

James V. Hillegas
Feb. 29, 2012

LSTA Grant Project Evaluation

Pacific University Library & Washington County Museum, "Washington County Heritage Online"

Summary of Evaluation

This report provides an evaluation of the first year of a two-year LSTA grant-funded project, the Washington County Heritage Online (WCHO) [initially known as the Washington County Digital Library project].

The purpose of WCHO project is to centralize and make more widely available historic images of Washington County, Oregon. Important historic materials in the county are scattered throughout the area and are in various states of preservation, organization, and availability. The WCHO will gather, digitize, and make available via a unified Internet portal materials from the collections of Pacific University Library (PUL), the Washington County Museum (WCM), and a number of other county heritage organizations.

Discussion with project administrators Lindsay Prescott (Project Manager, WCHO), Marita Kunkel (University Librarian/Library Director, PU), and Samuel Shogren (Executive Director, WCM) on January 14, 2012, provided insight into the progress, achievements, challenges, and future plans of the WCHO.

The WCHO has been quite successful in its first year, having established a solid administrative foundation, strengthened ties between county heritage institutions, and expanded exposure to and interest among county residents and other important institutions not originally envisioned to be part of the project. The project experienced some administrative hurdles in its first months with unforeseen staffing changes at PUL and WCM, and the project team has not scanned as many images as they originally thought they would during their first year. However, project administrators are confident that with the staffing now in place, the clear and robust administrative structure, and strong and growing ties throughout the county, that the project is well-positioned to expand both in breadth and in depth in the years to come.

The WCHO fills a clear and important need to centralize and make available historic images pertaining to the diverse communities and institutions of Washington County. With a user-friendly Internet-based collection these materials will be accessible not only to Washington County residents, but to people throughout and beyond Oregon. Also, with a solid administrative structure, robust information

technology architecture, and increasing collaborative partnerships throughout the county, the WCHO is well-positioned to achieve (and exceed) the project goals enumerated in LSTA grant application materials.

Project Objectives

The objectives of the WCHO are to gather, digitize, and make available via the Internet historic images of Washington County, Oregon. There are significant collections of these materials at PUL and WCM, and these two institutions have been working collaboratively to preserve and make materials more widely available. However, there are also a great many images in a wide array of other heritage organizations in the county that are not as widely known or accessible.

The collaborative WCHO project will address the technical, logistical, and administrative roadblocks hindering preservation, documentation, and presentation of these invaluable historic materials. In this way, the project sought to achieve Goal #5 of the State of Oregon's *Five-Year State Plan 2008-2012*, "Using technology to expand access and to increase efficiency."

The WCHO grant application stated that their primary goal during the Year 1 of the grant period to ensure project success after the grant ends by establishing a stable administrative and technical infrastructure. This would include

- 1) WCM and PUL staffing commitments and securing additional funding from various sources.
- 2) Build both the front- and back-end information technology architecture to support the online WCHO in accordance with industry-standard preservation and metadata guidelines, now and into the future.
- 3) Establishing clear training guidelines and standard procedures.
- 4) Continued work by the WCHO Advisory Group to sustain support and provide strategic leadership.

Specific ways the WCHO would achieve the overall goals of the project and the administrative and technical elements include:

- 1) Provide dedicated staffing resources at both PUL and WCM to manage and expand the project.
- 2) Actively solicit involvement from various county heritage organizations during all stages of the project—strategic planning, standards development, website and database design, image gathering, etc.
- 3) Train staff at county heritage organizations in metadata documentation, image selection, identification, scanning, and preservation, and other relevant areas.
- 4) Establish a standard set of guidelines, procedures, and best practices for image processing that will be applied at all county heritage organizations.

- 5) Scan 12,000 images over two years.
- 6) Develop and promote a web presence that is both user-friendly and optimized for Internet searches.

Project Method

The project team clearly identified their objectives on pages E-8 through E-10 of their grant proposal, each with a corresponding expected completion date during each quarter of the first grant year. The team also appended a project timeline to their grant proposal in which the six objectives are clearly noted with their projected quarterly completion dates. A perusal of this appendix, in particular, illustrates clearly the logic behind the project team's approach.

There were some areas of overlap in the timeline between each objective area and the various tasks in each area, but their basic approach proceeded in a logical manner that future project teams would find helpful:

- 1) Establish the administrative structure and technical infrastructure;
- 2) Evaluate existing content and content status and develop collection criteria;
- 3) Determine a core collection to digitize, provide metadata for, and showcase upon website launch;
- 4) Implement collaborative practices, training sessions, and other steps to help sustain the project;
- 5) Promote the project locally, regionally, and nationally.

To centralize the coordination of a project involving multiple institutions and staff and volunteers throughout the county, LSTA funds went toward hiring a Project Manager at .8 full-time employment (FTE). Some LSTA funds went to increase two staffing positions from .8 to 1.0 FTE—one staff member each at PUL and WCM. Funds also went to hire four to six student workers. PUL and WCM also provided, in-kind, a total of .77 FTE staff time.

Other primary areas of LSTA grant funding were to purchase hardware and software for scanning, image refinement, and the image database.

Project Results

By the end of Quarter 1 (May 2011), the project team reported that they were “off to a great start and schedule.” They had their administrative structure largely in place, had initiated community contacts, and had hired staff. They were able to get a start on their Quarter 2 objectives by digitizing a few images and moving forward with establishing their workflow and digitization standards. They also got a start on their Quarter 3 objectives by establishing their wiki page, <http://washingtoncountyheritageproject.pbworks.com/>. Also during Quarter 1, the

team produced “Washington County Heritage Online Training Manual” to disseminate standard practices for choosing, scanning, and adding metadata to images.

Highlights of Quarter 2 included PUL’s hiring a new Special Collections Librarian to replace a retiring staff member. This new hire possessed experience in image preservation and in web-based collections, which meant that she could do work that would otherwise had been contracted-out. The project team also established the metadata schema and digitization standards, and began working with a new community organization, Centro Cultural.

During Quarter 3, the team began building the WCHO website (<http://cdm16047.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/>), uploading metadata to CONTENTdm, and created their training manual. Progress in creating the WCHO website was delayed somewhat. as the team’s initial plan to have a student work on the website fell through. Opportunities to promote the WCHO were enhanced as the Project Manager staffed a table at the Second Annual Archives Crawl in Portland in October, and two team members applied to present at three regional and national conferences in 2012.

As of the end of the third quarter of FY 2011, the WCHO team had scanned 3,640 images and added 709 images to their CONTENTdm system. They had also held twenty-eight community meetings by this date.

Highlights of Quarter 4 included launching the official WCHO website, <http://washingtoncountyheritage.org>.

One particularly noteworthy and unexpected outcome of the project is the active involvement of Centro Cultural as a community partner. This partnership began somewhat serendipitously, as one of Marita’s colleagues is on the board of Centro Cultural. Student workers from Emporia State University scanned and provided metadata for some of Centro Cultural’s images, and this work became an unplanned and much-welcomed addition to the WCHO’s holdings.

Project Impact

The WCHO is an important project with statewide significance, and its overall success during Year 1 of the LSTA grant offers some clear lessons and models.

The project team succinctly stated the long-term significance of their project is in their grant application:

This project will greatly increase public access to the visual history of Washington County, using technologies and standard practices that support broader efforts within the state and region to share and preserve local history.

By leveraging LSTA funds, in-kind staff contributions from PUL and WCM, and volunteer time, the project team was able to serve as the central group to forge connections among institutions county-wide and to establish standards and practices that will broaden the expertise and involvement of participating institutions. This, in turn, will expand and improve the quality of visual historic materials presented in a centralized, readily-accessible online interface.

This project also provided many opportunities to work collaboratively for the benefit of all Washington County residents. This collaborative work occurred within different areas of the respective institutions, but—perhaps more importantly—has also helped to break-down barriers between academic institutions, community-based heritage organizations, and other cultural groups. Creating opportunities for these kinds of collaborative relationships has positive benefits above and beyond the nuts-and-bolts of historic image collection, and gets at the very essence of cultural visibility, appreciation, and empowerment.

The team’s process and deliverables are both models for other projects, in at least the following ways:

- 1) They did not try to “reinvent the wheel” as they went about their work, but, instead, actively sought models of other institutions doing similar work, and they chose their metadata schema and database with functionality and universality at the forefront of their minds.
- 2) Similar to the above, they focused on getting a clear understanding of the scope of the various collections throughout the county so as not to duplicate scanning efforts or scan images that had already been scanned.
- 3) They established a solid base of interest, involvement, and expertise by actively soliciting opportunities to increase collaboration among a wide range of county institutions.
- 4) Rather than being side-tracked by the more outwardly-visible process of securing and scanning images, they focused their first-year efforts on building the kind of administrative and technical foundation upon which the project can be sustained well into the future.

The WCHO project team recognized two broad areas that would be used to evaluate the project. The first was in the areas outlined in the six Objectives of Section C of their grant proposal. These include establishing institutional agreements, creating administrative structure and training materials, engaging in publicity and promotion, digitizing images, and building the website front- and back-ends.

As the team’s quarterly reports illustrate, with two minor and temporary exceptions, the team did achieve their goals on-time. These exceptions involved the process to replace staff at PUL and WCM, and a short delay in building the website due to lack of a student interested in working on it. The most significant manner in which the team did not achieve its Year 1 goals were in not scanning 6,000 images.

Marita admitted that this was a lofty goal on their part, but that, in hindsight, not meeting this particular goal ended up not being of critical importance, because the team's focus on the administrative structures, technical infrastructure, and community partnerships will ensure the project's sustainability well into the future.

The second evaluation area is complementary to the first and involves a different set of quantitative and qualitative data. This evaluation area includes website and web traffic statistics, links from referring websites, user comments, usability testing, and an evaluation meeting of participating institutions planned for the fourth quarter of 2012.

Suggestions for Improvement

The WCHO project team is to be commended for their clear and achievable project plan, and for the ways in which they achieved their Year 1 objectives in a logical, progressive way that ensured a strong foundation for Year 2 and beyond. Project team members have a clear understanding of their purpose and the time that they have allotted to achieve their goals, and they have worked diligently to meet their deadlines. Further, they also have the self-awareness to see clearly when roadblocks (however slight) have arisen and the creativity to work-around these roadblocks to achieve success.

At this time, there are no suggestions for improvement. Success in Year 2 of the LSTA grant is contingent upon the continued dedication of project team members, and there is every reason to believe that this will come to pass.