

Cooperative Program Planning History

From R&D to a Cooperative Program for Archival Description

The planning process laid the groundwork for transforming the data and technical infrastructure developed in the R&D activities into a sustainable international cooperative hosted by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. The Cooperative was planned to enable archivists, librarians, and scholars to maintain the descriptive data and to extend the scope of the people and records included. It was also intended to improve the economy and quality of archival processing and description, as well as address the longstanding research challenge of discovering, locating, and using distributed historical records.

Background

The early results of the R&D work led the SNAC team to realize that its methods would effectively support the extraction of the biographical-historical data embedded in the archival resource descriptions and the assembling of the data into descriptions of individual, families, and organizations. These descriptions would provide the foundation for a novel research tool. But, while the methods could continue to be refined and enhanced, algorithms alone are not sufficient to build a sustainable, dynamic body of data that can serve the processing needs of the professional archive and manuscript library community and support a reliable research tool for vast communities of scholars, students, and the public at large that are interested in the study of history.

In the fall of 2011, with funding from the U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services, SNAC began to begin to build support from archivists, librarians, and scholars for transforming its R&D into an international cooperative program that would both support the work of these communities and provide an important service that would facilitate historical research and understanding. Support for the idea began to grow through a series of meetings beginning in the spring of 2012, and the rough outlines of the cooperative began to emerge. In February 2013, the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration committed to becoming the administrative host of the cooperative, and immediately became a collaborator in the planning process.

The web site for the first phase of the Cooperative phase is maintained [here](#).

Planning Phase

In order to further the planning, in the fall of 2013 the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation invited a proposal for a one-year planning process to study in detail the administrative, governance, and technological requirements of the program. This phase focused on:

- Performing user requirement studies and developing detailed technical infrastructure planning.
- Establishing the initial administrative and governance structure.
- Determining requirements and developing models for sustainability.
- Establishing a legal foundation and intellectual property policies.
- Recruiting initial members.

This led into the two-year pilot implementation of the cooperative, which began in 2015.