methods
- retains valuable knowledge

#### 4. Gathers Information in One Place.

Often, information about digital content is scattered across different places - in data management systems, in shared networks, in catalogues, in paper documentation, or in someone's head. A DAR provides a place to collect all that information in one location, side-by-side, to better enable analysis and management of the digital content.

#### 5. Logs Preservation Risks.

Risk assessment is an important part of planning digital preservation. Logging identified risks associated with different collections in a DAR can make it simpler to craft responses that mitigate multiple risks, for a variety of digital content.

The overview of risks to digital content provided by the DAR will help an organization build a more comprehensive digital preservation program.

#### 6. Coordinates Digital Preservation Actions.

Logging information about digital content, especially the risks they face, from across an organization in a DAR can make it easier to identify preservation actions - such as migration to a common file format or emulation using a shared set of environments - that will work for multiple types of content. This information will make digital preservation more efficient and streamlined.

#### 7. Supports Negotiations with Management.

A DAR provides an at-a-glance view of an organization's digital collections. This aggregated view can help demonstrate to management the scale and complexity of a problem.

It also shows the coordinated analysis needed to support a case for a more comprehensive and proactive digital preservation program.

#### 8. Promotes Good Practice.

The process of creating a DAR - talking to colleagues and asking them relevant questions about the long-term viability of the content they work with - helps to start the conversation about good practice for digital preservation. Storing a DAR in a central location, accessible across an organization, also makes it simple for others to find quick information about digital content and what issues it presents for long-term preservation.

## 9. Provides a Basic Finding Aid.

In some cases, particularly for content that has not been formally processed, a DAR can provide quick information about digital content not yet included in other finding aids.

This might include basic information about the content, where it came from, where it's located, and who looks after it. That way, it can be found when needed and doesn't get overlooked when making preservation decisions.

## 10. Retains Valuable Knowledge.

Often, when staff leave or move onto other projects, information about digital content is lost. A DAR provides a way to document that information in a less labor-intensive process than formal documentation, such as detailed cataloguing.

Maintaining historical information about digital content is incredibly valuable, especially if an organization is slower getting a digital preservation program implemented.

## 11. Metadata in a Digital Asset Register.

What metadata should be included in a DAR? Any information relevant to making decisions about how to preserve digital content can be included in a DAR. A DAR should be populated with metadata needed internally by practitioners and managers, not with metadata needed for external use or interpretation. The metadata required for a DAR will differ from organization to organization, depending on size, remit, structure, etc.

Some basics:

- Name of collection or content
- Person or department of responsibility
- Size of collection
- A list of File formats and other information collected through characterization, for example with DROID
- Retention policy
- Ownership, rights, and data protection issues
- Associated risks and impact
- Results of a maturity modelling exercise
- Software or hardware dependencies
- Estimated value of content

## 12. How to Gather the Metadata.

How is this information obtained? The metadata needed for a DAR can be collected in a number of ways. For example:

- In documentation provided by depositors
- From finding aids and catalogues
- Data management systems

- Shared drives
- Interviews with staff members
- Survey to all staff members

Often, the best way to collect information for a DAR is to use two or more of the approaches above to ensure more accurate and comprehensive metadata.

### 13. Scoping a Digital Asset Register.

It's important to scope how big or detailed you want a DAR to be and plan out how long it will take to create one and collect all the needed metadata. Remember, if you plan to hold interviews, it can take time to schedule sit-downs with busy colleagues and managers. An organization with no DAR may want to start with a register that only includes a few high-level digital collections, such as all business records or all born-digital content. Information about these high-level categories can be recorded in general terms. Later, when an organization has made some progress in digital preservation, it's a good idea to return to the DAR and expand it by creating more specific entries and including more detailed metadata. For example, sub-collections or all audiovisual material.

### 14. Useful Tools: Digital Asset Framework.

There are a few good tools available to help support the creation of a DAR. The first we will mention here is the Digital Asset Framework (DAF) from the Digital Curation Centre:

DAF provides the means to identify, locate, describe and assess the management of research data assets, but is widely applicable and can be used with other types of digital objects. DAF offers a set of methods to gather the information, views, and experiences needed to scope research data support services or a wider digital preservation program.

Audit Form 2: Inventory of data assets						
Name of the data asset	Description of the asset	Asset Manager(s)	Reference	Classification	Classification comments	General comments
Bach bibliography database	A database listing books, articles, thesis, papers and facsimile editions on the works of Johann Sebastian Bach	Senior lecturer	RAE return for 2007, <a href="http://www.....ac.uk/">http://www.....ac.uk/</a> . ..	Vital	Part of ongoing research project so still being populated. High usage	An MS Access database in H:\Research\Bach\Bach_Bibliography.mdb. NB! Must ask what version of MS Access is used!

### 15. Useful Tools: The National Archives (UK) Guidance.

Another useful resource is the Information Asset Register guidance offered by The National Archives (UK).

It provides guidance on how to document the links between an organization's information assets and its business requirements. This guidance defines an information asset and makes suggestions on how to identify these resources within an organization. It also provides a downloadable template for an Information Asset Register.

Their characterization tool, DROID, that we covered in the "Using DROID" course, is also helpful to gather information about files, information that should be included in a DAR.

Asset number or ID	Name of asset	What does it do	Location	Owner	Volume	Personal data	Access	Shared	Format	Retention	Risks / impact	Key asset
1	Fostering case files, 2015-16.	These record the work of the Authority in placing children with foster carers, and monitor progress and outcomes	In shared network drive filepath: x:\abc\defg\I	[Name] Head of Fostering Services & Information Asset Owner	160 case files	Yes; includes sensitive personal data	Access is restricted to <u>named individuals</u> in Fostering Services Team, plus X, Y and Z job roles	Information is shared with X, Y and Z bodies under the agreed <u>2012 Information sharing agreement</u>	Emails, excel spreadsheets, PDF copies of correspondence	70 years	Loss of Confidentiality: - safety impact; - privacy impact;  Loss of Availability;  Loss of Integrity;	Yes
2												

## 16. An Example Digital Asset Register.

Below is an example of a Digital Asset Register. When designing yours it is important to tailor it to your own context.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
	Collection Type (A - External Deposit, B - Digitized Content, C - Internal Records)	Accession Number(s)	Collection Name	Description	Ownership/Responsibilities	Location	Size (GB)	Size (no. of files)	File Formats	Retention	Rights	Sensitive/Private Data?	Access	Key Risks
1				Records produced by the Human Resources department in the course of business	Head of HR	C:\DigitalArchive1\2002_INT_012\	2.2	5412	.doc, .xls, .mdb, .jpg, .html	20 years	Owned by organization	Yes, information on staff	Internal access only, with permission of Head of HR	Unauthorised access to private data Microsoft formats nearing obsolescence
2	C	2002/Int/012	Records from Human Resources	Papers of noted archaeology professor. Includes records of digs and drafts for publications	Ownership transferred to archive	D:\DigitalArchive2\014_DEP_002							Open access to content covering outputs of research and publication	Propriety (closed) file formats included
3	A	2014/Dep/002	Papers of Professor Chris Jones	Digitized images product catalogues	Ownership transferred to archive	F:\DigitalArchive4\1998_DEP_005	68.3	856	.docx, .xlsx, .jpg, .dwg, .dxf, .shp, .csv	In perpetuity	License granted in perpetuity	Contains some personal records, including bank statements	Open access	Low risk content
4	B	1998/Dep/005	Smith and Co. Collection											

## 17. What Happens Next?

It's not over! What happens to a DAR once you've created it? You can:

- Share across the organization
- Share with management
- Create more granular entries
- Create an update schedule
- Update at regular intervals or with new accessions

It's important to share a DAR to maximize its impact and increase its usefulness for propelling a digital preservation program to the next level. To be useful, a DAR should be kept up-to-date. Digital preservation requires responsiveness to change and a DAR is a good place to keep an eye on evolving technologies, formats, and user requirements.