

Strengthening Living Archives:

A Plan for Empowering Artists and Communities

A White Paper presented by Dance Heritage Coalition, Independent Media Arts Preservation, the International Guild of Musicians in Dance, and Theatre Library Association

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Executive Summary

“Strengthening Living Archives” was a collaborative, multi-disciplinary initiative undertaken to develop a deeper understanding of the goals and challenges of active performing artists in documenting and preserving their work, and to develop strategies for creating systemic change in how artists save and share their legacies. This paper presents findings from regional focus groups, a national survey, and a national forum, and proposes four models for implementing better practices. Two key findings of the project inform these strategies:

- **Empowering artists:** In order to create systemic change, artists must become agents and stakeholders in the preservation of their work. Partnerships between information professionals and artists are best shaped through peer networks, interactive communications, and mutually developed strategies, rather than top-down prescriptions. Artists need flexible solutions they can adapt to their individual creative processes. Communication cannot be one-way; artists’ voices must also be heard and incorporated into legitimate and effective solutions that reflect the culture of arts communities.
- **Community investment:** Findings from this project strongly confirmed that regional arts communities are diverse ecosystems with unique strengths and challenges. Local, state or regional organizations are best positioned to implement strategies to serve their communities. National platforms or online guides that provide formulas and templates are often alienating to individual artists or groups, particularly those who see their genre, identity, or tradition as outside the mainstream. Sustainable solutions depend on communities being invested in building their legacies.

The strategies proposed by this project are interconnected, interdependent, and complementary, and are intended to be implemented in an integrated, holistic manner.

1. **Ecosystem mapping:** a dynamic, interactive networking tool that provides access to information for an arts community. The map increases visibility of existing resources, encourages new connections and collaborations between groups with related missions, strengthens communication, and expands peer networks within a region.

2. **Shared services and resources:** community-based shared resources such as archival assistance, equipment and documentation services, and digital storage repositories help artists increase the quality and consistency of documentation and storage, and create opportunities for training, knowledge-building, and adoption of best practices, all without artists having to independently fund such support activities and services.

3. **Training and peer support networks:** Hands-on workshops in such skills as digital asset management, audiovisual preservation, records management, and disaster preparedness build skills and capacity, while peer support networks encourage knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and follow-through on projects.

4. **Developing an archiving curriculum for arts students:** To increase the baseline of useful knowledge, a curriculum of documentation and records management is embedded in BFA and MFA arts programs, as well as provided in non-academic settings through youth mentoring programs and community cultural centers. Students are empowered to put in place good practices at the outset of their careers, and become a resource for their peers and communities.

These strategies will have impact beyond the performing arts field, as arts will become more visible within communities. Performing arts are a powerful means by which individuals and groups express their identities and communicate their experiences, and hence have the capacity to influence the way Americans understand one another, as well as their own communities, histories, and aspirations. The vitality of art and its potential to change lives depends upon artists' ability to sustain their work and share it widely, which in turn depends on their access to knowledge, resources, and community networks.

Project Background and Goals

The goal of this project, titled “Strengthening Living Archives,” was to study the challenges of performing artists and emerging performance companies in documenting, organizing, maintaining, protecting, and preserving their in-house legacy assets and to devise a model archiving program that employs best practices to achieve practical and sustainable solutions to the challenges identified. The project was collaboratively developed and implemented by Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC), Independent Media Arts Preservation (IMAP), International Guild of Musicians in Dance (IGoMiD), and Theatre Library Association (TLA), with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

By bringing together service organizations representing dance, theater, music, and media arts, the project examined all forms of performing arts, both considering ways in which certain art forms or communities may have unique needs, and finding challenges and potential solutions common to all disciplines. This cross-disciplinary approach makes sense not only because the documentation needs of these groups have much in common, but also because there is a growing trend for universities and large archival repositories to have a combined library or archive for the performing arts, rather than separate facilities for theatre, music, and dance.¹ Moreover, more artists are producing multi-disciplinary work that blends dance, music, or theatre.

The term “Living Archives” refers to collections of records that:

- (1) allow the artist or company to use its records and artifacts effectively for everyday needs;
- (2) enable repurposing of the materials as deemed appropriate by the creators;
- (3) permit access to the materials by scholars;
- (4) facilitate cross-disciplinary research and ready exchange of information by aligning archiving and records management methods across performing art disciplines;
- (5) organize the materials so that ultimately when the artist or company no longer needs them, they can be transferred to a conventional repository; and
- (6) accomplish the traditional archiving tasks of employing preservation and storage techniques that safeguard paper, film, analog, digital, and various media records.

¹ Kenneth Schlesinger, “State of the Archive,” in *Performing Arts Resources* 31, “State of the Archive: Performing Arts Librarianship in the 21st Century,” 2015. Schlesinger highlighted the elimination of separate theatre libraries and their consolidation into arts libraries encompassing architecture, dance, design, film, music, and theatre during the past decade. He noted that the Drama School library at Yale was incorporated into the Arts Library and similar consolidations occurred at UCLA and University of Washington.

The term “Living Archives” underscores the need for performing artists and organizations, particularly those in early stages of their development, to simultaneously create an archival record and retain use of that record for education and outreach, publicity, grant applications, exhibits and social media, and restagings of their work. These artists cannot turn their materials over to traditional repositories which often do not provide the artist with copies of materials sufficient for the artist’s work needs. Moreover, traditional repositories often have backlogs that delay for years the processing of assets..²

This vision of “Living Archives” demands that in developing solutions we engage performing artists, particularly young and emerging artists and their companies. Early career artists, being more technologically savvy and confident than their predecessors, are already taking steps to document, share, and save their work, but frequently with inadequate tools and knowledge, sometimes they are doing more harm than good with their efforts. This goal also means that we must include those who train and educate artists in universities, academies, and theatres, and who can incorporate sustainable, pragmatic archiving best practices into their curriculums. Further, to achieve this goal, artists must be empowered to manage their own archiving needs with trustworthy solutions.

The project’s focus groups and surveys confirmed initial assumptions that the challenges faced by “living archives” are many. Common problems include shortage of staff time and expertise, space, secure storage, and other resources. Inadequate storage endangers legacy materials, which are often stored in offsite remote storage facilities lacking environmental controls and regular oversight; or they may be exposed to such hazards as water (particularly when stored in basements), fire, or damage by pests or mold. The bulk of material now created and collected by artists and their organizations is born-digital, and digital assets are vulnerable to bit rot, hard drive failure, software obsolescence, and accidental overwriting or deletion. Also, the sheer volume of digital assets created can be daunting for organization, preservation, and description; in a digital environment, curation is key to developing and maintaining a useful collection. The fragility of archives held by cultural heritage organizations has been brought to the fore in recent years by natural disasters such as Hurricane Sandy in New York City, which caused extensive damage and loss to collections held by the Martha Graham Dance Company, among many others,³ and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, which destroyed or endangered the working collections and legacies of countless musicians.⁴

Another immediate risk to performing arts collections comes from the inevitable deterioration of magnetic media formats. Audiovisual materials make up a substantial, often central component of dance

² This project was primarily focused on the need for active artists, especially those early in their careers, to put in place good practices (ones that accommodate the changing formats of digital record keeping), rather than late-career considerations around creating legacy archives.

³ Among the groups filing claims for losses were the Kitchen, Brighton Ballet Theater, Dance New Amsterdam, Flamenco Latino, Martha Graham Center of Contemporary Dance, Paul Taylor Dance Foundation, Streb, and Thin Man Dance. Daniel J. Wakin, “Modern Dance Groups to Get Hurricane Sandy Aid,” *New York Times*, 25 Dec. 2012. www.nytimes.com/2012/12/26/arts/dance/modern-dance-groups-to-receive-hurricane-sandy-relief-aid.html?_r=0; Chris Maag, “A Lifetime of Work Destroyed at Westbeth,” 7 Dec. 2012. cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/07/a-lifetime-of-work-destroyed-at-westbeth/

⁴ A Disaster Report prepared by the Heritage Preservation organization details the impact of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma on National Park Service sites, properties on the National Register, National Historic Landmarks, and museums. The report illustrates the kind of losses that can strike performing arts organizations: www.heritagepreservation.org/programs/katrinanps.htm. See also reporting on the damage to musicians’ archives held at Tulane University: http://tulane.edu/news/newwave/0415008_library.cfm

and theater collections; these collections tend to include multiple obsolete formats and unique content held only on highly endangered formats that can no longer be played, both due to the lack of appropriate playback equipment and the risks associated with playing fragile tapes without professional supervision.

In addition, the lack of robust descriptive information about materials (i.e., metadata, or data about data) diminishes both the current and the long-term usefulness of collections. Many “living archives” lack complete inventories, so artists or companies do not have a comprehensive record of what they own. They may also have difficulty locating materials when they are needed due to inconsistent filing methods and the lack of an inventory or catalog. Arts organizations frequently rely heavily on institutional memory: one or more staff members who have a history with the organization and are able to identify and locate items. This creates a high risk for this information to be permanently lost in the event of the staff member’s departure or death. As “living archives” transition to being legacy collections used for research, the materials will be valuable to users only insofar as they can be identified and described.

While these challenges are pressing and demand a strong response, recent years have seen important innovations and energy devoted to tackling these issues on the part of both artists and information and media professionals. Both this project and related investigations such as American Theatre Archives Project (ATAP) and Dance Heritage Coalition’s “Artist-Driven Archives” project have generated and uncovered tremendous enthusiasm for issues of documentation, archiving, and the creative use of legacy materials.

The specific aims of the “living archives” project were to gather and analyze information about the needs of active performing artists and their organizations; devise strategies and models to address these needs; and present an implementation plan for next steps. The activities undertaken in the information gathering stage included an environmental scan of existing resources and research; four focus groups for artists in different regions; and a survey widely disseminated to performing artists online. Findings were presented at a National Forum held at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., at which representatives of national service organizations were encouraged to provide feedback on four models for programs or initiatives to strengthen “living archives.” This input informed the development of an implementation plan, presented in the final section of this paper.

Analysis of Existing Resources

The four service organizations taking part in this project have created a variety of resources intended to provide practical advice and guidance on best practices to artists on documentation, preservation, records management, and legacy planning. Under the current project, the partners reviewed these existing resources and investigated how successful they have been in helping artists.

American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP), an initiative of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), is a network of archivists, dramaturgs, and scholars dedicated to preserving the legacy of the American theatre. ATAP’s local teams help individual theatre companies evaluate their records, develop an archiving plan, and secure funding to support long-term archive health. ATAP also offers an online manual on archiving for theatre companies (<http://americantheatrearchiveproject.org/atap-manual-preserving-theatrical-legacy>) and maintains listservs and regular regional meetings for members.

Dance Heritage Coalition provides free access to a number of guides and reports on its website. Most recently, in 2012 DHC launched the Artist’s Legacy Toolkit: www.danceheritage.org/artisttoolkit.html.

The toolkit includes downloadable templates and practical advice on records management strategies, digital asset management, preservation and storage, description and organization of materials.⁵ DHC also created a website that shares case studies of innovative “artist-driven archiving” projects and invites comment and discussion: artistdrivenarchives.wordpress.com/ In addition, DHC offers workshops and guidelines for best practices in managing an audiovisual digitization project.

Independent Media Arts Preservation (IMAP) serves the caretakers of media collections by providing information resources to help preserve cultural heritage. IMAP’s website offers guides on media preservation and cataloging, including tutorials and sample records, and provides links to information resources: <http://www.imappreserve.org/index.html>. IMAP also offers in-person education and training events.

The project also looked at other initiatives addressing documentation and preservation of performing arts and media arts. Among the resources that were reviewed are the following:

Library of Congress Digital Preservation Outreach and Education (DPOE) fosters outreach and education about digital preservation on a global scale, and promotes continuing education and training opportunities that increase individual and organizational capacity to provide long-term, durable access to digital content. See www.digitalpreservation.gov/education/

Preserving (Digital) Objects with Restricted Resources (POWRR) offers workshops, guidelines, lesson plans, and other tools specifically aimed at underfunded organizations. See digitalpowrr.niu.edu/

The Tate Gallery’s “Collecting the Performative” research network (www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/collecting-performative) examines emerging models for the conservation and documentation of artists’ performance and draws upon the practices of dance, theatre, and activism in order to identify parallels in the concept of a work and related notions of authorship, authenticity, autonomy, documentation, memory, continuity, and liveness.

The Activist’s Guide to Archiving Video (archiveguide.witness.org/) is a practical resource to help manage, authenticate, and use digital video. The user-friendly guide is aimed at activists and journalists and does not assume technological expertise.

The project also identified freely available resources that may be more technically advanced; while these are unlikely to be used by artists aside from those who have a technology focus, they may be useful for more tech-savvy artists or artists’ technology partners to gain new skills.

The consultant business **Audiovisual Preservation Solutions (AVPS)** has created a website providing access to its free, open-source tools for media and archiving. Among the resources is Fixity, a utility for the documentation and regular review of stored files. (www.avpreserve.com/avpsresources/tools/). Also, AVPS’s four-part series of video tutorials, created by Kathryn Gronsbell, is focused on Exiftool, a command-line application that can read, write, and edit embedded metadata in files (www.avpreserve.com/exiftool-tutorial-series/). The tutorial series provides detailed support to users

⁵ Other publications on the DHC website that give guidance in documenting dance include *Beyond Memory*, 1994, rev. c. 2000; *Documenting Dance: A Practical Guide*, 2006 ; *Securing Our Dance Heritage; Sustaining America's Dance Legacy*, Catherine J. Johnson and Allegra Fuller Snyder, July 1999, Council on Library and Information Resources; *Learning Applications to Document Dance*, San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum, 1997; *Magnetic Storage and Tape Handling*, National Media Library, 1995; *Digital Video Preservation Reformatting Project*, 2003.

looking for an approachable and practical introduction to Exiftool. Featured exercises have wide-ranging applications, but trend towards improving digital preservation workflows through step-by-step exploration of Exiftool's basic features and functions.

Digitizing Video for Longterm Preservation: An RFP Guide and Template is a publication by New York University intended to take an institution step-by-step through the process of drafting a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the transfer of analog video -- specifically VHS -- to digital carriers for preservation. This template can be used by libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions and submitted to qualified transfer vendors. library.nyu.edu/preservation/VARRFP.pdf

Focus Groups and Findings

Following this research and informal conversations with artists and educators at a number of national conferences, the project convened four Focus Groups in diverse geographic regions (Cleveland, Miami, San Francisco, and New York) to learn more about the goals and challenges of performing artists and how the project partners might help them. Invited participants were primarily working artists in dance, theater, and music, along with a smaller contingent of media professionals, scholars and faculty, and archivists. Each meeting brought together a mix of disciplines and a diversity of backgrounds, genres, and career stages, as well as significant racial and ethnic diversity.⁶ In each meeting, artists were asked to respond to four main questions:

1. When you have finished an art project (performance, residency, workshop, etc.): What documents or artifacts from this project speak best about what you accomplished? What do you find most valuable to save and share? What do you find less satisfactory or lacking?
2. Once you have accumulated or collected documentation of your work: What do you find most challenging about maintaining or using the records of your creative process or creative output?
3. How might we raise consciousness about archival practices among younger or emerging artists and introduce models or strategies to incorporate documenting and preserving as an active, integral part of arts-making?
4. How would you describe what processes or advice might be most helpful to you in saving and sharing your legacy?

An immediate finding from the Focus Groups was the variation between different regional communities. It was clear from the makeup of the meetings and the dynamics of the discussions that each arts "ecosystem" has its own channels of communication, networks for information exchange, demographic patterns, and unique challenges and advantages.⁷ Hence, the models developed from this project are intended to be adaptable and scalable to different communities and disciplines.

⁶ The meetings were facilitated by John McCann of Partners in Performance, who has more than 25 years' experience helping cultural institutions with innovation and strategic planning.

⁷ These findings confirmed and reinforced earlier investigations by DHC, dating back to the organization's establishment study in 1992. For instance, the Field Survey conducted in 2010 revealed concerns about how the dance field's diversity of genres and communities was insufficiently recognized by archival "gatekeepers." See <http://www.danceheritage.org/fieldsurveyreport.pdf>

The high levels of engagement at these meetings illustrated the dynamic increase in awareness and learning that can be created simply by bringing together diverse groups of stakeholders in a community to share information and ideas in a well-focused gathering. This underlines a primary finding of this project, the vital importance of connectivity and face-to-face communication in the arts community. As physical presence and human connection are central to the practice of the performing arts, they are also key to any outreach activities aimed at artists.

Cleveland

The response to the Cleveland meeting was especially enthusiastic, with participants driving from as far as Columbus, Ohio, to attend; this response indicated the need for more engagement and information-sharing in regions outside of the Northeast and West Coast. Participants talked about their experiences and expectations with archives, as records producers and users, but were especially eager and enthusiastic to discuss the possible future of Cleveland as a hub of arts preservation activities.

- Throughout the discussion, there was talk of “archives” encompassing records collections held in a repository, active or inactive files retained by the creators or disseminated online, curated oral histories, and “archives of the body” with respect to the limitations of documenting the intangible artistic processes of dance. Participants wanted “three dimensional,” “unfragmented,” and “holistic” collections to capture nuances of the “archival body” in the creative process and performances not otherwise attainable through video, diagrams, or photographs.
- Participants spent significant time considering Cleveland as a launch point for a cooperative digital repository where local or regional artists nationwide can securely deposit their body of work for preservation and access. With downtown Cleveland home to an Internet2 trunk line, it could feasibly become the domain of digital records and play a part in Cleveland's reinvention. Public/private partnerships with universities, philanthropic foundations, library consortia, and the state were discussed. The consensus among participants was that a larger effort with widespread support would be more attractive from a fundraising standpoint. Some intellectual property matters were discussed as possible speed bumps or roadblocks, and it was agreed that union and guild input and subsequent buy-in were crucial.

Miami

At the Miami Focus Group, a majority of attendees were bilingual, and they discussed cultural diversity, as well as the unique challenges of the Miami arts community, including lack of access to the Internet, limiting the usefulness of online information resources, and lack of public transit, leading to a dispersed, fractured community.

- Participants identified the technical and administrative burdens necessary to maintain graphics, sound, and video recordings. Common frustrations included: ongoing reformatting, planned technological obsolescence, the expense of using professionals, the dead-end reformatting, cataloging, or inventorying projects; and inconsistent work of interns or do-it-yourselfers in a continually changing landscape.

- Limitations on space, money, and staff time force record creators to cherry pick material for preservation. Participants agreed there were two simultaneous purposes of appraisal: preserving the legacy of work, which may favor the best and final records, and documenting the process for personal use and needs. Anticipating relevance is tricky, but “[w]e are the best curators of what needs to be preserved.” Participants seemed to agree with moderator John McCann’s statement that accessibility of records will ensure that time, which is an impartial arbiter, will determine what is valuable and what will be preserved in an equitable manner.
- Ideas for a community repository were discussed, and participants envisioned an artist-friendly, Craigslist- or Wikipedia-like environment for user-driven content. Participants suggested approaching potential technology partners, such as CreativeLab by Google, to assist with creating a digital archive.
- There was support for “train the trainer” initiatives with regular follow-up to ensure effective implementation; and for adaptable metadata templates. However, the group was divided in its preference for an in-house approach versus transferring materials to an archival repository.
- Other needs identified included a pool of grant money for conscientious, like-minded artists to foster good archival practices; a networked depository for works; access to high-quality digital editing.

San Francisco

The San Francisco meeting reflected the diversity, vitality, and innovation of the Bay Area performing arts community. Attendees included: practitioners of performance art and mime; a choreographer who also works as an educator; dance accompanists; a videographer; a stage manager and technologist; and a representative of an “incubator” arts space for the LGBTQ community.

- In discussing what is most valuable to document and preserve, many commented on the importance of capturing the context around the work, including critical and audience responses, and the spirit of the creative process, not just the finished performance. Historical context “makes the moment echo.”
- It was noted that documents may have different values, some serving a crucial purpose in the short-term for creation of work, but not having long-term value for legacy. Similarly, some artifacts have value that is personal to the artist, while others are intended for sharing. Hence, different types of documentation require different archiving plans; curation is key.
- As in other meetings, the issue of copyright and intellectual property was raised, both as an obstacle to sharing documentation (due to union restrictions, for instance), and as a concern artists have about their work being improperly used if it is made accessible.
- The conversation touched on the need for existing resources and support available for archiving and documentation to have greater visibility: in a community as diverse and geographically spread out as the Bay Area, resources and support groups may be hidden.
- The needs prioritized by the group were: a roster of funding sources for archival work; greater visibility for projects/resources; accessible documentation of best practices; greater recognition for professional archival practice; a map of local arts ecosystem (artists, funders, venues,

videographers, etc.); enlisting more technologists, historians, etc. who are in the community to partner with artists; a central hub to connect the many groups and ventures, so that everyone shares information and resources.

New York

New York is the nation's capital for performing arts and cultural institutions, and is often perceived in other regions as being the most resourced arts community and receiving the most attention. The New York meeting, which drew a mix of dance and performance artists, archivists, faculty, and representatives of service organizations, explored what is special about New York, but also found that independent artists and smaller organizations in New York face similar challenges as those in other regions.

- The participants discussed how an archive can capture and preserve the artist's voice. There was discussion of social media as an archive, and how content shared through social media is often process-based. Capturing drafts and "half-baked" ideas during the creative process can be crucial for future works. There was also discussion of how to improve performance documentation, so that it is more representative of the work; many artists lamented the impact that unequal distribution of resources has on the success of artworks, and the need to create documentation with an eye to satisfying the requirements of funders, which may be different from the requirements for legacy preservation. There was interest in workshops or other guidance on this issue, or having it incorporated in curricula. The generational shift in attitudes toward many of these issues (documentation, social media) was noted.
- Cross-generational dialogue has great value. Younger emerging artists benefit from hearing older artists talk about which types of documentation they have found valuable over time, while older artists can benefit from a different perspective towards sharing and the digital environment.
- The need for better metadata was discussed, particularly for naming digital files, and there was discussion of the usefulness of taxonomies.
- In discussing the New York "ecosystem," the robust student population was proposed as a resource that could be engaged in addressing these goals. Participants stressed the importance of recognizing micro-communities and underresourced, underrepresented groups that are often overlooked, including artists of color, artists with disabilities, and practitioners of culturally specific forms. New York is in dialogue with the international community, and these ties should be documented and honored.

Survey for Performing Artists

In order to expand the scope of information-gathering beyond the regions where Focus Groups were held, and to ensure the voices of those unable to attend the sessions were heard, a survey was disseminated to performing artists, in order to gather responses to the questions asked at the Focus Group, gauge support for different models for assistance, and collect demographic information about the respondents.

The survey succeeded in reaching the groups specially targeted by this project. The largest group responding (nearly 38%) had been making work professionally for one to ten years, and described

themselves as independent artists with varying budgets; the next largest group comprised small organizations with annual budgets under \$100,000. While this project intends to craft an archiving program that will work well for all performing arts practitioners and groups, it is intended primarily to benefit individual artists and groups in early or mid-career, with small- or medium-size budgets. These artists are most likely to rely on short-term staff or interns, deal with frequent staff turnover, and have no regular access to archivists or other records management experts. In addition, younger individual artists and companies are more inclined to adopt new technologies based on affordability or appealing features without understanding possible pitfalls related to platform support and long-term access and use.

More than half of the respondents (55.4%) cited performance video as the most valuable record of their work. Photographs were the next most valued (17.8%), followed by rehearsal video (10.9%). Most comments on this question suggested that performance recordings are the most complete record of the finished product and are most useful for restaging and marketing. Many also noted that they lack adequate resources for video and consequently lack good quality video. Also mentioned were lack of databases and ability to digitize archives.

More than half (56.5%) said lack of time or staff was the greatest challenge they faced in documenting and preserving their work, followed by lack of equipment (14%), then expertise (10.9%). There was enthusiasm for the model of shared archival services: “For individual artists, with little or no staff, having the shared resource of archivist or documenter, who might follow some standards for a group of us, might be a good investment.”

The survey asked whether respondents were familiar with a sampling of online tools (DHC’s Artist’s Legacy Toolkit, ATAP’s manual, and online resources of IMAP and DPOE). Familiarity with the tools ranged between 14% and 63%, depending on the resource; more than 50% of respondents had downloaded resources from ATAP, 44% from DHC’s Toolkit. Comments highlighted the need for these resources to be reinforced by training or guidance from professionals for implementation: “Besides getting information to individuals, we need to know how to implement the info,” one commenter noted.

Peer Support Groups: 66.3% of respondents believed that peer support groups in their regions would encourage them to be more active in documenting and preserving their legacies. One respondent commented, “Community-based feedback and accountability are very important; I would want something that combines those things [i.e., training and peer support groups], personally.”

Training: 76.6% said that they would take advantage of training in digital management skills, audiovisual preservation, or other archiving topics, if offered. One respondent added, “I would love to be able to document my own work using something other than a camera/phone! I would also love to receive training on how to convert work from obsolete formats to digital formats, and how to create my own Web resource, so I can market myself more successfully. I think that if those that have the expertise on how to convert video to digital would share/train others, we could all be that much further.”

Another commenter wrote, “Workshops for dance companies. I firmly believe that dance companies should be archiving materials from their very beginnings, rather than dealing with the mess later on down the road. But most artists don’t realize the importance of this, and don’t have the tools to do so. First, archive workshops should be as readily available as social media training is currently. And second, there should be someone people can go to for one-on-one and hands-on support.”

The survey supports the need for training, workshops, and a shared-service model for archival assistance, and also underscores the need for resources and support to enable artists to take on these projects.

Four Models for Strengthening Living Archives

Project partners analyzed what was heard through the focus groups and survey and developed four strategies for creating systemic change—not merely offering external assistance or short-term solutions, but giving artists the knowledge and resources they need to take charge of saving and sharing their work. These strategies are not intended to be viewed or implemented separately; there are many points of intersection at which they support one another, and effective implementation will draw from all four models.

1. Ecosystem Mapping

Numerous resources and support groups already exist, yet many artists are not aware these resources exist, and therefore don't know how to take advantage of them.. A single, centralized source of information for an arts community could increase visibility of existing resources, encourage new connections and collaborations between groups with related missions, and strengthen communication and peer networks within a region. Such an “ecosystem map” would help artists find:

- Sources of funding for documentation, digitization, or other archiving projects;
- Recommendations for reliable and affordable vendors;
- Links to online resources, guides, best practices, tutorials, etc.;
- Local artists' groups;
- Information about local library science programs or other possible sources for archival interns;
- Potential technology partners or others willing to offer legal, archival, technological, or scholarly consulting pro bono or as a fee-based service.

Many artists' groups already provide listings for performances, studio space, funding, or residency opportunities, and similar local information. Resources for documentation and archiving could be incorporated into existing information networks. The success of such a project depends upon creating a dynamic, interactive network that attracts users, remains up-to-date and accurate, and catalyzes discussion and activity. Users should be encouraged to share success stories, questions, and recommendations for resources to be added. These maps would discover, plug into, and strengthen interactions and conversations already taking place in communities, harnessing existing resources and sources of information rather than prescribing in a top-down way.

2. Shared Resources and Services

Artists consistently described lack of resources, time, and expertise as the primary challenge they faced in documenting and preserving artifacts of their performances. Increasingly, artists work independently, without the infrastructure provided by an established company. Few artists or small arts organizations can afford to retain a dedicated archivist or videographer, or purchase equipment needed for high-quality documentation and secure storage of digital assets.

Shared services or community-based resources offer promising solutions to this chronic challenge. They might include:

- **Community archivists:** Working simultaneously with a cohort of artists within a regional community, archives or records management professionals can provide training, hands-on workshops, guidance, and reliable recommendations to strengthen records management, audiovisual preservation, and digital stewardship. Rather than completing work themselves, the archivists would establish guidelines and provide training, and check in regularly to offer support and ensure follow-through of projects.
- **Shared equipment and documentation services:** Organizations serving the performing arts can set up “lending libraries” of electronic equipment needed by the community, such as high-quality video cameras, which can be requested on loan. Ideally, some form of training or guidelines for documentation and best practices should also be provided with the equipment. Such an electronics library is currently being developed by New York’s Alliance of Resident Theatres (ART-NY) for its members. A shared-service model such as that proposed for archivists could also be applied to videographers; if funding went to a documenter to serve a cohort of artists rather than going to artists to document their own work, this model could provide greater standardization and higher-quality documentation, and could potentially be linked to a storage plan ensuring long-term preservation of outputs.
- **Digital “dark storage:”** Secure long-term storage of digital assets is an urgent challenge, given the dangers of bit rot, format obsolescence, and equipment failure. If an institution with the technical resources and expertise to act as a “trusted digital repository” provided server space and ongoing maintenance to a regional arts community, this would free artists and their organizations from the burden of attempting to create their own storage plans. This model was extensively discussed in the Cleveland Focus Group. A respondent to the survey commented: “It would be valuable for artists to have access to inexpensive transfer facilities for aging documentation formats: to digitally store CDs, extinct video formats, older audio recordings, etc.”

One of the greatest advantages of the shared service and resource model is that it will strengthen community networks and ties, providing paths for artists to discover who else is undertaking related projects, and to share learning and innovations. It will increase investment and follow-through by creating oversight and peer support.

3. Training and Peer-to-Peer Support

Artists clearly expressed a need for skills and expertise in digital asset management, audiovisual preservation, records management, and disaster preparedness. While resources freely available online provide information and guidelines, artists commented that these resources would be more helpful if paired with training or workshops, whether in-person or via Webinars. “Online resources are passive,” a Focus Group attendee commented. “We need more active dialogue. Artists feel they’re being talked down to, condescended to. We need artist-centered, interactive systems.” Artists will have different questions arising from the resources, depending on their background and types of projects they are undertaking; they may need guidance on how to apply the advice or templates online to their specific needs. Artists are empowered when they have the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions, set priorities, and oversee projects.

76% of survey respondents said they would take advantage of training workshops or webinars if they were offered. Sample workshops include:

- Digital preservation best practices: file naming conventions, storage plans, file fixity;
- Project management for audiovisual digitization: workflow, inventory, curation, metadata, storage plans;
- Archiving social media and e-communications;
- Creating an in-house inventory or catalog: controlled vocabularies, templates, introduction to metadata, software platforms;
- Understanding copyright and fair use;
- Disaster preparedness: creating a disaster plan, resources, and supplies.

There are already a number of programs offering workshops, online guides, tutorial videos, and lesson plans for digital preservation and personal archiving, including Library of Congress's DPOE program, which conducts "train-the-trainer" sessions nationwide, and the Digital POWRR project. However, there is a need for training specifically devised and targeted for performing artists, especially those who do not have institutional ties or support. These workshops can address issues that are specific to documenting and preserving performing arts works, tackling topics such as: how to document evolving works; capturing the creative process; creating a holistic, multiformat archive; dealing with copyright, intellectual property, and public access; archiving culturally-specific works; and other concerns raised by artists throughout this project. By combining these issues with more straightforward skill acquisition, the workshops will attract more artists and increase the likelihood of training practices being implemented and sustained.

Training should be paired with peer support groups and regular check-in from trainers to ensure follow-through of implementation and consistent application of methods. Artists frequently express the desire for more communication and connections within their peer groups; a cohort of artists simultaneously undertaking archiving projects provides encouragement, a sense of commitment and responsibility, and a network for sharing information, learning from innovations, and celebrating results of documentation or preservation projects. Cross-generational and cross-disciplinary conversations are particularly valuable in expanding access to different viewpoints. Peer groups will be a venue for artists to discuss their communities' needs and a launching pad for new implementation projects.

4. Develop Archiving Curriculum for Arts Students

There has been a tendency among artists and funders to associate archiving with the final stage of artistic careers. Artists and their organizations often begin to focus on organizing, preserving, and using legacy materials only when a major, multi-decade anniversary approaches. By then, if materials have been gathered and stored haphazardly over the years, it is costly and labor-intensive to organize, describe, curate, and preserve these materials; also information about items may have been lost due to staff turnover and inconsistent records-keeping. In order to strengthen in-house archives, it is vital for artists to establish good practices for documentation and records management from the outset of their careers. This has the double benefit of improving artists' abilities to perform core mission activities—mounting works, marketing, fundraising, education—as well as ensuring long-term legacy.

In order to provide emerging artists with the tools they need to promote best practices, a curriculum for documentation and records management should be included in all performing arts BFA and MFA programs, and in arts administration Master's programs. Some institutions have already incorporated

studies in documentation, particularly in programs with a strong focus on media and technology, such as Lehman College’s BFA in Multimedia Performing Arts, and the dance programs at Ohio State University, where technology is a component of the BFA coursework, and the MFA and PhD programs offer a Dance and Technology focus. The development of curriculum standards would encourage more schools to adopt these types of courses and would promote a field-wide improvement in practice. Students who receive this type of education become a resource for their peers and communities, raising the baseline of knowledge, increasing capacity, and empowering artists to implement sustainable strategies.

Such a curriculum should teach:

- **HOW to document and WHAT to document:** in addition to learning technology skills for digital recording and storage of digital files, students should be engaged in discussing what makes good performance documentation, different types of documentation that might serve different needs, and in what ways documentation can capture the creative process. Students are required not only to mount a production and document their performance, but to document collaborative discussions, decision-making factors, and other elements of their process.
- **Records management as a time-saving, labor-saving tool.** Because artists collectively believe they lack the time and staff to devote to organizing or describing materials they create or collect, records management lessons should focus on how these practices can save time and effort, for instance by smoothing and speeding the process of creating grant applications. (As one Focus Group participant put it: “15 minutes a week is better than three days of panic every five years.”)
- **Principles of “artist-driven archiving.”** Students will be inspired to value their documentation and artifacts by learning about how older artists have creatively repurposed their legacy materials to tell their stories or make new works.

In the New York Focus Group, a recent graduate of the Dance and New Media Program at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University noted that while she had gained skills in documentation through her education, she was frustrated that as a working artist she was no longer able to afford access to the kind of resources for documentation that the school’s program provided when she was a student, and she was therefore unable to use her skills effectively. Curricula must take into account the resources available to artists and teach practical, scalable techniques, as well as create awareness of existing support that is available.

It is also crucial to explore options for making the curriculum available outside the academy through youth mentorship programs, especially those aimed at underserved groups, native communities, and non-English-speaking communities.

National Forum

The Four Models and project findings were presented at a National Forum at the Library of Congress on November 17, 2015, attended by field leaders: representatives of national service organizations, educators, and representatives from the Library of Congress’ Office of Digital Preservation. Attendees offered feedback on the models and recommendations for implementation projects. They identified areas needing further investigation and discussion:

- How can the curriculum be accessible outside the academy? A standardized academic curriculum may not serve native communities or other groups whose work is culturally specific and community-based. Partnerships with organizations currently focused on serving and documenting these communities were recommended.⁸
- How can we find out who is missing from the conversation? We must continue to ask who is not in the room, whose voices are not being heard;
- How do we document the evolving technologies of lighting and sound design, as well as scenic and costume designs;
- How do we capture what is ever-changing? Theater works are living, breathing entities: to get a true sense of the work requires documentation from multiple angles, multiple iterations, from conception through performance, and on to adaptation and revival;
- How to achieve sustainability beyond short-term projects.

Suggestions for next steps to explore included:

- Importance of case studies specific to diverse cultural contexts, particularly helpful for artist communities not connected to institutional/nonprofit arts traditions;⁹
- Identification of opportunities to assist the less commercial corners of the commercial sector for potential partners (e.g., independent music labels often have deep, poorly organized archives and few resources);
- Mentorship programs for youth arts/youth media provide a vehicle for education outside the academy and represent a potential resource as youth in training can partner with professional creators;
- Explore a model in which a funding agency would develop a repository to preserve documentation of all works whose creation it funds.

Next Steps:

Recommendations for Implementation

A state and region-based “mosaic” approach

Outcomes from the focus groups and national forum confirmed the need for region-specific, grassroots solutions, so this implementation plan recommends developing partnerships with state and local arts councils and community-based arts service organizations. Such groups have vital knowledge of and access to existing local networks; national groups with strong expertise in technology, archiving, or specific art forms can fruitfully partner with local organizations to adapt initiatives to serve diverse communities. National platforms or online guides that provide formulas and templates are often alienating

⁸ For example, CEMA (California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives): www.library.ucsb.edu/special-collections/cema; Knowledge River: si.arizona.edu/about-knowledge-river; School for Advanced Research: <http://sarweb.org/index.php>

⁹ For instance, the Merce Cunningham “dance capsules” project, presented at the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP) conference in 2010, catalyzed discussion of archiving strategies.

to individual artists or groups, particularly those who see their genre, identity, or tradition as outside the mainstream. Sustainable solutions depend on communities being invested in building their legacies.

A multi-disciplinary approach

Activities of this project confirmed the assumption that there would be benefits to bringing together representatives of various performing arts and media arts. While each form has certain unique needs, a multi-disciplinary approach respects the increasing number of artists whose work crosses disciplines, and who can be excluded or overlooked by approaches that categorize by art form. Artists are uncomfortable with efforts to define their work in ways that do not reflect their full vision or creative process. In addition, there is much to be learned from interchange between different arts practices, since models or initiatives developed by one group are often adaptable to others.

Empowering artists

In order to create systemic change, artists must become agents and stakeholders in the preservation of their work. Partnerships between information professionals and artists must be shaped by an understanding of the culture of arts communities, which aspire to be equitable, not hierarchical, and value peer networks and interactive communication over top-down prescriptions. Artists need flexible solutions that can be adapted to their individual creative processes. Online resources are often seen as too inflexible, and as “one-way” communication that does not allow artists to raise questions or interact with information professionals in meaningful ways.

Priorities

First steps to implement the strategies presented by this paper are:

- **Launch of interactive ecosystem maps:** develop an open-source, flexible template for building interactive ecosystem maps, and test by creating maps for a diverse pilot group of communities, in partnership with local groups that host the maps and enlist their members in research and user-testing.
- **Pilot a shared-service model in test community:** as part of research into available resources for these maps, conduct surveys that identify what resources or services are needed that are not currently available, and gather data needed to scale shared-service or shared-resource implementation; implement shared-service model for a test community and measure usage and outcomes.
- **Initiate skills-building workshop series:** through outreach connected with ecosystem mapping development, identify artists or arts groups that are ready to form training and peer support cohorts. Track metrics and measure knowledge- and capacity-building to test impact of training, workshops, and peer groups.
- **Draft proposed curriculum:** partner with arts in higher education groups and youth mentoring programs to conduct a study on existing curricula for documentation and records management in arts education programs; analyzing successful features and unmet needs, draft curricula standards for review by educators and artists, and conduct outreach to solicit buy-in.

Implementing these steps will raise awareness about the issues of how artists save and share their work; not only will artists become more conscious of good practices for documentation and preservation, and information professionals become more aware of how they can effectively help artists, but outreach connected with these initiatives will raise awareness among the general public about the importance of saving cultural heritage.¹⁰

The impact of these strategies will be felt beyond the performing arts field, as arts become more visible within communities. Performing arts are a powerful means by which individuals and groups express their identities and communicate their experiences, and hence have the capacity to influence the way Americans understand one another, as well as their own communities, histories, and aspirations. The vitality of art and its potential to change lives depends upon artists' ability to sustain their work and share it widely, which in turn depends on their access to knowledge, resources, and community networks. Successfully advancing the priorities laid out in this paper will result in art communities that have expanded capacity to engage audiences and share their visions and legacies. Strengthening "Living Archives" means strengthening America's vibrant arts ecosystems.

¹⁰ A number of artists have incorporated aspects of archiving or repurposing of legacy materials into public performances as a means of audience-engagement and education. For example, Jennifer Monson's "Live Dancing Archive," Yanira Castro's "The People to Come," David Gordon's "The Matter 2012: Art and Archive." See <https://artistdrivenarchives.wordpress.com/> See also DHC's report "Vision 2020: Creating a New Place for Dance in the Public Imagination" : <http://www.danceheritage.org/vision2020.pdf>

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