Digital Collections and Library Systems:
The Current Landscape in Wisconsin

In the past several years, a number of library systems – OWLS in collaboration with NFLS; WRLS, and ESLS – have adopted centralized hosting solutions for local history materials digitized by member libraries. These projects have been funded in part by LSTA grants, and all are now (or soon will be) discoverable through the Recollection Wisconsin portal and, eventually, will be made available through the Digital Public Library of America. Each of these projects has included an investment of staff time and expertise in digitization training and project support alongside the hosting service. Several other systems, including IFLS, SCLS and WVLS, are now at various stages of researching and implementing their own centralized hosting for digitized local history content. In addition, Recollection Wisconsin provides content hosting for individual public libraries, as well as academic libraries, museums and historical societies, in partnership with the Milwaukee Public Library.

Hosting content is just one of the numerous activities essential to a successful, sustainable digitization program. Other issues to consider in creating digital collections include planning, funding and managing projects; determining copyright status and accurate rights labeling; choosing appropriate equipment and techniques for scanning/reformatting; working with imaging vendors; creating standardized descriptive metadata; managing researcher inquiries and requests for reproductions; promoting projects to students, genealogists and other user groups; and implementing digital preservation strategies to ensure the stability of digital files and ongoing access to content.

WPLC is uniquely positioned to offer coordinated education and support to help library systems address these needs for their communities. A [survey](#) of more than 140 libraries and local historical societies in small Wisconsin communities (population 6,000 or fewer) conducted by Recollection Wisconsin in May 2014 demonstrated that more than 80% of these organizations are interested in bringing content online. Survey respondents indicated that the most valuable support to meet this goal would be avenues to outsource the work of building digital collections, in the form of either a trained fieldworker/intern to come to the library to complete a project, or an opportunity to send materials out for digitization.

Empire State Digital Network: A Possible Collaborative Model

[Empire State Digital Network](#) is the DPLA Service Hub for the state of New York. ESDN is administered by the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO) in collaboration with eight multitype regional library councils collectively working as NY3Rs Association. Each regional council contributes, in-kind, some level of digitization support to members, e.g. digitization equipment, staff assistance, templates and guidelines. Digitized content from each of the nine councils is made available online through one of three collaborative portals, which are then aggregated by ESDN and provided in a single feed to DPLA. A staff liaison at each council functions as the public face of ESDN and DPLA in their region. Funding for three full-time ESDN staff positions, all housed at METRO, is provided by METRO and NY3Rs.