



VCU

Libraries

Digital Collections Development Guidelines

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1. Purpose

VCU Libraries creates Digital Collections to provide wider access to rare, unique and at-risk materials, and to advance the University's academic and clinical care programs, research agenda, outreach efforts, and aspirations. VCU Libraries Digital Collections foster intellectual inquiry and experimentation that inform 21st-century research and scholarship, and further VCU's mission to build an inclusive, community-engaged culture. As with all VCU Libraries collections, resources selected fall within established collection guidelines. These guidelines will be reviewed annually.

2. Goals

The goal of these guidelines is to create a consistent, structured approach to the identification of materials for digitization, the selection of born-digital resources and scholarly output for wider dissemination, and the management of these collections. These guidelines will define and direct the scope of collection development efforts to build a nationally distinctive and focused resource supporting 21st-century research.

3. Selection criteria

The decision process expressed in this document aligns 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. Digitization and dissemination involve additional investment and risk, and decisions to digitize collections should follow this selection process.



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Digital Collections include born-digital and digitized items published online by VCU Libraries for dissemination to the global community. They are largely, but not exclusively, drawn from materials already held by VCU Libraries. Materials not owned by VCU Libraries that have high scholarly or regional interest and fall within established collection guidelines are considered. Collections from outside of VCU Libraries may be digitized as part of the [Community Digitization Program](#), or as part of VCU Libraries' service as a member of the Digital Virginia DPLA Hub.

Informed in part by the [NEDCC's Guide on Preservation and Selection for Digitization](#), these criteria are considered when evaluating potential 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, 3-D 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:** there is evidence of current or potential use, or wide interest is anticipated.
- **Preservation:** materials 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 may require treatment or handling guidance from the Preservation Librarian.
- **Uniqueness or rarity:** materials have strong immediate or enduring value. This may include items which are not otherwise available online; projects that provide an opportunity for technological innovation; or projects that may bring distinction and recognition to VCU Libraries or to 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.



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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. Environmental impact of digitization and storage is also considered.
- **Privacy:** materials containing personal information or other items which 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 should be noted in the metadata.
- **Legal requirements:** materials we are legally required to digitize and disseminate.

4. Selection process

Anyone may suggest collections for digitization and dissemination. Suggestions should be sent to the Head of Digital Engagement. The Head of Digital Engagement will consult with an internal digital collections development team including representatives from Special Collections and Archives, Collection Analysis and Investment, Metadata and Discovery, and relevant subject specialists and liaisons to develop a digitization and dissemination assessment and recommendation. For Community Digitization projects, Special Collections and Archives and Development will be consulted to determine existing relationships, research value, and potential for outreach and continuing partnerships. Other VCU Libraries stakeholders will be consulted as needed for expertise in areas such as subject knowledge, format, preservation, storage, and communications.

The digitization and dissemination assessment report will be guided by the selection criteria above and include:

- Description of collection including provenance and ownership
- Relevant selection criteria including research, scholarship, and curricular value
- Diversity and inclusion assessment, including identifying affected university or community stakeholders
- Copyright, privacy, or other legal concerns
- Scope of collection and estimate of resources to complete project
- Metadata treatment
- Digitization plan
- Accessibility plan
- Handling considerations
- Dissemination platform and publicity plan
- Preservation plan



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The Head of Digital Engagement will make the final recommendation based on consensus from the digital collections development team.

For Community Digitization agreements, the digitization and dissemination assessment report will be delivered to the Dean and University Librarian, who is the signatory authority for the Community Digitization Agreement.

5. Maintenance and Removal from Display

This policy is designed in part to ensure the development of digital collections that are of high quality, useful and usable, and cohesive. It is possible, however, that individual objects or entire collections may need to be removed or deaccessioned for reasons of collection weeding, storage, or copyright dispute, among others. Digital Collections 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 and does not typically remove items solely because of offensive content.

Anyone may recommend the removal of Digital Collections. Suggestions will be reviewed by the Head of Digital Engagement and responsible department head.

These decisions will be made in conjunction with the digital collections development team and others as appropriate.