

Digitization selection criteria

Selecting and prioritizing materials for digitization involves several distinct yet interrelated factors that involve patron service, collection integrity and budgetary considerations, including:

Scarcity. Is the item rare? Could it be replaced if it disappeared? Even if the item is not generally rare, would it be difficult for a library or research institution to obtain additional or replacement copies?

Access Relative to Research Availability. Is the item available and replaceable, but relatively inaccessible (relative to its research significance) in the collection? For example, a special section published in an unindexed local newspaper (that a library owns on microfilm) about the local high school's grand opening in the early 1900s might warrant the greater prominence that an electronically-published version would provide. This might replace or supplement the genre of items for which libraries, in a pre-Internet era, may have kept index or Rolodex card 'fact files' or 'fugitive fact files.'

Physical Condition and Format. Are originals of the item, whether rare or not, fragile or susceptible to damage, such as 1930s-era city directories that printed on highly acidic paper? Was the original document compiled in a format—in a loose-leaf or scrapbook, for example—that lends itself poorly to standard library organization, shelving, or use? Does the format of the information lend itself particularly well to display in an electronic medium—such as photographic and visual collections generally (and especially photo collections with captions and text that can be replicated with enhanced access in an electronic version)?

Intrinsic/Inherent/Monetary Value. Does the item have characteristics, beyond the intellectual information it contains, that would give it monetary value? An item's age, the circumstances regarding its creation, a signature, or attached seal, for example, might enhance an item's desirability as an artifact and/or collectible item. The owning library, to keep its collection intact and to satisfy its fiduciary responsibility to the public, has an interest in safeguarding such items appropriately.

Informational Value. What information does the item provide about persons, places, subjects, etc. beyond the entity that created the record? Genealogists and historians are keenly interested in the information held, for example, in information-dense works such as city directories, and finding aids such as indexes to historically significant texts. The capability to search for specific text in electronic documents can enhance the access to many such works beyond that in the print version.

Evidential Value. In archival parlance, this refers to the degree to which items shed light on the creator of the document. While this factor would be more important, for example, to a library with a special collection focusing on a particular individual or agency, other libraries' patrons may be interested to a similar extent in at least a community's most well-known or prominent citizens.

Archival/Historical/Continuing/Enduring Value. How does the item, beyond the intellectual information it contains, its rarity, and its monetary value, reflect some aspect of the community in a significant way? Would making the image of such a document available on the Web demonstrate and illuminate that significance?

Cost Effectiveness, Added Value of Additional Features, and Budgetary

Circumstances. In ranking potential subjects for digitization projects, whether done in-house or through a contractor, the following considerations may apply that are reflected in the expense of scanning and electronically publishing:

- scanning color mode—whether the item can be replicated well through black and white or grayscale images only, or if color is necessary
- original size—if pages can be scanned without premiums for oversize materials
- .pdf versus .html for text documents—assess the added value of scanning an original versus simply rekeying the text into a word processing program and posting the information as an .html document
- text searching—consider whether text searching would be a desirable feature, warranting an additional expense for OCR processing
- variety of formats—decide whether the type and frequency of use for the item would warrant reprinting of bound copies in print format in addition to electronic formats
- Finally, identify projects (especially higher cost projects) for which the added value of digitization could be expressed convincingly enough to warrant pursuit of grant funding from local foundations, LSTA, or other sources.

Copyright and Other Intellectual Rights. Does the library own the item or have easily obtainable permission to intellectual rights if an affiliated governmental entity produced the item? Is it in the public domain? Has copyright on the item expired? Is it possible to obtain rights to produce electronic copies and electronically publish the item, with or without conditions?

Administrative/Operational Value. In archival parlance, this is the value that the item has to an agency in the conduct of current business. A library would not generally encounter this situation with items in its collection per se. However, a library might find digitization of library-related historical newspaper articles and selected items from library administrative archives to be useful for public relations purposes, e.g., in describing the library's legacy of service to the community, or in providing such historical or administrative support to the municipality or other entity with which it is affiliated.