

AFR NE Ohio Symposium Summary

On October 18, 2010, the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Alliance for Response was pleased to welcome nearly fifty participants to a free, half-day symposium entitled, “Digital Media: Disaster Preparedness and Recovery.” Cleveland’s Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum hosted the event, and generously provided free admission to its exhibit halls for all who attended.

Tom Clareson, Senior Consultant for New Initiatives at LYRASIS, was the keynote speaker. He began by offering the results of surveys conducted within the last few years on the state of digital preservation both across the nation and specifically in Ohio. Most institutions, Clareson reported, even now are at the digital *project* stage vs. the digital *program* stage; few have coordinated approaches to digital initiatives, particularly in the areas of standards, quality control, access, promotion, and preservation. He then provided detailed definitions of digital preservation, and spoke about the importance of risk management as it pertains to maintaining digital assets. Clareson argued that institutions need to clearly understand what types of digital assets they hold; the long-term financial sustainability of their digitizing operations; the skills and knowledge gaps of their staff members; the contractual and legal rights associated with owning and providing access to their digital assets; and whether their policies and procedures are sufficient and transparent at any given point in time.

After a coffee and refreshments break during which the attendees enjoyed networking opportunities with colleagues from across the state, Adam Wead, Systems and Digital Collections Librarian for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, spoke. Wead defined a “digital disaster” as any event that renders a bitstream—a file or a stream of 1’s and 0’s—permanently unusable. He advocated determining what data is irreplaceable (and not all data is), isolating the technology that supports that irreplaceable data, identifying single points of failure in each of those technologies, and duplicating the components of each technology at least once to eliminate those single points of failure. He also promoted the idea of using open-source formats as much as possible, and pursuing “content-based strategies” tailored to the specific needs of your institution’s datasets.

Mark Kavinsky, Senior IT Consultant and Owner of Skynet IT Networking Solutions, began his presentation with sobering statistics on the high likelihood of a business being irreparably harmed by a disaster for which it is not prepared. (To cite only one example, 93% of companies that lose their data center for 10 days or more due to a disaster file for bankruptcy within one year.) Kavinsky explained the different types of data failures that can occur, the main causes of data loss, and stressed the absolute necessity of making multiple copies of data, at least some of which are stored off-site. He then explained the differences between “active” and “non-active” or “dark” datasets, and provided a list of advantages and disadvantages to the currently available technology options for data backup.

Final presenter Jill Tatem is University Archivist at Cleveland’s Case Western Reserve University. Her talk on “Digital Preservation: Preventing the Long-Term Disaster” provided a concluding philosophical framework in which to place the technical recommendations previously offered. Tatem emphasized the critical importance of advocacy in advancing

digital projects, and the need to frame requests for financial support of such projects as “value propositions” for the sponsors. The digitization of collections should be a process that is carefully planned and clearly defined at its outset, Tatem argued, but that does not mean that organizations should hold off on any action until a perfect system of creation and long-term maintenance for digital assets is achieved; such a thing will likely never happen. The perfect is the enemy of the good, as the saying goes, and we as a profession cannot risk the security of our common culture heritage by delaying all action in this arena.

Following the formal presentations, all four speakers participated in a panel discussion moderated by current NEOAFR chairperson Ann Olszewski of the Cleveland Public Library. The audience was encouraged to not only ask questions of the panelists, but also to share personal experiences of disasters that have occurred at their institutions.

For additional information about the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Alliance for Response, contact current chairperson Ann Olszewski, Preservation Manager for the Cleveland Public Library, at 216-623-2813 or Ann.Olszewski@cpl.org. Or visit the NEOAFR website at <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/AfR/Ohio/index.html>.

Submitted by Nicole M. Hayes, Director of Education for the Intermuseum Conservation Association, Cleveland, OH