

Opening History (OH) Aggregation Collection Development Policy¹²³ March 30, 2009

1. Opening History Mission

Opening History (OH) provides organized access to digital resources of value for research on United States history and culture. It aggregates a range of distributed and complementary cultural heritage collections from libraries, museums, and archives to increase their visibility and to enhance the value and usefulness of individual collections by integrating them with related collections, providing search and browse functions across collections, and linking to related resources outside of OH. The OH initiative encourages sharing of digital resources in open access formats and promotes coordinated access to regional, state, and local collections to support the creation of a digital cultural heritage aggregation of national scope.

OH supports its mission by:

- Developing and maintaining a Collection Registry for systematic representation of individual collections.
- Providing access to items within collections when metadata is made available by contributors.
- Including a wide range of collections varying in size and scope, representing many types and genres of materials, in formats including text, image, audio, and video.
- Organizing content to promote visibility and complementarity of collections.
- Developing online tools for efficient searching and browsing within the aggregation and for identifying related digital resources from other providers.
- Engaging with user communities and cultural heritage constituencies to guide development of content and functionality.

OH is an extension of the IMLS Digital Collections and Content (IMLS DCC) project <http://imlsdcc.grainger.uiuc.edu>. The IMLS DCC resource is an aggregation of IMLS-funded digital collections, and all collections from the IMLS DCC that are consistent with the mission and scope outlined in this policy are included in OH.

¹In developing this document, collection development policies of several aggregations and digital libraries were consulted, primarily: National Science Digital Library (NSDL) collection development policy http://onramp.nsdlib.org/eserv/onramp:42/NSDL_Collection_Development_Policy.pdf, California Digital Library (CDL) collection development framework <http://www.cdlib.org/inside/collect/framework.html>, South Carolina Digital Library (SCDL) collection development policy www.scmemory.org/documents/collection_policy.doc, and Digital Library of Georgia collection development policy <http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/colldev.html>.

² Please see Appendix 1 for the list of definitions used in this policy

³ This policy is to be reviewed and revised biannually by the IMLS DCC / OH Digital Collection Evaluation team.

2. The OH User Communities

Development and design of OH is aimed at U. S. history researchers, loosely-defined to include a broad and inclusive spectrum of user communities, including academic and non-academic history scholars; teachers and students, particularly at the undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels; genealogists and “citizen historians”; and others who learn or do research in settings such as museums and public libraries.

The user base also includes the creators and contributors of digital materials, cultural heritage professionals, including librarians, archivists, curators, and others who perform important roles as intermediaries and information providers for history researchers and other user communities.

3. OH collection scope

3a. Subject scope

OH collections cover all aspects of the history and culture of the United States. The aggregation aims to represent the varied population, urban and rural experiences, and the diverse cultural, political, social, geographic, and economic dimensions of U.S. history. Collections span U.S. history from pre-colonial times to the present. They may be interdisciplinary in nature and may represent relationships between history and public policy, law, health, medicine, science, economics, and other fields of study.

OH strives to build on its existing subject strengths and concentrations.

The general existing strengths are in

- state, regional⁴, county, and local⁵ history

and the following subject categories:

- ethnic groups
 - Asian Americans
 - Native Americans
 - African Americans
- military and wars
- particular higher education institutions (universities and colleges)
- education (schools, vocational, etc.)
- industries and labor:
 - transportation
 - mining
 - agriculture
- architecture
- expeditions and exploration
- women
- U. S. presidents
- religions

⁴ Regional history usually focuses on sub-state (e.g., Northern Illinois) and/or super-state geographic regions (e.g., Mountain West Region)

⁵ Local history focuses on the history of the place and people from a particular [village](#) or [township](#).

- economics
- sports and physical education.

Example target areas to extend existing strengths include:

- additional ethnic groups: Latina/Latino/Mexican Americans, German Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans;
- additional industries: oil industry, construction, manufacturing, automotive, etc.

3b. Geographic focus and languages

OH geographic coverage includes all 50 US states, as well as other dependent territories (e.g., Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, etc.).

OH strives to build initially on its geographic strengths in:

- Western states
- Southern states
- Midwestern states

with the aim of covering all regions over time.

The majority of the resources in the collections included in OH are in English, but other languages are not excluded, particularly other spoken languages in the United States.

3c. Nature of the materials

The collections included in OH vary in size, depth, and type of materials. They include, but are not limited to, the following digitized materials:

- books, pamphlets and manuscripts
- images, audio, & multimedia visual resources, including:
 - photographs
 - paintings
 - drawings
 - postcards
 - posters
 - films and videos
 - sound and voice recordings (e.g., oral histories, music, storyteller performances)
 - animations
 - interactive learning objects, etc.
- archival materials (such as letters, diaries, contracts, etc.) and archival finding aids
- government documents and websites
- newspapers, newsletters, magazines, and journals
- maps
- physical objects / realia, such as costumes, pins, etc.
- sheet music and scores
- events, including exhibits
- collections, such as aggregations of materials, libraries of digitized primary sources.

4. Selection Criteria

The OH Digital Collections Evaluation team manages the selection process. The process is guided by the principle of “contextual mass”, where size, or critical mass in and of itself, is not a driving factor for selection of individual collections. The emphasis for selection is on digital collections that extend, complement, or bridge existing OH subject concentrations and contribute to the integration of the aggregation as a whole in support of the research needs and activities of historians.⁶ Collections can be of any size and contain any type of content of value to historians now or in the future. The following baseline criteria are applied:

- Collection has thematic cohesiveness (e.g., by topic area, type of materials)
- Collection has a distinct title
- Collection is available through a unique point of entry (e.g., a unique URL)
- Collection has a basic collection-level description:
A complete collection description generally includes a collection’s title, hosting institution, subject coverage, geographic and temporal coverage, the types of objects included in collection, collection size, intended audience(s), and a statement about collection development guidelines/policy; also if applicable, collection provenance information and names of creator(s) of items may be included.
- Collection adheres to quality guidelines (see the Quality Guidelines section of this Policy).

A collection may have multiple sub-collections, provided these meet the same criteria above.

OH actively seeks regional/local history collections.

The following materials are not included in OH:

- Online public access catalogs and bibliographic databases
- Institutional repository collections as a whole
- Open access journals
- Current administrative documents and records of organizations.

5. Quality Guidelines

Because OH includes many types of collections intended to address the needs of different users, it is expected that individual collections will necessarily differ in their specific nature. The OH strives to aggregate collections that adhere to the following guidelines.

5.1. The collection offers high research, artifactual, or evidential value for historical research at present or in the future.

5.2. The resources add value to individual collections or groups of collections, such as:

- supplemental resources that help users to better understand, navigate, and use the collection
- materials that provide linkages to local and/or related resources

⁶ This principle is based on research on scholarly information use practices and analysis of digital resources created by scholars for their own research communities (Palmer, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2009).

5.3. The collection is robust and functional.

OH materials should be fully operational when users discover them. Therefore collections and items should:

- be free of conspicuous bugs, defects, and nonworking elements (e.g., links that don't work, graphics that don't display) that inhibit intended use;
- function with current versions of major web browsers and with widely used operating systems.

5.4. The collection is free of advertising.

Collections with advertising that is distracting, irrelevant, or that interrupts or interferes with the use of the material will be excluded.

5.5. The collection is easily accessible to users.

To ensure wide accessibility and use, OH collections should be free for end users. No fees are applied for use of the OH aggregation.

5.6. The collection has items accessible to users.

In particular, OH strives to include collections that are ready to share item-level metadata through the OH portal.

5.7. The collection is searchable or browsable as a distinct collection.

6. Resource Ownership and Management

Collections included in the OH aggregation are not housed on OH servers or storage systems. The collections and items are held and managed by their owners or providers. OH consists of a Collection Registry and a portal that provides search and browse access to collection records in the Collection Registry and also to item-level records when they are made available by collection providers.

Collection records provide structured descriptions that enable users to learn about OH registered collections and locate them through a link to the collection's primary webpage. The collection records are managed by OH; item level metadata records are provided by participating collections and made available by OH.

7. Participation

OH includes collections within scope of this policy from any kind of cultural heritage institution, and encourages participation by state, local, and university based libraries, archives, and museums to build an aggregation that represents states and regions across the U. S. The collections that work most effectively within OH are those that offer quality metadata, reliable delivery, ongoing maintenance, and assurance of longevity.

Participants are encouraged to provide item-level metadata. To support effective searching, item-level metadata should describe key characteristics of individual objects within a collection—title, URL, brief description, subject, object type (e.g., text, image, sound recording).

Additional detail information about participating in OH is provided at <http://imlsdcc.grainger.uiuc.edu/participation.asp>.

8. Accuracy of Data

Responsibility for accuracy of information and data within and about collections rests with the institutions creating and maintaining the collections. OH does not warrant any information available through the OH portal and recommends that all institutions contributing collections have a systematic process for assessing the accuracy of their content and a policy for site review and revision.

Appendix: Selected Brief Definitions

Cultural heritage institutions – libraries, museums, archives, historical societies, and other institutions providing access to content documenting cultural heritage.

Collection registry – a service that provides access, services, and additional functionality to a database of collection metadata descriptions.

Contributor — organization or institution (e.g., University of Illinois Library, Atlanta Historical Society) that creates or hosts digital collection.

Digital collection – aggregation of digital/digitized items that are assembled and maintained by one or more contributors over time for a specific purpose and audience, and according to a particular collection development plan.

Item – individual object (e.g., digitized letter, photograph, sound recording, etc.) that is part of a digital collection.

Metadata — structured data about an object or collection that supports functions associated with the designated object or collection. “Author/creator,” “title,” and “subject” are properties that are commonly identified as *metadata elements*.

Metadata record — an organized collection of metadata elements with content values that represent an object or collection (e.g., bibliographic or catalog record, finding aid). OH contains two kinds of metadata records – collection records that describe groups of objects defined as a collection, and item records that describe the individual objects in a collection.

Portal – a website that provides access to digital objects. In the case of OH, the portal provides access to the Collection Registry and the aggregated harvested item-level metadata for digital objects in participating collections.