

PLN Futures Panel

Transcript of the MetaArchive Cooperative's final Community Call

Panelists: Shanna Smith (Digital Collections Manager, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), Charles Johnson (Collections Archivist, Alabama Department of Archives and History; Co-chair, ADPNet), Justin Clark (Digital Initiatives Director, Indiana Historical Bureau), Chelsea Denault (Coordinator, MDPN)

Moderator: Snowden Becker (LOCKSS Community Manager)

[Jackson Huang]:

So we'll start today with a brief overview of MetaArchive's history and the sunset, just to provide some context for today's panel. But the main focus will be on lessons and dreams for a healthy, thriving, distributed digital preservation ecosystem, composted from the experiences of MetaArchive members participating in the network over the years (including through this deliberative sunset process), and of members from other PLNs who have supported MetaArchive members in finding new pathways forwards to continue meeting their institutions' digital preservation needs. We'll reserve some time for Q&A at the end, and then we'll wrap up with where to find us.

I want to give a brief bit of context on MetaArchive and the sunset. Founded in 2004, MetaArchive was the first and longest running private LOCKSS network, a network of members using the LOCKSS distributed preservation software to keep their content secure. MetaArchive hosted a wide range of member and content types across three continents. Over the last 20 years, the MetaArchive Cooperative has convened multiple working groups to address various types of sustainability challenges and ensure that the network is able to continue meeting member needs over time. The most recent effort was in 2023: We convened the Community Research Task Force (CRTF) to identify and propose options to address sustainability challenges, including:

- the creation of an Operating Reserve policy (how much funding that an archive needs to successfully sunset with integrity) which was then approved by the general membership
- identification of options to address ingest challenges and technical debt, including migrating technical infrastructure directly over to the LOCKSS program at Stanford
- and exploring grants and alternative membership models to increase funding.

At the beginning of 2024, the MetaArchive Operating Reserve fell \$20,000 below the sunset threshold. This combined with a new Educopia requirement for a full instead of half full time employee for membership communities—which is something that was independently identified as a need, both by the Community Research Task Force and by membership in previous mitigation efforts such as the 2019 Changing for Continued Impact series—triggered the network's decision to sunset. This deliberative sunset process has been carried out over the last year in accordance with MetaArchive's Operating Reserve

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and contingency plan in order to ensure that members have been able to find appropriate future pathways forwards for their institutional digital preservation needs, and to account for asset disposition and technical work related to returning and safeguarding member content in a stop gap solution.

This is a panel of MetaArchive members who have been active over the years and gone through the sunset process, and members from other PLNs who have supported those former members in finding or creating new PLN homes. So, the focus of this particular panel will be on the experience of participating in a PLN; what's being composted from the MetaArchive community and sunset process into the broader PLN community; and our collective dreams for the future of a thriving community-based digital preservation ecosystem. The panelists will likely not hold the context to answer very granular questions about the sunset, which is not the focus of this particular panel. And so, in order to make the most of the shared expertise of today's panelists, I'll be prioritizing questions in the Q&A around experiences that they'll be able to speak to.

However, just as a kind of FYI, Snowden and I, as two members of the MetaArchive Transition Research team who have been working to carry out the sunset from start to finish, will be presenting a retrospective on *'MetaArchive Across Its Life Cycle'* and the sunset process, in particular, at CNI Spring in a couple of weeks. This will be a recorded session for those who will not be attending, but are curious to learn more. Educopia will also be posting a summary and learnings from the process [to our website](#), so if there are questions that you have about the sunset, we'll try to go ahead and incorporate those answers into that final communication and share it with you in that blog post.

So having given a little bit of context just from MetaArchive, I'd like to do a brief introduction of our panelists, and then hand it off to Snowden. As a reminder, I will be monitoring the chat for questions to the panel, and I'll be gathering them for the Q and A at the end. With that out of the way, today's panelists are:

- **Shanna Smith**, the Digital Collections Manager at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Shanna has served in a variety of leadership roles in MetaArchive over her time representing her institution in the Cooperative, and chose to join the Alabama Digital Preservation Network (ADPNet) with MetaArchive's sunset.
- **Charles Johnson**, a Collections Archivist at the Alabama Department of Archives and History and one of the two current co-chairs of ADPNet. ADPNet made a decision to allow any MetaArchive member to join if they wished to stay in the LOCKSS ecosystem. In addition to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, it will be the new home for the HBCU Library Alliance.
- **Justin Clark** is the Digital Initiatives Director at the Indiana Historical Bureau, where he helps run Indiana Digital Preservation or InDiPres, a consortium member of MetaArchive. Having served in various MetaArchive committees, including in leadership roles, Justin is investigating options for a new regional PLN, both with former other MetaArchive members and institutions new to the PLN ecosystem.
- **Chelsea Denault** is the Coordinator for the Michigan Digital Preservation Network

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(MDPN). Chelsea is an active member of the broader PLN community, including the cross-PLN Technical Working Group and the LOCKSS Community Council, and has been providing support to Justin and the others working on a new regional PLN.

- And last but not least, today's panel will be moderated by LOCKSS Community Manager **Snowden Becker**. Snowden works with LOCKSS users and networks worldwide to support their community-based preservation efforts and to encourage a thriving and well informed community of digital preservation practice.

Off to you, Snowden.

[Snowden Becker]:

Thank you so much, Jackson. Thanks everybody for being here. It's nice to see a lot of familiar names and people who have been invested in this community, coming together and considering the impact. So I'm going to just dive right in. We are all people who participate in discussions about digital preservation in libraries and archives. All of those discussions generally yield the same set of perennial challenges, which include: limited financial resources, black box technical solutions, and isolation. Many of us work as solo digital archivists, or people who are handling digital archiving responsibilities in addition to other responsibilities, and are individual advocates within our organizations. These all often dovetail into a scarcity mindset.

So the first question that we're going to start with framing our discussion is, how does participating in a private LOCKSS network or PLN help address these perennial challenges of financial scarcity, black box technical solutions, and isolation, and support an institution's digital preservation needs.

And I'm going to start with Charles and Chelsea. Charles, Chelsea, why choose to run or create a PLN, with all of the different digital preservation models that are available to you?

[Chelsea Denault]:

Thanks, Snowden, maybe I'll jump off here and get us started. Just a little bit of background for folks, MDPN was established in 2020. A weird time to start new projects, that's for sure. The origin of MDPN actually came in 2019, with Matt Schultz, as a stepping stones project. Many of the folks on this call remember Matt Schultz from his time in the MetaArchive community, and he was a great help in setting the MDPN community on a path forward. Ultimately, for our group, the choice to run a PLN versus the other solutions that were out there came down to allowing us to have better control over our costs, and the fact that running a LOCKSS network really demands collaboration, right? We really saw joining the LOCKSS community as a way to draw many people from across the state of Michigan into a single community of practice to learn how to face challenges side by side, and that was really helpful for us and to I think, the broader cultural memory community. Because digital preservation, as we've said in the question, often does feel really isolating, especially when you don't have the skills or the technical knowledge—it can feel really daunting and overwhelming. And so at MDPN, we really chose to prioritize community and collaboration

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to help combat isolation, and a LOCKSS network is really, I think, well positioned to make collaboration a forcing function of that process.

[Snowden Becker]:

That's great. Charles, would you like to add to that from the ADPNet perspective?

[Charles Johnson]:

Sure. So just to give a quick bit of background on ADPNet, we are a long-operating private LOCKSS network. We have about 13 members, most of them in the state of Alabama. The grant that ultimately led to the creation of ADPNet was issued in 2006 and the network's been operational since 2008. So in some sense, when I began working on the PLN in 2018, I had over a decade's worth of inherited decisions in favor of PLN. So in large part, it was simply because this was the operational model that we had. But having spent some time working on it, and having put some effort both into technical development projects and also the community governance of the network, I would say that, on reflection, the things that drove the creation of ADPNet originally, and that drive us to continue with ADPNet, strongly underline what Chelsea was saying about the importance of collaborative relationships in the operation of the network.

This has been an extremely valuable means of creating community relationships, and a tool that's responsive to the community relationships amongst people at cultural heritage institutions in the state of Alabama, and now more broadly as well. That has allowed us to—in addition to managing the ongoing costs of the network in ways that we could not do if we're entirely dependent on vendor-provided solutions for the service—take ownership over and exercise a lot of local control over the technical and personnel costs of operating a digital preservation system. This has been a really valuable experience in having an open source software stack and a network topology that's not just canned for us and provided by the vendor, but is substantially up to us.

As we've gone through a number of transitions over 19 years' worth of the project and have had original founding members retire or transition to other roles, and had members/significant hosting nodes on the network come and go, the fact that the machines are operated by us and governed by us, has meant that these big changes in the network have allowed for a lot of sort of graceful degradation, easy transitions over time. That has been a major benefit for us in ways that we cannot always count on when we're dealing with even very long-standing vendor relationships.

[Snowden Becker]:

That's terrific. Thank you, Charles. And now I'm going to turn to Shanna and Justin, same questions, slightly different perspectives. Shanna, you're with a smaller museum. And Justin, you're with InDiPres, a local history and cultural heritage consortium.

Why did each of your institutions choose MetaArchive as your digital preservation solution originally, if you can speak to that, and why are you continuing in the LOCKSS ecosystem?

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Let's start with Shanna.

[Shanna Smith]:

Hey thanks, Snowden. So the decision to join MetaArchive was before I started in my role in 2020, but I imagine many of the decisions to go with MetaArchive and now to go with ADPNet were the same, in that it allowed us to have control over the costs of our digital preservation and allowed us to participate in digital preservation. I don't have to justify to upper management a return on investment on a vendor solution's high costs, our values align with joining a PLN, and now continuing with ADPNet and joining academic institutions in their digital preservation efforts, we hopefully have a reciprocal benefit for us joining them. So even though those decisions were made prior to me joining, we continue to support PLNs and be a participant.

[Snowden Becker]:

Yeah, so it's a decision you're getting to make again with the same rationale behind that choice. That's great. Justin, would you like to add to that from your InDiPres experience?.

[Justin Clark]:

So I became the Digital Initiative Director of the Indiana State Library in 2019. InDiPres was already in existence when I came on board. It was largely the brainchild of my predecessor, Connie Renfeld and another colleague of hers named Cinda May, who at the time was at Indiana State University [she would eventually go to Notre Dame, and she's since retired, but has been a continuing source of institution knowledge for both me and for Chelsea]. So it grew out of an LSTA IMLS grant in 2016 that was a working group trying to figure out: how do we provide digital preservation services to smaller institutions such as local county libraries, local historical societies, even some for profit businesses that had done some digital preservation work or digital heritage work. And so out of that grew InDiPres, and the way I describe it is I sort of came on in a moving train, trying to figure out how I fit into all of this. And so for the last six years, I've been very actively involved in both InDiPres as an organization, keeping that all running, and MetaArchive. I have done both at the same time.

I think that's what makes my experience maybe a little unique, in the sense that, InDiPres was a consortium of a consortium, so I had to kind of keep all of that straight. I think what we really gained out of it was making sure that the small institutions that we have as a part of our membership of InDiPres, which is 22 members, continue to get those digital preservation services throughout some challenging periods, whether it be COVID, or some of the technological challenges that that MetaArchive faced through 22 and 23 up through the sunset. And so with all of that in mind, we're pursuing a different future post MetaArchive, which I know we'll discuss a little bit later. The one other thing that I really enjoyed about my MetaArchive experience was the collective knowledge of its members, learning from people. The community was almost as important, if not more important, than the technology itself. And so it was a real crash course in how to do this work. I am very grateful for that part, because it felt like people had my back, and I always appreciated that in my experience with MetaArchive. So that's pretty much it for me in terms of how we got

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involved and why. We look forward to the future, and we can talk a little bit more about that later.

[Snowden Becker]:

That's great, Justin, thank you, and that leads us really nicely into the next question that we have for our panelists, which is exactly about that diversity and community and how that's reflected in the structure of PLNs. All the panelists here today are members of PLNs. The MetaArchive was actually the first private LOCKSS network, the proof of concept that illustrated that you can use the LOCKSS software to preserve any kind of digital asset, not just scholarly journals, as in the original use case. So there's a wide range in how PLNs look and are run. They're all the same, but they're all fundamentally different. They reflect the unique needs of the diversity of cultural heritage institutions that exist from research universities to local historical societies and really everything in between. PLNs don't have to look a specific way, or be set up all the same way, and that is, we think, a sign of a healthy LOCKSS user ecosystem.

So the question is, how does your PLN reflect and respond to the needs of its unique membership: the demographics of its membership; what kinds of institutions participate; the focus of the PLN: is it regional, is it topical, is it an affinity group?; the staffing structure; the governance structure, etc.

So for Charles and Chelsea, again, I'm going to ask this question from the perspective of people who are involved in the leadership and running the day-to-day of a PLN. Chelsea, let's start with you.

[Chelsea Denault]:

Thank you so much, Snowden. I think for us, two things really rise to the top when I think about how MDPN fits unique member needs. So the MDPN was founded with the goal in mind of creating accessible, affordable, and easy to use digital preservation services for small and under-resourced organizations across Michigan. Matt Schultz's Stepping Stones project collected data that found that most small organizations—think community archives, historical societies, small rural public libraries—were really the organizations that were getting left out of digital preservation services across the state. Many of our large research universities were doing digital preservation, but they were all doing it in these separate silos. And so Stepping Stones and MDPN really asked the question: how do we build a single statewide preservation system for the good of all? And MDPN as a result, with the idea in mind of creating access for small organizations, was able to create its own governance and membership structure, and that membership structure helps facilitate access especially for small organizations. So our membership costs are based on a tiered model, based on annual operating budget. So for example, an organization with an annual operating budget of \$10,000 or less, only pays \$100 to be part of MDPN. And so we really tried to structure our network from the very beginning to make it affordable and accessible to small organizations. We would not have been able to do that if we had just gone with a vendor solution where they come to you based on a set number of users, and [say] "you pay us this much money now". And so we were able to create a system in which larger organizations

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that have more resources are able to pay more, and smaller organizations can pay less, but everyone gets equal service. So I think that is to us, the most important way in which we're able to respond to the needs of our membership.

I also want to draw on something that Charles mentioned during his answer to the first question, and that's local control, both over the network infrastructure, but also over content. A lot of small historical societies and small community archives can have a sort of suspicion of large bureaucratic or commercial systems and organizations. And rightly so, right? I think there's a long history of marginalization of small "nonprofessional" history practitioners, and so it's been actually a really useful point of communication for us to say "your content doesn't live on a server farm in California". There isn't anything wrong with California, lots of people from California here!, but it's helpful for us to communicate to local historical societies and small scale members to say, "your content lives at the traverse area district library, or your content lives at Michigan State University." We know these people. We have lunch with them. It's been a really useful way, I think, to remind these smaller organizations that we're all part of the same group and community and system here to support each other. And it's been a really helpful thing to be able to communicate, to assuage that sort of anxiety that they have about "where does my content live and will I have access to it?"

[Snowden Becker]:

Great. Thank you, Chelsea. Charles, as the Alabama Digital Preservation Network exemplifies, you can be a regionally described network without being regionally confined—you're reaching out to help the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum all the way up in Boston. We used to say when I was at UT Austin, "what happens here changes the world". So Alabama is really taking a leadership role in the digital preservation community as a network that is based in Alabama, but is serving an entire segment of the country in a way that is incredibly helpful.

Can you talk a little bit more about how the Alabama Digital Preservation Network meets your unique membership, and how you define that membership, and how that definition has been changing?

[Charles Johnson]:

Sure, so the ADPNet was originally created through a grant administered by a consortium of academic libraries in the state of Alabama and until only a few years ago, had only members from institutions in the state of Alabama. We now have, I believe, three members outside the state: Louisiana State University, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and our most recent member to join is the HBCU Library Alliance, also coming to us from MetaArchive. I do think that the original regional focus of ADPNet, has nevertheless been a really important structuring feature of the PLN. And so the benefits that we get from it is that we have a network in which we are very happy to incorporate members from outside the state, but we have tried to build a set of institutions and practices around participatory community governance, where we have frequent online meetings, but also where most of the members are at most a three to four hour drive apart from each other. We have an annual physical

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meeting every year that we invite members to. One thing that's helped a lot, especially in building up the structure of the network, has been the fact that members at institutions have been able at times to go in person, to physically help out with troubleshooting problems on the network or working with content that new members are trying to bring in. But that said, I think the geographical centering of the network has been very important and valuable in building it up. But one principle of digital preservation is that we like having copies of things located in many physical locations, and it is extremely beneficial to us to have very active and supportive members that we've been able to interact with and bring in throughout the broader world outside the state. The change has raised a certain number of questions, and we had a meeting at one point about whether it was time to change the name of the network and ultimately decided that if SMU can be in the Atlantic Coast Conference, then LSU and as well as Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum can be in the Alabama Digital Preservation Network. But I think the grounding of the network in a fairly tightly interlinked community of practice, both in terms of day to day operations of the network, and also in terms of technical collaboration that, for example, Alabama Department of Archives and History have been able to do with folks working at Auburn University for instance, have been a really important throughline in maintaining the network over the long run.

[Snowden Becker]:

Terrific. Thank you, Charles and Chelsea. For Shanna and Justin, since you're using PLN as your digital preservation solution, why choose your particular PLN? What's what guided your decision? We can start with Justin on this one.

[Justin Clark]:

Well, the decision was made before me, it was before my time. The decision was made by Connie and Cinda and the members of what was at the time, the Indiana Digital Preservation Working Group, which became Indiana Digital Preservation, or InDiPres. Based on what I remember reading (because Connie and I didn't really have any conversations when I took on the role. I was hired months after she retired, and we didn't really have a correspondence)...but I did talk to Cinda. And when talking with Cinda, it was really that MetaArchive provided both a cost-effective way and a technologically-feasible way of being able to provide digital preservation services to those smaller institutions that were our members. Cinda and Connie were very hands on with the project. They often helped the earliest members from beginning to end in terms of adding materials, and that has continued on through my tenure, where we have worked pretty directly with our members to not only continue to preserve what was already put in, but also to add new things.

Most of what's been added in my time was a major ingest by the Indiana State Library that was in accordance with a massive national endowment for the humanities grant for digitization of the Will Hays papers. Will Hays was Chairman of the Republican Party in the 1920s and he was the head of what would become the Motion Picture Association of America—the Hays Code was named after him. So his papers were digitized in a NEH Grant that included digital preservation services. Indianapolis Public Library has been a very vibrant part of our community, and they have also had grant-funded projects that have

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ensured digital preservation for those specific projects. So yeah, I think a lot of why we went with MetaArchive at the time was, or at least what Connie and Cinda's idea was,, that we could spread out the cost to our members, and we could get the work done that we wanted to.

[Snowden Becker]:

Terrific. Shanna, you want to weigh in on how your choice of PLN really meets your individual needs and your needs as a member?

[Shanna Smith]:

Yeah. As I mentioned before, I think if there weren't PLNs, if there wasn't MetaArchive, if there wasn't ADPNet, then we wouldn't be able to participate in any digital preservation activities. We just wouldn't be able to participate. Our digital preservation is for the photography of our collection materials, and they continuously get photographed as documentation of how they've changed over time. So all of this activity is just happening within one department within the museum. It's not museum wide. So we're pretty limited on staff and staff time dedicated to it, as well as funding. So PLNs allow us to have affordable and also simplified digital preservation, which allows us to actually participate. I also think the community aspect of MetaArchive (and now ADPNet) is really, really important. Being a contact for other vendors, for some of our other systems, I feel like being in a smaller institution, we're frequently overlooked regarding some of our needs or some of the issues that come up when dealing with the vendor. And so being a part of a PLN, it's completely the opposite situation. The community really is helpful in helping us troubleshoot our workflows or to help us participate in digital preservation, adding to the community.

[Snowden Becker]:

Yeah. Sounds like you're more of a collaborator than a customer, and that must feel good. That leads us nicely into our next question, which is about sustainability, and successful sustainability planning is really meant to not support perpetuation, but responsible stewardship, which involves organizational transitions from leadership transitions to sunsets like we're going through right now. Change is part of healthy growth, and it's natural, especially given the long term nature of digital preservation, that it's an intergenerational task—we're hearing people have inherited their PLN involvement, and will be passing it on to their successors. **So how do your experiences with organizational transitions shape your practices and your planning for the sustainability of your PLN, and what are you composting, if we can use a nice metaphor here, from MetaArchive into a healthy PLN ecosystem in the present tense and in the immediate near future.** So practices around financial literacy and contingency planning, succession planning, expansive visioning of alternative systems, taking time to implement assessment or finding key indicators of health within your networks, etc. I'll focus this on Justin and Shanna, and how your institutions are participating as PLN members and creating advocacy and transparency in your networks.

[Justin Clark]:

Yeah, so with the end of MetaArchive, LOCKSS, launched a stopgap program that eventually

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became Project Dandelion, which is this continued service through the LOCKSS program for what was preserved through MetaArchive. We're using that currently. We'll be using that for, I would imagine, the next year or so, depending on how things go, but we're looking at a variety of different avenues for the future. And the one that is probably the most exciting is the development of a regional PLN network that would be from institutions across Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky. So it's us, InDiPres, which comprises academic institutions, public libraries and other organizations; Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, the University of Louisville Kentucky, Purdue University [etc.]. And so we're working on developing both a technical infrastructure and a governance infrastructure for that PLN that would sort of replace what MetaArchive was for us. It's very exciting work. We have a really great group of folks working on that, including Reid Boehm from Purdue, and Ben Parnin from Purdue, and of course, Snowden and Chelsea and Ted and all the great folks at the LOCKSS team. Any name I missed, I'm sorry.

So we're really learning from what MetaArchive did best. And in my estimation, what they did best was provide cost effectiveness and good governance policy. I think that through the years I was involved, there were many, many good meetings, a lot of fruitful discussions and good community building. And that's the kind of stuff we want to translate into a future PLN, and so that's what we've been working on. The discussions of this go back to as early as April of last year, where we were talking about this as we knew that MetaArchive was sort of winding down. So we're looking into a variety of grant opportunities to see what potential funding we could secure, both for the technical infrastructure, but then also just for the development of a governance policy. So that's kind of the next step, but I'm very confident that we'll be able to put something together over the next year or two. While we are certainly living in uncertain times in many ways in terms of funding, I think that the opportunity to find something will be out there and we will work very closely with our former MetaArchive partners, not just ones that are a part of this prospective regional PLN, but also ones who grew out of the community or are adjacent to it. So, you know, Chelsea has been a huge help and inspiration to me and into the InDiPres community. I feel like I've learned a ton just from her work. And so we lean very much on both what MetaArchive did well and what MDPN is doing well and they kind of show from soup to nuts how you can do this, and in a way that's not as large as what MetaArchive was—MetaArchive was quite a large PLN. And that's not to say that MDPN is tiny or anything, but it's smaller in relation to MetaArchive. MetaArchive was a global preservation network, and so, you know, the examples of ADPNet and MDPN really give us a lot to learn from. One thing I think I'm particularly stoked about seeing later in the year is the implementation guide that MDPN is developing. I can't wait to see it. I'm so excited, because I know that Chelsea and the team at MDPN have been working really hard. I can't wait to see that. So I think in terms of what will be composted, probably stuff like that, you know, which is funny, because they also learned from our governance and tech policies with InDiPres, so we rise by lifting others, right? So that's the stuff I'm really excited about. We'll learn from the LOCKSS team, we'll learn from other experiences, and just continue to build networking and try to figure out what institutions can help us. And so we've looked at other universities who might be able to host servers for us. We've looked at other organizations that might become members and so on. So, yeah, that's the kind of thing we're really excited about going forward, and what I hope to

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continue to do as a part of this work.

[Snowden Becker]:

That's great. Thank you. Yeah, watch this space, people. There's going to be exciting news coming from that part of the PLN landscape, and that corner of the LOCKSS community. We are really excited about it, and I think you'll be seeing exciting news. And Shanna, I know you have thoughts about how you will continue to be bringing the lessons of participation in MetaArchive and the really strong community that existed amongst MetaArchive members to your work with another PLN, where collaboration and active participation in the network governance is built right into your membership.

[Shanna Smith]:

Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm sort of answering all these questions the same, but yes, since ADPNet allows us to participate in digital preservation, we just want to continue to participate. Hopefully we can act as a model for a smaller institution to participate and join ADPNet, and that could mean anything from just attending meetings and being a part of the community, but also maybe eventually helping with any workflows that are needed and helping with the goal of making really simplified digital preservation.

[Snowden Becker]:

Excellent. Thank you. And before we get to the last question, I'll just extend this question a little bit to Charles and Chelsea as PLN leaders. **Are there really quick primary takeaways about sustainability that you've learned in the time that you have been running your networks and over the period that your networks have been taking shape?**

[Chelsea Denault]:

Yeah, I'll jump in really quickly, Snowden. I think there have been two primary takeaways for us. The first has been building workflows with sustainability in mind, especially our technical workflows. We've really focused on having multiple interchangeable elements between the packaging, processing, and LOCKSS parts of our workflow. Another place that we've tried to build sustainability is the technical infrastructure that we maintain directly, trying to keep that very, very simple. Right now, our pre-process script, which is the processing piece, is a mere 350 lines of Python code. Every time that we have to add to it, we all are like, "oh, why?". You know, we want to keep it as small as possible, and that's available on GitHub for anyone to see and reuse, and will be part of the implementation guide that everyone is very excited for—lots of pressure on us now! And I think the second place that this has been a helpful exercise is just normalizing change. I think it's been a helpful exercise for us as a new network, to see a network that's been doing this work for 20 years and to understand that this sunset is sad, but it should not be viewed as a failure of cooperative digital preservation. Context and needs change over time, and organizations need to change over time too. Change can be really hard or uncomfortable, and so it's been helpful for us in the MDPN community, even though we're very early on in our life cycle as a network, to have discussions about how MetaArchive's process now might guide us in the future.

[Snowden Becker]:

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That's great. Change is part of healthy growth, right? And I think the composting metaphor is terrific because there is a point at which the stuff that you are working with seems like garbage and it's smelly and it's messy, and then it turns into something really rich and fertile and I think we're all in that. We're coming out of the smelly, messy part and into the rich and fertile part and it's a very exciting time. It's also a time for us to be looking forward and it's also sustainable, as Danielle points out [in the chat]. It is part of how we take what we have and reduce waste and make sure that nothing is thrown away. We're reusing what we know and building on it. The cycle is a virtuous one, not a vicious one. So 20 years is a really interesting chunk of time to work with. We have 20 years of history, and we can envision 20 years forward. **I would love for each of our panelists to talk about: what is your vision for a thriving LOCKSS ecosystem and an ecosystem of community-based distributed digital preservation. What will that look like 20 years in the future?** What's your dream for that? Give us your pitch for a world where digital preservation is sustainable and beautiful 20 years in the future, what does that look like? Chelsea, go.

[Chelsea Denault]:

For me, it's really making sure that we create access and space for small organizations and that they don't get left behind in the digital preservation process. I also think about working towards interoperability of service. Very early on in my role, I heard about the Digital Preservation Services Collaborative and was brought in by colleagues (many of whom are on this call) who I really look up to and who were really helpful for me early in my professional life in this field. I would be really interested in finding ways for networks to provide lifeboats for each other in cases where we need to reach out to each other so that we can keep cooperative digital preservation going no matter who's doing it. So those would be my two dreams.

[Snowden Becker]:

That's beautiful. I love that vision. Shanna, tell me about your vision.

[Shanna Smith]:

That vision sounds great, interoperability sounds great. Continuing to help the larger institutions, academic institutions, and hopefully with smaller institutions participating, it can be a mutually supportive ecosystem and just continuing to support in any way that we can.

[Snowden Becker]:

That's terrific. Yeah, the supportiveness is really the thing for me. Like, you know, throw me a life preserver. Help me row the boat. Let us all be swimming in the same direction. Justin, what's your vision look like 20 years in the future?

Justin Clark:

I think 20 years in the future, what I'd like to see is for the PLN program, or digital preservation in general, to move from what it's been currently: where it's not always the most user friendly, it's not always the most smooth. I want to be able to develop a program that enables people who are students, interns, all the way up to volunteers who are in their

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80s (because I train a lot of folks who are in their 80s to do the kind of work that they do) to be able to do this kind of work without a tremendous amount of hand holding. Where they can go on to a web-based staging server, they can just drag and drop and set it and forget it. That would be my dream is to get it to that, and then to continue to support small libraries. So you know, these small rural communities, many of which are in my home state of Indiana, and of course, all over the country, they need this kind of support because otherwise they don't get it. So I want a network that not only works successfully for them, and is easy for them to use, but is also one that is financially sustainable, financially viable, and that will continue to do the work of preserving the things big and small, from big and small institutions, and make sure that they don't feel forgotten. Because I think sometimes smaller institutions feel like they're forgotten. So that's what I'd like to see for the future.

[Snowden Becker]:

I love that vision, and I love the idea of digital preservation being for everyone and not an afterthought, but part of the process that everybody gets to learn how to do and gets to participate in. That it's not exceptional, that it's routine. That's great. Charles, you get the honor of going last. Tell me about your vision.

[Charles Johnson]:

So I guess the main components of my vision, as I see it, five years, 10 years, 20 years from now, I would very much love to see a world of PLNs that are like dandelions. Networks that are healthy, modestly sized, many of them regional or affinity based networks that are modestly sized enough to be functional for digital preservation, while also able to be participatory without being bureaucratic in terms of their governance, and that are engineered, as some of us been saying, towards a goal of interoperable tools and standards and support for smaller institutions. Networks come, networks go, and nodes and participants are able to easily move from one to the other—take content, take servers, move back and forth, have overlapping network memberships and a fair amount of ideally lightweight, open source, flexible and fault tolerant decision making, and development around the tools and the standards that are used in the network. Ultimately, the thing I want most is, you know, I'm a simple man, I'd like to be able to explain in about 15 minutes to a new member what it takes to go from a folder of files to an AU preserved on the network, and maybe another two minutes to go from the AU back to the folder files.

[Snowden Becker]:

Fantastic. We just have a few minutes left. I would love to turn it over to our wonderful audience for your questions, and our panelists can speak from their experience and to your questions. Please feel free to ask questions through the chat and Jackson, I think will be moderating and furnishing us with stimulus and prompts here! Go right ahead, Jackson, Do we have questions already?

[Jackson Huang]:

There haven't been many questions in the chat, but there has been huge appreciation for all the panelists, and all that they've shared about the way that while successful collaboration does enable participation by smaller institutions, it also really makes the whole ecosystem

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stronger, echoing what Shanna said. It's not just a case where it's large institutions subsidizing smaller institutions, but it's actually a model in which collaboratively, the whole network is able to benefit from the diverse knowledge across the kind of membership and how that's really necessary, not only in the face of rising costs, but also just in thinking about how to maintain shared cultural heritage or collective responsibility—and collective responsibility can only really be done collectively. If people have questions, I hope that we continue these conversations in the hallways of conferences or in our institutions. I'm just going to go ahead and wrap us up. So as we've been mentioning, MetaArchive will be sunsetting after the 31st [March 2025] but as part of composting MetaArchive, a bunch of resources have been created around creating and running PLNs, and that will be available in the LOCKSS Community Wiki. So you will be able to find that come April 1. MetaArchive has been doing a lot of synthesis and learning from the sunset process in particular, and those blog posts will continue to be available on the Educopia website, along with a final roundup of all that work that's been done. For those of you who expressed interest during registration, that roundup will also go to your inboxes. But for those of you who didn't, worry not, it'll be on the Educopia website. I think the last thing is that for those who are interested in learning more about LOCKSS or joining a PLN, feel free to reach out to Snowden, the LOCKSS Community Manager, or Chelsea and Charles who represent LOCKSS PLNs. There's a lot of community spirit in the PLNs, and I think, as both Charles and Chelsea have spoken to, they've benefited a lot from talking to their peers, and they love passing it forward. So thank you all for your time, for spending the last MetaArchive community call with the MetaArchive community and the broader digital preservation community. Here's to 20 years of thriving digital preservation in the future.

[End of audio]