

CODE OF ETHICS FOR DIGITAL PRESERVATION

CONTENTS

Document Control

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Purpose | 3 |
| Definition of terms | 3 |
| Application | 4 |
| Relationship to other codes | 5 |
| Principles | 6 |

DOCUMENT CONTROL

| Version | Notes |
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| 1 | Draft for public consultation. Send all feedback to Peter McKinney, National Library of New Zealand: peter.mckinney@dia.govt.nz . |
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PURPOSE

This code of ethics defines standards for the ethical behaviour of professionals that are involved in digital preservation activities.

Digital preservation professionals assume obligations to the digital material they are caring for, and by extension, the content creators, custodians and future generations that will make use of this material.

Codes of ethics exist to outline a set of values that a community, profession or organisation adhere to. These codes are written to help define conduct, standards, behaviours and obligations that are expected within the relevant group of people.

A code of ethics for digital preservation supports its members. It highlights and codifies our responsibilities to digital objects that have long-term value and offers the following benefits:

- It enables the community to have a degree of accountability through the setting of expectations.
- It acts as a statement of expectation for all members of the community, offering an introduction to who we are as a group and what our responsibilities are.
- It is an instrument of justification. It can be referenced to support arguments for particular courses of action that are digital preservation specific.
- Finally, a code of ethics is one of the steps required if digital preservation is to be considered a distinct profession.

This document is not a code of conduct, nor is it a code of practice.

A code of *conduct* defines specific behaviours. It is generally internally facing and details rules and compliance considerations. A code of *practice* may specify activities and best practice. It may even detail auditable activities. This document may be used to help develop either of these codes.

This code of ethics codifies high-level expectations and responsibilities under which activities should be discharged by members of the community

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Consumer: Users. Can be seen as equivalent to “consumer” in the OAIS model: “those persons, or client systems, that interact with OAIS services to find and acquire preserved information of interest”

Digital Object: A discrete unit of information in digital form. It can consist of data and metadata in form of one or more digital files. Digital Object can be simple or

complex. It can be equivalent to an archival ingest package¹, intellectual entity, representation or file.²

Digital preservation: “[A]ll of the actions required to maintain access to digital [objects] beyond the limits of media failure or technological and organisational change.”³

Action: For the sake of this code of ethics, the definition of actions is broad and can include collection of digital objects, appraisal, assessment, migration, emulation, processing and giving access.⁴

Ethics: “[...] moral principles recognized in a particular profession, sphere of activity, relationship [...]”.⁵

Stakeholders: Any person or group that has a stake in the digital object. This can include creators, custodians and consumers.

APPLICATION

This code of ethics applies to anyone who plays a role in preserving digital materials.

The code is as applicable to researchers, teachers of digital preservation and developers, as it is to those whose day to day business is preserving collections. The principles are designed to be relevant to all members and to support the practices of a professional community.

The principles described below look to describe an individual’s responsibilities to:

1. Content – through understanding and respecting context and practices.
2. Colleagues – through displaying respect and honesty.
3. Stakeholders (including creators, custodians and consumers) – through displaying respect and honesty.
4. Themselves – through self-reflection on capability and constant self-improvement.
5. The environment within which work is undertaken – by acknowledging and respecting mandates, limitations and boundaries.

¹ For more information on Archival Information Packages (AIPS), see The Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems, *Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System*, June 2012. <https://public.ccsds.org/pubs/650x0m2.pdf>.

² For more information on Intellectual Entities, Representations and Files, see PREMIS Editorial Committee, *PREMIS Data Dictionary for Preservation Metadata*, Version 3.0 June 2015. <http://www.loc.gov/standards/premis/v3/premis-3-0-final.pdf>.

³ *Digital Preservation Handbook*, 2nd Edition, <http://handbook.dpconline.org/>, Digital Preservation Coalition, <https://www.dpconline.org/handbook/glossary#D>

⁴ This broad definition is predicated on a holistic view of the digital environment in which digital preservation is undertaken. These activities overlap with other spheres of professional activity (including archiving, librarianship, museology and informatics), but all are activities that are intertwined with digital preservation, therefore should be covered by the code.

⁵ "ethics, n.". OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/355823?rskey=KulQ6U&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed March 14, 2018).

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER CODES

Digital preservation activities cut across other professions, including, archiving, librarianship, museology and information technology. In addition, those that work under a banner of digital preservation come from many different backgrounds and may not solely be a member of this community.

This code of ethics is therefore designed to work in tandem with codes from other professions.⁶ If this code does transgress the boundaries of other professions' codes, it is unlikely that the intent contained in each would be in conflict. It is expected that individuals will apply the code that is best suited to each domain they are working within at any given time.

⁶ A number of codes of ethics have been consulted during the development of this document. The list includes:

International Council on Archives, Code of Ethics, 1996,
https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA_1996-09-06_code%20of%20ethics_EN.pdf;

IASA, Ethical Principles for Sound and Audiovisual Archives, 2010 (revised 2011),
<https://www.iasa-web.org/ethical-principles>;

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice, 2015, <https://www.conservation-us.org/docs/default-source/governance/code-of-ethics-and-guidelines-for-practice.pdf?sfvrsn=9>;

New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials, Code of Ethics, 2006,
<http://www.nzccm.org.nz/bin/CodeofEthics.pdf>.

PRINCIPLES

Members of the digital preservation community shall

1. Work to make digital objects available and accessible for future generations.
Digital preservation is the activity that gives longevity to the digital world. It maintains digital objects across time in order to allow access to their content.
2. Have respect for the digital objects in their care, striving to understand the context of the objects, including (but not limited to) cultural, historic and social underpinnings.
The preservation of digital objects must be informed by the context of the objects and the preservation community member should be sensitive to those contexts and how actions may impact them.
3. Never discriminate on the basis of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation.
This principle should be applied to the digital object, stakeholders and members of the community.
4. Understand the ramifications of any work undertaken, make a record of that work and be able to justify the course of action undertaken.
Digital preservation actions can take many routes depending on mandates, institutional requirements and other inputs. The community member must understand the impact of their work across all of those inputs and be able to justify their work within the environment in which they work.
5. Strive to give consumers easy access to information that allows them to understand exactly what they are accessing.
The digital world allows for multiple copies and representations of objects. The consumer must be given easy access to information that allows them to understand exactly what they are accessing and its relation to the "original" object. This may include any history of change or information on surrogacy creation.
6. Be aware of digital preservation standards, theory and best practice.
It is incumbent on the community member to be aware of and conversant in the primary documents and discourses underpinning digital preservation.
7. Work within limits of their expertise, education and available resources. They should look to address these limits through continued professional development, collaboration and other methods.
The digital preservation community is diverse and comprised of members with a wide-variety of backgrounds and skills. Each member should strive to develop themselves and the community through training, working with others and other modes of development.
8. Maintain an understanding of technical trends and consumer expectations.
Having an informed picture of what can be achieved with current and emerging technology (both in terms of content creation and preservation), and how

consumers may expect to interact with objects using technology is crucial to informing preservation activities.

9. Act with honesty and respect in all professional relationships.
This principle guides both work practices and communication. Stakeholders should expect expert advice and recommendations that are given with impartiality. Members of the community must be able to hold discourse that is built upon mutual trust and a desire to develop best practice.
10. Observe legal requirements and obligations determined by rights associated with digital objects.
The community member has a duty to ensure that they adhere to any obligations as laid out in donor/depositor agreements, legislation, institutional mandates and any documentation.
11. Strive for the highest standards of work.
The community member has a duty of care to those that come after. Ensuring the quality of current work supports those who will care for the objects in the future. In addition, while resources are finite and vary across institutional contexts, the quality of the work undertaken should not be compromised.