# Digital Collections Development Guidelines

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## 1. Purpose and Goals

VCU Libraries creates Digital Collections to provide broader access to rare, unique, and at-risk materials to advance VCU's mission and vision. Digital Collections include born-digital and digitized items published online by VCU Libraries for dissemination to the global community. Materials are typically digitized from the Libraries' collection, often drawn from Special Collections and Archives, or through collaborative partnerships with other institutions and community partners.

As with all VCU Libraries collections, the resources selected fall within established collection guidelines. These guidelines align with VCU Libraries Collection Guidelines and VCU Libraries Guidelines for Special Collections and Archives. VCU Libraries' Special Collections and Archives and general collections are the result of a rigorous selection process. Digitizing and sharing them online involve additional investment and risk.

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These guidelines aim to:

- Create a consistent, structured approach to identifying and selecting materials for digitization.
- Guide the selection of born-digital resources and scholarly output for wider dissemination and the management of these collections.
- Build a nationally distinctive and focused resource supporting research.

These guidelines will be reviewed annually.

# 2. Selection Criteria

The following criteria are considered when evaluating potential digital collections.

## a. Content and demand

- **Types and formats:** materials and formats to be considered include text and manuscript documents, photographic materials, ephemera, fine art, illustrations, sound recordings, video recordings, 3D objects, born-digital resources, and other types of digital materials.
- **Intellectual content**: materials are a rich source of information or perspective, supporting VCU's research, learning, inclusion, outreach, patient care, community impact, and other strategic institutional goals.
- **Demand**: evidence of current or potential use or wide interest is anticipated.
- **Preservation**: materials that are heavily used, or their physical condition makes access difficult; materials are at risk due to poor condition or obsolete media format. Digitization must not place the originals in unnecessary risk. Fragile materials require treatment or handling guidance from the Collections Care Librarian & Conservator.
- **Uniqueness or rarity**: materials with strong, immediate, or enduring value. This may include items not otherwise available online, projects that provide an opportunity for technological innovation, or projects that may bring distinction and recognition to VCU Libraries or VCU.
- **Value**: digitization will enhance materials' intellectual value, access, and use.
- **Existing collections strengths**: materials fill gaps in existing collections or deepen or diversify current content.

- **Diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice**: materials advance core values of diversity, inclusion, and equity or address disparities in society.
- **Community engagement**: materials strengthen community partnerships.

## b. Resources and time

- **Processing**: the item is cataloged, the collection is processed and open for research use, or resources are available to describe the materials.
- **Formats, size, and complexity**: materials' formats align with in-house or outsourced digitization capabilities.
- **Resources**: funding, equipment, and staff time are available to digitize materials and make them accessible and discoverable.
- **Digital preservation:** resources exist to provide the appropriate level of digital preservation support.

## c. Permission, privacy, and ethics

- **Ownership**: VCU Libraries is able to establish clear ownership of the materials, or permission has been granted to digitize materials from other repositories.
- **Copyright**: materials considered for digitization must be evaluated for compliance with copyright laws. Preference is given to materials that can be published on the public internet as public domain or openly licensed materials, and/or through permission from the copyright holder.
- **Ethics**: the decision to digitize is made within professional codes of ethics with input, where possible, from individuals, researchers, creators, and communities most affected by the proposed digitization. The environmental impact of digitization and storage is also considered.
- **Privacy**: materials containing personal information or other items that would violate privacy laws if made public should not be digitized. Items containing private information that can easily be redacted may be considered for digitization. Redactions will be noted in the metadata.
- **Legal requirements**: materials we are legally required to digitize and disseminate.

# 3. Selection Process

Anyone may suggest collections for digitization and dissemination. The Digital Initiatives Librarian will develop a digitization recommendation guided by the criteria above in consultation with VCU Libraries stakeholders who have expertise in areas such as subject knowledge, format, preservation and conservation, storage, and communications. External communities may be consulted as well. The digitization recommendation will be delivered to the Head of Digital Libraries and Publishing for final decision.

For Community Digitization projects, the Head of Digital Libraries and Publishing will additionally consult Special Collections and Archives and Development to determine existing relationships, research value, and potential for outreach and continuing partnerships. The community digitization recommendation will be delivered to the Dean and University Librarian for final decision.

After a digitization recommendation is approved, the Digital Initiatives Librarian will develop a digitization project plan with stakeholders' input to include workflows, priority levels, and an anticipated schedule for digitization.

# 4. Display, Description, and Accessibility

The development and maintenance of digital collections is scaffolded by a commitment to creating collections for and with the communities we serve. Digital collections will be hosted on a globally accessible platform that strives to support a variety of avenues for access for individuals using accessibility tools, in line with the VCU Web Standards and Guidelines on Accessibility.

Items come from a broad range of sources, including materials that are offensive or contain negative stereotypes. VCU Libraries provides access to these items to support research and inquiry. New digital collections are described and existing collections' descriptions are improved or remediated using interoperable metadata parameters that

aim to bring clarity to all users, reflect the uniqueness of the materials, and mitigate harmful language.

## 5. Maintenance and Removal

These guidelines are designed to ensure the development of high-quality, useful, usable, and cohesive digital collections. However, it is possible that individual objects or entire collections may need to be removed or deaccessioned for collection weeding, storage, copyright dispute, or if the physical object is deaccessioned. Digital Collections represent a broad range of historical sources that may contain offensive material or negative stereotypes that do not reflect VCU's current commitment to diversity and inclusion. VCU Libraries provides access to these items to support research and inquiry, and they are not typically removed for these reasons.

Anyone may recommend the removal of Digital Collections. Suggestions will be reviewed by the Digital Libraries and Publishing Department and the stakeholders and evaluated based on the above guidelines and the VCU Libraries' Statement on Challenged Materials.

## 6. References

NEDCC's Guide on Preservation and Selection for Digitization