



Council on Library and Information Resources

CLIR

Council on
Library and
Information
Resources

issues

Number 62 • March/April 2008

New Grant Program to Fund Cataloging of Hidden Collections

IN JUNE, CLIR will launch a new national program to identify and catalog hidden special collections and archives. The program is supported by generous funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Through a national competition, the program will award funds to institutions holding collections of high scholarly value that are difficult or impossible to locate through finding aids. Award recipients will create descriptive information for their hidden collections that will be linked to and interoperable with that of all other projects funded by this grant. In so doing, they will create a federated environment that can be built upon over time.

The Challenge of Exposing Hidden Resources

Libraries, archives, and cultural institutions hold millions of items that have never been adequately described. These items are all but unknown to, and unused by, the scholars those organizations aim to serve. A 1998 Association of Research Libraries' survey of 99 North American research universities' special collections revealed that, on average, 15 percent of printed volumes in special collections are unprocessed or uncataloged. The figure rises to an average of 27 percent of manuscripts, 35 percent of video holdings, and 37 percent of materials in audio format.

"Librarians and archivists have long despaired at the huge amount of intellectually valuable information that, for lack of cataloging, is unknown or inaccessible to scholars," said CLIR Board Chairperson Paula Kaufman. "This award to CLIR underscores the importance of the hidden-collections problem and supports a coordinated, national response."

"Only a national program can effectively address the problem of hidden collections," said CLIR President Charles Henry. "The records and descriptions this program creates will be accessible through the Internet and the Web, exposing collections to a global audience of scholars, students, and teachers. It will facilitate the harvesting,

aggregation, and thematic correlation of the records to advance intellectual productivity. As a cyberinfrastructure effort, the program will also build sustainable communities of complementary backgrounds and perspectives within higher education over time."

Priority to Collections of Scholarly Value

CLIR has formed a review panel to evaluate proposals and select award recipients (see list to right). "The composition of the committee is meant to ensure the program's priority of making collections available that are of the highest value to research and teaching," said Mr. Henry.

The request for proposals (RFP) will ask each applicant to provide information on the scope and depth of the hidden collection, its disciplinary focus, its value to research, the type of media it includes, and other descriptive elements that will help the review panel assess the intellectual impact of cataloging and exposing these materials. The RFP will also require the applicant to respond to questions about long-term sustainability, additional sources of funding, and institutional support.

The program will initially produce two layers of information: (1) a basic registry of hidden collections and archives, created from information in the proposals, that can be found through a Web-based platform; and (2) a descriptive record of a subset of collections that are deemed most urgently in need of cataloging and documentation. The record will evolve as grantees complete their projects.

CLIR anticipates that this project will eventually lead to the creation of a third layer of information—digital versions of the special collections and archives that have been cataloged. The digitization effort will be funded by other sources.

CLIR will issue an RFP in early June. Proposals will be due in late July, and decisions will be announced in fall 2008. CLIR expects to award about \$4 million in the first cycle. The program may be extended for subsequent funding cycles over five years.

More information about the award program is available at <http://www.clir.org/activities/details/hiddencollections.html>. Questions about the program may be directed to Amy Lucko, at alucko@clir.org.

Hidden Collections Review Panel

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