

NSLA DESCRIPTION AND CATALOGUING PROJECT

Background

This paper provides information about the Description and Cataloguing Project, which forms part of the NSLA Reimagining Libraries initiative.

Some of the approaches being considered in this Project may be of interest to libraries beyond the NSLA sector.

The Project aims to:

- improve access via Libraries Australia (and now Trove) to documentary heritage materials, especially unique materials, held by NSLA member libraries
- stimulate the use of more productive and streamlined ways of processing and cataloguing that are appropriate to the category of materials; and
- identify cost-effective approaches, tools and standards and develop workflow models for integrating control of unique materials.

It is a basic goal of NSLA to expose, as comprehensively as possible, their collections in Libraries Australia and Trove. It is an assumption of the Project that some categories of NSLA member library collections will never receive detailed item-level cataloguing. However, in many such cases, collection-level descriptions, summaries or lists have been created.

The Lists Project

To make these lists and summaries available for searching via Trove, the project has identified a specific action in its Action Plan called the Lists Project.

A common approach is to create one bibliographic record that describes the collection and to create a list of items in the collection for a more detailed level of access. Generally, the collection level record is entered into the institution's catalogue and is sometimes contributed to Libraries Australia. However, more often than not, the lists of items within the collection are available only within the institution or at best through the local catalogue.

The lists come in many forms and formats from paper to electronic (Word and Excel), and are used within a library as an aid to access – for instance, they might be housed with the physical collection, available for consultation at the reference desk, be available for browsing or searching on a local catalogue or through a web site. They are for the main part not findable through resource discovery services, including Trove.

Most collections described in the lists consist of unique or rare heritage material and they are often large and complex. The lists can comprise for instance, detailed notes on the history and provenance of a collection; captions and citations for individual

items; and index references. The research value generally lies in the collection as an entity but it is necessary to know what is in the collection to assess its usefulness. It would be beyond the resources of any library to catalogue such collections in sufficient detail using more traditional approaches in order to provide researchers (and staff) with the level of information they require to use and manage the collection. It is therefore necessary to find another way of revealing those largely “hidden” collections more widely through commonly used resource discovery services.

Trove functionality now provides opportunities for libraries to make such information about important collections available for searching online without the need to catalogue items individually. To streamline the process of converting existing descriptions into online searchable data and to maximise discoverability of the data, guidelines on different approaches and on data standards are required.

NSLA has agreed to provide funding to develop these guidelines, based on a review of the range of existing lists and to test them by carrying out a trial to convert a representative range of the lists.

The NSLA funding will support the appointment of a Project Officer for a three month project to be undertaken during 2010. The Project Officer will:

- gather examples of lists from each institution to have a representative range of the types of lists in existence
- analyse the lists to gain understanding of the issues involved in their conversion and to identify possible solutions
- discuss local requirements and constraints (such as library management system functionality) with member institutions
- discussing possible models for converting lists of collection description with the Trove team, taking into account bibliographic standards required
- trial the conversion of a selection of lists
- document models and guidelines and discuss these at a workshop with member libraries
- develop agreed NSLA/Trove models and guidelines for contributing information related to collections to Trove.

Ingestion of lists into Trove

This Project has a relationship with the plans of the Resource Sharing and Innovation Division to strengthen the coverage of Trove by exposing collection-level descriptions and finding aids provided by libraries, archives and museums. A good example is the “local history collection” pages that have been published on the Web by many public libraries.

Where these collection summaries exist as published web pages, it is relatively straightforward for Trove to index them. The envisaged workflow is:

- Trove ingests a brief record for each collection guide, finding aid or file description. Each brief record would include the URL of the web page containing the full text of the guide
- If Trove finds an appropriate trigger in the brief record, it will follow this link and will index the text of the guide
- Trove will expose the brief record in an appropriate result set in response to a user search
- If the user clicks on a link in the search result, he or she will be taken from the brief record to the web page containing the original guide
- Where the web page contains further links into the local web site, the user can follow these links to obtain more granular, item level information.

This strategy will provide an effective context for the user and will expose library, archive and museum collection content that has not been catalogued at item level.

Stage 2 of the Trove Project (now due for completion at the end of April 2010) will include an enhancement to index the full text of collection summaries and finding aids, triggered by incoming records which contain appropriate trigger phrases and URLs.

There remains the question of the “brief record” and how Trove would obtain it. For libraries, the most appropriate method of contributing such a brief record is to catalogue the web page into Libraries Australia.

If the contributing institution is not a library (for example, if it is a museum, gallery or archive) it is unlikely that the brief record would be contributed through Libraries Australia. In these cases an appropriate strategy may be for the institution to create a brief Dublin Core-compatible record for the collection through a form hosted on the Trove home page; or to provide such a record to an aggregator partner (a possible example is the Collections Australia Network) and that partner provides the record to Trove.

Recommendation

That the Committee notes the report.

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