Policies for Digital Preservation

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Introduction
In the digital era both profit and non-profit organisations are challenged when dealing with digital information. One of the main questions is how to ensure digital assets are understandable and usable in the face of rapid organisational and technological change. And while many initiatives and projects are investigating this issue, there are few accessible and coherent approaches that organisations can apply in their own environment. In an effort to disseminate current thinking on designing, developing, and establishing a digital preservation policy for your organisation, ERPANET is running this seminar.

Although not many implementations exist at this point of time and most of the thinking is still on understanding the issues connected to digital information and exploiting the new possibilities offered by information technology, there is a growing need to take action to secure digital information. That requires policies, strategies and methods, which may not exist yet. The objective of this training seminar is to provide guidance on how to establish digital preservation policies and identify the issues that should be addressed as well as how to get started in implementing these policies.

The situation
Stakeholders are addressing the preservation of digital resources in various ways: methods for long-term preservation are being considered, digital repositories are being planned, processes for archival management are being rationalised.

While these bottom-up approaches appear to offer possibilities, the question is how coherent solutions can be created and put into place without a clear mission statement and without making the positions towards the issues involved explicit. How can we go somewhere without any reference points and guidelines that indicate the direction to be taken? A remedy for the digital longevity problem is only conceivable if clear directions and guidelines are formulated. It will ensure that actions within an organisation are not working against each other, but are taken in a coherent and co-ordinated way.

Only slowly are organisations starting to formulate digital preservation policies. Most policies that are publicly available via the web are by cultural heritage institutions and have largely been written only recently. The digital preservation policy for the National Library of Australia, for example, was first compiled mid 2001 and has been revised early 2002. The “Columbia University Libraries Policy for Preservation of Digital Resources” was written in the year 2000. At the same time it is apparent that not all cultural heritage institutions have created a digital preservation policy, even though preservation in broad terms is their primary business field.

Similarly there are few private sector companies that seem to have formulated a digital preservation policy. Policies by private companies, of course, are rather
unlikely to appear on the public web. Still, as it seems, companies have only just started establishing preservation policies. Existing corporate policies mostly address the restricted operational fields for which organisations are legally obliged to retain digital objects, as for example financial data or the retention of email as a documentary record and evidence, or research data about products delivered to the market.

There may be some confusion on what a preservation policy is, since there are apparently similar or slightly different approaches, under different names, such as Digital Asset Management, Collection management, and Trusted Repositories. How do they relate to the issues discussed in this seminar? Digital preservation is approached from many perspectives with different needs, and is addressed at different levels. Another reason to have a closer look at what we talk about.

**Seminar Topics**
The seminar will be based on best practices and experiences that will be analysed and used for identifying issues and steps. It is designed to be interactive with discussions in practical sessions.

The areas that will be covered by this seminar are:

- **Context and objectives**
  This session will address the domain or context in which organisations are working and how that may influence digital preservation policies. It will also try to identify objectives for policies.

  *Focus questions:*
  - What is the relationship between the core business of your organisation and ideas of preserving information?
  - To what extent are preservation policies influenced by the (business) context in which an organisation is working? What issues arise from that?
  - What is the influence of possible (internal or external) user needs?
  - What institutional requirements exist that could influence policies?
  - What can be identified as generic and what as domain specific?
  - What are the risks of not having a policy?

- **Issues to be addressed**
  Based on existing examples the issues that should be addressed when developing policies are identified. Participants will be offered the opportunity to discuss them in small breakout groups.

  *Focus questions:*
  - What policy areas can be identified?
  - What are the issues in each area?
  - How to achieve a coherent view?
  - What people, processes, etc. are involved?
  - How can existing reference models (e.g. OAIS model, or the ‘Trusted Repositories’ report) help in this task?
**Impact on organisation**
After objectives and issues are sufficiently identified and understood, the impact of possible policies on organisations (structure, people, finances, feasibility, etc.) will be presented. This will help to implement policies and to identify the related processes for change in the organisation.

*Focus questions:*
- Who will be influenced by the policy? Who will influence the conception of the policy?
- What changes have to be made to make a policy effective (e.g. people, organisational structures, knowledge, rules and procedures etc.)?
- Is it possible or desirable to integrate a preservation policy in stages?
- How to embed a preservation policy in the whole of an organisation’s policy framework/guidelines?
- How to identify the costs involved?
- What measures have to be taken to maintain and/or adjust policies over time (the role of continuous monitoring or auditing)?

**Implementing digital preservation policies**
Having discussed the main issues with respect to developing policies and the impact on organisations, it is possible to identify the necessary preconditions to get started and the possible first steps for implementation.

*Focus questions:*
- What are the prerequisites and the necessary activities to successfully implement a digital preservation policy?
- What responsibilities can be identified and who should be involved?
- What should be the first steps to implement the established policy?
- What does it mean for a digital preservation policy remain up-to-date? Is it necessary to revise it frequently?
- Should audit be conducted on a regular basis, be triggered by stimuli, or both? What are external or internal stimuli that might evoke a policy review?

**Finally**
We advise you to read some of the literature presented below to prepare yourself for the seminar.

You are also invited to use your own organisation as a reference during the seminar and take with you any documentation that may provide useful information or cases.
Bibliography

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