

VAM 2025 Proposal

Title: Curating Your Box of Chaos: Digitizing Collections of SWVA Community History

Detailed Session Description:

The Greater Southwest Virginia Digital Collective (GSDC) is a community-owned collective steered by a volunteer community advisory board composed of community members from the region and Virginia Tech University Library (VTUL) faculty members that reviews, approves, and champions community collections to be added to the Virginia Tech Digital Library. The challenge GSDC aims to address is the gap between well-resourced institutions and smaller cultural heritage organizations by providing community-tailored assistance in processing and describing collections, digitization and consultation, and depositing material into an access and preservation repository.

The foundation of GSDC is to support regional cultural heritage organizations without the resources to make accessible and digitally preserve their content with the same care and consideration given to institutional collections. Our goal is to build trust by encouraging stakeholders to take an active role in this relationship, and unlike typical higher education institutions, all copyright and ownership remain with the original organization at their discretion. Rather than paying a fee, stakeholders dedicate time, personnel, and expertise to an open collaboration where all needs are met. Born from an IMLS Community Catalyst grant co-designing a collaboration model between VTUL and invited stakeholders, the GSDC is the result - an independent collective with established bylaws and Advisory Board aimed at extending shared resources to community partners. As a young collective, GSDC hopes to learn what collaboration looks like for similar organizations, confirm that GSDC is designed to actually meet the variety of needs from our regional community partners and bridging that resource gap, and integrate responses and feedback into our collaboration strategies.

This Roundtable will consist of a presentation and Q&A hosted by members of the GSDC Advisory Board. The presentation component will introduce the GSDC and its origin and values, discuss successful and unsuccessful collaborations, and describe the process for becoming involved in the GSDC community as well as how to contribute material. The Q&A component will include questions for our attendees to consider about their collaborations with other organizations, what unique needs and pain points they face, and how they can improve their digital curation strategies. This Roundtable is geared towards mid-career and advanced practitioners with practical knowledge of digital curation strategies and possessing the autonomy to make organizational decisions.

This session aligns with the conference theme “Looking Back to the Future” in two areas. First, we as a collective are an example of what it looks like for a higher education institution and

cultural heritage organizations to collaborate and uplift those regional stories to a national audience; and as VTUL reckons with its past and works to improve relationships with community organizations.

Public-Facing Session Description:

Whether it's your grandmother's attic or the archival storage room of your favorite historical society, we've all encountered that "box of chaos" with documents, photos, and that one floppy disk no one can open. As time passes, though, the risk of losing material to degradation, obsolescence, and institutional memory increases.

The Greater Southwest Virginia Digital Collective is a new community-owned, community-designed collaboration between regional cultural heritage organizations and Virginia Tech University Libraries to provide resources for organizing, digitizing, and preserving the SWVA historical record. Join our Roundtable to learn about GSDC, our resources, and ways to collaborate to preserve your box of chaos.