

October 23, 2006

Narrative Final Report: LSTA-05-F-03

Opening Archives: Improving Access to Primary Sources in Florida

I. Abstract

The Florida Center for Library Automation (FCLA) was awarded a \$34,000 LSTA grant to encourage through training and consulting the creation and sharing of encoded electronic inventories of collections in cultural heritage repositories such as libraries, archives, museums, historical societies and government agencies throughout Florida. As a result of LSTA funding, FCLA and its partners created and promoted best practices and standards for creating and sharing encoded archival inventories; created a training curriculum and accompanying freely distributable tools and templates; trained 80 participants from 41 organizations, performed multiple follow-up site visits and consulting; established a large number of new partners committed to using the same descriptive standards for their research collections; and increased the number of organizations contributing electronic encoded inventories to a shared *Archival Collections* database hosted by FCLA. Post-training surveys of workshop participants indicate FCLA can expect the number of organizations contributing to this database to increase significantly within the next year. Additionally, this project yielded valuable data about the technology training needs within Florida's archives and repositories.

II. Introduction

LSTA-05-F-03 was funded with two primary intended outcomes:

- Outcome #1: Librarians, archivists and curators learn to use technology that makes hidden archival collections available to the public via the Internet

This first outcome was to be achieved by developing a training curriculum on the Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard, and conducting three regional workshops in Florida, with a goal of training 60 participants (from an estimated 10-20 organizations) + 3 regional co-trainers in the use of this standard; and providing them with freely distributable tools for creating EAD-encoded finding aids (guides) to their organization's cultural heritage collections.

Key indicators for this outcome were:

- Number of finding aids created by participants following training
- Increase in EAD finding aids contributed to FCLA database
- Number of participants indicating they learned EAD
- Number of co-trainers indicating they learned to teach others EAD
- Number of participants indicating they will integrate EAD into local workflow

- Outcome #2: Public uses technology to get information on primary sources from Florida institutions

Key indicators for this outcome were:

- Number of people who access finding aids via the FCLA database
- Increase in inquiries regarding finding aids in FCLA database

III. Project Activities

During the funded period, FCLA and its partners on this grant performed or exceeded (indicated by *) all activities described in the original proposal, including:

Planning & Development

- Hired Lead Trainer
- Conducted a training needs assessment survey (75 respondents)
- Developed a “Florida EAD Best Practices” guideline document
- Developed an EAD training curriculum
- Created EAD training workbooks for workshops
- Created a suite of free EAD tools including templates, stylesheets
- Evaluated curriculum & tools
- Trained 3 regional co-trainers
- Scheduled and publicized workshops
- Wrote mid-term report

Training & Support

- * Conducted regional workshops (3 promised, 4 actually conducted)
- * Trained participants (60 promised from 10-20 organizations; 80 from 41 organizations actually trained)
- Follow-up site visits to 5 sites, plus multiple follow-up emails to all participants

Development of FCLA Archival Collections Database

- Collected EAD-encoded finding aids created by participants (see discussion section)
- Added new finding aids to FCLA database
- * Created collection home pages for new contributors (actually migrating to new system and re-branding FCLA database as “Archives Florida”; see discussion section)

Evaluation

- Conducted trainee evaluations at end of workshops
- Conducted post-workshop assessments by trainers
- Consultant evaluation following first workshop
- Conducted final survey of participants
- Collected Archival Collections server data

Dissemination

- Promoted workshops via listservs of regional library networks, the State Library of Florida, and a project website
- * Published article in *Florida Libraries* on the project
- * Oct. 2005: Presentation to representatives of State University Libraries
- * Submitted presentation proposal to Society of American Archivists conference

IV. Discussion

Activities

Due to extensive prior planning and experience managing grant projects, project staff encountered very few difficulties expending project funds as described in the original proposal. Staff hiring and equipment purchases were completed within weeks of the grant award. Project consultants and workshop host organizations (Florida State University, the Tampa Bay Library Consortium, the Southeast Florida Library Information Network, and the University of Central Florida) all met their obligations and delivered excellent services both to FCLA and to workshop trainees.

A training curriculum was developed, along with accompanying *Florida EAD Best Practices Guidelines*, distributable recommended models for encoding inventories, stylesheets, a training workbook, templates designed to run in the free NoteTab software, and other helpful tools for trainees. Many of these materials are now available on the project website at <<http://www.fcla.edu/dlini/OpeningArchives/>>. Consultant Katherine Wisser of the NC-ECHO project provided helpful guidance and examples of materials used by NC-ECHO in a similar statewide training program. Additionally, at several points during the grant project, she reviewed periodic modifications and expansions of the curricular materials created by project staff. Prior to conducting the workshops, a “train the co-trainers” workshop was held at Florida State University. The co-trainers provided valuable suggestions on modifications to the curriculum, which were implemented before the first workshop.

Though 3 workshops originally were planned, a total of 4 workshops actually were delivered in 2006:

- April 10-11 @ Broward County Public Library
- May 9-10 @ Florida State University Libraries
- June 1-2 @ Tampa Bay Library Consortium facility
- Sept. 7-8 @ University of Central Florida Libraries

A total of 80 trainees attended from 41 organizations, including:

1. Barry University
2. Broward Community College
3. Citrus County Library System
4. College Center for Library Automation

5. Embry-Riddle University
6. Fairchild Tropical Botanical Gardens
7. Florida A & M University Libraries
8. Florida Atlantic University Libraries
9. Florida International University Libraries
10. Florida State University Libraries
11. Historical Museum of South Florida
12. Institute on WWII and the Human Experience
13. Jacksonville Public Library
14. JM Family Enterprises
15. Maitland Historical Society
16. Miami Dade College
17. Miami Dade Public Library
18. Miami Herald Media Company
19. Monroe County, FL
20. Nova Southeastern University
21. Orange County Regional History Center
22. Palm Beach Community College
23. Palm Beach Preservation Foundation Archives & Library
24. Polk County Library Cooperative
25. Ringling Museum of Art
26. Rollins College
27. National Park Service
28. Saint Thomas University
29. Sanibel Island Library
30. Southwest Florida Library Network
31. St. Augustine Historical Society
32. St. Petersburg College
33. State Library of Florida
34. Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library
35. University of Central Florida Libraries
36. University of North Florida
37. University of South Florida Libraries
38. University of South Florida. School of Library & Information Science
39. University of West Florida Libraries
40. Wakulla County Public Library
41. Winter Park Public Library

As the Evaluation section explains below, participants found the workshops to be very valuable. Based on requests, follow-up site visits were conducted at the University of West Florida, Rollins College, Winter Park Public Library, Florida International University, and St. Petersburg College. These visits included review of workshop material, analysis of local collections and workflow with subsequent modifications to the templates and tools distributed to participants, and recommendations on integrating EAD into collection arrangement and description functions. A librarian at one visited site subsequently informed her manager:

“[Our] Archives is now the Proud Owner of a 21st century resource, a Finding Aid written in EAD format! I am tremendously excited, and grateful to [Lead Trainer] Chuck Thomas who, with his colleague, spent all day yesterday assisting me in this endeavor.”

Throughout the workshops and follow-up visits, project staff frequently promoted the Opening Archives project, particularly the goal of more organizations statewide contributing encoded collection inventories to the *Archival Collections* statewide database maintained by FCLA. As a direct result of LSTA funding, FCLA added inventories from five new contributing partners within less than six months of commencing training. As the Evaluation section below explains, FCLA expects many more new contributing partners within the next year. The *Archival Collections* database currently is being migrated to new software, so a new version that includes inventories from these new contributors will be online by the end of 2006 under the new identity *Archives Florida* (see <http://palmm.fcla.edu/digitalComps/archiveComps.html> for a preview)

Only two modifications to the original work plan are worth mentioning:

1. Professor Elizabeth Yakel of the University of Michigan originally was slated as a second consultant to review to training curriculum. However, project staff determined adequate review was conducted with consultant Katherine Wisser, and through the “train the co-trainers” test of the curriculum. With Prof. Yakel’s agreement, these funds (\$800) were re-allocated to support the extra workshop offered Sept. 7-8 at the University of Central Florida.
2. The original grant budget included \$600 to purchase the 60 copies of the “commercial” version of the NoteTab text processing software for workshop attendees. However, project staff concluded the “light” free version of the software was suitable for training and distribution, and that the \$600 could be better used to produce more substantial training workbooks.

Both of these reallocations were approved by the State Library of Florida and were consistent with the terms of FCLA’s grant.

Participant Feedback

Throughout the funded period of activity, project staff received useful feedback through surveys, questionnaires and general emails. Some of the feedback was practical suggestions on how to improve the training, curricular materials, etc, and these suggestions often were adopted. Much of the feedback was encouragement for our efforts, and confirmation of the value of the “Opening Archives” project. Following are some representative comments received through various channels:

[Regarding the Workshops]

"Thank you for organizing this important educational program for Florida archivists."

"[The workshop] was an excellent workshop. I am now aware of the following, that I did not know before the workshop: 1) how [FCLA] will assist and provide server 2) the appropriate software 3) the potential that EAD can offer us 4) enough knowledge to be able to apply for funding for hiring a FT person to create EAD finding aids."

"Everyone I've talked to has found [the workshop] valuable and there's a need for more people to be trained."

"This is a really fabulous project. With so many in the museum and archives field in Florida lacking basic training and knowledge to preserve and process the precious collections in their care there is a huge need for training that emphasizes the basics as well as best practices for archival arrangement and description. My staff came back from the workshop feeling they learned just as much about best practices and arrangement and description as they did about EAD, and I feel much more confident in my skills. Thank you!"

"I learned a lot more than I expected."

"I totally admire [the trainers]. They were amazing. They had great knowledge and were wonderful trainers. They were among a few great instructors I've ever had. They were well paced, patient, and extremely knowledgeable. Thanks to [the trainers] and kudos to FCLA, SEFLIN and others who made this workshop possible."

[Regarding EAD and their organizations]

"Currently, we do not have any online access for patrons; staff do searches in-house using a database. So, anything would be an improvement."

"It has proven to be useful to patrons already. Some of them are using our collections that have been encoded in EAD because they've discovered them online."

"I believe that patrons are more interested in obtaining the access than the method they use to achieve it. However, the more points of access available, the better."

"Yes, because of the unique nature of our collections, we regularly get inquiries from through the country and internationally. Our patrons are a mix of genealogists and scholars. EADs would help our patrons be more specific in their

requests which would in turn facilitate our ability to handle requests more quickly and handle more requests. It would also save many of our patrons from the necessity of a site visit."

"Yes. we currently have no online access, so why not follow the standard when making online access available?"

[Regarding Likelihood of Contributing to a Statewide Database]

"Yes, as time and staff allows. We have applied for grant funding from the NHPRC and if awarded we will hire a full time archivist for description, EAD encoding and marking up in XML for inclusion in PALMM."

"We plan to contribute them."

"Yes, as they are created."

"Yes, definitely. We want researchers to find out about our collections through as many different paths as possible."

"Yes, if we can develop the expertise to contribute finding aids and the other technological capabilities that go along with this, we will certainly participate in the state wide Union Database."

"Although we have not yet contributed finding aids, I expect to do so in the coming year."

Evaluation

The Opening Archives Project outcomes stated earlier were:

- Outcome #1: Librarians, archivists and curators learn to use technology that makes hidden archival collections available to the public via the Internet

In the initial training needs assessment survey of organizations throughout the Florida, 88% of 75 respondents indicated their organizations would likely contribute EAD finding aids to a statewide database such as FCLA's *Archival Collections*, but that nearly 75% of them has little or knowledge of how to create EAD finding aids. These results strengthened the rationale behind FCLA's original request for LSTA funding.

Workshop participants were required to complete survey questionnaires immediately before and after training, to gauge effectiveness of the training. Analysis of responses revealed that 82% of attendees learned what they had expected to learn, and 92% agreed they improved their knowledge of EAD. When asked if they planned to create EAD-encoded finding aids using knowledge gained in the workshops, 46% were sure

they would, 44% were not sure; only 10% indicated they probably would not adopt the EAD standard for their archival inventories.

In a third survey activity, during September 2006, all workshop attendees were asked to respond to a final evaluative survey. 25% of attendees, or 19 individuals, responded to this survey. Of these, project staff learned:

- 100% of respondents would find a statewide database of archival inventories very useful or somewhat useful
- 75% of respondents indicated their organization would definitely contribute finding aids to the statewide database
- 89% of respondents indicated their expertise with EAD was somewhere in the range from “somewhat familiar” (50%) or “very familiar” (39%)
- Within less than six months of training, 9 organizations collectively had created 26 new EAD-encoded inventories as a result of the training

Using the key indicators outlined at the beginning of this document, FCLA and its partners were highly successful in achieving Outcome #1.

- Outcome #2: Public uses technology to get information on primary sources from Florida institutions

The two key indicators chosen to evaluate this outcome were:

- **Server usage statistics:** FCLA server logs show strong increases in use of the *Archival Collections* database from FY2004-2005 to FY2005-2006, both in terms of unique visitors (approximately 300% increase) and in searches of the collection of inventories (approximately 1200% increase). However, none of these increases are directly attributable to the Opening Archives project. While the aggregation of inventories from more contributors to a shared database may result in increased use of the FCLA database, more time and analysis of use patterns will be required to detect any such correlation.
- **# of inquiries** regarding finding aids in the Archival Collections database: To date, inquiries regarding finding aids in the FCLA database have been minimal, and no increase was detected during the period of LSTA funding.

Using these indicators, no specific impact on use of the Archival Collections database is detectable or measurable at this time. User behavior, after all, can be influenced but never to the extent possible as in Outcome #1 above. However, it is reasonable to assume that an increasing number of archival finding aids in an easily-discoverable location such as FCLA's digital library will experience growing usage.

Future Plans

The success of Opening Archives will be useful as FCLA and its partners submit future funding requests to continue and expand the program. Project staff learned much about the extent and scope of technology-related training needs in Florida's cultural heritage organizations. The remaining obstacles are now clearer on the path to opening Florida's archives to the world. Additionally, the gains made during the first project generated a list of important questions and issues that should be addressed, such as:

- Future outlook for EAD as the main standard for archival information sharing
- Best tools for creating encoded inventories (FCLA-developed vs. others)
- Technical support for a growing network of partners with varying capability
- Policy issues that should be considered for future viability and sustainability
- Relation of FCLA's training efforts to other training standards and activities
- Shape and scope of a future training curriculum
- What is best done centrally; what is best done distributed?
- Participation criteria and communities we should target particularly
- Best mechanisms to enable discovery of collections in Florida's archives
- Expanding relationships & local capabilities that enable discovering these collections
- Supporting growth of digitization projects; relating these to a finding aids database

At the present time, we cannot find one reference model or plan that addresses all of these issues for initiatives such as ours described above. FCLA intends to address these issues by organizing a strategic planning forum, and bringing in a group of external expert consultants to help. The outcomes of that forum will help shape continued future training and consulting initiatives that build upon the success of Opening Archives.

As a condition of LSTA funding, FCLA committed itself to opening the Archival Collections database to any contributing organization in Florida that can meet basic requirements. These requirements were taught during the workshops and are described in the workshop training workbook.

Replication by Other Libraries

All materials produced for the training workshops are available freely on the Internet. Project staff performed 5 major revisions of the distributable templates and tools during the past year, based on requests and lessons learned during the hands-on training and site visits. These tools, electronic presentations, templates, standards and guidelines all can be adapted easily by other groups or libraries. Co-trainers from this project also are now familiar with all such materials, and are available to conduct additional training across the state when requested.

Lessons Learned

As stated in the Evaluation section, FCLA now understands more clearly the scope and extent of technology-related training needs among Florida's archives. The initial training needs assessment survey (see <http://www.surveymonkey.com/DisplaySummary.asp?SID=1573992&U=157399267568>) showed more than 80% of respondents also want training in other technologies relevant to making archival collections information available online, such as digitization, XML and stylesheets. These findings will be reflected in future proposals to expand the training agenda for more workshops.

The second major lesson of this project was the scope of the challenge when supporting both customization and flexibility of any standards or systems for a large network of customers. Already, FCLA is clarifying with additional policies and training what degree of customization and flexibility can be supported realistically for a large statewide effort.

. V. Conclusion

The Opening Archives project was most successful at training many archives staff in the use of EAD, and at establishing new partnerships with cultural heritage organizations of many types. The resources and expertise available through FCLA are now much more familiar to archives, libraries, museums and other repositories in Florida. In particular, the *Archival Collections* statewide database was promoted extensively, and FCLA proved its commitment to providing the support necessary to secure new contributing partners. The benefits of sharing collections information are apparent to repositories across the state, both large and small. LSTA funding significantly accelerated efforts by FCLA and its partners to foster such relationships, and the success of this project already is providing multiple new opportunities for innovation and collaboration that did not exist previously.

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