

Appendix E:

Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning, Internal Report, Executive Summary

(Companion to Focus Group Study)

Prepared on behalf of the partnership between the HBCU Library Alliance
and the Council on Library and Information Resources

by

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes data gathered from five member institutions selected by the HBCU Library Alliance to participate in this study. The five institutions make up a sample that primarily reflects the needs of small and medium-sized institutions (Lincoln University of Missouri, Meharry Medical College, Southern University at New Orleans, and Xavier University of Louisiana) but also includes the perspectives of those working on one larger campus (Prairie View A&M University). Ranging in size and budget, the five institutions are situated across four states (Missouri, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Texas), and their unique collections encompass African art, narratives of the enslaved, the collected works of Langston Hughes, campus alumni history, and more. Taken together, these HBCU Library Alliance member institutions provide a rich yet manageable range of data conducive to analysis within the year-long timeframe for *Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archival Collections*.

The goals for the study were to (1) build consensus around and articulate common values, priorities, and needs for describing and managing special and archival collections for the HBCU Library Alliance community; and (2) document basic technical capacities and user profiles that could be used to design sustain-

able shared technical solutions for creating access to the majority of HBCU Library Alliance members' archival collections. Researchers conducted interviews with individuals working at the five participating institutions to identify opportunities for improving support for creating access to special collections and archives across HBCU Library Alliance member organizations.

Major Recommendations

Most of the challenges articulated by the participants relate to the practical maintenance of their repositories and providing access to their special collections and archives. Workflows are not standardized across member institutions or even, in some cases, within institutions. Only one of the five participating institutions is actively collecting user experience data to confirm appropriate levels of support to researchers discovering special collections and archival records. For these reasons, the research team proposes two major initiatives. Each would require broad participation across the HBCU Library Alliance membership.

1. The HBCU Library Alliance should develop an extensive arrangement, preservation, and description guide based on existing DACS and OAIS standards to establish model workflows and appropriate tools suited to the realities of HBCU libraries; these may differ from those located at PWIs.
2. The organization could also facilitate a working group to develop and implement a user experience evaluation strategy to improve discovery and access for researchers.

Library leadership and the institutions' administrations can influence the resources available to support this work as well as ideologically steer digitization efforts and expectations. Developing policies related to collecting and acquiring new materials, deaccessioning records, environmental planning, and staffing and funding fall under the purview of leadership staff who may or may not participate in establishing protocols and workflows but are certainly responsible for enforcing policies. For these reasons, the researchers propose that the HBCU Library Alliance should support library directors by:

1. underscoring the role of libraries as a central hub for supporting the research communities;
2. advocating for the use of university resources to conduct outreach and enhance marketing efforts;
3. conducting research related to advancing the professional development of existing and emerging librarians and archivists, and;
4. facilitating an open dialog among member institutions.

Additional Recommendations

Drawing from their analysis of the interview data as well as an investigation into relevant policies and protocols for providing access to special collections and archival records, the research team proposes additional recommendations for three areas of work: maintaining reliable and trustworthy repositories, improving user experiences and discovery, and supporting other member institution priorities. The recommendations cover staffing, budgeting, establishing workflows and standards for digitization and access, evaluation, and addressing hardware and software needs.

Recommendations for Maintaining Reliable and Trustworthy Repositories

HBCU Library Alliance member institutions should be encouraged to adopt existing and updated practices, theories, techniques, standards, and tools in order to maintain reliable and trustworthy repositories. Efforts should be focused on preserving and creating access to unique, locally oriented materials rather than competing to provide parallel services unnecessarily. Recommendations in this area might be adopted by individual member institutions, across small cohorts of collaborating institutions, or across the entire HBCU Library Alliance membership:

1. Commit resources to developing multi-institutional digitization hubs similar to those at Prairie View A&M University and Xavier University of Louisiana, documenting practices so that they can serve as models for other collaborative endeavors.
2. Launch a collaborative initiative to inventory, clean, and reorganize rare materials in order to prevent environmental damage, degradation, and loss.
3. Prioritize the digitization VHS, microfiche, and other volatile analog materials at risk of degradation.
4. Dedicate at least one individual at each organization to digitization work and focus on supporting that person's professional development and growth, and create opportunities for them to share knowledge with others.

Recommendations for Improving User Experience and Discovery

Participants suggested three main recommendations dealing with user experience and discovery:

1. Launch initiatives to create and enhance finding aids so that researchers can better discover special collections and archival records.
2. Provide an online form, easily accessible from finding aids and catalog records, that would enable users to nominate materials for digitization quickly and easily.
3. Mobilize resources across organizations (e.g., university marketing, alumni outreach) to promote and support the libraries' efforts to better engage with faculty, students, and researchers.

Supporting Other Member Institution Priorities

Participants in the study identified additional challenges and obstacles they faced at their respective institutions, noting administrative support and advocacy as a priority for securing resources to sustain all library activities. Advocacy for libraries can benefit from attention at the local as well as consortial levels, through enacting some or all of the following recommendations:

1. The HBCU Library Alliance should develop a "State of the HBCU Library Alliance" address that can be shared widely amongst member institutions' administrations each year, helping institutional administrations better appreciate the larger undertaking HBCU

- libraries facilitate: to preserve and protect African American history and shape the documentation of African American legacies.
2. More local and national attention should be devoted to recruiting more young people of color into the fields of library and information science, special collections and archives, and information technology. BIPOC populations, and particularly African Americans, are an underrepresented group within each of these respective professions.
 3. Since very few library school programs are offered at HBCUs, the HBCU Library Alliance should facilitate a conversation amongst its member institutions to strategically and collaboratively address these career gaps for African Americans.
 4. The HBCU Library Alliance should endeavor to provide more face-to-face professional development and networking opportunities for member organizations with the goal of facilitating deeper and more extensive collaboration across organizations.