

PROJECT REPORT

Indigitization

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Indigitization is a British Columbia-based collaborative initiative between Indigenous communities and organizations, the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (IKBLC), the Museum of Anthropology (MOA), the UBC iSchool at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) Archives and Special Collections, to facilitate capacity building in Indigenous information management. This project is committed to clarifying processes and identifying issues in the conservation, digitization, and management of Indigenous community knowledge. It does so by providing information resources through the Indigitization toolkit and by enabling community-led audio cassette digitization projects through grant funding and training. Indigitization seeks to grow and work with a network of practitioners to develop effective practices for the management of digital heritage that support the goals of individual communities.

Keywords: culture; language; First Nations; Aboriginal; Indigenous; audio cassette; community archives; British Columbia

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Many people who have worked with community heritage institutions know that navigating best practices established by the information professions can be a challenge, particularly when they are developed with larger institutional settings in mind. This navigation is especially challenging if best practices cannot speak to the unique nature of culturally situated materials, such as Indigenous contexts. How can information professionals address the unnecessary barriers created by their own fields to better support the people and organizations best equipped to manage and make decisions about their collections and community knowledge? These are the core questions which gave rise to the Indigitization program (<http://www.indigitization.ca/>) and continue to drive the work that we do.



Tlingit artist, Alison O. Marks.

Indigitization is a British Columbia-based collaboration between the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (IKBLC) and the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC), the UBC iSchool, and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) Archives and Special Collections. It grew out of an understanding that vitally important cultural heritage information on legacy media formats is increasingly at risk. For First Nations, the need to make these materials accessible is intensified by language revitalization efforts, as well as extensive rights and titles endeavors. The role digitization plays in support of these activities cannot be overstated, and yet finding the resources necessary to undertake such projects is a challenge.

One of the resources needed to start this work was a step-by-step manual written for a non-technical audience. The Indigitization Toolkit was developed as an online manual intended to help First Nations organizations plan and conduct scalable digitization projects. In addition, Indigitization put together a buying guide with a set of hardware recommendations specifically for audio-cassette digitization. A barrier First Nations face in accessing grant funding for this work is the common requirement by agencies that they make the digitized materials open access (OA). In making the case that IKBLC should establish a new grant program for First Nations cultural heritage workers, our team successfully advocated that First Nations retaining control of the digitized materials is fundamental to the values of the program. To date, the Indigitization program has co-funded 44 projects and helped First Nations in BC build their internal capacity and digitize almost 11,000 tapes.

As Indigitization grows, it needs to stay relevant. Thanks to feedback from previous participants about where the program should focus next, the work is starting to take a slightly different shape. Beyond developing additional training opportunities throughout the province for other formats, particularly reel-to-reel and VHS (and continually updating our Toolkit), there is a growing interest in the ethical questions surrounding Indigenous information stewardship. While there is a clear value in Indigitization's participation in scholarly activities (such as publishing and presenting at conferences), these activities take time away from other efforts that might more directly benefit First Nations, including further developing curriculum materials for additional formats, offering remote training opportunities and workshops, or funding development for the Indigitization program. This is a constant negotiation for all involved with the program, but also a very generative one. It keeps pushing us to stay true to the questions which guide this work, to keep looking at the big picture, and to identify new ways to support the critically important work being done by First Nations and Aboriginal organizations.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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