Minnesota Digital Library Governing Task Force

Public Report

3/5/2014

Overview

The Minnesota Digital Library (MDL) provides public access to photographs and images, maps, journals, oral histories, letters and works of art and hosts services to digitize resources. Professionals from libraries, archives, historical societies, museums and organizations like the Girl Scouts and St. John's Abbey follow rigorous standards and best practices as they expand the collection. We also use our collections in education support and outreach services. Funding for MDL is through the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (Legacy) via the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); additional funding is provided by Minitex. Our collaborative partners also contribute substantial in-kind services.

Minnesota Reflections is our premier collection with content provided by 160 participating cultural heritage organizations. *Reflections* is over ten years old and contains more than 186,000 historical treasures revealing Minnesota's rich cultural past. *Reflections* content is also available through the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), and will be preserved through a joint project with the University of Minnesota Libraries.

MDL Governing Task Force

A representative group of MDL participants started meeting in September 2013 to consider a new governance structure. Currently, MDL's governing structure is flat with operations, management, and oversight occurring within the same management team. The decision to look at governance was driven by a number of factors:

- The maturation of MDL required a more sophisticated governance structure
- The desire to engage the community in a more personal and proactive fashion
- The need to deepen our interactions with public and school libraries
- The need to strengthen oversight for grants and funding provided by the MN Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (Legacy)
- The rapid growth of new collections and new relationships require strengthened coordination
- The need to optimize our connection to DPLA and other collaborators, while fulfilling our core mission and obligations.
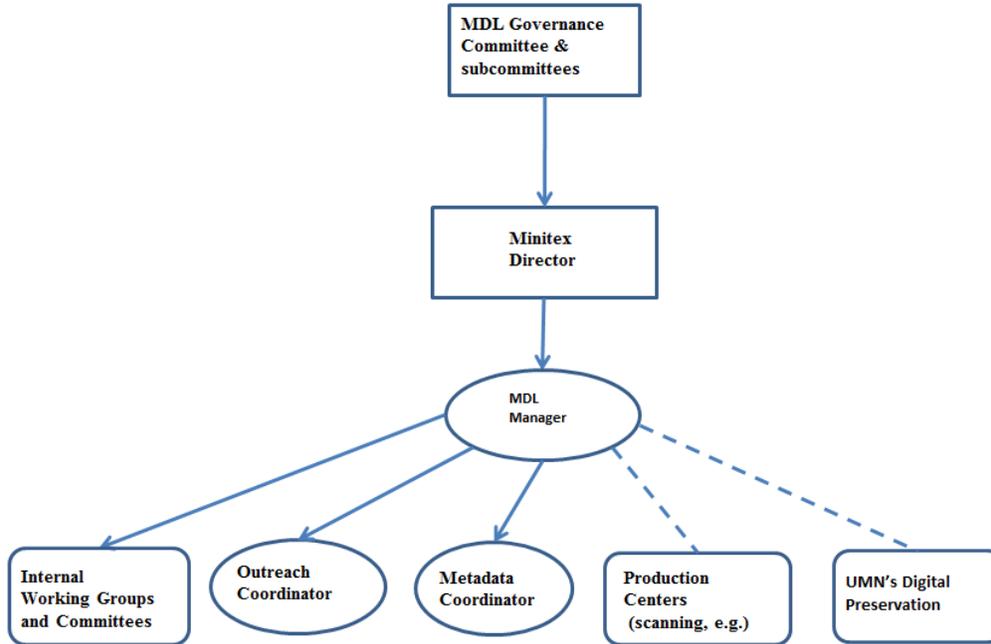
The task force included: Valerie Horton, Chair (Minitex), John Butler (University of Minnesota),

Jennifer Jones (Minnesota Historical Society), Keith Ewing (St. Cloud State University), Ben Leonard (Nicollet County Historical Society), Joyce Schneider (Washington County Library), Peggy Korsmo-Kennon (American Swedish Institute), and Carla Urban (Minitex). The task force's charge was *to develop assumptions and principles and create a proposed governance model as well as consider accountability and future development directions.*

This report identifies areas where the new governing body should take direct action. The proposed model formalizes the governing structure and builds in key oversight functions required by the receipt of Legacy funds and other grants. It expands representation on the governing body to include organizations not currently at the table, such as State Library Services, public libraries, and governmental libraries. The model also separates operations from management and creates clear lines of reporting. Finally, the proposal strengthens MDL's position within Minitex' management structure to ensure MDL's long-term viability and further the coordination of operations.

New MDL Governing Structure

Relationship Chart

The solid lines represent lines of authority, the dotted lines represent working relationships.

The roles and responsibilities of the new MDL Governing Committee include establishment and oversight of:

1. Mission, vision & goals
2. Policy
3. Oversight of finances and grant administration
4. Strategic planning
5. Partnership strategies and development
6. Advocacy, advancement, legislative relationships
7. Communication with key constituencies and to complementary organizations

Membership in the Governing Committee will consist of standing members and rotating members drawn from participating organizations. Standing members are the Minitex Director and a representative from the University of Minnesota, Minnesota Historical Society, and the Office of State Library Services. Rotating members will include two representatives each from participating academic institutions, public libraries, cultural heritage societies, and one representative from Minnesota's governmental libraries. The MDL Manager will be an ex officio staff liaison. Interim appointments will be made until bylaws are written.

New MDL Governance Committee Bylaws

Bylaws for the Governing Committee will mirror those of the MnLINK Gateway Operations Committee. The following items should serve as a starting point for the Governing Committee's bylaws.

- The Governing Committee will meet quarterly (more often at first)
- Each of the 11 Governing Committee members will have a vote
- Quorum and meeting attendance will be given consideration
- The positions of Chair & Vice Chair will be elected
- Secretarial support will be provided by Minitex
- Voting shall be in person or by electronic means as pre-approved by the Chair in accordance with state law
- Representatives for public, college, and governmental libraries will be selected using the same approach as for the Minitex Policy Advisory Council
- Representatives for cultural heritage organizations will be recommended by current governing committee members or through requests for volunteers

Expanded Role for Minitex

In this proposed model, Minitex takes on a more active staffing and operations role. Included Minitex activities are policy and plan implementation, committee support and work group coordination, HR and fiscal administration, grants, outreach to participant organizations and to the user community, marketing and web development, and liaison to digitization centers, digital preservation operations, and library hubs liaison.

The proposed staffing change brings the two employees currently paid by MDL under Minitex' administration and also creates a new position to support operations. The proposal leaves undefined the committee and working group formation that will replace the coordination activities currently taking place within the MDL Management Team.

The following sections capture much of the discussion of the MDL Governance Task Force. They are included here to help inform those interested in MDL on the current philosophy of the organization. The Task Force encourages readers to pay particular attention to the MDL Principles. These principles set practice but also show the values we believe are critical to the Minnesota Digital Library.

MDL Principles

1. **Access**: We believe individuals will increasingly use digital content to learn, create, and reminisce; therefore, MDL actively gathers, provides access to, and preserves digital content.
2. **Community Engagement**: We believe MDL should resonate with all Minnesotans; therefore, we will actively engage diverse communities and organizations both large and small to ensure their resources are preserved and their stories are told.
3. **User Empowerment**: We believe that information is empowering; therefore, we enable users to engage in the creation, discovery, and use of digital content.
4. **Openness**: We believe that information should be widely and freely available; therefore, we advocate for open access and the ready availability of as much of the MDL collections as

possible.

5. **Funding**: We believe our mission should be undertaken with the goal of long-term significance and value to the citizens of Minnesota; therefore, we must proactively pursue diverse and sustainable funding sources.
6. **Legacy**: We believe that we should honor the intent of our taxpayer funding source as well as other contributors; therefore, our activities, products, and collaborations should result in long-term significance and value to the residents of Minnesota.
7. **Collaboration**: We believe that we can achieve more as a community than separately; therefore, we should pursue collaborative opportunities that allow us expand and innovate.
8. **Meaning**: We believe that aggregating digital materials leverages MDL resources; therefore, we should provide opportunities for deepening the use of the collection through storytelling, exhibits, and other publishing efforts.

Purpose Discussion

The Ad Hoc Governing Task Force discussed the purpose of MDL. It is not the task force's charge to create a new mission statement, but rather to evaluate our current purpose and propose possible new ways of looking at MDL's future roles and activities. The discussion on purpose helped inform task force members of key issues regarding MDL, and we believe this discussion can be used by the new governing structure to help create a final mission and other related documents.

We started by looking at our current mission statement: *"To provide enduring open access to a growing body of digital content that is focused on valued cultural heritage information resources and serves the general interest, life-long learning, research, and educational interests of the citizens of Minnesota and beyond."* While a strong statement, task force members felt the current mission does not acknowledge MDL's important work with partners like DPLA and MHS and doesn't capture the deep collaborative nature of this enterprise. The task force wanted to reinforce the importance of the deep collaborative nature of MDL.

Other critical aspects of MDL's purpose include the need to be agile and to focus on the future. MDL has perhaps been taking too safe a path, especially in light of the changes occurring with digital content usage as shown by DPLA and other digital library initiatives. There is also the question of whether we should commit to an open-access model. Finally, our purpose must also demonstrate the earnestness and commitment we have for this project. We wish to inspire, not just preserve and provide access to resources.

The new Governing Committee may wish to consider the following possibilities when considering purpose:

- Capture Minnesota and the region's history and culture through digital objects to tell our story for generations to come
- Identify materials that are unique to Minnesota and the region for digitization and preservation to share long-term value
- Serve as the collaboration coordinator for organizations to help aggregate resources, collections, and expertise
- Provide avenues for students, researchers, and residents to engage with digital objects that reflect our heritage and culture

- Set standards, educate, and digitize materials for organizations without the resources to do so.

MDL has a history of leadership in the digital library field, and we wish to continue this tradition. We also see our purpose as showcasing what is unique and special about Minnesota and its peoples. Finally, we believe it is very important to honor the intent of the Legacy funding that makes up much of MDL's resource pool.

Audience
Users in the state, region, and world who have an interest in information from, for, and about Minnesota.

Window Shoppers
Random image searches (often not premeditated) bring these users to MDL. They may look quickly at an item and leave. They represent a huge potential audience, though the vast majority will be one-time users. Larger collections will increase the volume of window shoppers, but this audience does not really use MDL.

Casual Consumers
Casual consumers find us through specific searches outside MDL. They are looking specifically for a place, name, subject, etc. Usually they don't expand their searches beyond original intent. MDL may expand this audience through collection volume, participation in DPLA, and proactive collections development based on national trends, content-rich items (such as newspapers or plat books), leveraging History Day and state standards, and site analytics. Mass-marketing efforts and social media may have some effect with this group.

Deep Consumers
Deep consumers represent a variety of constituencies. Some may come as casual consumers but then follow-up with additional search terms from within MDL. Others may be returning visitors who routinely make MDL part of their research process. Deep consumers typically enter with a specific purpose in order to improve their understanding or expand their knowledge. They may dig and alter their search terms in hopes of finding what they want/need. Some are willing to add to descriptions or note corrections to be made because they feel ownership. This is a relatively small group of users, but probably the most intense. Marketing and social media efforts will have an impact, but directing those messages into their hands is difficult. There is potential to engage this audience and seek feedback from within MDL, especially those that feel most connected.

Creators
Some creators will be deep consumers who use MDL to create or assist in projects, programs, or publications. A small group may want to mine metadata to create applications for others to use. Some creators may also be casual users who just want to grab a pre-packaged exhibit or lesson plan and go.

Contributor
Participating organizations that contribute to MDL can also be classified as deep users and creators. This may account for more visits than we realize. Most small organizations lack user friendly collections databases. It's easier for them to use MDL for internal search and retrieval. Basically, MDL is their discovery system. This group also drives content and is now more aware, thanks to

analytics that MDL provides, of what types of content the public seeks to find.

Conclusion

Task Force members have found it valuable to look at MDL with fresh eyes from start to finish and with a focus on the future. We believe MDL is positioned to capture Minnesota's culture and history in a way that would not be possible without the collaborative nature of this enterprise. Our partnership with DPLA as well as our approach to the entire lifecycle of a digital object (discovery, creation, cataloging, access, and preservation) make MDL a vital asset for Minnesota residents and for researchers worldwide.