



DPLA Financial/Business Models Workshop

13 March 2012

Executive Summary

The Financial/Business Model workstream held its first workshop after other workstreams had met so as to learn as much as possible about the future of the DPLA. Much was and remains uncertain, and at the moment, that is impeding progress for this workstream. We hope that our report, the list of questions, and the matrix will guide the direction of the other workstreams so we can collectively continue to push the DPLA forward.

Certainties

Some roles, functions, and infrastructure will require persistent funding streams regardless of future strategic decisions made by the DPLA. The DPLA needs an Executive Director by April 2013 that is dedicated, paid, full time and empowered to make decisions. The organization will also eventually need a program manager, and liaisons or advisors. Liaisons may reach out to local communities or interface with the nodes. Advisors may help make technical decisions moving forward while taking into account the ideas stemming from the workstreams. Software developers will also need to be involved, even if some DPLA functions are crowd-sourced. In addition, the DPLA will have a physical space with operational and cyberinfrastructure costs.

The node structure devised by the Content & Scope workstream will incur costs to collect, ingest and enable adequate metadata; ensure links to content are correct; manage rights and execute take-down requests; and develop sustainability plans. Nodes may also need continuing monies for ongoing functions at the aggregation level.

Costs & Funding Sources

Nodes may already perform some of the required functions and thus may not need to seek outside funding to accomplish them. Alternatively, nodes may need funding to fulfill their duties. If they need to allocate funding to clean up their metadata, they will need an incentive to pay to participate in the DPLA. The major incentive discussed by the workstream for nodes to incur a cost to participate was the enhanced search and discoverability DPLA would provide. However, nodes with the least pristine metadata are likely to be the poorer entities and consequently costs fall on the least fiscally well-off.

Grant funding is available for only 18 months. While stewardship of existing grant funds should lead to some financial sustainability, the DPLA must also consider how to be sustained in other ways. Some components may be donated in-kind, but many of the cost needs outlined above and in the matrix attached will not be able to be funded by selling a product. Determining the magnitude of costs is only possible after knowing more about the strategic direction of the DPLA.

Initial Project Recommendations

Three potential projects were discussed at our meeting. First, we may want to grab “low-hanging fruit” to get a system up and running. We could start with clean data from a provider such as HathiTrust and/or the Internet Archive.

The second is that digital government documents, which are works in the public domain but not available anywhere else centrally, might be used as a collection focus when launching the DPLA.

The third stemmed from concern that public and state libraries would view DPLA as a competitor for scant resources. The DPLA should ask those stakeholders how it could enable them to scale up their operations to fulfill their missions in a broader way. What does the DPLA provide as an infrastructure that local institutions care about but cannot do themselves? Enhanced search and discoverability to a much broader audience may be incredibly valuable to these stakeholders. This workstream suggests that the DPLA work with local historical societies and public libraries to become nodes, perhaps in an aggregated way. Participants also suggest that at some level of involvement in the DPLA, there would be face-to-face meetings where members of local entities get together to learn together. For example, DPLA could host trainings on minimum metadata requirements through this network. This type of model would add value and distinguish the DPLA from organizations like the Internet Archive and HathiTrust.

Uncertainties

While we made progress toward starting to craft a business model for the DPLA, we felt impeded by a lack of clear vision for the future. The DPLA concept has no limits or edges with respect to content, scope, audience, participation or governance. Without some direction, it is difficult to shape the market and create a business model for the DPLA.

To provide a context for our uncertainties and guide future conversations, we created both a list of questions as well as a matrix to guide other workstreams, the steering committee and the secretariat. The matrix lists potential cost centers as rows and strategic scenarios enumerated by other workstreams as columns. We need help from other workstreams in winnowing this matrix and answering the questions we pose before we tackle how much each cost center will cost in each scenario.

General DPLA Recommendations

The plenary must present something substantive to retain people’s faith in the DPLA project. To this end, participants suggested that the chairs of the workstreams meet to hear a re-cap of each workstream’s progress and consider next steps collectively.

Finally, the conscious lack of centralized coordination among workstreams is causing confusion and impeding progress. This workstream strongly urges the DPLA to determine a central decision-maker—perhaps the steering committee or secretariat. In addition, we urge that the steering committee or secretariat take all the input it has received from the workstreams and re-express the direction and vision of the DPLA.