

CARL Principles on Digital Access to Collections and Learning Resources

Introduction

Over many decades and in some cases, centuries, CARL libraries have built and continue to develop and maintain expansive print and digital collections. During the past year's global pandemic, libraries – their expertise, collections, spaces, and other services – have proven to be more vital to research, teaching and learning success than at any previous time and have received a great deal of appreciation from both users and administrators. This year has also shown that in addition to continuing its stewardship of print collections, libraries must actively prioritize, shape, and enable digital access in order to retain, evolve and strengthen their core roles.

Digital access continues to present uncertainty, risk, and challenges. Library ownership of resources is no longer a given; at the same time, costs for digital access have become unsustainable and new barriers constraining access and use have been imposed by publishers and vendors. The integration of vendor product offerings into teaching, learning, and research workflows, accomplished through avenues other than the library threatens to decenter the library and impose unacceptable surveillance and cost burden on learners. Foundational digital access principles and user rights based in legislation (copyright, privacy, Internet services, etc) are challenged and evolving.

Relationships and a view to equity and inclusion must be central to our thinking and actions advancing digital access. There must be an inclusive commitment to creators, learners, and researchers of today and tomorrow. Respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and traditional knowledge systems must be at the core of our content development and acquisition and must come about through direct engagement with the communities involved. All library offerings must be examined through an anti-racism lens and rethought to become inclusive practices.

Principles

CARL has identified the following key principles to guide our work in this area:

- 1. Digital first.** Remote access at global range is now a permanent feature of higher education, and digital modes of access permit new, varied, and timely content uses in teaching, learning, and research. Academic libraries must make digital the default in outreach, instruction, collections, services, preservation, and research.
- 2. Digital access must foster, not impede, equity.** Canadian academic libraries should consider, where possible, the diversity of their user communities and of their uses and access circumstances, as well as those of global users. While print will persist in many disciplines as a preference or a primary source, the goal must be for all users to have timely access to a usable digital version.
- 3. Digital content must be accessible.** Academic libraries have a responsibility to ensure that the content they produce meets or exceeds legislated accessibility standards, considering all types of physical and learning challenges. There can be additional

economic and geographic barriers comprising the digital divide; libraries must make all efforts to ensure content can be accessed by those without high-speed internet. Libraries should demand the same for digital content they purchase or licence.

4. **Prioritize historically marginalized perspectives and voices.** Decolonize and re-balance the perspectives represented in scholarly content, online digital collections and the metadata that enables access to them.
5. **Indigenous content (both Indigenous-authored and on matters relating to Indigenous peoples) requires special attention and priority action.** As part of reviewing all library practices, prioritize working collaboratively with Indigenous communities to address a range of colonial metadata issues and enabling protections on use of traditional knowledge and cultural expressions.
6. **Protect privacy by design.** Proactive vigilance and appropriate licence terms are required in order to limit undue user surveillance and data collection. The aim is to protect sensitive and personal data as necessary, but not to limit access unduly.
7. **Default to open.** Whenever possible, academic libraries must prioritize the publishing and dissemination of open digital content in service to our community. Going forward, library spending will increasingly shift from licensed content to building and financing open infrastructure that is not for profit and is controlled by the academy.
8. **Enable the exercise of user rights.** Digital licences and vendor contracts must not limit legal uses and user rights as defined under the *Copyright Act*.
9. **Build in long-term access and preservation.** The scholarly record is rapidly evolving, and increasingly digital – and yet digital formats are fundamentally ephemeral. A deliberate, comprehensive preservation strategy is imperative, and must be put in place from the moment of creation or as soon as possible. Perpetual access and archival digital preservation interventions must be the norm.
10. **Approach digital access as an opportunity to foster sustainability practices.** While there are environmental stressors attached to digitization and cloud computing, advanced digital technology offers the opportunity to increase access while reducing carbon footprint, such as reduced travel for onsite research visits. Producers of digital content must strive for practices that limit environmental damage and provide offsetting measures whenever possible.

These principles were inspired by and draw on the [Library Futures Principles](#); and should be pursued in tandem with CRKN's updated [Licensing Principles](#) (February 2021), which outline practices specifically related to licensed content.