



Sustaining & Growing
The Opening Archives In Florida Project:
Report of Ad Hoc Project Advisory Group Meeting

May 28, 2008

Introduction

In the spring of 2008, FCLA received unsolicited funds from the State Library and Archives of Florida, to continue training and consulting activities for staff of archives, museums, libraries and other organizations in Florida holding rare and unique collections. The only constraints on this funding were that FCLA expend the funds and complete all project activity by September 30, 2008, a date only five months after the funding became available. The goals of this new project, as with the 2005-2006 *Opening Archives in Florida* project, are to raise the general level of technical expertise among archivists in the state, to promote the use of the Encoded Archival Description standard in Florida, and to increase archival information sharing in the state by encouraging Florida's cultural heritage institutions to contribute copies of encoded archival finding aids (inventories) to a statewide database hosted by FCLA, named *Archives Florida*.

As round two of the *Opening Archives in Florida* project commences, FCLA thought it was important to host a meeting of an advisory group, to advise FCLA on some technology-related issues identified during the first year of project activity. Some of those issues, as explained in a 2006 project report to the State Library and Archives, are:

- The future outlook for EAD as the main standard for archival information sharing.
- Which technologies and tools should FCLA support for creating encoded finding aids?
- How to support a growing network of partners with varying capabilities and workflows.
- Making contribution to the *Archives Florida* database as easy as possible for partners.
- Recognizing some archives may also share information with other services.
- Maintaining and updating the *Opening Archives in Florida* training curriculum.
- Most appropriate governance and administration model as the initiative grows.
- Policies to ensure quality and appropriateness of inventories in *Archives Florida*.

FCLA held an *ad hoc* technology advisory group meeting, May 28, 2008 at FCLA headquarters to discuss these topics. The advisory group consisted of grant project partners and other SUS Libraries representatives who were able to attend the meeting in Gainesville with approximately ten days' advance notice. Those present at the meeting included:

Project Staff

Chuck Thomas (Florida Center for Library Automation) – project manager
Melissa Finley Gonzalez (University of West Florida) – project co-trainer
John Nemmers (University of Florida) – project co-trainer
Kyle Rimkus (University of Miami) – project co-trainer
Eddie Woodward (Florida State University) – project co-trainer

Other SUS Libraries Representatives

Judith Beale (University of Central Florida)
Tomaro Taylor (University of South Florida)

Recommendations

Based on these topics, the ad hoc advisory group made the following recommendations:

1. Encoded Archival Description should remain the primary standard promoted and supported by *Opening Archives in Florida*, and by the *Archives Florida* database.

A May 27, 2008 conference call of the SUS Special Collections Subcommittee emphasized EAD as the main standard being supported across archives and special collections in the SUS Libraries. In fact, many of those archivists who participated in that conference call agreed that they are more likely to be able to support EAD than MARC descriptions of their collections, because of organizational and workflow divisions that leave finding aid creation in the hands of archivists, but separate MARC record creation as the responsibility of another division. EAD is strongly supported within SUS Libraries.

Although creating EAD-encoded finding aids still requires significant investments by libraries and archives, the number of organizations creating EAD inventories continues to increase, and EAD is still the most appropriate standard for the types of archival information sharing that drives the *Opening Archives in Florida* project. Although new softwares such as Archon and the Archivist's Toolkit permit organizations to describe, manage and share information about collections via databases on the Web, meeting participants agreed that EAD (strongly supported by both of these softwares and by the DigiTool platform on which *Archives Florida* runs) provides the greatest assurances of interoperability, portability, and persistence for archival finding aids.

On a related note, meeting participants agreed the *Archives Florida* database should continue to contain only EAD-encoded inventories, not inventories in other formats, nor links to collection descriptions stored externally.

Action Items: 1) Continue to emphasize EAD standard in training; 2) continue to enforce only validated EAD-encoded finding aids as content for the *Archives Florida* database.

2. To encourage growth of the *Archives Florida* database, FCLA and its *Opening Archives in Florida* partners should support the existing NoteTab templates, but should also support other complementary technologies, tools and strategies.

a. The existing, customizable NoteTab templates maintained by FCLA have been very helpful for many organizations wishing to create EAD-encoded finding aids. Advisory group participants voiced strong support for continuing to provide these templates and documentation on the project website, and to use the templates during introductory EAD workshops.

b. FCLA already is aware of other emerging tools available to help archives describe and manage their collections, and have made a good decision to support use of the Archon software for those SUS institutions who find it to be an appropriate solution for their

needs. The advisory group recommended that FCLA, as the coordinating partner for Opening Archives in Florida take the following actions regarding Archon:

- Support SUS Libraries by continuing to implement, maintain and customize Archon for those SUS libraries and archives that wish to use it;
- Emphasize (via training, consulting, documentation, development, etc.) Archon's utility as a tool for generating valid EAD-encoded finding aids, with the goal of generating and exporting EAD finding aids for import into the *Archives Florida* database;
- Develop a small segment of the Introduction to EAD workshop devoted to Archon;
- Share information with external partners in Florida, about ways to customize and optimize Archon as a tool for creating and sharing EAD finding aids in *Archives Florida*;
- Serve as a primary contact point with the Archon software developers at UIUC, to report software problems, enhancement requests, etc.
- Analyze EAD output from Archon and develop a small add-on NoteTab script that will optimize Archon-generated EAD for the *Archives Florida* database.

c. Many organizations wishing to creating encoded finding aids discover encoding container lists of “descriptions of subordinate components” is the most technically challenging aspect of using EAD. Based partially on this knowledge, and also on the success of FCLA's web-based EAD validation service (<http://good-ead.fcla.edu>) the advisory group agreed unanimously that a web-based form to generate top-level collection descriptions, minus the container lists, would likely generate substantially more valid EAD-encoded finding aids for inclusion in *Archives Florida*. Specifications for such a web-based form, drafted by Chuck Thomas are attached as Appendix A.

d. Though a roving EAD encoder is an expensive, unsustainable service, the advisory group and participants in the May 28, 2008 conference call of the SUS Special Collections Subcommittee agreed on the value of such an expert, and encourage FCLA to include a roving encoder in any future archives-related grant requests to state, national or other funding agencies.

Action Items: 1) Continue to teach with and support use of NoteTab templates; 2) Add small section about Archon to EAD training curriculum; 3) develop a NoteTab clean-up script so Archon EAD exports are optimized for *Archives Florida* ingest.

3. FCLA should explore creating an OAI-PMH metadata harvester that can routinely harvest EAD finding aids from metadata provider sites that register with the harvester.

The OAI-PMH protocol is capable of harvesting metadata in many formats besides Dublin Core, including EAD. An EAD harvester administered by FCLA would make routine submission and updating of EAD inventories to Archives Florida easier for many institutions. Advisory group participants were enthusiastic about the prospect of such a service.

Action Items: n/a

4. The *Archives Florida* database eventually will need to support more than one stylesheet for displaying EAD inventories. FCLA and its partners should anticipate this necessity and make provisions and policies for when and how to permit use of multiple stylesheets for rendering EAD inventories via *Archives Florida*.

FCLA and *Opening Archives in Florida* partners have been aware of the eventual need to support the use of multiple stylesheets, so that as an increasing variety of valid encoding patterns are seen in finding aids ingested into *Archives Florida*, they can be displayed with no problem. Maintaining one stylesheet that can anticipate all of the possible variations in valid EAD encoding is an unrealistic expectation, though this strategy has worked well to date.

Advisory group participants favored allowing different XSLT stylesheets to be supported in DigiTool, as long as each stylesheet includes some common header components when finding aids are displayed (e.g., a search box, an Archives Florida link or logo, and support for institutional branding in a manner much like the current level of branding).

The simplest way to support use of multiple stylesheets might be to expand the EAD object class in DigiTool, so that class “EAD” uses one stylesheet, class “EADxxx” uses another stylesheet, etc. For those current or future project partners who wish to create and use their own XSLT stylesheet (assuming it meets some established criteria), FCLA could adopt a “you maintain the stylesheet, we’ll use the stylesheet for your finding aids” practice.

Advisory Group participants agreed the need for at least a second stylesheet is likely to occur within the next several months, and while the *Opening Archives in Florida* initiative is once again active with grant funding, it might be a good time to develop the capability and plans for this expansion.

Action Items: 1) Establish policy or guidelines on when new stylesheets will be supported, and 2) Implement support in DigiTool for multiple EAD object classes.

5. The Opening Archives in Florida project website should be updated.

Action Items: Needed changes are 1) an updated look, 2) reorganization and addition of new documentation and new, and 3) More emphasis on regional EAD experts as contacts.

Appendix A: Specifications for a Web-based Collection Description Form

1. This form should be linked to from the current FCLA “Good EAD” website at <http://good-ead.fcla.edu>.
2. The final output of information entered into the web-based form should be exportable as well-formed XML that can be validated against the EAD Document Type Definition.
3. The Web-based form should function so that Web users with a standards-compliant Web browser can come to the site, enter data into a simple form, enter an email address, and have the final XML output from the form emailed to the address they provided, along with instructions about how to proceed with having the finding aid ingested into *Archives Florida*.
4. Fields with empty values should be suppressed to avoid empty XML tags without values.
5. Each field should be set to accept 500 characters max, except for the “bioghist” and “collscope” fields, which should accept 2500 characters max, and have the ability to break the text into paragraphs.
6. The data entry fields defined in the form should be:

Archive Name	[fieldname = archname]
Archive AddressLine1 (required field)	[fieldname = archaddress1]
Archive AddressLine2 (required field)	[fieldname = archaddress2]
Archive AddressLine3 (required field)	[fieldname = archaddress3]
Archive Email Address (required field)	[fieldname = youremail]
Archive MARC Agency Code (required field)	[fieldname = marcagency]
Collection Inventory Author	[fieldname = invauthor]
Collection Title (required field)	[fieldname = colltitle]
Collection Identifier (required field)	[fieldname = collid]
Inclusive Collection Dates	[fieldname = colldate]
Extent (2 fields)	
Number	[fieldname = extentnum]
Unit (dropdown choice list)	[fieldname = extentunit; permissible values of “Boxes”, “Folders”, “Items”, “Cubic Feet”, “Linear Feet”]
Collection Creator	[fieldname = collcreator]
Biographical Note	[fieldname = bioghist]
Collection Scope Note	[fieldname = collscope]
Collection Abstract	[fieldname = collabstract]
Indexing Terms	[fieldname = subjects]
Language(s) of Materials in Collection	[fieldname = languages]
Access Restrictions	[fieldname = accessrestrict]
Use Restrictions	[fieldname = userrestrict]
Acquisition Information	[fieldname = acqinfo]
Preferred Citation Format	[fieldname = prefercite]
Related Materials	[fieldname = related]

7. The XML output of the form should be according to the following pattern:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="ISO-8859-1"?>
<!DOCTYPE ead PUBLIC "-//ISBN 1-931666-00-8//DTD ead.dtd
(Encoded Archival Description (EAD) Version 2002)//EN" "ead.dtd">

<ead>

<eadheader countryencoding="iso3166-1" repositoryencoding="iso15511">

<eadid countrycode="us" mainagencycode="[marcagency]"
publicid="-/us::[marcagency]//TEXT us::[marcagency]::[collid]//EN">[collid]</eadid>

<filedesc>
<titlestmt>
<titleproper>[colltitle]</titleproper>
<author>[collcreator]</author>
</titlestmt>

<publicationstmt>
<publisher id="[marcagency]">[archname]</publisher>
<address>
<addressline>[archaddress1]</addressline>
<addressline>[archaddress2]</addressline>
<addressline>[archaddress3]</addressline>
</address>
</publicationstmt>
</filedesc>

<profiledesc>
<creation>
<date>[auto-insert today's date as YYYYMMDD]</date>
</creation>
</profiledesc>

</eadheader>

<archdesc level="collection">
<did>
<unitid>[collid]</unitid>
<unittitle>[colltitle]</unittitle>
<unitdate>[colldate]</unitdate>
<physdesc>
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</physdesc>
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<origination>[collcreator]</origination>
<langmaterial>[languages]</langmaterial>
<repository>[archname]</repository>
</did>

<accessrestrict><p>[accessrestrict]</p></accessrestrict>
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<prefercite><p>[prefercite]</p></prefercite>

<bioghist>
 <p>[bioghist]</p>
</bioghist>

<scopecontent>
 <p>[collscope]</p>
</scopecontent>

<controlaccess>
 <p>The following indexing terms were used for this collection: [subjects].</p>
</controlaccess>

<relatedmaterial><p>[related]</p></relatedmaterial>