Five Organizational Stages

The five stages model is a way of thinking about where an organization is in terms of its involvement with digital preservation and support of preservation initiatives. It allows organizations to have a common language for discussing how mature their digital preservation programs are both internally and with other groups. It also provides a way to judge progress toward digital preservation goals by explaining what is necessary to reach each stage. All organizations go through each of the stages at least briefly, but progression is not uniform; organizations move at different rates, and an organization may exhibit some behaviors of a higher stage before it has actually reached that stage.

This "cheat sheet" describes each of the five stages and provides a summary table.

Stage 1 (Acknowledge) involves coming to understand that digital preservation is a local problem. Initially, there may be a belief that digital preservation is someone else's responsibility. The enormity of the problem may lead to a sense of paralysis and inability to act effectively, or there may be an optimistic sense that the future will simply take care of itself and that the organization doesn't need to worry. However, when the organization discovers problems accessing important digital content, it may begin to understand that it needs to start doing something about digital preservation. At this stage, the organization is likely to have no policy or implicit policy only, no cohesive technological infrastructure, and few or no sustainable resources in place.

Stage 2 (Act) involves initiating digital preservation projects. These projects are typically limited in scope; they respond to immediate threats without addressing the ongoing problem. At this stage, digital preservation is viewed as a technological problem only, and is not integrated with major organizational functions. However, organizations soon find that this superficial approach is inadequate for effective digital preservation. At this stage, the organization is likely to have either a very high-level policy or no policy at all, an ad hoc technological infrastructure that specifically responds to the needs of particular projects, and project-based funding.

In Stage 3 (Consolidate), the organization moves from projects to programs. It realizes that project-based activities do not support long-term preservation planning, and begins to engage in ongoing activities that are increasingly coordinated with each other. It also begins to attend to external standards and digital preservation efforts. Digital preservation is increasingly seen as connected to the organization's mission and worthy of support. At this stage, the organization will have core written policies, the technological infrastructure will begin to be managed more proactively, and there will be a limited amount of sustainable funding.

Stage 4 (Institutionalize) involves incorporating the larger environment and rationalizing programs. The organization realizes that it is expensive and redundant to have multiple uncoordinated digital preservation projects or programs. The organization begins mapping its efforts to external standards and practices and promoting coordination of initiatives to create an integrated set of digital preservation activities. Support for digital preservation is internalized institution-wide. At this stage, an organization has comprehensive, well-managed policies and systematic, coordinated management of digital preservation activities; anticipates and plans for technology needs and trends, rather than just responding to them; and has sustained, designated funding for digital preservation.

Stage 5 (Externalize) involves embracing inter-institutional collaboration and dependencies. The organization realizes that internal programs are necessary but insufficient, and begins to pursue cooperative arrangements with other organizations. This collaboration generally leads to an integrated repository or repositories. Digital preservation activities are cross-institutional and designed to leverage individual participants' strengths. Digital preservation is understood as a shared responsibility, not an individual one. At this stage, organizational activities will be well managed, with collaboration being an inherent consideration in planning, and with clear inter-organizational delineation of roles and responsibilities; the technological infrastructure will be distributed and highly integrated, with clear understanding of how responsibility for maintenance is distributed; and resources will be sustainable and distributed.

Five Stages Summary

Acknowledge	Understanding that digital preservation is a local concern	⧖ (DP)	• often non-existent • implicit policy, or very high level
		0101	• non-existent or heterogeneous, decentralized
		$$$$	• low, finite, ad hoc financial commitment
Act	Initiating digital preservation projects	⧖ (DP)	• implicit policy or expressed in general terms • increased evidence of commitment
		0101	• project- specific and reactive • ad hoc location
		$$$$	• often project-based funding
Consolidate	Segueing from projects to programs	⧖ (DP)	• development of basic and essential policies
		0101	• assessment of technology investment and requisite infrastructure • shift to proactive mode
		$$$$	• some funding and support beyond projects, but limited
Institutionalize	Incorporating the larger environment	⧖ (DP)	• consistent, systematic management • comprehensive policy framework
		0101	• technology planning anticipates needs • infrastructure investments planned/ implemented
		$$$$	• sustainable funding identified for core program areas and enhancement
Externalize	Embracing inter-institutional collaboration and dependencies	⧖ (DP)	• virtual organizations complement institutional ones • collaboration inherent feature in resource planning
		0101	• distributed and highly integrated • extra-organizational features and services
		$$$$	• varying levels of investment, but sustainable funding • possibly distributed financial management

OAIS and the Five Stages: Take One…

OAIS Function	Stage				
	1	2	3	4	5
Administration	○	◐(half)	◐	●	Σ ●
Ingest	◐	◑	●	●	Σ ●
Archival Storage	◑	◑	◐	●	Σ ●
Data Management	◑	◐	◐	●	Σ ●
Preservation Planning	○	◑	◐	●	Σ ●
Access	◐	●	●	●	Σ ●
Common Services	◑	◐	◐	●	Σ ●

Key: Probable highest level achieved

○ Nothing in place

◑ Something in place, but not OAIS-compliant

◐ Partially OAIS-compliant

● Fully OAIS-complaint

Σ ● OAIS-compliant based upon the sum of collaborative efforts