

1) Community:

The Digital Public Library of America's main mission is to collect and freely distribute unique resources from libraries, archives, and museums around the country. DPLA strives to provide access to resources across all subjects to a global audience. DPLA uses its portal to make items more discoverable, its application programming interface platform to increase resource usability, and has a strong commitment to keep access free to the public.

DPLA was developed between 2011 and 2013. The process began in Cambridge, MA during a meeting of over 40 leaders from information institutions around the United States in October of 2010. The idea was to create "an open, distributed network of comprehensive online resources that would draw on the nation's living heritage from libraries, universities, archives, and museums in order to educate, inform, and empower everyone in current and future generations (DPLA, 2016)." Development began at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University a year later. Supported by the Alfred P. Sloan foundation, DPLA was created and is now run by Executive Director Dan Cohen, a board of directors comprised of experts all over the country, and a staff of ten. The collection itself is maintained not just by DPLA's staff, but also by Service Hubs—institutions meant to maintain and edit metadata, digitize physical objects, and trouble shoot technical issues.

DPLA is funded by a myriad of foundations and government agencies. Such funding allows them to keep the library public and continue to expand its collection aided by institutions nationwide. Support is provided by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Arcadia Fund, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Whiting Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and an anonymous donor from August of 2013.

2) Content:

In keeping with its mission, DPLA has materials from libraries, archives, and museums from across the United States. The collection comes from the Content and Services Hubs, made up of large digital libraries, repositories, archives, and museums from at least 40 states. The materials are made up of manuscripts, sound recordings, photographs, videos, books, and special exhibits.

DPLA's unique collection, in turn, requires a unique collection development policy. DPLA acquires digital and surrogate copies of materials belonging to other institutions. Thus, DPLA has a Metadata Policy Statement rather than a collection development policy. The policy is easily accessible on the "About" page of their website. Said policy fully outlines Content: an object that is in digital surrogate, born-digital, or physical form and is "part of the United States' cultural or scientific heritage (2016);", Metadata: textual information relating to the Content which aids patrons to discover and use the collection; and Preview: Content reduced in size as a

preview of the material. All content is usually held and maintained by the providers' servers or on their premises. Metadata also includes hyperlinks to the provider's webpage, and is not embedded in preview information.

Apart from the initial definitions regarding the collection, four main rules apply to the metadata policy. The majority of the metadata supplied by a Content Hub must not be subject to copyright restrictions, partners of DPLA must share its vision of free public dissemination of information, all content in DPLA's database must be in the Public Domain, and all users must have unimpeded access to DPLA's metadata.

As stated above, DPLA has a unique way of accessioning resources. It does so through its Content and Service Hubs, institutions across the nation that provide metadata and content to DPLA's servers. As of now, only Hubs can contribute objects to DPLA's collections; however, they do provide information for those who wish to apply to work for a current hub or to become a Content or Service Hub.

DPLA has developed a website which is simple to navigate. The homepage leads you through five different ways to search for content: a link to its primary source collection, a general search bar, a link to DPLA's special exhibitions—held in alphabetical order, a search for content by geographic region, and a search for content by time period.

DPLA has an atypical relationship with its partners. DPLA is not connected to one physical library. In order to fulfill its vision, DPLA has partnered with not only physical libraries, but digital libraries, museums, and archives. Each contributor helps DPLA's team in maintaining content, digitizing, editing metadata, providing host servers, and more. The endeavor would fail without each party's commitment to the cause of free, public information.

3) Services:

The entire point of DPLA is for a global audience to be able to access its content. So in theory, anyone with access to the internet can access DPLA's collection. DPLA can be accessed through its website, <https://dp.la>. Much of the content can also be accessed through its respective host site; however, it may be easier to search for through DPLA.

Another promotional tool used for discoverability is social media. DPLA's vision to create a free, public library full of culturally and scientifically unique objects of American History must still be aided by advertisement and promotion. DPLA has a blog, DPLA Blog, a Facebook account, Twitter account, and Tumblr account with which to promote new collections and featured exhibitions in the library.

DPLA's website is designed in such a way as to make browsing easy. There are tabs at the top of each webpage where a user may browse by alphabetically by subject, by partner, by exhibition, map—geographic browse, or timeline. There is also a master search bar on each page: in the center of the homepage, and the top right corner of each subsequent page. Finally, selecting an object is a simple two-step process. Once a user has found the intended object,

he/she can click on the title, which will lead to the metadata page with accompanying preview. There is a hyperlink under the image leading to the host institution page containing the object. Once clicked on, the user then has full access to the object.

To test how easily objects might be found from outside DPLA, I used Google to search for two items. The first was a page of music from the ragtime opera “Watch Your Step.” The second was an article, broadcast, and photographs of President Roosevelt during the Great Depression. I typed in the title of the opera and “sheet music.” The first result was the collection from NY Public Library, which provides the content for DPLA—from which you are taken straight to the NYPL page. So searching Google was slightly more efficient than searching DPLA. For the second object, I searched “Franklin Roosevelt, depression-era president.” The third result was the DPLA page containing the article. Thus, I can conclude that DPLA works very hard to make their collection discoverable.

Due to the unique nature of DPLA’s setup, they only offer a limited reference service. DPLA staff are willing and able to aid users in using DPLA or finding materials in the collections; however, they do not provide instruction or in depth research help like one might find in a physical library.

4) Technology

In the same location where the above explanation of reference/instructional services is found, a list of software used by DPLA is provided. However, there is no indication as to what hardware might be used by DPLA or its partners. DPLA uses the Akara framework and Python programming language to ingest data into the DPLA Metadata Application Profile. They store the data in CouchDB, which is an open source database. DPLA’s platform is a Ruby on Rails application used in conjunction with Elasticsearch search index. DPLA’s portal is also built using Ruby on Rails as well as PostgreSQL, and JavaScript libraries Backbone.js, Leaflet, and jQuery. Finally, the DPLA Exhibitions are built with Omeka, the zoomable feature provided by OpenSeadragon JavaScript Library (2016).

DPLA’s relationship with its partners is such that most objects link out to their home institutions, many of which are other digital libraries. These can be found on the Partners page, where each partner institution is listed and hyperlinked to their respective websites.

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References

DPLA. (2016, May 3). DPLA: Digital Public Library of America. Retrieved from <http://dp.la>.