

## Priority areas for grants

The Steering Committee of the Yale Collections Collaborative encourages Yale repositories to submit proposals for collaborative grants in the following areas:

### **I. Increasing the productivity of descriptive work in Yale repositories and the availability of collection information.**

The absence of information about existing collections in Yale museum, library, image and other systems is one of the most serious shortcomings in providing access to these research resources. In many cases, the systems that allow users to discover and gain access to collections are in place, but the resources are lacking to enable Yale repositories to create the needed catalog records, inventories, and other finding tools. These resources include both the ready availability of tools that support the creation of these descriptions, as well as the staffing to carry out the work. The Collaborative Steering Committee is interested in proposals to develop and implement tools and models that will facilitate the timely production of collection descriptions and their entry into existing or newly developed access systems.

#### **a. Acquiring, developing, and implementing common descriptive tools**

Tools might include data entry or authoring systems that can be used by multiple Yale repositories but that are supported collaboratively or centrally; such support might include selection or development, implementation and training, and ongoing maintenance. The tools may be focused on producing input for specific systems (such as Orbis, TMS, or EMu) or on producing standardized input (such as MARC records or encoded finding aids) that can be loaded into multiple systems in which people might expect to search for it. Proposals may be for increased resources for tools already in place or under development or for those not yet available. Proposals may request support for purchase of tools available commercially or for local Yale development where they do not exist.

#### **b. Expanding content in existing access systems**

The incorporation of collection descriptive information, however created, into appropriate Yale systems that already exist would increase their visibility. There are a

number of well-supported systems in place for managing and providing access to information about collections in all their many forms, genre, and media, but they often contain information restricted to the repository that maintains the system, rather than for similar collection materials across the University. Proposals may look to assess and define the University scope of these systems and add collection information from other parts of Yale to them. Such projects might include incorporating descriptions of library collections outside of the library system into Orbis, object descriptions outside of the art museums into TMS, or descriptions of specimens or anthropological materials held outside of the Peabody.

**c. Developing and implementing models for shared processing**

A number of Yale repositories hold archival, manuscript, and similar collections as adjuncts to their core holdings, but do not have permanent staff to describe and manage them. The ability for these repositories to outsource the processing and description of selected collections to another Yale repository but continue to “own,” set policies, and retain control of them could leverage existing processing staff and alleviate the need for repositories to create and manage their own processing staff on either a project or permanent basis. Proposals might investigate whether and how existing repositories might provide management, professional expertise, and existing infrastructure for Yale collections beyond their own holdings. For example, curatorial papers held by a museum that need to remain available for use with specimen collections might be processed in collaboration with another Yale repository, combining subject expertise in the museum with manuscript processing expertise in an archives.

**II. Investigation and development of standards and structures for cross-collection searching**

Achievement of the goal of providing search capabilities across the holdings of Yale repositories depends on both technological and content developments. Distinct applications for managing and searching collection information, each with its own data structures and programming environment make it difficult to find and aggregate collections information and deliver it as a package to the user. Vocabularies, definitions, and other content standards that differ across disciplines and professions create an environment with different languages and cultures that must be interpreted and navigated before users can discover collection resources across repositories. The Steering Committee assumes that the management and access systems now in place (e.g., EMu, Orbis, TMS) generally support the particular needs of those repositories who maintain them and that any cross-collection searching capability will rely on searching or extracting information from those systems rather than replacing them with a generic system for all Yale collections. The Steering Committee has identified the following critical areas to address in order to move the prospect of cross-collection searching closer to reality.

**a. Developing crosswalks that define how data in disparate systems relate to each other**

Each management and access system has its own structure of records and data fields that reflect how information is defined and stored within the system. In addition to different data field names for the same types of generic information (e.g., author, creator, artist), there are often different definitions of how content should be recorded in those fields. The definition of particular data fields may also differ significantly even when the content may appear to be the same (e.g., use of geographic terms for various attributes of a collection). Projects that seek to identify equivalent fields in different systems and develop commonly agreed-on definitions of them (i.e., crosswalks) would provide a critical prerequisite for the combined search of information in those systems.

**b. Developing prototype systems that discover information in multiple systems and package the combined results for users.**

In order to search or extract information within existing systems, they need to be configured to allow appropriate linking or access to other Yale systems. There are numerous technical ways of accomplishing this (e.g., the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting), but such work is often deferred because of higher priority needs for internal management of information. By selecting existing systems and testing whether they can be configured technically for such sharing of information without opening them up to unauthorized access or tampering, projects can advance the state of knowledge about the policies and technical requirements required to enable combined searching of disparate systems. Proposals that focus on particular topical or disciplinary areas for which there are collections in multiple Yale repositories may be particularly useful in testing such systems and faculty involvement in identifying content and functionality is also encouraged.

**c. Investigating vocabulary management**

Even where data fields used in different systems can be matched to each other for similar content, the vocabulary that repositories use may vary widely. The recording of the form of a personal name, for example, may be highly controlled or left to the discretion of the curator or data entry person. Similarly, geographic names differ widely over time, cultures, and disciplines and are not easily correlated. External resources for vocabularies (e.g., the Art and Architecture Thesaurus, the Union List of Artists' Names, Library of Congress Name Authorities, taxonomic lists for biological specimens) are used in different Yale repositories. In some of these cases, there are provisions for selecting from a group of approved headings, none of which is "preferred" but which can be used interchangeably. The acquisition, implementation, and maintenance of authority lists, thesauri, and other controlled vocabularies are expensive and might be a shared undertaking for Yale repositories in similar areas. The Steering Committee encourages proposals for investigating the use of shared authorities across repositories and cross-referencing models for dissimilar vocabularies.

### **III. Describing and providing access to media and digital materials**

The proliferation of media types (graphic, moving image, and audio) and digital collections that are increasingly part of the collections acquired and maintained by Yale repositories is a critical challenge to responsible stewardship of our holdings. In addition to the preservation concerns raised by these media and formats, there are serious issues relating to their adequate description and effective access for users.

Projects are needed to investigate and propose policies and technologies for access and duplication, catalog records, and detailed indexing. If such policies and technologies can be developed and adopted by many Yale repositories instead of handled as a local responsibility, it would make these materials easier to find and use and improve the quality of stewardship that repositories are able to provide.