


The High-Impact Digital Library: Innovative Approaches for Outreach and Instruction, by Anna Neatrou, Jeremy Myntti, Rachel Jane Wittmann, Rebekah Cummings, Jane D. Monson, and Megan Myres McMillan

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The authors are all academic librarians with extensive experience in managing digital collections. They presented their ideas for developing this book via research surveys at an ALA Core: Leadership, Infrastructure, Futures meeting in October 2022. Their research methodology consisted of a professionally designed survey and interviews with digital collections practitioners. The survey was sent to discussion lists commonly used in the field of digital librarianship, such as Code4Lib, the Digital Library Federation, and the ALA's Metadata Interest Group, in November 2022. There were 82 respondents, ten of whom agreed to a further structured interview.

The authors recognize the great diversity in outreach techniques and programs mentioned in the survey responses but consider that outreach takes place in three main ways: “social media promotion, integration of digital collections into teaching

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and instructional activities, and partnerships with external campus units or community organizations” (viii). Much of the book entails looking at such patterns in experience as reported by survey respondents and interviewees to gain insight into opportunities and barriers to outreach. It also offers examples of successful outreach programs.

The book does not aim to create a grand framework for outreach. However, within its brief compass, it provides a fine overview of approaches to outreach based on many well-chosen examples broadly grouped into chapters. There are also helpful interviews with experienced practitioners reflecting on their projects and on their work generally.

This book would be most useful for librarians and archivists who work with digital collections and are looking for ideas on how to do more effective outreach. The many examples may assist readers in identifying outreach already taking place, finding opportunities for more, and identifying barriers, such as lack of staff time.

The examples of outreach and engagement in the book’s four thematic chapters (“Instruction,” “Outreach,” “Digital Scholarship and Digital Humanities,” and “Rapid Response Collecting”) are where the book shines. The examples of successful projects, large and small, are detailed enough to spark ideas that readers may wish to explore in their own contexts. The chapters also stand alone well enough that one could, for example, read the “Instruction” chapter for insights into incorporating digital collections into classes, without needing to explore the rest of the book. Necessarily, given the emphasis on projects, the book is a bit episodic, but this means readers can take it one section at a time, or, at least, one chapter at a time.

A chapter I found most helpful was “Digital Scholarship and Digital Humanities,” which emphasizes the value of partnerships between libraries and digital humanities scholarship. Libraries offer not only “a treasure trove of potentially mineable data” (93) but are naturally interdisciplinary spaces. Moreover, “librarians have expertise valuable to digital scholarship projects such as manipulating metadata, evaluating copyright, project management, data management, digital preservation, special collections, scholarly communication, and open access” (93).

Another area of great value in this book is the excellent annotated bibliography. There are 14 carefully curated pages of select digital library projects that showcase effective outreach, with diverse entries ranging from *Canadiana* to a *Cinderella Bibliography*, *Black Panthers Newspaper Publications (1974)*, and *Renaissance Society of America*. This is in addition to the project descriptions themselves and the references at the end of each chapter.

The book has a storytelling style which brings the projects it describes to life.

Readers get a sense of the challenges faced, the resources needed, and sometimes the ongoing problems with outreach. For example, in the chapter “Rapid Response Collecting,” the need to act immediately leads to challenges for long-term stewardship. There are also ethical considerations when trying to document in the context of a disaster, such as the need for sensitivity towards those impacted, and care for the library or archival staff. It is important to go into rapid response collecting with a plan, including for later review, attention to metadata quality, and future access.

Overall, the book provides a great snapshot of a still emerging specialization within the library profession and its implicit responsibility for outreach with digital collections. It will be very useful for those fortunate to be working in this area and for the many library staff who occasionally engage in digital outreach activities. It is well laid out and carefully written, and it should help those hoping to expand user engagement with their institution’s digital collections. The notes on careful planning, measuring progress, building relationships, reaching out to new and perhaps underserved communities, identification of resource needs, and recognition of what each group has to offer in partnership, should help build confidence in recognizing outreach opportunities and seizing them. There is a lot of wisdom to be found here.

The writers recognize that what they have provided is indeed a snapshot, and they note in the conclusion that their book does not cover recent developments in AI. There is also, of course, no mention of the funding and political challenges of our current environment. However, the analysis and examples that this book provides remain encouraging and useful in our rapidly evolving information landscape.