UKSG

People in the News
Emily Gore

Discussions around the idea of creating a national digital library had been circulating among US librarians and scholars since the early 1990s, to tackle the growing corpus of digitized materials which often sat independently in silos. John Palfrey and Bob Darnton at Harvard began to draw up a plan in 2010, but it was the more formal two-year process which followed, under Maura Marx's leadership as Director of the Secretariat, which helped to design and construct what was to become the Digital Public Library of America, known as the DPLA, Inc.[1], an independent nonprofit organization. Emily Gore was the first employee, hired as Director for Content, and it is this role which has kept Emily in the spotlight since.

Your Editor began by welcoming Emily, and asking what the role of Director for Content involves. "As Director for Content, I am responsible for establishing and maintaining partnerships with hubs, including the initial contractual relationships. I am also responsible for overall content strategy for the DPLA, and I manage a number of our grants." She went on to explain that " … the overarching goal of the DPLA is to establish a national digital library representing content held in the United States' cultural heritage institutions and to provide a discovery interface and API to access that content."

Emily has a vast range of experience with digital content. Before moving to the DPLA, she served as the Associate Dean for Digital Scholarship and Technology at Florida State University (FSU) Libraries, where she established an institutional repository, began building a new Fedora-based repository for digital assets, and was involved with establishing an open access policy on campus. Prior to joining FSU, she held a number of positions at academic and state libraries where she led digitization projects, but also worked on a number of collaborative projects, including NC ECHO in North Carolina and the South Carolina Digital Library in South Carolina. She also successfully bid for over US$2.5 million in grant funds for project/program-based digitization work prior to joining the DPLA.

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When it launched in 2013, Robert Darnton said in the *New York Review of Books* that he thought "… the DPLA represents the confluence of two currents that have shaped American civilization: utopianism and pragmatism … "[2], so your Editor was keen to find out how Emily responds to those comments. "I am not sure that I would have ever thought of the DPLA in terms of utopianism and pragmatism before Bob Darnton wrote this article …" she replied, "… but I definitely understand his analogy. I definitely feel like the DPLA is a pragmatic project. We started with structures that already existed: large repositories of content and state or regional aggregators of content. We didn't

try to build new structures; we simply worked to pull together what has already existed for a number of years. This helped us lay a solid foundation to build upon."

The DPLA launched with just over 2 million records, but this number has climbed significantly, and currently contains approximately 7.5 million records. It is this growth in content that Emily is responsible for. When asked about her strategy for content development over the coming years, Emily replied, "For the next few years, we are looking to build out our hubs model so that there is an easy access route to the DPLA in every state. We want to make sure that all cultural heritage institutions that have content that they want to share with the DPLA have a pathway for doing so." (A tough challenge, indeed, noted your Editor). "Right now, we have Service Hubs established in 10 states and one region, the Mountain West, which currently aggregates content from five states. I am in the process of working with a number of key stakeholders in other states to establish new Service Hubs in their states. We also continue to add a number of Content Hubs, institutions that themselves hold over 200,000 records resolving to digital objects which have a 1–1 relationship with DPLA."

Emily explained, "In addition to building out the current Service and Content Hubs model, we will continue to explore other models for content contribution. We are looking to potentially establish content/format-specific aggregators where needed. These types of aggregation may include institutional repository/scholarly content, A/V materials, or even organizational specific (e.g. a Museum hub) aggregations."
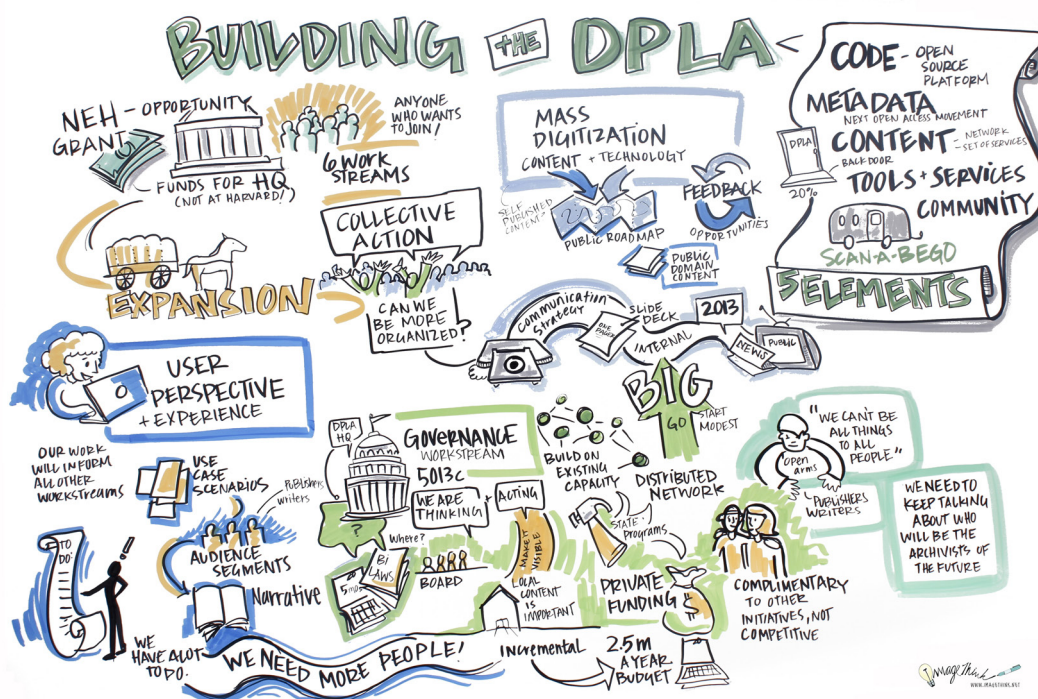
When asked whether the DPLA models itself on similar initiatives around the world or whether she hopes that the DPLA model will be a foundation for others to build on, Emily replied pragmatically, "Both – we follow others closely and we hope that our work will help others…", before going on to explain that "… we work closely with Europeana[3] and have learned a great deal from their work over the past five years or more. Dan Cohen and Jill Cousins, Executive Directors of the DPLA and Europeana, respectively, have regular contact, and we are currently working with Europeana on a rights statement initiative where we hope to establish a set of standardized rights statements for large-scale aggregators to use. We also have regular contact with New Zealand and Australia, who have built a number of tools that we are looking to potentially reuse." Looking at the global aspect, she said, "We also hope that the DPLA itself will be a model for others to build on. We have already seen this happen in Serbia, where our open source code has been reused to establish a national aggregation and discovery layer. We hope that others will do the same as we refine our current set of tools."

It seemed to your Editor that the DPLA is already finding its place in the global infrastructure, so Emily was asked about her vision for the DPLA. "I want to see the DPLA be representative of all cultural heritage institutions in the US. I think that it is important that we continue to find ways to make sure that small institutions, which often hold a lot of rich content, are able to be active participants in the DPLA." Most importantly, she added, "… I also want to see the DPLA used by the public. I want the DPLA to become a household name. On the global scale, I want to make sure that our data is interoperable so that others can make use of the data our partners supply. I also think there are a number of issues that national-scale aggregators can work to tackle together, like the rights initiative we are currently working on with Europeana."

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That is no small challenge, so your Editor asked Emily what she sees as the major obstacles to achieving that vision. Unsurprisingly, she responded that "Funding is probably the largest obstacle, at least right now. Many of the Service Hubs are not well funded at the state level, and because our model relies heavily on this one-to-many relationship, I think that this is a key issue that needs to be addressed. At present, the funding varies from state to state and there is no formulaic funding. I would definitely like to see that change… ", before going on to add, "Funding for core DPLA staffing and services is also an obstacle. There are a number of grant funders who are committed to the DPLA, but we are looking to establish a sustainable business model in the coming year where we will have a diverse mix of funding, instead of being reliant only on grant and foundation funding."

Despite what has been achieved already, it is clear that there are still significant challenges ahead. Your Editor asked Emily whether there are things that have been achieved (locally or globally) that have given her confidence in taking forward the DPLA. She replied, enthusiastically, "Absolutely. I feel like the DPLA has a lot of momentum because of what we have been able to achieve in a short time. The establishing of and participation in the DPLA has really given new life to a number of digital libraries, including the statewide aggregations." Here she cited the example of traffic to the Mountain West Digital Library, which has risen over 100% since joining the DPLA. "Institutions who never participated in these aggregations are contacting their state service hubs and wanting to participate because they want to be a part of the DPLA. The DPLA has established itself as a program to be a part of – a program that cultural heritage institutions want to be a part of." As testament to this growing reputation, Brett Bobley, CIO at the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), recently said that in his mind "all roads lead to DPLA," and that when proposals are submitted, they are analyzed for how they will fit with the DPLA. He encouraged other funders to think the same way.

> "The DPLA has established itself as a program to be a part of …"

"This all gives me confidence that the future is bright for the DPLA and our partners," Emily said, but, when asked if she could say/ask just one thing of the global knowledge community, replied, "We are all working on similar issues. Wouldn't it be ideal for us to work together, across borders, to tackle these issues together? I think collaboration is the key to broad success. I also think we all have a responsibility to help each other. We are better together than alone."

On that optimistic note, your Editor drew the interview to a conclusion, leaving Emily to head off and enjoy some leisure time. "As a remote employee at the DPLA, I actually live at the beach in North Carolina, where I grew up, after being gone from here for nearly 20 years. Since moving back, I enjoy spending most of my free time on the water with family and friends when it comes time to relax. My motto in life is definitely 'work hard, play hard'."

References

1. The DPLA:
    http://dp.la

2. Darnton, R, The National Public Digital Library Is Launched!, *New York Review of Books,* 25 April 2013:
    http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/apr/25/national-digital-public-library-launched/?pagination=false (accessed 30 May 2014).

3. For more information on the setting up of Europeana, see: Cousins, J, The cultural heritage of Europe: building the value proposition for Europeana, *Serials*, 24(1), 69–78:
    http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/2469